

Jerry John Rawlings (22 June 1947 – 12 November 2020)[1] was a Ghanaian military officer, aviator and politician who led the country for a brief period in 1979, and then from 1981 to 2001. He led a military junta until 1992, and then served two terms as the democratically elected president of Ghana.

Rawlings came to power in Ghana as a flight lieutenant of the Ghana Air Force following a coup d'état in 1979. Prior to that, he led an unsuccessful coup attempt against the ruling military government on Tuesday, 15 May 1979, just five weeks before scheduled democratic elections were due to take place. After handing power over to a civilian government, he took back control of the country on Thursday, 31 December 1981 as the chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

In 1992, Rawlings resigned from the military, founded the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and became the first president of the Fourth Republic. He was re-elected in 1996 for four more years.[5][6] After two terms in office, the limit according to the Ghanaian Constitution, Rawlings endorsed his vice-president John Atta Mills as a presidential candidate in 2000. Rawlings served as the African Union envoy to Somalia. He died in 2020 at age 73 and was accorded a state funeral.

Background

Rawlings was born as Jerry Rawlings John on Sunday, 22 June 1947 in Accra, Ghana, to Victoria Agbotui, an Anlo Ewe from Dzelukope, Keta, and James Ramsey John, a British chemist from Castle Douglas in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. Rawlings attended Achimota School and a military academy at Teshie. Rawlings was married to Nana Konadu Agyeman, whom he met while at Achimota College. They had three daughters: Zanetor Rawlings, Yaa Asantewaa Rawlings, Amina Rawlings; and one son, Kimathi Rawlings. Junior Agogo was the nephew of Rawlings.

Education and military career

Rawlings finished his secondary education at Achimota College in 1967.[14] He joined the Ghana Air Force shortly afterwards; on his application, the military switched his surname John and his middle name Rawlings.[15] In March 1968, he was posted to Takoradi, in Ghana's Western Region, to continue his studies. He graduated in January 1969, and was commissioned as a pilot officer, winning the coveted "Speed Bird Trophy" as the best cadet in flying the Su-7 ground attack supersonic jet aircraft as he was skilled in aerobatics. He earned the rank of flight lieutenant in April 1978. During his service with the Ghana Air Force, Rawlings perceived a deterioration in discipline and morale due to corruption in the Supreme Military Council (SMC). As promotion brought him into contact with the privileged classes and their social values, his view of the injustices in society hardened. He was thus regarded with some unease by the SMC. After the 1979 coup, he involved himself with the student community of the University of Ghana, where he developed a more leftist ideology through reading and discussion of social and political ideas.[16][unreliable source?]

1979 coup and purges

Further information: 4 June revolution in Ghana

Rawlings grew discontented with Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's government, which had come to power through a coup in January 1972. Acheampong was accused not only of corruption, but also of maintaining Ghana's dependency on pre-colonial powers, in a situation which led to economic decline and impoverishment.

Rawlings was part of the Free Africa Movement, an underground movement of military officers who wanted to unify Africa through a series of coups. On Tuesday, 15 May 1979, five weeks prior to civilian elections, Rawlings and six other soldiers staged a coup against the government of General Fred Akuffo, but failed and were arrested by the military. Rawlings was publicly sentenced to death in a General Court Martial and imprisoned, although his statements on the social injustices that motivated his actions won him civilian sympathy. While awaiting execution, Rawlings was sprung from custody on Monday, 4 June 1979 by a group of soldiers. Claiming that the government was corrupt beyond redemption and that new leadership was required for Ghana's development, he led the group in a coup to oust the Akuffo Government and Supreme Military Council. Shortly afterwards, Rawlings established and became the Chairman of a 15-member Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), primarily composed of junior officers. He and the AFRC ruled for 112 days and arranged the execution by firing squad of eight military officers, including Generals Kot

ei, Joy Amedume, Roger Felli, and Utuka, as well as the three former Ghanaian heads of state; Acheampong, Akuffo, and Akwasi Afrifa.

