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## **Sierra Leone's president promises to treat coup attempt as 'law and order issue' only**

### ***Президент Сьєрра-Леоне обіцяє розглядати спробу державного перевороту лише як «проблему правопорядку»***

*Президент Сьєрра-Леоне Джуліус Маада Біо каже, що його уряд розглядає спробу державного перевороту виключно як питання закону та порядку, оскільки він намагається згуртувати свою націю на захист демократії. Згідно з інформацією, оприлюдненою урядом Д. Біо, внаслідок спроби державного перевороту загинула 21 особа, у тому числі 14 солдатів і троє нападників. На думку спеціалізованої консалтингової фірми з бізнес-аналітики «Songhai Advisory», Д. Біо, який зараз перебуває на своєму другому і останньому конституційному терміні, має виконати свої обіцянки щодо виборчих реформ, якщо хоче врятувати демократію. «Д. Біо доведеться призначити незалежну організацію, щоб ініціювати процес виборчої реформи, що заслуговує на довіру, як умову поліпшення політичної стабільності і відновлення довіри партнерів з розвитку», - йдеться в повідомленні експертів.*

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/sierra-leones-president-promises-to-treat-coup-attempt-as-law-and-order-issue-only-20231204>

President Bio said the coup attempt of 26 November was not a political, religious, or tribal matter.

Thirteen military personnel and one civilian were held as suspects in the claimed coup attempt. A Catholic bishops meeting in Lagos, Nigeria, last week raised concerns that coups were getting civilian support as democracy fails.

President Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone says his government is treating last week's coup attempt purely as a matter of law and order, as he attempts to rally his nation in defence of democracy.

The overthrow attempt would "be dealt with by my government purely as a law and order issue, not a political, tribal, or religious matter", he said in a State of the Nation Address on Saturday night, while investigations were ongoing.

In his first address last week, the president said some of those involved in the attack on an army barracks, prison, and other selected places in the capital of Freetown had been arrested.

According to information made public by the Bio government, 21 people were killed in the coup attempt, including 14 soldiers and three attackers.

Thirteen military personnel and one civilian were being held following the coup attempt.

Thirty-one people, including one woman, are on the wanted list in relation to the coup attempt, and a curfew remains in place between 21:00 and 6:00.

Bio's balancing act

In September, there were protests in Sierra Leone leading to dozens of arrests. This was just over a year after the August 2022 riots that claimed the lives of 20 civilians and six police officers, amid mounting frustrations over the soaring cost of living.

Going into the general elections and the period beyond, there was mass disgruntlement across the political divide.

To date, no one has been brought to justice over the August 2022 deaths.

Samira Daoud, director of Amnesty International's West and Central Africa, office said the government had failed its people.

"The Sierra Leonean authorities have failed to live up to their promise to conduct a full, impartial, and transparent investigation and guarantee justice and truth to the families of victims," she said.

According to Songhai Advisory, a bespoke business intelligence consultancy firm, Bio now in his second and last constitutional term, should fulfil his promises of electoral reforms if democracy was to be saved.

"Bio will have to appoint an independent entity to initiate a credible process for electoral reform as a condition for improving political stability and restoring development partner confidence," it said.

"The governance agenda would be at risk in a scenario where there is no systemic change supported by stakeholders. But allowing for meaningful opposition and reversing some changes that weakened the democratic process would improve the political risk outlook."

A prayer for Africa

Catholic Bishops in Africa met in Lagos, Nigeria, for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Pan-African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS) last week.

They prayed for civilian victims of coups.

"In our prayers, we solemnly remember all these victims who have tragically lost their lives due to the unchecked ambitions of certain leaders (coups and unconstitutional changes of government)," they said.

"These leaders, driven by self-interest, the agendas of their clans, or the objectives of their foreign allies, have placed these priorities above the welfare of their nations."

Members of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) raised concerns about the failure of general elections to reflect the people's will in parts of Africa.

Sierra Leone prevents coup: Government regains control after violence

"It has become apparent that some of these elections are seemingly orchestrated to favour state-backed candidates, thereby undermining the democratic process," they said.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will be the last African country to hold elections this year, on 20 December.

The National Episcopal Conference of Congo said the DRC's economic and political stability depended on the running of the elections.

"The stability of our country and the well-being of our people hinge significantly on the conduct of free, inclusive, transparent, and peaceful elections," they said in their statement at the CEPACS meeting.

A new breed of coups

SECAM president, Congolese Fridolin Cardinal Ambongo, noted that there had been a change in the nature of recent coups, compared to the 1970s.

"These occurrences contrast with the coups of the 1970s and 1980s, where the aim was predominantly the acquisition and prolonged retention of power," he said in a statement.

According to Afrobarometer, declining public satisfaction was threatening African democracy, with putsches getting civilian support.

Ambongo holds similar views.

"The recent coups are characterised by a somewhat messianic intent, purportedly aimed at liberating the populace from injustices and terminating the monopoly of national wealth by entrenched 'political dynasties' and their international allies," his statement read.

"The general populace has shown support for the coup leaders, viewing these actions as an expression of deep-seated frustration and anger towards longstanding injustices."

The bishops concluded by saying: "Principally, we stand opposed to coups d'état, a position that aligns with the teachings of the Church, which firmly rejects the seizure of power through force."