

Ça Va?

The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea
Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea

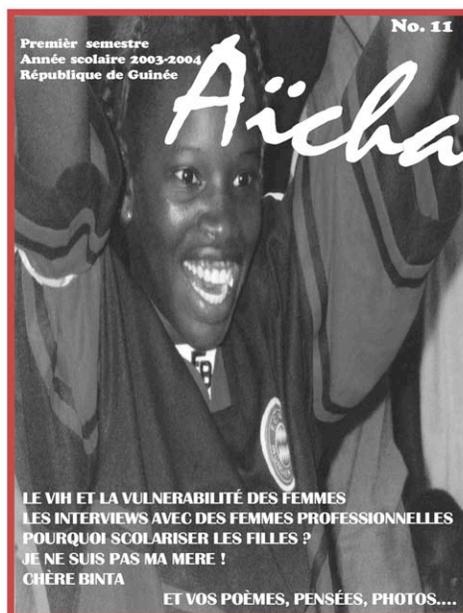


Aïcha Marches On In Guinea! □

Victoria Chang, PCV Conakry

As current and former Peace Corps volunteers know from their service in Guinea, Guinean women do not have an easy life. In addition to the common difficulties and challenges that face all Guineans, women in the country are at a particular disadvantage. Girls are destined to predefined roles such as early marriage, bearing and raising children, cooking, cleaning, farming and caring for others. A staggering 79% of Guinean girls have never been to school and only 7% make it to secondary school. They are seldom encouraged to look beyond their traditional roles and are rarely recognized as essential agents of development. While the community depends on the work of women, women rarely have leadership roles. Studies have shown that the empowerment of women leads to increased productivity, efficiency and economic advancement for the entire community; and that a woman's education level is the best predictor of her child's well being. In light of these staggering obstacles confronting Guinean women and the development of Guinea in general, Peace Corps Guinea began publishing a specifically female magazine in 1997, called *Aïcha Magazine: Les Filles Parlent aux Filles*. The principal goals of *Aïcha* are:

- To offer girls an avenue to express their concerns and desires.
- To encourage girls to succeed academically.
- To discuss and explore the role of women in Guinean society and in development
- To introduce girls to possibilities for their futures which they may not have considered before.
- To recognize and appreciate the traditional and nontraditional work that women do.
- To help girls take control of their bodies and lives by addressing reproductive health issues.



This journal is written by and for Guinean women, specifically those who are literate; and for the most part is targeted at older school age girls (from seventh grade to university level). Peace Corps Volunteers bring together all submissions, and then choose and edit them. The journal is used in a variety of ways, from simply encouraging discussion on women's issues to teaching about specific topics that relate to them.

Peace Corps volunteers publish 2,500 copies of *Aïcha Magazine* two or three times a year depending on funding levels. For each issue that is printed, 2,000 copies are sent to the interior of the country to be distributed for free by the volunteers in almost every prefecture and many sub-prefectures in three regions of the country. The remaining 500 are

distributed free of charge in Conakry to advertisers and Peace Corps partners such as USAID, UNICEF, PSI/OSFAM, PRISM, Africare, International Rescue Committee, Institute National pour la Recherche et l'Action Pédagogique, Programme National pour la Lutte contre le SIDA, etc.

Eventually Peace Corps Guinea would like to hand over all publishing and editing roles to Guineans themselves, in order to make this a truly Guinean publication. Before which, however, *Aïcha* must be made self sufficient and sustainable.

In an effort to curb reliance on altruistic funding and donations, advertising space has been sold in the magazine since 1998. The ad sales ensure future fiscal viability and allow for expansion of production. It has also become necessary to sell advertisements because donations have not been constant nor have they been sufficient to cover the costs of production, which is at 3 million Guinean Francs per issue (for 2,500 copies). If *Aïcha Magazine* were able to secure continual financial support from donors, its production would finally be guaranteed and the difficulties related to ad sales would greatly diminish.

