

## **DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: THE RETURN OF THE DARK AGES**

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After the very long period of one-party rule that followed the wave of independence of African countries in 1960, the early 1990s were marked by the holding of "sovereign national conferences" in most of Africa, followed by the establishment of consensual democratic transitional regimes with governments of national unity.

These transitional democratic governments have worked to restore political pluralism and public freedoms, generally crowned by free, democratic and transparent elections. Many African countries are currently in their fourth or fifth democratic change at the top of the state, especially in Southern and Eastern Africa, and in some West African countries, such as Senegal, which is an example of democratic transition. In Central Africa, some countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Angola and Sao Tome and Principe, democratic alternation has been able to take place peacefully, alongside the world's oldest regimes (since the death of Queen Elizabeth II of England...). In some other countries, democracy has been limited to texts and electoral rituals, but without alternation.

Of course, this democratic train, albeit slow, moved forward despite generally fraudulent elections, opportunistic constitutional revisions aimed at securing "third terms" or extended presidential mandates, and increasingly visible governance deficits in many countries. A multitude of political parties emerged in our countries, but often without a real ideological backbone. In many countries, the role of these parties must be questioned, at least in ethical terms, in relation to the general problem of the weakening of representative democracy in Africa in recent times. Unfortunately, political parties, whose role as guardians of democracy is central, are too often manipulated by unscrupulous powers to form docile parliamentary 'majorities', and do not hesitate to monetise their support for policies in which accountability is increasingly absent. Citizens feel legitimately betrayed by politicians who deal behind their backs.

While it is true that in many of our countries the background to elections is increasingly electric, as the recent example of Gabon shows. It should also be noted that many African countries, not least Nigeria ...., Tanzania, Botswana, etc., have already experienced several peaceful changes of government, and democratic advances have gone hand in hand with credible public policies that have led to significant improvements in the living conditions of the population.

However, in the last two or three years, it has become clear that democracy is going through a period of great turbulence in Africa: military coups have returned at an impressive pace. First Guinea, then Mali, Burkina-Faso, Niger and, earlier this month, Gabon. These coups have overthrown democratically elected presidents in each of these countries, using almost identical pretexts: poor political, economic and security governance.

Military juntas, each more far-fetched than the last, have been established with rhetoric that pretends to be about change, but barely masks autocratic, anti-democratic and freedom-destroying political practices. **The coup d'état in Niger, which overthrew and took hostage the democratically elected President Mohamed BAZOUM, along with his wife and son, by soldiers in charge of his security, is an illustration of this new militaristic patrimonialism in our countries, which will result in the socio-economic and political destabilisation of the whole of Africa if nothing is done about it.**

Returning to Niger, because it is a burning issue, for seven weeks now President-elect Bazoum has been bravely refusing to sign a resignation that would seal the death of Niger's institutions and give carte blanche to the traitorous military: by refusing to do so, President Mohamed Bazoum remains one of the last shields against the tipping of our fragile democracies into an abysmal regression. Ironically, the usurpers of power, the gravediggers of democracy, now intend to prosecute him for "high treason", with threats against his life and physical integrity.

As we celebrate 15 September, International Day of Democracy, President Mohammed BAZOUM, a progressive, democratic and republican, democratically elected President of Niger, who has been taken hostage by soldiers, is a symbol for Africa and the whole world of democracy under threat.

**We do not want a second ALLENDE, we do not want a dead hero. President BAZOUM must be released and restored to power.**

**What can we do concretely?**

If we, democrats and progressives all over the world, really want the democratic aspirations of the African peoples to be respected, we must consider that the ring of

fire of the military coup and constitutional putsches of the "third mandate" or of the powers without term limits, must disappear from this planet. **Just as we fought against brown fascism the day before yesterday, just as we fought against colonialism and imperialism yesterday, together we must fight relentlessly against the new AIDS in Africa, which is called military or civilian coup d'état. They are the two sides of the same coin, and their consequences are the confiscation of power from the people and the denial of democracy.**

The International Day of Democracy also reminds us of the duty of solidarity between progressives and democrats all over the world. This solidarity must be active and militant, everywhere and at all times, because we are convinced that TODAY the future of the democratic process throughout Africa is in danger. If, as democrats, we are convinced that democracy is the only way to achieve human dignity, and that "pronunciamientos" must not, once again, become the preferred access to power on the continent, then **solidarity becomes an imperative and democratic interference a duty.**

### **What future, what prospects for Africa?**

As progressive people, our main goals are peace and social justice. Democracy enables us to build peace and work for social justice in Africa and around the world. Democracy holds elected leaders accountable, through institutions of checks and balances, and thus to work for the common good.

The security and development challenges facing the African continent will not be solved by states of exception, but quite the opposite, as we can already see in some regimes that have fallen under the control of military corporations. **They will be solved by organised, progressive and republican political forces, relying first and foremost on the African peoples themselves, especially young people and women, and international militant support will be a decisive impetus.**