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Ban recommends adjustment in UN mission in Guinea-Bissau to help restore order, stability



Head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), José Ramos-Horta.

9 May - The mandate of the United Nations political mission in Guinea-Bissau should be adjusted to support a two-phase process towards full restoration of constitutional order and medium-term stability in the country, which last year faced a military coup, according to a report by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented to the Security Council today.

“It is important that the United Nations system and subregional, regional and international partners work together to support a responsible, legitimate and effective State, operating under the rule of law and able to provide security, essential services and economic opportunities to its people,” the report says.

Jose Ramos Horta, Special Representative for the Secretary-General and head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), who led an assessment of the Office’s mandate that was reflected in the text, today told the Security Council that if appropriate support is given towards more pro-active preventive diplomacy programmes, “Guinea-Bissau could become a shining example of a success story.”

Soldiers in Guinea-Bissau – a West African country with a history of coups, misrule and political instability since it gained independence from Portugal in 1974 – seized power on 12 April 2012.

The coup d’etat came ahead of a presidential run-off election that was slated for 22 April between Carlos Gomes Júnior and a former President, Kumba Yala, prompting calls from the international community for a return to civilian rule.

According to the Secretary-General’s recommendations, the first phase of the restoration of constitutional order and stability would culminate in presidential and legislative elections, and focus on creating “a political environment built on confidence and non-interference in the electoral process.”

“It is my humble view that the problem of Guinea-Bissau should be squarely placed at the feet of the political elite who have



failed their people for almost four decades,” Mr. Ramos-Horta told the 15-member Council.

He added that it was “imperative” that the Security Council and the UN Member States support Guinea-Bissau towards the elections. He also urged the Council to give “serious consideration” to the Government’s request that the UN take leadership in the electoral process “so as to avoid possible elections-related disputes or violence.”

Speaking earlier today to UN Radio, Mr. Ramos-Horta said the UN has been working with the African Union and other partners to see how to assist Guinea-Bissau “fast track the process of transition into elections” which he hopes will be held by November.

He also praised the African Union, which recently said it could restate the country’s membership after barring its participation in the regional bloc a week after military leaders seized power.

The second phase proposed by the Secretary-General, which would conclude at the end of the term of the next elected Government, should focus on post-election stability, on strengthening State and democratic governance institutions – notably security, justice and defence – and on the functioning of both central and local State structures.

Addressing the Security Council, Mr. Ramos-Horta urged the international community to provide support for post-election rebuilding of the key institutions of the State, including through collocation of international experts for a period up to five years.

He also urged a “major re-thinking” of the Defence Forces “based on a sober analysis of the security needs of the country and adjusted to the financial resources available.” While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is taking the lead in this process, Mr. Ramos-Horta noted that there are other partners outside the region who are “ready to contribute towards a new national army that is more professional, imbued with a democratic culture, smaller, less costly and yet more effective.”

Among other top priorities in the country, the Secretary-General highlighted the negative impact of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking on peace, stability and development efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

In his briefing, Mr. Ramos-Horta called for mobilization of “robust financial and human resources” to assist the authorities in Guinea-Bissau and the entire chain of handling of drugs from source countries through to consumption countries to face this challenge.”

In recent weeks, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) assisted with the arrest of former navy chief, Bubo Na Tchuto, and an indictment was put out for Guinea-Bissau’s Armed Forces Chief of General Staff, General Antonio Indija. Mr. Ramos-Horta called these events a “turning point” in the fight against drug trafficking.

Again speaking to UN Radio, Mr. Ramos-Horta said he supported efforts of countries such as the United States to “forcefully intervene” to curb the drug trade and noted that if a criminal gang uses Guinea-Bissau as transit point, “sooner or later, you will have someone, in this case the Americans, landing on your shores and taking action.”

He also gave a serious warning to people involved in the business to “start clearing everything, cooperating with authorities.”

The current mandate of UNIOGBIS, which was established in 2010 to replace the previous peacebuilding support office known as UNOGBIS, which in turn was put in place in 1999 after an 11-month civil war, expires later this month.

UN senior official calls for widespread support for Somali Government reform efforts



Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson briefs press. At right is UN Spokesperson Martin Nesirky. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

9 May - A senior United Nations official today stressed the need for widespread support from the international community for the new Somali Government to help it succeed in its reform efforts.

The Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said some the biggest challenges for Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud are to assert his authority across the entire country and to grow relations with its neighbouring countries.

"[Mr. Mohamud's] challenge is to establish authority in all of Somalia and I think it's important for the international community to support this desire to create a well-functioning federal state," Mr. Eliasson told reporters during a briefing on his recent trip to the Somalia

Conference in London earlier this week.

"The second challenge for Somalia is to develop a 'neighbourhood' relation that is a positive one," he said, adding that the relationship between Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia is crucial for Somalia's development.

Mr. Eliasson, who met with the heads of State from all three countries, said he was encouraged by the growing dialogue among them, and said he hoped this would lead to peaceful regional context.

"I was encouraged by the growing dialogue between these three countries and I would hope that we would see it developing with a strengthened direction of a well-functioning Somalia supported by the new structure of the UN after the Security Council decision two weeks ago, and also a relationship with neighbours that will also help Somalia continue on the reform path."

The conference, co-hosted by Mr. Mohamud and UK Prime Minister David Cameron, took place during what participants called in the final communiqué that capped the event, "a pivotal moment" for Somalia, as it rebuilds from two decades of factional fighting that followed the 1991 ousting of President Siad Barre. The event also raised some \$300 million for Somalia's security sector.

In 2011, Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgents retreated from Mogadishu, and last year, new Government institutions emerged, as the country ended a transitional phase towards setting up a permanent, democratically-elected Government.

Mr. Eliasson said the conference was a show of solidarity and support of the new leadership in Somalia, but noted absence of the delegations of the regions of Somaliland and Puntland.

"We hope that all factions and all clans of Somalia would see it in their interest to support the reform efforts of the President who has been selected by all clans and all parts of the country at an earlier stage," he said.

UN honours work of three Iraqi women journalists



Photo: UNAMI

9 May - Three Iraqi women journalists have been selected as the winners of a United Nations contest which seeks to highlight the everyday challenges faced by women living in the Middle Eastern country.

The stories submitted by Suha Audah, Enas Jabbar and Shatha al-Shabibi were selected by an independent panel for their depiction of women's situation in Iraq.

Suha Audah's article describes the pressure of traditional values on women practicing sports in Mosul, Enas Jabbar relates the suffering of women subjected to abduction and Shatha al-Shabibi addresses the sensitive issue of honour crimes, widespread in traditional Iraqi society.

"The selection was difficult since the quality of the articles received was high; most stories portrayed brilliantly the challenges faced by women in Iraq," said the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs, Gyorgy Busztin, who was a member of the jury.

The three winners received their prizes during a special ceremony organized at the UN Compound on 1 May, as part of a roundtable discussion on women and media to mark World Press Freedom Day.

Ms. Audah, a freelance journalist from Mosul, highlighted the importance of such awards for Iraqi women journalists who are facing several difficulties in their daily work. "Women should be able to impose themselves," she said. "However, when I claim women's rights, some people label me as sexist."

The winning stories were anonymously selected by an independent panel composed of Mr. Busztin, the head of the Public Information Office (PIO), Eliana Nabaa, the Senior Political Advisor to UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and former journalist Hussain Hindawi and the representative for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women, Frances Guy.

Facing meningitis outbreak, UN and South Sudan announce vaccination campaign in Upper Nile

9 May - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) and South Sudan today announced they will carry out a vaccination campaign to address a meningitis outbreak in the Upper Nile state that has killed three people.

The campaign will target 150,000 people out of 220,000 living in the city of Malakal. The first case was reported by health officials on 12 April and the state ministry of health declared the outbreak on 30 April. Eighty-seven people are currently receiving treatment.



Photo: GAVI/Olivier Asselin

"Partners are boosting capacity at the Malakal hospital, including by establishing an isolation ward, and are monitoring neighbouring counties for an eventual further spread of the outbreak," the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in South Sudan said in a report.

WHO medical officer Tesfaye Zewde said the agency is supporting the health ministry with testing and drugs. "WHO has supported the state ministry of health in taking samples to Nairobi for testing," said Dr. Zewde. "We are also helping in transporting the vaccines."

A community outreach campaign would also be implemented to increase communities' awareness of meningitis and help identify new cases as early as possible, OCHA said.