Peace Corps Guinea is extremely proud to announce that we will soon be printing our 12th edition of *Aïcha* to be released in June 2004. Since its inception, *Aïcha* has been well received by Guineans and remain very popular, especially in the remote villages where volunteers consistently report that the magazines are highly sought after by boys and girls of all ages. School teachers and administrators have expressed their support as well, some of whom used the magazine as a tool in their classrooms. Many volunteers reported that copies were also left in many health centers, which further extended *Aïcha*'s contact with Guinean women. For many young Guinean women, *Aïcha* provides a much-needed space for self-expression and discussion of the issues and problems that impact their lives.

A Great Success for PC Guinea: The First Ever Young Men's Conference

Sonya Starr, PCV Wawaya

On January 17th and 18th 2004, Peace Corps volunteers in Guinea hosted the first Young Men's Conference. The conference organizers hope that this experience will mirror the positive effect that the annual Girls' Conference has had on the young women of Guinea who have had the opportunity to attend.

Twenty Guinean middle and high school students from across the country met in Mamou with twenty-one Peace Corps volunteers and six Guinean speakers. The volunteers and speakers worked together to present informative and interactive sessions on professionalism and scholarization, relationships with women, environmental issues, AIDS, STDs and reproductive health, and public speaking and presentations.

At the end of the two-day conference, each youth created an action plan with the help a volunteer. The action plan outlined how each young man planned to take the information presented at the conference back to their respective village or town in an effort to educate their friends, family and neighbors.

The conference was highly successful and all participants hope to see this become a yearly tradition in Guinea. Provided that funding can be obtained, next year's



conference will be open to a larger number of young men and perhaps be extended to three conference days.

Rights Groups Blasts Guinea

The Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has called Guinea a "caricature of democracy" in a report entitled "Guinea: a virtual democracy with an uncertain future", according to the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN).

The report, published April 12, was prepared after visits to Guinea by the group in November 2003 and February 2004. Its conclusions were supported by the Guinean NGO, Organization for the Defense of Human Rights (OGDH), in a press conference in Conakry on April 14.

The report noted that opposition parties and independent newspapers are tolerated in Guinea, and that elections take place, but severely criticized the government for repeatedly violating its own laws in order to rig elections and harass opponents.

It also criticized last December's presidential election, in which six out of seven opposition candidates were banned from the ballot and international observers were prevented from monitoring voting. Although official results showed Lansana Conté with more than 95% percent of the vote on a turnout of over 82%, the report estimated the actual turnout at less than fifteen percent and cited several examples of vote rigging.

Opposition leaders have denounced last December's vote as a sham.

The report also criticized widespread use of arbitrary detention without trial, including many arrests in the armed forces amid coup rumors in late 2003, as well as the arrests of trade union and student leaders.

The report blamed Guinea's poverty on government misrule and warned that if Conté, already suffering from heart disease and diabetes, were to die in office, the country would be at "high risk" of political instability and violence.

Opposition Leader and Army Chief Arrested and Charged with Coup Plot

On April 22, Guinean security minister Moussa Sampil went on national television to announce the arrest of three opposition members in an alleged coup plot. More arrests were to follow.

After detaining opposition leader and former prime minister Sidya Touré for three days for interrogation about a meeting in Paris where the possibility of overthrowing the Conté government was allegedly discussed, Sampil announced that three members of Touré's Union of Republican Forces (UFR) party had been charged in the plot. Touré was rearrested on April 26, charged in the same case and released April 27 pending trial. Also charged April 27 was deputy chief of staff of land forces Colonel Mamadou Camara.

Minister Sampil said that UFR members had admitted the plot. "These citizens organized a meeting in Paris and discussed the assassination of the head of state and the dissolution of republican institutions," Sampil said according to Reuters. He said they had confessed to the police.

Touré has said he was not at the meeting, and knew nothing of any assassination plot.

An opposition alliance which includes the UFR had already dismissed the coup allegations as false. Ba Mamadou, spokesman of the alliance, said on April 23, “Everything the minister has declared is based on lies.” He accused Sampil of living in the past and using the tactics of Sékou Touré against the opposition.

Ba Mamadou and Sidya Touré were both prevented by the government from leaving the country on April 10 when they tried to board a plane to fly to a conference in Sénégal.

