

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS IN GUINEA

GIJTR PARTNERS: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV), International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), and the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC)

LOCAL PARTNERS: Association des Victimes de la Répression (AVR), Association des Victimes du Camp Boiro (AVCB), Association des Victims, Parents et Amis du 28 Septembre 2009 (AVIPA), Le Consortium des Associations des Jeunes pour la Défense des Victimes de Violences en Guinée (CODEJEV), Humanitaire pour la protection de la femme et de l'enfant (HuProFE), Observatoire Guinéenne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen (OGDH)

TIME FRAME: March 2017 – Present



Guinean survivors and activists visit the Apartheid Museum as part of a South African Exchange

BACKGROUND

Since its independence in 1958, Guinea has experienced cycles of violence characterized by massive human rights violations, destructive transitions of power, and ethnic and political tensions that have been exacerbated by authoritarian rulers who failed to hold perpetrators accountable. The groundwork for one of the most recent and horrific atrocities was laid in 2008 when a group of military officers established the National Council for Democracy and Development, which went on to commit serious human rights abuses – most notably on September 28, 2009 when they opened fire at a pro-democracy protest at the country's main stadium in Conakry, killing 156 civilians and raping at least 109 women and girls.

The “Stadium Massacre,” as it has come to be known, and the organization of democratic elections in 2010 led to renewed calls for accountability and reparations, in the hopes of building a more just and stable future. To bolster this transition, since 2017 the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) has provided technical, programmatic and financial support to civil society organizations (CSOs) and survivors in Guinea in order to strengthen local truth, justice and reconciliation initiatives, which have proven essential to preventing violence and promoting community rebuilding.

In the early stages of the project, the GIJTR focused on training these groups on transitional justice processes and bringing them together to collectively advocate for a holistic national reconciliation process through the lens of the September 28, 2009 Stadium Massacre and the recommendations of the Provisional National Commission on Reconciliation (CPRN). More recently, local partners have in turn dedicated themselves to building the capacities of survivor groups and community organizations to participate in community-based truth, justice, memory and psychosocial support activities. The significance of this project continues to grow, given the transitional government's opening of the Stadium Massacre Trial, combined with the continued need for the establishment of a holistic transitional justice process to address countries wide-ranging truth, justice and reconciliation needs.

OBJECTIVES

When local communities understand and are fully integrated into transitional justice processes, there is a greater likelihood that cycles of violence can be broken and social cohesion established. To support this locally led approach, the GIJTR will:

1. Equip Guinean civil society with the tools to support survivors and advocate for a more just and stable future through national and grassroots transitional justice mechanisms by sharing international best practices and the experiences of other contexts;
2. Build the capacity of diverse stakeholders, including religious leaders, journalists, artists, educators, youth and women leaders, to raise awareness within local communities about the wide-ranging impacts of past violations and lead efforts to promote and reach truth, justice and reconciliation goals;
3. Build the capacity of representatives from CSOs and victims' associations to act as community psychosocial support practitioners, addressing survivors urgent psychosocial support needs and promoting broader community healing;
4. Break harmful taboos surrounding previous cycles of violence by providing spaces for dialogue and reflection about the past and opportunities for interaction between survivors and youth with the goal of violence prevention and empathy-building; and
5. Provide spaces for truth-telling and justice by documenting survivors' narratives that are at risk of being lost in order to promote healing and a general respect for human rights.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DATE

- **Capacity-Building Workshops:** The GIJTR has trained over 85 Guinean CSO representatives, survivors, religious leaders and journalists on key transitional justice concepts, with an emphasis on conceptual and skill development and the role of local communities in promoting national reconciliation.
- **Participatory Methodologies Trainings:** Twelve CSO representatives received skill development training to bolster their community's engagement in violence prevention initiatives, and an additional training on transitional justice and community dialogue was provided to regional coordinators appointed by local partners in order to extend the geographic reach and impact of the project activities.
- **Programmatic and Financial Support for Grants Benefiting Local Communities:** Six local partner organizations received financial and programmatic support related to strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation that enabled them to develop and implement community projects related to psychosocial support for survivors, transitional justice awareness-raising, and advocacy for the implementation of the recommendations of Guinea's Provisional National Commission on Reconciliation (CPRN).
- **Memory and Advocacy Learning Exchange:** Twelve CSO representatives – including survivors and journalists – participated in an exchange program in South Africa with additional participants from across the continent to learn about the successes and challenges of the Truth Commission in South Africa and gain exposure to regional approaches to advocacy, memorialization, and truth-telling processes.
- **Regional Town Hall Dialogues and Truth-Telling Activities:** Regional coordinators appointed by GIJTR's local partners carried out town hall dialogues on violence prevention strategies with support from religious leaders, as well as a range of activities including exhibitions and film screenings that promoted intergenerational exchange and provided platforms for survivors to share. Over 311 youth, women, community leaders, survivors and activists from all four regions of the country were engaged through these activities, helping to break silences about past violence that can ultimately lead to recurrence.

