

SFCG-Guinea

Information Letter, March 2005

Supporting Regional Peace Initiatives

Building solidarity among the Kissi People of the Mano River Union

To encourage dialogue and promote understanding between the Kissi people of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the Guinean Parliament organised a peace event on 17-20 February 2005 in Kailahun District, Sierra Leone with the joint support of UNDP and the governments of the three MRU States. The festivities brought together over 200 people, including government officials, parliamentarians, and traditional leaders from the three MRU countries. The extraordinary event aimed to celebrate common Kissi values and traditions and paved the way for cross-border reconciliation and solidarity after years of division and conflicts.

Talking Drum Studio participated in the four-day festivities and captured the various discussions and aspirations of the participants across languages and regions. Participants had a chance to explore the roots of the conflicts, as well as each other's responsibilities. They agreed that tolerance, compromise and forgiveness must serve as the guiding principles for rebuilding solidarity among the Kissi, regardless of borders. The discussions also focused on common challenges for the Kissi, including the need to consolidate peace, solve border disputes and address debilitating economic problems as a means of contributing to sustainable development and the reduction of confrontation and violence.



The Kissi devil celebrating the reconciliation/reunion of the Kissi people

To mark this change, a twelve-person committee composed of representatives of MARWOPNET and WAPNET, along with community elders was established to formulate a collective peace agenda for Kissi people in order to improve human security, encourage human development across the region, and advance women and children's rights. The adoption of the 'Koindu resolution' coincided with the opening of the new Koindu market in the presence of the Heads of State and/or representatives from the three MRU countries.

The Koindu Resolution

"Convinced that this historic conference of the Kissi People presents a rare opportunity to build bridges to encourage good neighbourliness, enhance regional security, promote socio-cultural and economic initiatives beneficial to this area and region...The Kissi people of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone resolve to live in peace and unity, ensure collective security and promote cultural values for development."

Strengthening the media in their peacebuilding role

Strengthening Guinean journalists' coverage of conflicts and being journalists in favour of peace, particularly in the context of the poor coverage and comprehension of the devastating conflicts in neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone, were some of the objectives of the two-day training workshop for media and peace building that Search for Common Ground conducted on 24-25 January 2005 in Conakry at the request of APAC-Guinée and AJG.

The workshop successfully brought together 25 journalists from both the private and the public press to discuss and gain skills in several key areas: understanding the different types of conflicts and their causes, the consequences of conflicts on populations, conflict prevention and resolution through the media, and conflict coverage techniques.

Most participants came into the meetings with the assumption that things needed to change, and two days of intense interaction and exercises resulted in a frank

discussion of where the fault lines lie. Each of the participants began by describing a particular conflict and the underlying approach and goals. The workshop revealed that, despite varying mandates and work priorities, participants shared important underlying goals. Common goals included instilling a culture of support for peaceful conflict resolution efforts, encouraging education in conflict prevention/resolution, inducing representatives of competing factions to change from adversarial to cooperative approaches, fostering dialogue among parties to the conflict, and strengthening civil society prevention mechanisms. Participants recognised the critical influence of the media in conflict zones. To the extent that the press maintains objectivity, it can be a valuable resource. Where the press is seen as political and biased, however, it can exacerbate tensions. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants concurred that the skills and lessons they had covered would prove most valuable in their ongoing work to promote peace education and build peace in Guinea and in the region. They also emphasised the need to enhance the media's role in conflict reduction through capacity building and specifically recommended further training for the group.



Participants of the training workshop on the media coverage of conflicts

In a participant's words:

"These two days enabled me to learn things I did not know about conflict. What struck me is that no matter the conflict, dialogue is paramount to solve problems between two parties in conflict."

Listeners assess Radio Moa's "Fréquence de l'Unité"

Talking Drum Studio (TDS) Sierra Leone and Talking Drum Studio Guinea organised a joint visit to Dandou in the Forest Region to capture Radio Moa listeners' impressions on an increasingly popular Radio Moa programme called "Fréquence de l'Unité" (Frequency of Unity). This programme enables Guineans, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans to express their opinion on common issues such as non-violence, respect for others, culture, HIV/AIDS and ethnic cohabitation. A customs officer interviewed by TDS explains that issues discussed in the programme are particularly familiar: "I am a Peul from Guinea, but I married a Mende woman. I am proud to be Peul and to speak fluent Mende because of my matrimonial ties." Further, the chief of Dandou says: "I am happy that this programme speaks about the links between the peoples of the three countries. I live in Dandou, but am originally from Sierra Leone."

In Guinea, SFCG is engaged in:

- Contributing to strengthening participation of the population within the local, national, and sub-regional decision-making process through the reinforcement of social dialogue.
- Supporting existing peace initiatives and contributing to reinforcing the links between media and civil society, and supporting social cohesion and sustainable development.