Guinean Prime Minister Resigns, Goes Into Exile

On Friday, April 30, Guinean Prime Minister François Fall controversially resigned his post, only weeks after replacing Lamine Sidibé as head of government last February 23. Fall was appointed in order to implement reforms to help stimulate the Guinean economy and to renew dialogue with international partners, but he complained to Radio France Internationale of “numerous blockages” and “police abuses” that hindered such reforms and rendered his task “impossible.” Fall claimed that Guinean president Lansana Conté refused to accept a significant sum of European Union aid because it was contingent upon dialogue with the opposition. He condemned the arrest of former prime minister and current opposition figure Sidya Touré, saying he had opposed the justice minister’s handling of the case since the beginning. Fall’s resignation letter also deplored “anachronistic practices” that led to serious differences between himself and other members of the regime on major questions such as reform of the justice system and foreign debt. He said he preferred resignation rather than “remaining in office and implicitly going along with policies that can only aggravate the mess the country finds itself in.”

Fall’s step was welcomed on May 1 by the *Association des Guinéens résidant à l’extérieur* (AGRE), whose president, Lanciné Camara, told the French news agency PANA that the prime minister “has taken a very courageous political decision which honors his reputation as a distinguished diplomat. Guineans abroad are grateful to him for having behaved in such a manner”. He went on to note that he had previously met with Fall, who had expressed such concerns about the human rights situation in Guinea that Camara had not been surprised to hear of his resignation.

Fall announced his resignation while in Paris and said that he expects to remain in exile for an undetermined period of time. His letter of resignation was dated April 24 but was not published until the conclusion of a conference he had flown to Paris to attend, “for reasons of security” according to his RFI interview. He had previously taken the precaution of taking his family out of Guinea, and on May 8 he was interviewed by telephone in New York, where he told Guineenews that he planned to stay out of politics and concentrate on “reading, thinking, and educating my children.”

In a related development, the May 2 issue of *Jeune Afrique l’Intelligent* was blocked from distribution in Guinea when the Guinean Interior Ministry refused permission to

distribute the French newsweekly, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. Editor Marwane Ben Yahmed said that the magazine’s distribution had apparently been blocked because it contained a feature interview with Fall explaining his disillusionment with the Conté government and his reasons for leaving. In the article, Fall quoted president Conté as having said to him, “Me, I am a general. You ministers, you are my corporals. I give the orders, you carry them out. I don’t discuss with you”.

At the time, Fall’s resignation had not been officially announced in Conakry. Although the government successfully prevented *Jeune Afrique l’Intelligent* from appearing on newsstands, some direct subscribers received the issue anyway and a flourishing trade in illegal photocopies of the banned article subsequently developed, according to a report from the Media Foundation for West Africa.

Tragedy Strikes Guineans in New York and Boston

Four members of a Guinean immigrant family from Pita died when a fire engulfed their Brooklyn apartment in the early hours of April 17, according to a report in The New York Times. Killed in the fire were Hattiatou Bah, her 18-month-old daughter Hadja Oumou Diallo, and two of her husband’s cousins: Issiaga Diallo and Mamadou E. Diallo. Two more cousins escaped the fire, but it claimed a fifth victim on another floor, James Gardner.

Ms. Bah’s husband, Mamadou Diallo, was at Kings County Hospital with the couple’s other child, Abubacal, who has sickle-cell anemia, when he learned of the fire. According to the times report, he worked as a street vendor and was related to Amadou Diallo, the unarmed Guinean immigrant shot to death in the Bronx by four police officers in 1999.

Over one hundred firefighters worked for two hours to control the fire, which also injured twelve people including six children, three adults and three firefighters, one of whom was hospitalized with first-degree burns. Police later arrested a neighborhood man who they said admitted starting the fire in a dispute with a building resident.

“The entire Guinean community is so sad,” according to Mohamed Jalloh, the president of the Guinean Community of America. Local associations of Guinean immigrants up and down the East coast collected donations to help the family send the bodies back to Guinea for burial.

