Guinea military declares state of emergency

Civilians prevented from circulating on streets after clashes following disputed election

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A police officer stands guard in the suburb of Bambeto, in Conakry. Photograph: Jerome Delay/AP

The Guinean military yesterday declared a state of emergency after violence broke out following a tense presidential election.

The armed forces chief, Nouhou Thiam, read the decree on state television. He said the measure prevented civilians from circulating on the streets, and that only military and security forces would have unrestricted movement.

Mohamed Kaffe, a spokesman for General Sekouba Konate, who has served as Guinea’s interim president, said a state of emergency prohibited any gatherings of people, such as rallies.

He said Guineans were allowed to go to work and to the market, but must travel alone and not move in groups.

Kaffe said that, under the state of emergency, the army would be deployed across the
country to enforce the decree.

The decree will hold until the supreme court declares final results from the 7 November poll, after a challenge from the losing candidate. It must do so within eight days of the announcement of the results late on Monday.

Alpha Conde, a Malinke, was declared the winner, prompting Peul supporters of his opponent, Cellou Dalein Diallo, to riot. They burned tyres, barricaded roads and destroyed the homes and businesses of Malinke neighbours.

Yesterday, some members of Guinea’s Malinke ethnic group said they had armed themselves for possible clashes with Peul neighbours. Groups of men lining the road from the capital, Conakry, to the suburbs shook sticks, guns and machetes at passing cars.

"We are here to protect ourselves. We have knives ... and sticks," Mohamed Camara, a Malinke, said.

The mostly Malinke security force in Guinea has taken over troubled neighbourhoods. Few residents venture outside.

Reports of police brutality against Peul citizens are multiplying, and at least four people have been killed and 62 injured since the election results were announced.

Gunfire continued to be heard yesterday, and hospital officials said more injured people were being brought in.

Observers fear the violence in Guinea could destabilise the country’s fragile neighbours if it gets out of hand.

Ethnic tensions have already sparked clashes in Sierra Leone, where police said Peul and Malinke had clashed. Twenty people in the town of Kenema were arrested for rioting. Guinea borders Sierra Leone and Liberia, countries recovering from wars fuelled by ethnic divisions. For decades, Guinea was a counterpoint to these two countries, with Peul and Malinke living side by side.

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