



Plenary sitting

B8-0524/2017

12.9.2017

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Gabon : repression of the opposition
(2017/2830(RSP))

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on behalf of the ALDE Group

B8-0524/2017

**European Parliament resolution on Gabon : repression of the opposition
(2017/2830(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolution (2017/2510(RSP)) of 22 February 2017,
- having regard to the press release issued by the African Union on 1 September 2016 condemning the violence of the post-electoral conflict in Gabon and calling for its peaceful resolution,
- having regard to the statement on Gabon issued by the VP/HR's spokesperson on 11 September 2016,
- having regard to the joint statement issued on 24 September 2016 by the VP/HR and the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, following the announcement by the Gabonese Constitutional Court of the official results of the presidential election,
- having regard to the final report of the EOM on Gabon,
- having regard to and Gabonese Constitution,
- having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of June 1981,
- having regard to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,
- having regard to the African Union's Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (2002),
- having regard to the UN International Charter of Human Rights,
- having regard to the Cotonou Agreement,
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. Whereas independent from French colonial rule in 1960, the Republic of Gabon have had only three Presidents ever since among whom two are father and son presiding the country since 1967 denying in fact any democratic change; whereas Gabon's economy is dominated by oil which generates 46% of the income of the country, 43% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 81% of its exports ;

B. whereas Gabon's August 2016 presidential election pitted incumbent president Ali Bongo against Jean Ping of the opposition Union of Forces for Change; whereas President Ali Bongo was declared winner with a 5000 votes lead on 31 August 2017 ; whereas the government blocked access to internet and social media applications on the night the

results were announced and during the following 5 days and maintained partial restrictions until the end of September;

- C. whereas violent protests erupted in the capital city and some other areas after the results were announced; whereas during the days of riots, the parliament building was set on fire and security forces launched a crackdown to suppress dissent and deter assemblies and also stormed Jean Ping's headquarters, killing two and injuring more than a dozen people; whereas security forces did not just use tear gas but also so live ammunition as well as heavy weaponry shooting from helicopters;
- D. whereas estimates of the death toll from the unrest ranged from fewer than 10 to more than 50, and hundreds of others were arrested though most of them were later released or freed pending trial ; whereas a civil society group, an association of Europeans and Africans named "Collective turn the page" has requested for international inquiry on the military and police repression that followed the post-election violence in which at least six people were killed ;
- E. whereas International Criminal Court has conducted a preliminary examination on 21-22 June 2017 over the post-electoral violence at the request of the Gabonese current government; whereas a French investigating judge subsequently decided to investigate possible crimes against humanity perpetrated during the post-electoral turmoil in Gabon;
- F. whereas President Ali Bongo launched a "national dialogue" of political and social groups as part of efforts to resolve the crisis sparked by his re-election and attended by representatives from 1 200 groups from civil society, around 50 political parties according to Prime Minister Emmanuel Issoze Ngondet; whereas the talks are boycotted by his rival Jean Ping and other main opposition leaders ;
- G. whereas the government of Gabon suspended on 17 March 2017 the activities of Conasysed trade union of the educational sector citing "disturbance of public order" caused by strike that has been ongoing since October 2016 ; whereas the Minister of education had also decreed a suspension on the payment of salaries to 807 teachers in order to end the strike; whereas Security forces dispersed around 200 people from the trade union coalition "Dynamique Unitaire" in Libreville on 1 May 2017, the Labour Day,
- H. whereas Marcel Libama, leader of the trade union "Conasysed" was arrested on 15 June 2017 in the town of Tchibanga where he went to attend the trial of his colleague Cyprien Mougouli who had been detained for one month on charges of organising a general assembly without authorisation; whereas the journalist Juldes Bivinga was also arrested on 17 June 2017 after refusing to remove from a local radio station an interview given by Marcel Libama; whereas Libama and Bivinga were charged with defamation, obstruction of justice and in contempt of a magistrate and were sentenced 184 days of prison and fined about 500 euros on 13 July 2017;
- I. whereas on 15 June 2017 the National Council of Communication suspended the "Echo du Nord" newspaper for a period of two months for publicly insulting the President and the Prime minister of Gabon, the newspaper has been subject to harassment and its offices raided on 3 November 2016; whereas Gabon is ranked 108 on the 2017 World Press Freedom Index dropping 8 places from its 2016 ranking because of the Communication Code which came into effect in January 2017 and the cuts in internet access and attacks on media preceding the August 2016 presidential elections ;