On February 12, Habib Diallo died in Boston of injuries sustained when he was stabbed during a robbery by three street-gang members of the convenience store where he worked as a cashier, according to Toronto-based Guineenews. After completing his university studies in Senegal, Diallo had returned to Guinea to teach at two private schools in Conakry, while also opening and managing a private computer training center. He came to the United States in 2001 to study English and business management and last December was married to an American. His friends said that his intention was to return to Guinea after completing his studies, to participate in the development of his country.

Diallo’s remains were returned to Djourbel, Sénégal, home to a number of his relatives. His assailants have not been apprehended.

Inside PC Guinea

Thank you to Country Director Lisa Ellis and FOG's PC Guinea Liaison, Nancy Fleisher, for making available to us Peace Corps Guinea's in-house newsletter. Here are highlights from recent issues.

March

PC Guinea is adopting the hotel voucher system used in other PC Africa countries, which will allow a slightly increased limit on volunteers' use of public lodging facilities each quarter. The official hotel in Kankan is the Baté, and in Labé it is the Tata. Tata owners Raby Barry and her husband Flavio are said to have sold their hotel in Senegal and to be moving back to Labé.

SPA has funded an ecotourism training project and a public health oriented music and theatre group.

The drug now provided to volunteers for self-treatment of malaria (as distinguished from prophylaxis) is the newer medication Malarone, instead of Fansidar which was used previously.

Peace Corps Guinea has several new videos on HIV/AIDS topics. Most are in French but two are in Malinké.

April

In March Country Director Lisa Ellis and others made a presentation to government and NGO officials on the results of PCV efforts in 2003. The Minister of Women's Development requested six volunteers on the spot and intends to introduce the GLOBE program in schools in Conakry.

Girls' Conferences took place in March. Lisa Ellis characterized them as "extremely well thought-out and organized," and tells of a young woman who was inspired by one of the first Girls' Conferences to excel academically, and is now studying in the U.S. on a scholarship. Conference organizers are attempting to improve the system for monitoring the impact of the conferences on girls' lives and behavior.

Fouta and Haute Guinée PCVs are offered reimbursement to fly to Conakry instead of traveling by road for their July–September quarterly visit, for reasons of reduced road safety during the rainy season. Recent congressional hearings on the safety of PCVs are well-covered, with full reprints of three news articles. PCVs planning vacations are reminded that Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, southern Senegal and most parts of Sierra Leone are on the State Department's "restricted travel list". All are countries bordering Guinea.

A decrease in Peace Corps' operating budget for 2004 has resulted in an overall reduction in recruitment of volunteers, and fewer volunteers will be arriving in Guinea in the next group. Conakry is asking COSing Volunteers to prepare their communities in case they are not replaced. In another sign of the times, PC Guinea now has officially designated responders in case of chemical or biological attack.

An article on the nutritional value of mangos notes that they are an excellent source of dietary fiber, potassium and anti-oxidant vitamins. Apparently they are richer in vitamin C while they are still green, but richer in vitamin A after they are ripe.

PC Guinea staff member Odette, a native of Gueckedou, contributes an article on her experience of being a Catholic Christian in Guinea. She emphasizes the general

mutual tolerance and conviviality between Christians and Muslims in Guinea but observes that there are, even in Guinea, extremists of the Wahabbi sect who refuse to accept Christians.

May

On April 14-18, PC Guinea hosted a sub-regional T.O.T. (training of trainers) workshop on HIV/AIDS and nutrition, based on the "Hearth Model" that was originally developed in Haiti and has since been introduced in Asia and Africa. Participants came from Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Benin and Togo to take part, as well as from Guinea itself. This was a first for PC Guinea.

PC Guinea has identified local physicians in Conakry, Kankan and Labé that are approved to provide reimbursable services to volunteers. (The beginning of the first Guinean HMO? Maybe not.) Conakry is looking for others, and solicits recommendations from PCVs.

The American Cultural Center in Conakry is soliciting applications from PCVs for microproject grants. They have already provided funding for the recent Boys' Conference and for AIDS Awareness Day Activities. Among other things, the American Cultural Center operates the only free, public library in Conakry.