These executions were dramatic events in the history of Ghana, which had previously suffered few instances of political violence. Rawlings later implemented a much wider "house-cleaning exercise" involving the killings and abduction of over 300 Ghanaians. Elections were held on time shortly after the coup. On Monday, 24 September 1979, power was peacefully handed over by Rawlings to President Hilla Limann, whose People's National Party (PNP) had the support of Nkrumah's followers. Two years later, on 31 December 1981 Rawlings ousted President Hilla Limann in a coup d'état, claiming that civilian rule was weak and the country's economy was deteriorating. The killings of the Supreme Court justices (Cecilia Koranteng-Addow, Frederick Sarkodie, and Kwadjo Agyei Agyepong), military officers Major Sam Acquah and Major Dasana Nantogmah also occurred during the second military rule of Rawlings. However, unlike the 1979 executions, these persons were abducted and killed in secret and it is unclear who was behind their murders, though Joachim Amartey Kwei and four others were convicted of murdering the Justices and Acquah, and were executed in 1982.

1981 coup and reforms

Believing the Limann regime to be unable to resolve Ghana's neocolonial economic dependency, Rawlings led a second coup against Limann and indicted the entire political class on 31 December 1981. In place of Limann's People's National Party, Rawlings established the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) military junta as the official government.

Rawlings hosted state visits from "revolutionaries" from other countries, including Déni Bouterse (Suriname), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), and Sam Nujoma (Namibia). More famously, Rawlings reversed Limann's boycott of Gaddafi's Libya, allowing the Black Stars to compete in the 1982 African Cup of Nations. The team won the AFCON trophy for the fourth time, their last win as of 2022.

1992 elections

Further information: Rawlings government

President Rawlings (right) with United States Ambassador Kenneth L. Brown (center) and a United States Air Force crewman in 1995

Rawlings established the National Commission on Democracy (NCD) shortly after the 1982 coup, and employed it to survey civilian opinion and make recommendations that would facilitate the process of democratic transition. In March 1991, the NCD released a report recommending the election of an executive president, the establishment of a national assembly, and the creation of the post of prime minister. The PNDC used NCD recommendations to establish a committee for the drafting of a new constitution based on past Ghanaian Constitutions, that lifted the ban on political parties in May 1992 after it was approved by referendum.

On Friday, 3 November 1992, election results compiled by the INEC from 200 constituencies showed that Rawlings' NDC had won 60% of the votes, and had obtained the majority needed to prevent a second round of voting. More specifically, the NDC won 62% in the Brong-Ahafo region, 93% in the Volta region, and majority votes in Upper West, Upper East, Western, Northern, Central, and Greater Accra regions. His opponents Professor Adu Boahen won 31% of the votes, former President Hilla Limann won 6.8%, Kwabena Darko won 2.9%, and Emmanuel Erskine won 1.7%. Voter turnout was 50%.

The ability of opposition parties to compete was limited by the vast advantages Rawlings possessed. Rawlings' victory was aided by the various party structures that were integrated into society during his rule, called the "organs of the revolution". These structures included the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), Commando Units, 31 December Women's Organization, the 4 June movement, Peoples Militias, and Mobisquads, and operated on a system of popular control through intimidation.[21] Rawlings held a monopoly over national media, and was able to censor print and electronic media through a PNDC newspaper licensing decree, PNDC Law 221. Moreover, Rawlings imposed a 20,000 Cedis (about \$400) cap on campaign contributions, which made national publicity of opposition parties virtually impossible. Rawl

ings himself began campaigning before the official unbanning of political parties and had access to state resources and was able to effectively meet all monetary demands required of a successful campaign. Rawlings travelled across the country, initiating public-works projects and giving public employees a 60% pay rise prior to election day.

Opposition parties objected to the election results, citing incidences of vote stuffing in regions where Rawlings was likely to lose and rural areas with scant populations, as well as a bloated voters' register and a partisan electoral commission. However, the Commonwealth Observer Group, led by Sir Ellis Clarke, approved of the election as "free and fair", as there were very few issues at polling stations and no major incidences of voter coercion. In contrast, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) issued a report supporting claims that erroneous entries in voter registration could have affected election results. The Carter Center did acknowledge minor electoral issues but did not see these problems as indicative of systematic electoral fraud.

