

Burkina Faso Coup Leader in Custody

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Pressure from the masses and international community compels elite military unit to return to the barracks

Gen. Gilbert Diendere, who led a coup aimed at derailing upcoming elections in Burkina Faso, was arrested in the capital of Ouagadougou on September 30.

Earlier reports suggested that he had gone to the Vatican representative's residence in the capital of the impoverished and underdeveloped West African state. The coup was designed to derail the national elections which were scheduled for October 11.

The 1,200 presidential security regiment (RSP) had refused to disarm even after an agreement had been reached through negotiations mediated by the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Broader elements within the Burkinabe military had entered the capital threatening to disarm the RSP by force if they did not return to the barracks.

Diendere was quoted by the Associated Press as saying "I am willing to turn myself over to face justice. I would like the people of Burkina Faso to find a solution to this crisis through dialogue. All parties must talk to find an inclusive solution for the future of the country."

Due to the political crisis the elections were postponed to a later date.

A national uprising against the dictatorial rule of ousted military leader turned head-of-state, Blaise Compaore, during late October 2014, created the conditions for the formation of an interim government. Michel Kafando and Isaac Zida were appointed as temporary president and prime minister respectively after intensive negotiations.

Hundreds of thousands of workers and youth took to the streets demanding an end to the 27-year rule of Compaore. The leader soon fled to neighboring Ivory Coast where he has close political and family ties.

In order to calm the October 2014 revolt, military and political forces agreed to hold internationally-supervised elections one year later. A coalition of parties claiming the political legacy of revolutionary socialist leader Capt. Thomas Sankara pledged to run as a bloc during the elections.

Both Kafando, a career diplomat, and Zida, a former military official, were placed under detention at the beginning of the coup on September 16. Kafando and Zida were eventually released and have returned to their positions.

Diendere was a longtime intelligence director for the 1,200-member elite presidential security regiment (RSP) which worked closely with French and United States imperialism.

The coup was probably precipitated by the concern that the RSP would be disbanded leading to possible prosecutions of members of the unit which have committed crimes against the people of the country.

In addition, political parties allied with Compaore were barred from participating in the national elections. The former rulers are seeking to secure a future in the soon to be new political dispensation.

Mass demonstrations, international pressure and dissent within the broader military forces converged to force Diendere to surrender on October 1 after refusing to disarm for several days in the wake of a brokered agreement by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Interim Leaders Pledge to Continue Transition Process

After being the first of the two interim leaders to be released, President Kafando traveled to New York City to participate in the 70th United Nations General Assembly.

Kafando addressed the international gathering saying “The transition I am leading is the result of a popular uprising in October 2014. It is a response to the arbitrariness, nepotism and injustice of an anti-democratic regime.” (UN News Center, October 2)

He expressed his greater appreciation of the notions of liberty noting “As I was deprived of this for a time, I know how precious it is.”

Just two weeks prior to his address at the UN, he had been arrested by members of the RSP whom he described as “praetorians of another time who were rowing against the current of history and trying to seize democracy to serve their sordid ambitions.”

The interim president continued stressing that “It is thanks to you, defenders of [liberty and democracy], that I speak freely today.” His speech denounced as “heinous” the September 16 coup staged by military officers who Kafando said were “bought by vengeful politicians” to influence political developments leading up to the previously scheduled elections.

RSP Officially Disbanded Amid Calls for Retribution

Burkinabe Confederation of Labor leaders are demanding that Diendere be put on trial for the coup as well as other crimes such as involvement in the assassination and overthrow of Capt. Thomas Sankara, the revolutionary leader who ruled the country during 1983-1987.

The labor federation, which represents 17 unions, had staged a general strike in opposition to the coup. Their efforts were instrumental in bringing the RSP to the negotiating table with the ECOWAS mediators.

Secretary General of the Confederation of Labor, Bazie Bassolma, outlined what he thought was the proper course to take in bringing the coup makers to justice. Bazie said “There are many, many, many things. The first thing is that we have found his name in many problems in our country. We also know that at this moment there are many bodies in our hospitals. So we need to try him to get justice for our people.” (VOA, October 1)

News reports said that at least 10 people were killed in the recent struggle against the RSP

coup while many others were wounded and injured.

Bassolma went on to say also that “It is not only Thomas Sankara; there are others like Dabo Bokari and Charles Taylor in Liberia and Angola. His name is found on many, many problems his name was found. We cannot accept that terrorists killed many people and now want to get amnesty. We will not accept.”

The labor leader appealed to the Burkinabe people from across the county saying “You know the solution to our problem is not in elections. If we are not organized, if we are not mobilize it would be difficult to find solution to our problems.”

He also expressed his gratification to the people throughout the continent stressing that “The first thing is to thank our brothers and sisters in other countries who helped us in this difficult situation. We are fighting for democracy in Burkina Faso but also for Africa and the world.”

Unrest Reflects Growing Economic Crisis

Despite the positive reports about the phenomenal growth of African economies, countries like Burkina Faso have not been able to translate the escalation of foreign direct investment (FDI) into better living standards for workers, farmers and youth. Burkina Faso is the fourth largest producer of gold in Africa but remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

Even leading exponents of FDI such as Mo Ibrahim, a wealthy African businessman, said recently that he is concerned about the immediate prospects for growth and development on the continent considering the precipitous decline in oil and other commodity prices.

In an interview published by the Wall Street Journal on October 5, Ibrahim said “Things are stalling. We can’t pat ourselves on the back and pretend everything is hunky-dory. It’s not.”

This same Wall Street Journal article noted “An annual index of economic, political and developmental indicators compiled by Mr. Ibrahim’s philanthropic foundation and released Monday (October 5) showed that the security and business environment in many of Africa’s 54 nations isn’t improving as rapidly as a decade ago, when the continent was hailed as the next great global economic frontier. This year’s rating of 50.1 on a 100-point scale, while up from 46.5 when the index was first issued in 2000, is down from a peak of 50.4 in 2010. Under the Ibrahim Index of African Governance 100 represents a prosperous, democratic utopia.”

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