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Calls for president Sall to forgo third term as Senegal celebrates 63 years of independence

Президента Салла на святкуванні 63-річчі незалежності закликають відмовитись від третього терміну

Президенту Сенегалу Макі Саллу порадили не балотуватися на третій президентський термін і продовжувати подавати приклад демократії, що працює, для решти Африки. У Сенегалі побоюються, що М. Салла може зацікавити третій термін, незважаючи на те, що він відверто про це не заявив. У 2016 році Конституція країни скоротила ліміт президентських термінів із семи до п'яти років, і ніхто не повинен балотуватися на третій термін. В інтерв'ю французькому журналу L'Express М. Салл сказав, що його перший термін не входив у сферу його дії, коли закон набув чинності. «У мене є порядок денний, робота, яку потрібно виконати. Коли прийде час, я оголошу свою позицію спочатку моїм прихильникам, потім сенегальському народу», - зазначив М. Салл. Його головному політичному супернику Усману Сонко висунуто кримінальні звинувачення, які можуть позбавити його права балотуватися на пост президента.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/calls-for-president-sall-to-forgo-third-term-as-senegal-celebrates-63-years-of-independence-20230404>

Senegal's President 'open to dialogue' after tensions

Senegal has been one of Africa's stable democracies since its independence from France in 1960. There is anxiety in the country amid suspicion that President Macky Sall might run for a third term.

His biggest political rival, Ousmane Sonko, faces criminal charges that may disqualify him from running for the presidency.

Senegalese President Macky Sall has been advised not to seek a third term and to continue setting an example of a working democracy for the rest of Africa.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and a former World Bank vice-president gave Sall this advice on Tuesday as Senegal celebrated the 63rd anniversary of its independence.

The former French colony has had four heads of state, starting with its founding father, Léopold Sédar Senghor, famed for being one of the early proponents of Negritude, a philosophy of pride in the cultural and physical aspects of African heritage.

Senghor ruled for 20 years, followed by Abdou Diouf, who was in power for 19 years.

Abdoulaye Wade became Senegal's first two-term president, and Sall is at the tail end of his second term, with elections due on 25 February 2024.

Since independence, three political parties have been in power. The first two presidents were from the Socialist Party of Senegal, the next two presidents were from the Senegalese Democratic Party, and Sall's Alliance for the Republic, a breakaway of the Senegalese Democratic Party, is currently in power.

Former World Bank vice-president Dr Obiageli Ezekwesili challenged Senegal to stay true to democracy.

She said:

To the leaders of Senegal, through President Sall, and to its valiant people, I would like, through this message, to encourage you to build and consolidate on your democratic credentials and ensure that it remains a worthy model in Africa from which sister African countries can draw inspiration as we journey towards a common ideal.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US' ties with Senegal were hinged on "the shared ideals of democracy, security and economic prosperity".

He said Senegal was the US' regional ally in the face of emerging threats to peace in Africa.

"We greatly value Senegal's leadership and commitment to ensuring regional stability through its substantial contributions to peacekeeping operations around the globe.

"My conversations with President Sall at the US-Africa Leaders Summit on the full range of pressing issues – food and health security, climate, elevating African voices in matters of global governance, and pushing back against democratic backsliding in Africa – underscore the depth and breadth of the US-Senegal friendship. We look forward to deepening our partnership in these areas in the coming months," he added.

Last year, Sall was the African Union's (AU) chairperson, an annual rotational post where regions choose their preferred candidate. The current chair is President Azali Assoumani from the Comoros.

In Senegal, there are fears that Sall might be interested in a third term despite not openly saying so.

In 2016, the country's Constitution shortened the presidential term limits from seven to five years, and no one should stand for a third term.

French navy jet helps Senegal tackle illicit fishing

Sall was hailed for reducing his own term at a time when countries such as Benin, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo-Brazzaville considered extending presidential terms.

In an interview with a French magazine L'Express last month, Sall said his first term was not part of the scope when the law came into effect when he was five years into his first term, that ended in 2019.

As such, he claimed that standing for a third term was "a political debate" in which "I have not yet given my answer. I have an agenda, a job to do. When the time comes, I will make my position known, first to my supporters, then to the Senegalese people."

It could be history repeating itself. In 2008, an elderly Wade increased the presidential term to seven years, a reversal of the five-year term that had been activated in the 2001 Constitution. The extension didn't apply to his 2007-2012 term. The seven years would then begin in what was to be a "third term" if he ran for office, which he did. He lost to reformist and career government minister Sall.

NGOs in Senegal pleaded with Sall not to take up a third term as this would dent the country's democratic record.

This is because third terms were not received well in Guinea, where Alpha Conde was later removed through a coup as well as in Ivory Coast where Alassane Ouattara got a third term in an election marred by a huge boycott.

If Sall was to stand for re-election, his main rival would be 48-year-old Ousmane Sonko from the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity. In 2019, Sonko was the youngest candidate in the presidential race. Since the beginning of the year, his supporters have been holding demonstrations against Sall.

Sonko, a former tax inspector, has criminal charges hanging over his head, including a defamation case filed by Tourism Minister Mame Mbaye Niang, who Sonko accused of corruption. If found guilty, he will not be eligible to stand in the upcoming elections.