

Politics-Gabon-2016 Elections

LIBREVILLE, Feb 21 (Infosplusgabon) - Jean Ping, the former chairman of the African Union Commission, may challenge President Ali Bongo Ondimba in 2016 elections to end 47 years of rule by Bongo's family in Africa's sixth-largest oil producer, according to Bloomberg News.

"If the Gabonese people seriously ask me to be a candidate for the 2016 presidential election, I will accept," Ping said in an interview in Libreville, the capital, yesterday. "I'm not afraid of the consequences."

Ping, 71, served nine years as foreign minister under former ruler Omar Bongo before his appointment as chairman of the African Union Commission in 2008. He returned to the oil-producing nation after his term at the African Union, which is based in Ethiopia, came to an end in 2012.

Gabon : African Union's Ping May Run to End 47-Year Bongo Rule in Gabon

Écrit par Antoine Lawson

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Opposition groups asked him to lead them, Ping said, without giving further details. The fractured Gabonese opposition should unite and contribute to the development of the country, he said. The ruling Parti Democratique Gabonais won 108 of 120 seats in the National Assembly in 2012. Bongo won the 2009 election for president with 42 percent of the vote, with the next closest candidate garnering 26 percent, after his father's death that year.

"It is time for the opposition to play its role, and for opposition leaders to think one way and contribute to the development of the country," he said. "It's clear that I have nothing to do with the current Gabonese authorities."

Longest Rule

Gabon, a nation of about 1.6 million people, has had three presidents since declaring independence from France in 1960. Omar Bongo, who was in office for 42 years, was the longest-serving national leader at the time of his death at the age of 73 in 2009. The presidential election that year was only the third since gaining independence. The opposition refused to accept the results of the 2009 election, leading to riots and a clampdown on the media.

Oil production has helped the nation boost per capita gross domestic product to more than \$11,000, making it an upper-middle income country and about 10 times the average of sub-Saharan African countries. Still, about 20 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, according to the World Bank.

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The nation sold \$1.5 billion of dollar bonds in December as part of an exchange and buyback of existing debt. The yield on the debt due in December 2024 has dropped 30 basis points to 6.08 percent this year.

West African nations bordering the Gulf of Guinea, including Gabon, produce more than 3 million barrels of oil a day, about one-third of Africa's total oil production. Gabon pumped about 245,000 barrels of crude a day in 2012, according to the BP Statistical Review. The nation is the world's fourth-largest producer of manganese, which is used to strengthen steel, according to the website of the U.S. Geological Survey.

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