- **Intergenerational Dialogues:** As a follow-up to the Intergenerational Storytelling Workshop organized by GIJTR in August 2022, project partners supported a total of 10 educators and youth leaders to carry-out creative intergenerational storytelling projects in support of violence prevention and social cohesion in their communities. The projects were designed collaboratively by the youth leaders and educators and aimed to address the lack of access to nuanced and trustworthy information about recent human rights violations among youth by encouraging more open dialogue on these subjects between generations. In Kankan, for example, the participating educator and youth leader, in collaboration with CONAREG, used a local tradition of community dialogue called “Summun,” traditionally used to discuss important issues with villagers on the eve of a wedding ceremony or other significant occasion, to bring elders and youth together to discuss recent human rights violations that had taken place in Kankan and strategies to prevent future violence. A griot helped to facilitate the exchange.

KEY IMPACT TO DATE

- **Establishment of the National Coalition in Support of Reconciliation in Guinea (CONAREG):** While some of the local project partners initially viewed each other with mistrust and/or a sense of competition, with GIJTR’s guidance these perceptions shifted toward an emphasis on cooperation, coordination, and the realization of a common goal. As a result, with GIJTR support, the National Coalition in Support of Reconciliation in Guinea (CONAREG) was established by the local partners in order to consolidate their advocacy efforts and develop a joint strategy to pursue truth, justice and national reconciliation moving forward.
- **Successful Implementation of Grant Projects:** The community grants supported by the GIJTR and referenced above led to the creation and implementation of a range of high-impact projects, including one that identified survivors and helped establish a survivor database; a collection of oral histories, which can be particularly useful in preserving the stories of rural, poor, and illiterate survivors; and the development of an art exhibit depicting human rights abuses committed against young people during pro-democracy protests (see right), among others. Plans are currently being developed for the resources that emerged from these community projects to be stored as part of an online archive for students, researchers, survivors, and CSOs interested in transitional justice issues in Guinea. In addition, these outputs are especially notable because the projects prioritized the inclusion of typically marginalized communities – youth, women, survivors, and victims’ families – whose input is necessary for sustainable peace to take hold.



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- **Regional Exchange Conducted with South Africa:** Creating a platform for Guinean participants to connect with other regional survivors and CSOs was critical in expanding their views on contexts similar to their own. Through the GIJTR-led exchange, the Guinean partners gain a clearer understanding of the longevity of transitional justice processes and the necessity of compromise. Following the exchange, participants reported remaining in contact and cultivating the new connections they formed and feeling motivated to find innovative ways to preserve the country’s history to promote social cohesion and violence prevention.
- **Successful Advocacy Campaigns Conducted by Diverse Actors in Favor of Violence Prevention:** In the lead up to the highly contested Guinean presidential election on October 18, 2020, local partners trained by the GIJTR succeeded in bringing together broad coalitions of community leaders to craft and broadcast messages in favor of non-violence and social cohesion through community radio stations in multiple local languages. While episodes of violence were seen in the days surrounding the election, GIJTR’s local partners actively worked together to de-escalate tensions, in one instance obtaining the cooperation of opposition leaders to reschedule a regional protest that would have coincided with a visit from government officials.
- **Dialogues on Gender Justice and Violence Prevention:** As a follow-up to a workshop that GIJTR led in May 2022 on the topic of gender, transitional justice and violence prevention, the 11 women leaders trained as part of the project were supported by the GIJTR and CONAREG to carry out dialogues related to gender justice, transitional justice, and violence prevention in their communities. The dialogues presented an opportunity to share the women leaders’ learnings with a broader audience of women and girls and to engage them in brainstorming practical solutions to pressing violence prevention, truth, justice and reconciliation needs in their regions. The topics for the dialogues varied and were designed by the women leaders in consultation with CONAREG. In Kindia, for example, one of the women leaders brought together 20 women from local victims’ associations, professional associations, and civil society organizations to discuss the high rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Upper Guinea and strategies to educate youth on this issue and reduce the occurrence of similar violence going forward. Other themes included violence against women and girls in educational institutions, domestic violence, and access to justice for domestic workers.
- **Psychosocial Support for Survivors:** Through the GIJTR’s intensive psychosocial support capacity-building program, CSO and victims’ associations have been trained over multiple years to act as community-based psychosocial support practitioners. Participants in this area of the program have noted that the psychosocial capacity-building has helped them to better support the communities in which they work and constitutes an important step in addressing a significant lack of mental health and psychosocial support resources in the country, which threatens community-rebuilding and long-term efforts to support reconciliation and social cohesion.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- **Memorialization Projects:** Working in pairs, representatives from Guinean CSOs, victims' associations and other stakeholder groups will design and implement six grassroots, participatory memory projects, aimed at memorializing past human rights violations and promoting recognition of survivors' experiences in their communities.
- **Monitoring of the Stadium Massacre Trial:** Project partners will produce a report on the ongoing Stadium Massacre Trial, highlighting key moments from the proceedings and survivor perspectives to raise awareness among the general public, while engaging in outreach efforts to combat misinformation about the trial and polarizing, ethnocentric reports.
- **Community Body Mapping Workshops:** Local partners are currently preparing to implement 10 community body mapping workshops with survivors of human rights violations in all regions of the country. Following the community workshops, a traveling exhibition will be organized to promote recognition of victims' experiences and dialogue around past human rights violations and their relationship to present-day violence prevention concerns.



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