

# Guinea-bissau

Guinea-Bissau *gīn' ē-bīs' sou'*, officially Republic of Guinea-Bissau, republic (1996 pop. 1,100,000), 13,948 sq mi (36,125 sq km), W Africa. It borders on the Atlantic Ocean in the west, on Senegal in the north, and on Guinea in the east and south. The country includes the nearby Bijagós (Bissagos) Archipelago and other islands in the Atlantic. Bissau is the capital and only large city. There are nine administrative regions. Land and People

The country is largely a low-lying coastal plain and has many rivers, some with wide swampy estuaries. The chief towns are Gabú, Oio, Cacheu, and Bolama. About half of the inhabitants adhere to traditional beliefs; over a third are Muslim and there is a small Christian minority. The population is comprised mainly of five ethnic groups: the Balante, the Fulani, the Mandjack, the Mandinka, and the Papel. Portuguese is the official language, but Crioulo (a Portuguese creole) and a number of African languages are also spoken.

## Economy

Guinea-Bissau is one of the world's poorest nations. Farming is by far the leading occupation; rice, corn, beans, cassava, and cotton are the main crops grown for domestic use. Cashew nuts are by far the largest export; fish, seafood, peanuts, palm kernels, and timber are also exported. Much of the land is state owned. Bauxite is mined and there are unexploited petroleum deposits. Industrial activity is mostly limited to the processing of agricultural products. Guinea-Bissau is a member of the Franc Zone.

## History

The area that became Portuguese Guinea was first visited by the Portuguese in 1446–47, and in the 16th cent. it was an important source of slaves sent to South America. The territory was administered as part of the Portuguese Cape Verde Islands possession until 1879, when it became a separate colony. In 1951 it was constituted an overseas province.

In 1956, Amilcar [Cabral](#) founded the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). After some years of sporadic violence, the PAIGC launched a war of independence in Portuguese Guinea in the early 1960s; in 1973 it declared the province, renamed Guinea-Bissau, independent of Portugal. A government was established and elections for a national assembly were held in PAIGC-controlled areas. Following the coup in Portugal (1974), the new Portuguese government initiated negotiations with the PAIGC.

In Aug., 1974, an agreement was reached under which Portugal granted (Sept. 10) independence to Guinea-Bissau. Luis de Almeida Cabral (the brother of Amilcar Cabral, who had been assassinated in 1973) became the first president, and Guinea-Bissau was admitted to the United Nations that year. Although Portugal refused to give the Cape

Verde Islands and Guinea-Bissau independence together (granting Cape Verde separate independence in 1975), the two maintained the PAIGC as a common political party for five years. Guinea-Bissau remained a single-party state with limited civil rights. Security was a primary concern in the early years of independence, as the regime was weak in Bissau where there was lingering support for the Portuguese.

In 1980 a coup brought João Bernardo Vieira to power. The new regime opposed unification with Cape Verde, but relations between the two nations were normalized in 1983. Although Vieira's regime in the 1980s was characterized by purgings of political enemies and suppression of dissent, he also introduced health reforms and initiatives to increase agricultural production and economic diversity. However, the economy did poorly and the country relied on outside aid to make up for enormous deficits. In 1991 the national assembly officially revoked the PAIGC's status as the sole legal party, and in 1994 Vieira was chosen as president in the country's first free elections.

An army mutiny began in June, 1998, eventually turning into a war in which neighboring Senegal and Guinea intervened on Vieira's behalf, but the coup almost marked the beginning of a period of economic and political troubles. In May, 1999, the military ousted Vieira and installed Malam Bacai Sanhá, the former head of parliament, as interim president. In Dec., 1999, two opposition parties won a majority in parliament, and, after defeating Sanhá in a runoff in Jan., 2000, Party for Social Renewal (PRS) candidate Kumba Yala won the presidency. An army rebellion in Nov., 2000, by former junta leader Gen. Ansumane Mane was crushed and Mane was killed. Yala, hampered by the poor economy and heading an unstable government, was ousted in Sept., 2003, by a military coup that subsequently received the support of many civilian leaders. Businessman Henrique Rosa was appointed president of a transitional national government. Parliamentary elections in Mar., 2004, resulted in a plurality for the PAIGC, and Carlos Gomes Júnior became prime minister with the support of the PRS. In October the chief of the armed forces was killed in a brief mutiny over back pay, but a peaceful end to uprising was negotiated.

#### Bibliography.

See C. Lopes, *Guinea-Bissau: From Liberation Struggle to Independent Statehood* (1987); R. Lobban and J. Forrest, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau* (2d ed. 1988).

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