

Civil society against lifetime presidency

- By Jørgen Olsen, coordinator of GtU, Denmark, and member of Emmaus' World Council on Political Action and International Solidarity
- Ida Lipka has translated from Danish into English – this is the original version
<https://globalnyt.dk/content/civilsamfund-mod-livstidspraesidenter>

88 % of the population in Togo has only known the rule of one presidential family, even though the country is not a monarchy. Democracy has better conditions in the three neighbor counties. The network “Tournons la page” (= Let us turn the page!) supports the many democracy movements in Africa.

On October 14th Mathieu Kérékou died at the age of 82. He ruled his country Benin as both a military dictator (1972-1991) and a democratically elected president (1996-2006).

For the last 9 years of his life, Kérékou lived a peaceful and secluded life in his home region, the Atakora region in the north west of Benin close to Burkina Faso.

Throughout time, many African presidents have died in exile or in prison – or they have been murdered.

On October 14th the current president, Yayi Boni, declared one week of nation mourning.

Nationally and internationally people are waiting in eager anticipation to find out whether Boni will demand a change in constitution to allow him a third presidential term. Presidents with such ambitions are quite well known in Africa, but Boni has made no such declarations as of yet.

Movement sweeps away president of 27 years

Perhaps Boni is a believer in democracy, or he simply paid attention what happened in Burkina Faso in November 2014 and September 2015. A general mobilization led by ”Balai Citoyen” (= *The Citizens Broom*) drove the president of 27 years, Blaise Compaoré, out of the country. Ten months later, when some of Compaoré’s supporters attempted a coup, the very same public forces defeated them.

The overthrow in November 2014 in Burkina Faso coincided with the founding of the international network “Tournons la page” (= *Let us turn the page!*), who believes that democracy can only work if the leading politicians are replaced regularly.

Here is a short introduction http://gtu.dk/tournons_la_page_paa_dansk.pdf - when you enter this Danish version you can link to versions in English, Spanish and French + to a report in French, which provides examples on how far away such ideals are in a number of African countries.

109 African civil organizations have signed this report – so has 57 organizations outside of Africa, many of which are organization for Africans in exile. In addition to these are 4 pan-African organizations and 2 international: Tax Justice Network and Emmaus International.

87 % of the population of Gabon and 88 % of the population of Togo has only known one ruling presidential family. Similar numbers appear in Angola, Cameroun, Tchad, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Congo Brazzaville and so on.

From the French speaking world

“Tournons la page” and the before mentioned report is marked by the fact that the initiative had its beginning and growth in the French speaking world. For example, the report has not been signed by any organizations from Ghana, even though Ghana is considered one of the most democratic countries in Africa.

My Facebook friend Louis Dovi from the organization MARS (*Mouvement d'Action pour le Renouveau Social = Movement of Action for Social Renewal*), Togo's only member organization of Emmaus International, posted a picture in the spring of 2015 showing Ghana's former president, Jerry Rawlings, walking on the pavement in Accra, the capital, wearing shorts and sandals and apparently without any military protection.

It may take many years before something similar could happen in Ghana's neighbor country, Togo. This would require the development of a tradition for peaceful exchange of opinions. In 2005, at a demonstration against letting Faure Gnassingbé inherit the presidential seat, more than 500 people were killed by military forces.

Louis Dovi's organization MARS works with organizing and education, and this can be valuable in the long run. For the time being, Louis Dovi underacts about the general political situation of his country.

When I met him in Paris in 2013 I asked him what he thought about Faure Gnassingbé.
“He is better at building roads than his father was.”