NRM Volunteers are helping to introduce improved beekeeping and honey-harvesting technology in several communities (four so far). In a SPA-funded project, one PCV has produced an audio cassette in French, Pulaar, Soussou and Malinké, featuring interviews with Guineans living with HIV/AIDS. This audiocassette is being distributed to all volunteers as way of stimulating discussion in communities. PCVs have already used the tape in community meetings and even at soccer games.

Planning for next year's Boys' and Girls' conferences will begin with a meeting on June 21. Postcard ballots are being distributed to PCVs in advance of November's general election.

Projects Report

Donald N. Parker ('01–'02), Projects Director
projects@friendsofguinea.org

I hope everyone's year is going well. I am happy to be working with the Friends of Guinea Network.

Congratulations and thank you to everyone for helping to donate \$500 towards Meghan Greeley's Library Project in Koundian, Mandiana. We are halfway to our goal of donating a total of \$1000 for the year.

FOG is currently trying to further its efforts in providing assistance to PCVs in the way of project funding. FOG is a member of the Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP). This is a program that provides financial assistance to PCV projects. I recently spoke with Caroline Taylor at the Office of Private Sector Initiatives (OPSI) with Peace Corps. Mrs. Taylor is the Program Specialist for Africa. She is our contact in Peace Corps Washington concerning FOG's desire to fund PCV projects in Guinea. She gave me a plan for FOG to use in streamlining the process of project funding.

The first step is that a PCV applies for funding through the PCPP. After approval by Peace Corps the project is listed on the Peace Corps website: www.peacecorps.gov.

FOG then needs to stay current with the website. This duty would belong to the Projects Director and members of projects committee. If FOG decides there is a project or projects that we want to fund, we then contact OPSI and tell them we wish to do so. OPSI can then send us a copy of the application for our records. FOG then can send funding to OPSI, which will relay the funding to the PCV.

Mrs. Taylor asked that any requests that come to FOG first, be relayed to OPSI so they have a "heads up" on potential projects. She asked that we also refer the PCV to OPSI and to the PCPP. This duty would also belong to the Projects Director. Mrs. Taylor suggested that FOG and the PCVs not use a coversheet to request FOG assistance. This would cut down on paperwork for the Volunteer and confusion in OPSI and in FOG.

To view approved PCPP requests: Go to www.peacecorps.gov. Click on "Donate Now." Click on "Projects." Projects are listed by country. Go to Guinea and you will find a list of PCPP sponsored projects.

I believe this new format will make things easier for FOG to support PCVs and their communities. If anyone has suggestions or questions please feel free to contact me. Also if any one has information on projects in Guinea please pass that information on to me. I would like to thank Membership Director Stephanie Chasteen, former Projects Director and current Webmaster Cherif Diallo, Caroline Taylor and Andrew Barnes at OPSI, and everyone else in FOG who has helped my transition in to this position.

If anyone has any funding requests, questions or concerns about FOG projects please contact me at projects@friendsofguinea.org. I'd be happy to help. For updates and info on past and present projects check out the FOG and the Peace Corps websites.

Take a Chance on a Child

Emily Ramshur ('00-'02)
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Are you willing to take a chance on a child who needs you? All around the world children sit in orphanages waiting for families. The situation for some of these children is even more desperate as they are infected with HIV and, as a result, are unlikely to ever find homes.

A Chicago area not-for-profit foundation, Chances by Choice, works to find permanent adoptive families for these children. In 2002, only 200 HIV positive children were born in the United States, down from 2000 in the year 2001.

Therefore, Chances by Choice is focusing on children living in countries where social stigma and lack of education and resources have created a massive health crisis. HIV infected children in some of these countries will not only live in miserable conditions in an orphanage, but they also will not receive the medication and treatment they need to live long and healthy lives.

If you or someone you know would like further information about adopting a child who needs a loving family, please visit Chances by Choice online at www.chancesbychoice.org, email us at info@chancesbychoice.net, or call Kim, Margaret, or Emily at (708) 524-4673.

