

**Summary of the visit by H.E. Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, Chair of the
Peacebuilding Commission and of the Guinea Bissau Country-Specific
Configuration**

29-30 October 2014

The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the PBC's Country-Specific Configuration (CSC) for Guinea-Bissau, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, traveled to Guinea Bissau from 29-30 October 2014. Ambassador Patriota was invited by H.E. Jose Luis Guterres, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Timor Leste, to attend the 13th Special Session of the Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) which addressed the role the international community could play in supporting the democratically elected government of Guinea Bissau and the consolidation of the progress made since the country's formal return to constitutional order. The Chair's visit represented an opportunity to meet with different interlocutors, including the new authorities of the country and follow-up on an earlier mission undertaken in January 2014 jointly with the former Assistant Secretary-General of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), Judy Cheng-Hopkins, to identify possible entry-points for the Peacebuilding Commission engagement in the immediate post-electoral phase.

During the two-day mission, the Chair met with the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the President of the Council of Ministers, the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Miguel Trovoada and the Ambassadors of Angola and ECOWAS. The discussions of the various meetings focused on how the PBC could best assist Guinea-Bissau in implementing key reforms, notably in the security sector; advance the government's priorities as outlined in the programme recently approved by Parliament (ANP); and support the mobilization of resources, with a particular emphasis on the upcoming international partners' round table, anticipated for February/March 2015.

The main outcomes of the visit are summarized below in three sections: (1) the political situation; (2) the socio-economic situation, and (3) concluding remarks and entry points for PBC engagement.

A. The political situation

During his visit, the Chair encountered a political situation markedly different from the one he saw in January 2014. Following Parliamentary and Presidential elections in April/May 2014, a new government took office in July 2014. In September 2014, the government submitted an ambitious programme to the ANP articulated around three main components:

- (i) **an emergency plan** focusing on the first six months and addressing urgent issues, such as the payment of arrears to civil servants, the conclusion of the previous school year and the beginning of the new one

(2014/2015), a reinforcement of the health system, notably with a view to the threat posed by the Ebola epidemic in neighbouring countries, support to the agricultural sector, and the delivery of basic services, such as water and electricity;

- (ii) **a contingency plan** (*'plano de contingência'*) focused on analysing and clarifying the terms of commitment regarding the extraction of mineral resources, such as bauxite, phosphates and heavy sand, and the exploitation of natural resources, such as exotic wood, undertaken by the transitional government; and
- (iii) **a development plan** drawing on the PRSP II (DENARP II), the National Strategic Plan developed by the National Commission for Planning and Strategic Coordination and the government's vision of comprehensive state (re)building and articulated around four central themes (governance, infrastructure, agro-industrialization, and urban development) as well as two cross-cutting ones, notably human development and biodiversity.

Referring to the Prime Minister's presentation of the government's priority program during the CPLP meeting, the Chair stressed in his intervention the commitment of the PBC to serve as an advocate for a new image of Guinea Bissau and emphasized that the strength of PBC advocacy lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive perspective on peacebuilding as well as serve as a platform for coordination among varied international partners. To illustrate, the Chair mentioned that the PBC has come to regard the review of contracts relating to the exploitation of natural resources as a common experience and priority among the countries on its agenda. Last but not least, the Chair suggested that promoting a pro gender agenda be taken into consideration as a cross-cutting theme in the government's development plan.

Following the CPLP meeting, several of the Chair's bilateral interlocutors stressed the importance of national dialogue and national reconciliation processes, as well as the need for a constitutional review. The Chair noted different views regarding the sequencing of the two processes. Some interlocutors preferred to conduct a national dialogue prior to the reform of the constitutional, while others preferred to see constitutional reform as the first step in the process. There was a general agreement on the importance of maintaining a constructive dialogue among the different organs of sovereignty, notably the Presidency, the Prime Minister's Office and the ANP.

The Chair noted that, in keeping with their commitment to reform the security sector, the President and the government had shown decisive leadership in substituting the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, General Indjai, and that important preliminary steps are underway in the delicate process of the this reform, such as the routing of all salary payments through the banking system (previously all payments were made in cash), the updating of the members of the armed forces retirement roster, and the identification of 100 military personnel to be retired in January 2015. Further noteworthy steps include a revision of key legislation as well as the adoption of the Code for Military Justice and the Code of Discipline of the Armed Forces. The presence

of ECOMIB was unanimously credited with playing an essential role in the implementation of these reforms. A similar consensus prevailed on the continued presence of ECOMIB (or a successor force) as a necessary condition for future steps in the security sector reform process.

B. Socio-economic situation

Notwithstanding the brevity of his visit, the Chair was impressed by the new sense of optimism that seems to prevail among the population. Improved access to water and electricity, the payment of salaries and improved roads within Bissau all represent notable dividends of re-establishment of constitutional order and the election of a government committed to carrying out reforms. However, as the Prime-Minister made clear, delivering to the population in these areas has required the government to take out loans with interest rates that are unsustainable in the long run for the weak Bissau-Guinean economy. Increased revenue generation therefore represents the only viable path to sustainability. It is within this context that the responsible extraction of natural resources in the national interest will be essential and interlocutors were unanimous in emphasizing the importance of PBC support to the '*plano de contingência*' as well the important role the CSC could play in the mobilization of resources and technical assistance in this area.

It was clearly acknowledged that progress on the socio-economic front could be overshadowed and reversed by the potentially devastating consequences of an Ebola outbreak. While some international support has been forthcoming, such as a USD 750,000 grant made available by the World Bank Group, all interlocutors emphasized the extreme fragility of the country's health system. Within this context, the Chair encouraged both government and UN counterparts to engage with UNMEER and continue their efforts to bolster Guinea Bissau's rapid response capacity and preparedness.

C. Concluding remarks and entry points for PBC engagement

The re-establishment of constitutional order and the new government's commitment to inclusiveness, tolerance and reforms discernible after the first 100 days in office have rightly drawn praise by national and international partners. The Chair's visit constituted an important opportunity for the PBC to assess first-hand the progress made in a short period. The state of the current situation however may be better described as a 'fragile stability', leaving room for cautious optimism requiring the support of stakeholders, political and financial, for the new authorities to tackle the challenges ahead. Continuing progress will greatly depend on the government's ability to maintain the momentum for reform and mobilize sufficient internal and external support for its implementation, while effectively preventing spoilers from threatening to unravel the fragile stability achieved so far.

Against this background, the Chair's timely visit revealed at least four areas where the PBC's engagement could play in support of peace consolidation in Guinea Bissau:

1. **Political dialogue process around a clear Security Sector Reform (SSR) process in general and an enlarged ECOMIB mandate in particular:** the Chair intends to actively engage with the Contact Group in support of Guinea Bissau's efforts to ensure the continuity and potential enlargement of ECOMIB under a renewed partnership between ECOWAS and the CPLP;
2. **Improved revenue generation through responsible management of natural resources,** with an emphasis on a rigorous analysis of commitments undertaken by the transitional government with respect to the extraction of natural resources: the Chair will seek to facilitate discussion among potential partners, notably the PBF, UNDP and the World Bank Group, with a view to the timely mobilization of technical assistance and the strengthening of national capacity
3. **Mobilization of international partners in preparation for the donor round-table** expected to take place during the first quarter of 2015;
4. **Improved resilience** of the country's health system and general preparedness against the spectre of a potential Ebola outbreak.

In closing, the Chair wishes to express his gratitude for the warm reception received in Guinea Bissau by its authorities and its people, and for the spirit of trust and dialogue demonstrated by national and international partners.
