

The Peace Dialogue

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Article I

People Power in Burkina Faso: The 16 September 2015 coup

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1. What happened?

In October 2014 civil society, political parties, women and young men in Burkina Faso protested against the National Assembly amending article 37 of the Constitution, in order to allow President Blaise Compaore to run for a third term in office having been in office for 27 years. The social protest succeeded in stopping plans to abolish Article 37 of the Constitution, and President Compaore tendered his resignation.

After this extraordinary situation, a transitional government was set up to prepare the country for democratic general elections within one year. The election date was set for 11 October 2015. But the process of a civil transitional government has not been easy, due to interference from the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP). The RSP was involved in protests against the government in December 2014 and February 2015, and finally staged a coup on 16 September 2015, just 25 days before the scheduled general elections.

2. The reaction of the people and the world

What happened on 16 September was not very clear, since the RSP did not openly claim that it was a coup d'état. In fact initially they attempted to gain the support of high ranking officers of the army and when it failed the RSP announced on 17 September that they had taken over power after taking hostage the president Michel Kafando, his prime minister Colonel Zida and two others ministers of the transitional government, while they were holding a cabinet meeting.

As soon as the country heard about the coup, young people and civil society organizations went to the streets to protest. The RSP soldiers engaged in shootouts to disperse the protesters. According to the first council of ministers of the newly restored government, 11 people were killed and 271 injured. (www.lefaso.net)

The religious association for peace in Burkina, political parties and the citizens reacted against the coup, so that the RSP and the new president of the so-called National Council for Democracy (CND) were in a precarious situation.

The international community condemned the coup as well as the regional political organization within ECOWAS and the African Union (AU). ECOWAS sent two presidents to negotiate for peace and the restoration of the transitional government, but the deal did not please the people of the country who refused both to cancel the RSP mistake (staging the coup d'état) and to integrate the former party of the former president Compaore in the process of the future elections.

Therefore the RSP decided not to step down from power. The population asked the rest of the army to fight the RSP, so the Commander in Chief of the army General Pigrenooma Zagre invited the national army to fight the RSP. Several parts of the army started marching to the capital Ouagadougou to fight the RSP if need be. General Zagre gave an ultimatum to the CND and RSP to step down when the rest of the army was in Ouagadougou ready to fight.

Happily through the mediation of the Moogho Naaba¹ (the Emperor of the Mossi), the RSP and the young officers of the army came to an agreement allowing the prisoners to be released and returning power to the former transitional government. The RSP accepted a ceasefire and returned to barracks.

When the ECOWAS delegation came back to Burkina after a difficult meeting held in Nigeria, the peace process was already on the right track. They officially reinstated President Kafando and the former interim government.

On Friday the 25 September, the first business of the restored interim government, was to disband the RSP together with other military officers who were involved. General Diendiere the president of the CND was stripped of any responsibility in the army. The Commander in Chief of the army, general Zagre called the RSP

¹ The Moogho Naaba is the 37th Emperor of the Mossi, the most important people in Burkina Faso. Members of this population are about half of the population of all the country. The Moogho Naaba is a traditional chief, respected by the whole country. He has moral authority over the country. Very often the meditation process has to pass through him in order for it to succeed.

to integrate into the national army and to be under his orders. The RSP had been forced to surrender all its weapons to the national army.

3. What lessons to draw from this sad week?

The citizens of Burkina Faso suffered from this unfortunate situation. However, the revolution of the people overthrew the coup and the RSP that was a thorn on the flesh for the country. The coup was the 'felix culpa' for a stronger unity of the country, between the army and the people. The army decided to retain its role of protection of the country and not to mix in politics. After the exile of President Compaore, the RSP had been a threat to the stability of the country. Through their failed coup d'état, the RSP gave the country the opportunity to disband it forever.

The entire country has become more aware of the need not to accept coups d'état in Burkina. For me, a new era has begun in Burkina Faso. Political parties can no longer behave as they want, without the control of the people. We have established a new process for more efficient governance.

This difficult situation has led the country to see the necessity of solidarity against those who destroy the unity of the country. People have prayed for peace and justice, and now we have settled down to a new way of ruling the country based on justice and equity. This is great, and the people of Burkina are grateful to those who helped them handle this sad situation.

Article II

Commemorating the International Day of Peace – September 21, 2015

September 21st is the International Day of Peace. The day was established in 1981 by a resolution 36/67 of the United Nations General Assembly to coincide with its opening session every September. In 2001, another resolution was passed (55/282) to make September 21 the official date annually. On this day across the globe, warring parties are to maintain a ceasefire and stop hostilities for the entire day. Numerous celebrations take place in cities and countries worldwide to mark this important day. A symbolic gesture observed during the celebration is a minute of silence at 12 noon as well as the ringing the UN Peace Bell.

This year Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations had the privilege of celebrating the day at a gathering organized by the East Africa Standby Force (EASF). The event whose objective was to create awareness on the work undertaken by EASF in promoting peace in the region, brought together students from various universities, civil society organizations working for peace as well as staff from the EASF. Among the key guest speakers were Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat and Professor Macharia Munene of the United States International University. Highlights of their presentation included a chronological account of the challenges faced by the countries served by EASF since independence. These countries include Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. Since April 2013 South Sudan is also included amongst the EASF countries but with an observe status. Some of the countries had experienced coup d'états, genocide, protracted intra-state wars, electoral related violent conflicts, border conflicts and secession.

In the current context, issues that could lead to greater instability in countries served by EASF include the change of presidential terms, democracies informed largely by tyranny of numbers, deepening ethnic divisions in most of the countries, border disputes within and between nation states, extreme religious ideologies, assassinations and politicisation of critical issues by politicians. Leadership that can collaborate across critical issues irrespective of whether one is in government or opposition is an urgent need in the region. The strides made in uniting the region economically should also find expression in the political agenda of the leaders.

In reference to EASF and its mandate, the guests learnt that the idea of an Africa Standby Force (AFS) was proposed as early as 1960 by the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah. This was realized 12 years ago when the Africa Union established the Africa Peace and Security Architecture that comprises the African Standby Force among its five pillars.

Article III

HIPSIR Roundtable Discussion Series – Extractive Industries: Focus on Oil and Gas Sector – August 28, 2015

HIPSIR organized a roundtable discussion on extractive industries focusing on the oil and gas sector. The roundtable's objective was to share experiences from the perspective of the various stakeholders. We had

presentations from representatives of the Kenya Gas and Oil Association, the Kenya Civil Society Platform on Oil and Gas, the Kenya Human Rights Commission, Kenya Oil and Gas Working Group and the Institute for Law and Environmental Governance. The Roundtable provided a platform for candid discussions on the current understanding and practice of the various stakeholders in this sector. A key outcome of the discussions was need to create more fora for constructive dialogue that aims at ensuring stakeholders can be held accountable to have best practices. Issues of accountability, transparency and good governance in this sector were emphasized.

Article IV

Extractives Dialogue: Perspectives from Religious Leaders, Oil Companies & Communities

Public Forum – October 2, 2015

The extractives dialogue public forum brought together representatives from the Christian and Muslim faith and local community representatives to dialogue on the sector. This is part of the on-going series by HIPSIR to provide reflection spaces where voices of different stakeholders can contribute ideas and views on how best to manage this sector in Kenya. Issues raised in the forum included how to prepare and to manage expectations of local communities in the areas where exploration and mining was taking place. The religious leaders are part of a committee that meets periodical with government officials in the energy sector. The forum was informed that exploration of natural resources should be guided by justice and tampered by integrity. Kenya should avoid a situation where exploitation of its natural resources are by few for the few. All should benefit.

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