UN chief urges strong, peaceful voter turnout for upcoming Pakistan elections

9 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is urging all eligible Pakistanis to peacefully take part in the country's upcoming elections while also expressing concern about the recent wave of violence and attacks aimed at disrupting preparations for the 11 May polls.

"The Secretary-General wishes every success to the Government and people of Pakistan for the national and provincial elections in Pakistan," his Spokesperson said in a statement today issued from New York.



UN Photo/Steve Tickner

Mr. Ban "hopes that all eligible Pakistanis peacefully take part, regardless of their religious affiliation, ethnic background, or gender and carry out their civic duty on this important day," he added.

These polls will mark the first time that a civilian Government has completed a full five-year term and handed over to an elected successor since Pakistan was created in 1947.

Noting that he has been following preparations for the upcoming votes, Mr. Ban "commends the efforts of the Government, the Election Commission of Pakistan, political parties, civil society and religious leaders to encourage voter turnout, particularly amongst women," according to the statement.

More than 86 million Pakistanis are reportedly registered to vote. They will be selecting from among 5,000 candidates for the National Assembly and nearly 11,700 vying for the Provincial Assembly.

In today's statement, the Spokesperson noted Mr. Ban's "concern" about the series of attacks in the run-up to the elections targeting politicians, political rallies, and election offices.

More than 100 people have reportedly been killed during this latest cycle of political violence, according to media reports. The UN chief conveys his heartfelt condolences to the families of all the victims.

Mr. Ban "acknowledges the efforts being made by the Government of Pakistan to ensure the safety and security of candidates, party workers, election officials, observers and voters on the day of the elections," the statement noted.

Ban appoints Atefeh Riazi of the United States as new UN information technology chief



Photo: ITU

9 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Atefeh Riazi of the United States as the new Chief Information Technology Officer for the United Nations, with the responsibility for all substantive and operational needs of the world body relating to information and communications technology (ICT).

She will replace Choi Soon-hong of the Republic of Korea, who has headed the Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) within the Department of Management since 2007.

"Ms. Riazi brings with her wide-ranging experience in the public and private sector, focusing on leading complex organizational change involving large departments in challenging environments to deliver vital business transformation through the use of innovation and technology," stated the announcement of her appointment.

Since 2009, Ms. Riazi has served as the Chief Information Officer of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) with oversight responsibilities for design and deployment of smart building technologies and cost containment practices. She also served as the Acting General Manager with responsibility for all operations.

Prior to joining NYCHA, she was the global Chief Information Officer and Senior Partner of Ogilvy and Mather overseeing technology, applications, networks and data centres.

She began her career with the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City, where she held various progressively responsible positions over the course of 16 years, and was appointed as the Chief Information Officer with responsibilities for implementing the Metro Card in New York City.

OICT provides services to meet the overall ICT needs of UN Headquarters and, in cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, for lease lines and satellite communications to overseas duty stations.

Maldives approaching 'critical juncture' with upcoming elections – UN official

9 May - The upcoming elections in the Maldives represent an important opportunity to move forward with its democratic transition, a senior United Nations official stressed today, as he wrapped up a three-day visit to the country.

“We are at a critical juncture in the Maldives, and the forthcoming elections will be an important step in its democratic transition,” Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told reporters in the capital, Malé.

He encouraged all stakeholders to ensure the conditions for free, fair, inclusive, credible and non-violent elections when voters in the South Asian nation go to the polls to elect a new president on 7 September.

Multi-party presidential elections were held in the Maldives for the first time in 2008, ending 30 years of one-party rule. Mohamed Nasheed, who was elected in those polls, resigned in February 2012 in contested circumstances, and was succeeded by his former deputy, Mohammed Waheed Hassan.

The Government set up a National Commission of Inquiry to probe the events leading to the regime change, with the Commission presenting its findings last August.

“I stressed that while respecting the Constitution, the credibility of the electoral process and acceptability of the results depends on whether all candidates wishing to participate in the presidential elections are able to do so,” said Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

“I made it clear to all that elections by themselves are not sufficient to address the long-term social and economic challenges facing the country,” he added. “In the public interest, and with a view to the day after elections, I called on political leaders to commit to dialogue and focus their campaigns on needs and concrete proposals to meet them.”