Library Needs Funding

While Friends of Guinea strives to support volunteer projects, our means are limited. Here is a profile of the "Sougueta Library Project", which is seeking \$2,000 to buy books:

There are a very limited number of books in Sougueta and books are expensive and hard for community members to obtain. Most of the students in the elementary and junior high schools do not even have the textbooks for all of their classes. A library in Sougueta would give the people of this community the opportunity to improve their literacy skills, a resource center for the village, and a place in their community where continual learning is encouraged. The library will be initially focused on aiding the junior high students because of their initial strong support of the project. The junior high consists of children from all backgrounds within the community and equal access will be given to all children. Eventually, the library will be open to everyone in the entire community. Partnership funds are needed to purchase furniture and books.

Anyone interested in supporting this project may do so by going to www.peacecorps.gov, clicking on "Donate Now", "Volunteer Projects", and "Guinea".

Guineenews Receives Grant From FOG

Friends of Guinea has donated \$200.00 to Toronto-based news service Guineenews, in recognition of the important work that it carries out in providing accurate and objective information about events in Guinea and among the Guinean diaspora. Guineenews editor Boubacar Bah thanked Friends of Guinea, saying "This gift will go towards offsetting the expenses of our Conakry bureau. Youlake is compensated monthly thanks to generous donors like you."

If you are interested in following events in Guinea, log onto the internet and go to www.boubah.com. We think you'll like what you see.

Free personal Classifieds in CaVa?!

All members in good standing of Friends of Guinea are now entitled to one free personal advertisement per year in CaVa?, the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea. These advertisements are limited to 21 words and are intended primarily as a way for families and friends to send messages of support and encouragement to volunteers serving in Guinea, although they might equally be used to broadcast other messages. We encourage you to take advantage of this free service by emailing your message of 21 words or less to the Newsletter Editor at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org. Please note that this service is available only to current members of Friends of Guinea, so please submit your advertisement under the name in which your membership is listed so that we may verify your status.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Jason Smith (Kankan '97 – '99) recently married Tori Oliver and is currently working at the Corporation for National and Community Service (Americorps).

Jon and Denise Goldin-Dubois ('94 – '96) are organizing a **tenth-anniversary reunion** in the mountains of Colorado this summer for their stage group. If you haven't already been contacted by Jon, please get in touch with him at jgoldind@commoncause.org, or by telephone at (303) 292-2134.

Jon and Denise were part of a luncheon get-together in Denver on April 11 that also included **Nikki Shull** (Boké '02 – '04), **Stephanie Chasteen** (Wawaya '97 – '99) and **Woody Colahan** (Maci '93 – '96). They had a great time at the Abyssinia Market Café Ethiopian Restaurant, and plan to meet again on a regular basis. Any Guinea RPCVs in the Denver area not already contacted by Woody are requested to get in touch with him at ecolahan@du.edu.

Email Newsletter Available

If you prefer not to have this paper version of *ÇaVa?* cluttering up your mailbox, or if you don't want your membership in Friends of Guinea to promote deforestation, or if you just want to save us the price of a stamp, you may elect to receive this newsletter by email. The email version is text-only, but includes a link to a .pdf version of the paper newsletter that is posted on the Web and contains all the



formatting, graphics and pictures of the original, and is in color besides. Or you can receive both the paper and electronic version, and have the best of both worlds. Just contact us at membership@friendsofguinea.org and let us know of your preference, and we will make a note of it.

From left to right: Jon Goldin-DuBois, Nikki Shull, NiNyoman Erawati and her husband, Woody Colahan, Denise Goldin-Dubois.

Update Your Information!

Did you sign up on the FOG Registry (<http://friendsofguinea.org/registry.shtml>)? Has your email address or location changed since then? Please email our cheerful registry update guy, Scott Sackett, at registry@friendsofguinea.org, and he'll update your information. Make sure your RPCV friends can find you! As always, the registry is protected from spam-harvesting programs (but not from the public eye).

Love to Lauralou from her admirers at 3220 Cathedral - Patrick, Matt, Radek, Dylan, Bonnie, Willie and Chirpie, and of course Mama.

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