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Jason, Emily & Savannah Atkins

April and May, the Twitter version: We're back in Michigan early because of a coup in Guinea-Bissau. We really like eating cheese again 😊

THE BACKSTORY

No elected president in the 39 years since the independence of Guinea-Bissau has finished a five-year term. The last several years have been even more unstable in Guinea-Bissau because of periodic, half-hearted coup attempts by different military leaders. In January the president died of an illness and an interim president was put in place to oversee elections in April. The first round of voting left one candidate far ahead of the pack. The candidate ran on a platform which involved reducing the size of the corrupt military to help bring stability to the country. A few days after the first round of voting, before a second round which would've confirmed the election, the military kidnapped the candidate, interim president, and several other members of the government and supreme court. After negotiations slowed, the UN and international community placed sanctions on the military and country, cutting off aid. Foreign aid is responsible for paying teachers, many government employees, keeping the prisons operating, subsidizing the price of food, and many other things. Currently negotiations continue in an attempt to reinstate the imprisoned (and later released) leaders and reconstitute the government. The international community is threatening military involvement if the Guinean military doesn't put things back as they were.

PROCESSING THE EVACUATION *by Emily*

When we arrived in Africa nearly six years ago everything felt so foreign and I cried out to God to give my heart a home in a strange land. He answered that prayer in so many ways, and while I'm so grateful, it has made leaving in the midst of a military coup even more difficult. There are things about evacuation that I always thought would be hard, but when it came right down to it I was surprised how much grace God gave us to make tough decisions easily. Even though we live in a tiny apartment, you can't pack three people's whole lives into one suitcase. We had to leave lots of things behind, but even in the midst of packing, it seemed easy to take the most important stuff and let everything else go.

Leaving our friends wasn't so easy. As more and more missionaries and embassy personnel left the country in the week after the coup, the National Director of YFC Guinea-Bissau, Pastor Ze Augusto, decided it would be wise for us to go as well. Foreigners are always targets in times of uncertainty and can often be blamed for decisions made by the international community. As we packed up our car to head to Senegal we were feeling pretty torn up about leaving, but Pastor Ze Augusto told us that when a family has problems there comes a time when the problems get so serious that everyone else has to go and the family has to sit down and deal with them. He went on to say that the problems in Guinea-Bissau are of their own creation and now is the time for Guineans to find solutions.



Us and our teammates, the McHargues. We spent the whole evacuation with them, first at their house in the village and then sharing a little bungalow for several weeks in Senegal. This was our last time together as they are now back in the U.S. to stay. We loved serving with them in Guinea-Bissau over the last three years and we're excited to see what God has in store for them!

Continued...

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When we left for Senegal in mid-April we were fully expecting the conflict to be resolved in a matter of days or weeks and we were looking forward to being able to go back to our normal lives in the country we love. We had been planning on coming back to the U.S. for June and July to attend Jason’s sister’s wedding and to meet both of my sisters’ first babies. As the conflict stretched into May, with no end in sight, the leadership of YFC in Guinea-Bissau advised us to go ahead and head home a few weeks early.

We arrived in the States the weekend of Mother’s Day and while our bodies are getting over jet lag our hearts and our prayers are with the people of Guinea-Bissau. The country needs change. The people are tired of war. They are tired of poverty and suffering and fear. We know that God often does His greatest work in times of uncertainty and we’re trusting God for miracles in our little corner of West Africa.

GOING FORWARD by Jason

We arrived in the U.S. May 12 and are glad to be getting settled in for a little while. Before the coup we had originally planned to come home for my sister's wedding and both of Emily's sisters' first babies in June, July, and August. At the moment it looks like the situation in Bissau might have improved enough for us to head back sometime around then; we're making some tentative plans to return, but we'll have to see how things are in Bissau as we get closer. We'll be in Little Rock visiting Emily's family and speaking in a couple of churches in June, after which we'll be back in Michigan. It's been a crazy couple of months and the Lord has been taking care of us in so many ways. Thanks again for your thoughts and prayers for us!

Jason + Emily



One of Savannah’s favorite parts of being in the US - Cheerios!



The coup happened the day that Savannah turned 18 months old and we landed in the US the day she turned 19 months. It was a crazy month for us but our flexible little girl took it all in stride and had a great time along the way!

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