Opposition parties boycotted subsequent Ghana parliamentary and presidential elections, and the unicameral National Assembly, of which NDC officials won 189 of 200 seats and essentially established a one-party parliament that lacked legitimacy and only had limited legislative powers. After the disputed election, the PNDC was transformed into the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

Rawlings took office on Thursday, 7 January 1993, the same day that the new constitution came into effect, and the government became known as the Fourth Republic of Ghana.

Policies and reforms

Rawlings established the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) suggested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1982 due to the poor state of the economy after 18 months of attempting to govern it through administrative controls and mass mobilization. The policies implemented caused a dramatic currency devaluation, the removal of price controls, and social-service subsidies which favored farmers over urban workers, and privatization of some state-owned enterprises, and restraints on government spending. Funding was provided by bilateral donors, reaching US\$800 million in 1987 and 1988, and US\$900 million in 1989.

Between 1992 and 1996, Rawlings eased control over the judiciary and civil society, allowing a more independent Supreme Court and the publication of independent newspapers. Opposition parties operated outside of parliament and held rallies and press conferences.

Post military

The 1992 constitution limits a president to two terms, even if they are nonconsecutive. Rawlings did not attempt to amend the document to allow him to run for a third term in 2000. He retired in 2001 and was succeeded by John Agyekum Kufuor,[33] his main rival and opponent in 1996. It was the first time in Ghanaian history that a sitting government peacefully transferred power to an elected member of the opposition.

Kufuor won the presidency after defeating Rawlings' vice-president John Atta Mills in a runoff in 2000. In 2004, Mills conceded to Kufuor after another election between the two.

Post presidency

In November 2000, Rawlings was named the first International Year of Volunteers 2001 Eminent Person by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, attending various events and conferences to promote volunteerism.

In October 2010, Rawlings was named as the African Union envoy to Somalia.[36] In November 2010, he attended the inauguration of Déni Bouterse as President of Suriname, and took a tour of the country. He was especially interested in the Ghanaian origins of the Maroon people.

Rawlings delivered lectures at universities, including Oxford University in England. Rawlings continued his heavy support for NDC. In July 2019, he went on a three-day working trip to Burkina Faso in the capacity of Chairman of the Thomas Sankara Memorial Committee.

In September 2019, he paid a tribute on behalf of the president and people of Ghana, when he led a delegation to the funeral of Robert Mugabe, the late former president of Zimbabwe.

Death and state funeral

Rawlings died on 12 November 2020 at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, a week after having been admitted for a "short term illness" in Ghana. According to some reports, his death was caused by complications from COVID-19. His death came nearly two months after that of his mother, Victoria Agbotui, on 24 September 2020. President Nana Akufo-Addo declared a seven-day period of mourning in his honor and flags flown at half-mast. His family members appealed to the Government of Ghana to bury him in Keta in the Volta Region. A schedule for the signing of a book of condolence was opened in his memory. His funeral, originally planned for 23 December 2020, was postponed at the request of his family.

State burial

From 24 to 27 January 2021, funeral ceremonies were organised at Accra in Rawlings' memory. A requiem mass for Jerry Rawlings was held at the Holy Spirit Cathedral on 24 January 2021, followed by a vigil at the Air Force Officers' Mess in Accra later that evening. His body was laid in state in the foyer of the Accra International Conference Centre from 25 to 26 January 2021. There were also traditional rites performed by the Anlo Ewe people of his maternal ancestry. On 27 January 2021, a state funeral, attended by national and international political leaders, paramount chiefs, diplomats and other dignitaries, was held at the Black Star Square before his burial service at the Military Cemetery at Burma Camp, with full military honours, including a slow march by the funeral cortège, a flypast of a Ghana Air Force helicopter, the sounding of the Last Post by army buglers and a 21-gun salute