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco also called for the strengthening of the justice sector and the independence of the judiciary.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, found during her visit to the country in February that judicial officials there are not sufficiently independent from external pressures and interferences.

“The concept of independence of the judiciary has been misconstrued and misinterpreted in the Maldives, including among judicial actors,” she had stated, adding that there was insufficient dialogue, respect for the new Constitution created in 2008, transparency and access to information, and accountability to allow the judiciary to function properly.

She had also noted a relatively low number of sitting female judges, lack of education and training possibilities for persons in the judicial sector, and the lack of trust the general public has in the country’s judiciary.

Also wrapping up a visit to the country was the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Violence against Children,



Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

Marta Santos Pais, who said the upcoming polls provide a key opportunity to safeguard the rights of children.

“I am confident that the unique opportunity to promote a lasting consensus around children’s well-being and protection will be seized by Maldives, and this vision will inform the future of this country,” she said in a statement, following a five-day visit that concluded yesterday.

The Special Representative expressed her support to national efforts to address concerns about a 15-year-old girl who was a victim of sexual abuse and was sentenced to flogging.

“I welcome the expression of condemnation by the President and other Maldivian authorities, as well as civil society, of the sentence issued against this girl,” said Ms. Santos Pais, who added that the case is emblematic of the wider situation of violence against children.

The case also provides an important opportunity to push for change to prevent similar cases from happening again, she stated. In this regard, she welcomed the decision of the President to set up a Child Protection Committee to identify loopholes in the child protection system, and to present recommendations to overcome existing challenges.

She noted that the country had a “sound foundation” to effectively prevent and address incidents of violence against children. “Nevertheless, incidents of violence remain hidden and concealed, are sensitive to be raised as a public concern, and difficult to report.”

Ms. Santos Pais stressed that it is crucial to prevent social acceptance of violence against children by investing in awareness-raising about children’s rights amongst the public-at-large and supporting families in their child-rearing responsibilities to protect children from violence.

There is also an urgent need to promote capacity-building and training initiatives for teachers, social workers, law enforcement officials, judges, prosecutors and other child protection actors, as well as to ensure the legal prohibition of all forms of violence against children, including in the home, in care and justice institutions, and as a form of criminal sentencing, she added.

Food prices rise for second month, strong cereal crop forecast for 2013 – UN agency



Photo: UNMISS/James Sokiri

9 May - World food prices rose for a second straight month, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today said, while global production of coarse grains could set a new record this year with strong growth also projected for global wheat and rice production.

FAO’s Food Price Index – which measures monthly changes in international prices of a basket of meat, dairy, cereals, oils and fats, and sugar – rose two points to 215.5 in April, up one per cent from March.

The slight boost was driven mainly by a spike in dairy prices which indexed an averaged 259 points in April, up nearly 34 points or almost 15 per cent from March. The change is due mainly to a lull in milk production in New Zealand, the world’s largest producer.

The FAO Cereal Price Index slipped 10 points or 4.1 percent in April to 235 points, but it still 11 points higher than in April 2012.

The rising trend for cereals is forecasted to last throughout the year, barring unusual weather conditions. Coarse grain production is expected to set a new record at 1.266 million tonnes, up 9.3 per cent from the 2011 high of 1.167 million, according to the May issue of FAO’s ‘Cereals Supply and Demand Brief.’

The Rome-based agency predicts that global wheat production will reach 695 million tonnes, up 5.4 per cent from last year’s

harvest and just short of the 672 million record level in 2011.

Production of maize in the United States and recovery from drought in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is expected to drive this year's harvest to about 960 million tonnes, about 10 per cent higher than in 2012. The US, the world's largest maize producer, is expected to plant the largest area of maize since their highest level in 1936.

Still tentatively, FAO foresees rice production in the forthcoming 2013 season to rise to 497.7 million tonnes, 16 million tonnes more than in 2012, with particularly large increases expected in India and Indonesia.

In addition, prices for oils and fats fell 1.5 per cent, or 2 points, from March. Weakening energy prices and concerns about the global economy continued to weight on the vegetable oil complex, FAO said.

Meat prices averaged 179 points in April, keeping level since the latter part of 2012, but overall higher than the historical standards.

The FAO Sugar Price Index slipped 9 points or 3.6 per cent from March to 353 points in April.