- J. whereas the government of Gabon announced on 3 September a ban opposition leaders, including Jean Ping, from leaving the country in what it said was a "temporary, administrative measure"; whereas "this measure follows inflammatory comments by Jean Ping on August 18 when he called for public disorder, rebellion and insurrection," interior ministry spokesman Jean-Eric Nziengui Mangala said ;
- K. whereas a political rally of the Gabonese opposition was scheduled at the Ntchororet college in Libreville on Monday 4 September 2017 as part of the commemoration of the first anniversary of the deadly assault on Jean Ping's headquarters last year; whereas "the owner of the premises was reportedly pressured into cancelling the rally, even though all the necessary steps had been taken for the event to be held," an opposition source explained ;
- L. whereas on the venue, national gendarmerie officers were deployed to stop anyone from accessing the building with security officials saying "we have received firm instructions, access to the site is forbidden" ; whereas the leaders of the opposition Coalition for the New Republic had to give up their gathering ;
- M. whereas three opposition activists, arrested on Sunday 3 September 2017 while they were distributing leaflets announcing the public meeting scheduled for the Monday 4 September, were imprisoned on Tuesday 5 September 2017 while several others were still being heard by police ; whereas the prosecutor of the Republic, Steve Ndong Essame Ndong said that the "three people were incarcerated for infringement of the public order and tranquility (atteinte à l'ordre et à la tranquillité publique)"; whereas the trial of the three activists will be held on 18 September 2017 according to their lawyer, Me Eric Iga Iga ;
- N. whereas nine people had already been imprisoned after being arrested on the sidelines of unauthorized demonstrations of support for the opponent on 25 August 2017 which assembled hundreds of people in different cities ;
- O. whereas Jean Ping still holds himself out as the duly elected president of Gabon in defiance of the Constitutional court which upheld Bongo's victory one year ago and seeks to mobilize his supporters to show his determination not throwing in the towel;
1. calls on the Gabonese government to comply with constitutional freedoms, particularly the freedom to demonstrate and freedom of expression, recalls that the Gabonese constitution recognises people's right to freely associate with one another to form organisations;
 2. deplors the post-election losses of lives and expresses its deepest sympathy to the people of the Republic of Gabon; strongly condemns the use of excessive and disproportionate force against protestors,
 3. condemns all the violence perpetrated and the human rights violations committed, the arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions, the political intimidation and harassment of civil society, the violation of freedom of the press;

4. urges the authorities to exercise restraint in dispersing protestors and allow peaceful protests in line international standards, calls for all restrictions on the media to be lifted and for all arbitrarily arrested to be released,
5. calls on the government of Gabon to remove the ban to opposition leaders from leaving the country ; calls on all stakeholders to refrain from any form of incitement and other acts which can lead to violence;
6. notes that the “national dialogue” held on the initiative of the President Ali Bongo was not “inclusive” as main opposition leaders had not attended it and the post-election crisis remain unsolved; Calls on President Ali Bongo to include the opposition in this dialogue;
7. requires the full cooperation of all Gabonese stakeholders to cooperate in all investigations into the alleged human rights violation and crimes against humanity and insure that the perpetrators are held accountable;
8. calls on the Gabonese authorities to take all the necessary measures to prevent further electoral conflict and in particular in next legislative elections on April 2018; Insists that the legislative elections take place within the foreseen delay, even if they will have to be organised on the basis of the new provisions of the electoral code; underlines that the organisation of these elections within a reasonable time is an opportunity to pave the way for normalisation;
9. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the African Union, the President, Prime Minister and Parliament of Gabon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN Human Rights Council and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly