

# The Unilateral Proclamation of Independence of Guinea-Bissau: Fifty Years Later (1973-2023)

## Call for Papers

International Conference: Online and In-Person

Lisbon, 22-23 September 2023

Venue: NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal

In January 1963, the PAIGC (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* – African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde) engaged in an armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau. Soon afterwards, the movement started to claim control over part of the Guinean territory, the so-called liberated areas. From 1965 onwards, liberated areas became a key concept and one of the linchpins of the PAIGC diplomacy and were linked by the movement to the attempt to establish a proto-state through state-building programs to provide health, economic, educational, technical, judiciary, and administrative assistance to the local populations. The movement conceived the liberated areas and state-building programs to fit into contemporary paradigms of statehood and to be used as means to gain the support of formal allies and informal networks of solidarity, as well as to place internationally the struggle and the demand for independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde. This becomes evident in the way the PAIGV endeavoured to delegitimize the Portuguese rule and to convince the international community that the situation in Guinea was comparable to an independent state with a portion of its territories, namely the urban areas, occupied by foreign armed forces.

Claiming that Portugal was no longer capable of ruling over most of the Guinean territory, the PAIGC leader, Amílcar Cabral, started in May 1968 to contemplate the unilateral proclamation of independence as part of his strategy to win the war. The proclamation was postponed several times and only in the early 1970s the idea came to fruition. The progress of the armed struggle coupled with the United Nations (UN) visiting mission to Guinea, held between 2 and 8 April 1972, became a strong stimulus to the intention of unilaterally proclaiming independence. After securing recognition by the UN as the sole and authentic representative of the Guinean population, the PAIGC held elections to the People's National Assembly and established the Republic of Guinea-Bissau on 24 September 1973. Soon, many countries recognized the unilateral declaration of independence, and 50 UN member states requested a General Assembly debate on the situation in the territory. From the beginning, the intention behind the request was clear since the wording of the issue in the agenda reproduced the PAIGC rhetoric of “illegal occupation by Portuguese military forces of certain sectors of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and acts of aggression committed by them against the people of the Republic.”

Resolution 3061 (XXVIII), of 2 November 1973, approved by the General Assembly took the independence of Guinea-Bissau for granted, although Portugal denied the existence of the Republic and argued that it did not meet the criteria of a nation. Nevertheless, the resolution only welcomed the accession of the people of Guinea-Bissau to independence, failing to recognize the formation of a new sovereign state. This was a symptom of how divisive the recognition of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau was for member states, with the United States and the United Kingdom threatening to use the veto power in case of a

request for admission at the UN. No attempt was made for the membership of the Republic at the UN, but resolution 3061 (XXVIII) deeply influenced the future of the independence struggle in Guinea-Bissau. The document established that since the PAIGC held control over part of the territory, a unilateral proclamation of independence was a legitimate action. Moreover, the resolution refused Portugal's claim to represent the colony, branding the country as an aggressor that was violating the sovereignty and integrity of an independent state.

The proclamation of independence significantly increased the international notoriety of the PAIGC and of Guinea-Bissau. The event played a crucial role in the process of recognition by Portugal of the independence of Guinea-Bissau that occurred on 10 September 1974. Overall, the Guinean anticolonial liberation struggle transformed the face of the world politics: it worked as a catalyst for the regime change in Portugal. It was one of the driving forces behind the Carnation Revolution (25 April 1974), that brought the *Estado Novo* dictatorship to an end. The Guinean anticolonial struggle also influenced the whole Portuguese decolonization in Africa and opened pathways to establish state partnerships and placed Guinea-Bissau as a global political actor. This is why, as a local historical fact, the proclamation of Guinea independence should be scrutinized through the lens of connected histories, to consider its local, regional, international and transnational dimensions and scopes in order to shed light on the multiple aspects, dynamics, impacts and ramifications the event generated in Africa and elsewhere.

Although the unilateral proclamation of independence has been highlighted in the scholarship regarding the struggle for the independence of Guinea-Bissau, there is a need to explore the subject in greater depth. To expand the parameters of inquiry on the Guinea-Bissau rise to statehood (and taking into account the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unilateral Proclamation of Independence), the Institute of Contemporary History–NOVA University of Lisbon and the CEIS 20–University of Coimbra will organize an international conference to be held online and in-person on 22 and 23 September 2023.

Proposals for 20-minute presentations on issues related to the unilateral proclamation of independence will be accepted, including but not limited to the following topics:

- comparison with other cases of unilateral declarations of independence;
- the PAIGC's strategies for internal legitimacy and international recognition of the unilateral declaration;
- the recognition of the state of Guinea-Bissau by other countries around the globe;
- how the proclamation impacted the work of networks of international solidarity with the PAIGC;
- the intersection of the unilateral proclamation with the Cold War and the Third-Worldism dynamics;
- the narratives about the proclamation of the state of Guinea-Bissau created by different actors (journalists, filmmakers, writers, artists, diplomats, and so on);

- the reactions of Portuguese authorities;
- how the Guinea-Bissau's unilateral proclamation contributed to the Carnation Revolution and to the end of Portuguese colonial rule;
- the recognition of the proclamation by Portugal after 25 April 1974;
- the transfer of powers after the recognition and the relations of Guinea-Bissau with neighboring countries, namely Senegal and Guinea-Conakry;
- the impacts of the proclamation on the negotiations for the independence of Cabo Verde and the other Portuguese African colonies.

Abstracts of presentations (300 words) and biographical notes (250 words) should be sent to: [unilateralindependence@gmail.com](mailto:unilateralindependence@gmail.com)

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 10 June 2023

Notification of acceptance: 30 June 2023

Working language: Portuguese, English and French.

The organizers foresee the publication of the communications.

### **Organizing Committee**

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*The IHC is funded by National funds through FCT — Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the projects UIDB/04209/2020, UIDP/04209/2020, and LA/P/0132/2020.*