

Security Council - The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Statement by the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission

H. E. Ambassador Mauro Vieira, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations

30 August, 2018

Madame President,

I would like to thank you for the invitation to address the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

Since my last briefing to the Security Council, on 16 May, I undertook a trip to Guinea-Bissau and Portugal, from 24 to 27 July, in my capacity as Chair of the Configuration. This mission was undertaken to obtain first-hand accounts on the implementation of all provisions of the Conakry Agreement and, most importantly, on the organization of the legislative elections.

During my visit to Bissau, I consulted extensively with a broad range of stakeholders that included the President of the Republic; the Speaker of the National Assembly; the Prime Minister; the President of the Supreme Court; a number of ministers and members of all political parties represented in the National Assembly and some not represented in parliament. I also hold meetings with President of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) and with representatives of the international community and of the UN. Additionally, I took part in meetings with the civil society of Guinea-Bissau.

In Lisbon, on 27 July, I met with the Director-General of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP, in Portuguese), Georgina Benrós de Mello, when we discussed the role of the Community in supporting Guinea-Bissau and in helping finding a solution to the political situation.

My mission confirmed that there has been tangible progress in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and in the process of return to the normality of the political life, as compared to the same period last year when I visited the country. There is a renewed sense of optimism regarding a definitive solution to the protracted crisis and the upcoming elections are seen as a window of opportunity to this end.

The Conakry Agreement remains a fundamental point of reference for most political actors and all stakeholders consulted stressed the need to expedite its implementation .

Among the achievements that I witnessed, allow me to underline the following important developments that took place in the last months: the appointment of a consensual Prime-Minister and the formation of an inclusive Government; the approval of a Government program and of the National Budget and the reopening of the National Assembly.

With relation to the electoral process, the Government of Guinea-Bissau reaffirmed during my visit its intention to hold **legislative elections on 18 November 2018**.

All the national authorities I met manifested their support for respecting this established date. The holding of elections is also considered by political actors a crucial exercise for the country to return to stability. This election builds on the positive political developments in the last months and the opening of space for political dialogue, as well as on the provisions of the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau.

Many of my interlocutors also stated that postponements of the election would prolong the crisis and will be frustrating for the population, for the political actors and for the international community.

Let me also state that I heard no support to defer the November election in favor of joint presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019

The President of Guinea-Bissau, H.E. José Mario Vaz, expressed all his support for my mission and received me for a meeting. In that occasion, he outlined to me his current three priorities for the country:

- 1) The holding of legislative elections on 18 November;
- 2) The reform of the security sector, including the creation of a pension fund for the military;
- 3) And combating drug trafficking and organized crime – a point that was recently included in the mandate of UNIOGBIS by the Security Council

During my visit, I reaffirmed to all my interlocutors that I have indeed noticed progress in the political situation of the country and I also underlined the importance of having elections on 18 November 2018 as a conclusion for this transition towards stability, according to national solutions and always respecting the Constitution.

Madame President,

It is important to mention that while stakeholders stressed the importance of holding legislative elections on the established date, there remain significant financial, logistical and coordination challenges for this to happen.

In terms of election preparations, I held substantive discussions with the Minister of Territorial Administration, and with senior representatives of the Technical Office of Support to Electoral Process (GTAPE) and of the National Electoral Commission (CNE), who informed advances in the preparation for elections but were concerned

with its **slow progress**. It was noted in this regard that some progress had been made on electoral cartography and the preparations for the election budget, although funds were slow to come. There remain important **technical challenges** to address, particularly on the voter registration update, sensibilization, and compliance with the legal electoral process

Although there is general appreciation of UN and UNDP support to the electoral process, I was made aware of several areas where differences of approach existed and which need to be urgently resolved. Allow me to mention four important challenges that were mentioned during my visit:

First, The management of the **limited time available** to organize the November election in line with the constitution;

Second, the late process of updating the voter registration lists with a **compressed timeline – this registration was scheduled to start on 23 August and should last for a period of one month;**

Third, the lack of proper coordination between and among Government entities and with UNDP on election preparation logistics, especially the procurement and sourcing of sufficient voter registration kits and the conduct of the voter registration exercise itself.

For example, I was informed that the government had started his own bidding process for the registration kits in parallel to the efforts of the UNDP I was also informed that the government has bilaterally sought help obtaining the elections kits from international partners.

And fourth, the financial question - A budget for the elections were assessed at US\$7.7 million by the UNDP, of which the Government contributed with an amount of \$2 million. Further contributions have, during the time of my visit, reduced the funding gap to US\$1.2 million. In this regard, allow me to add that the SRSG Viegas, during

his briefing to the PBC, on 13 August, reported that report that the gap may have been closed following pledges by several international partners. However, I was informed in Bissau that none of the pledged contributions will likely be disbursed before September 2018, which means that there is an urgent need to cover the voters' registration operations if they are to start now .

On 23 August, in Bissau, Prime Minister Aristides Gomes held a ceremony to launch the update of the voter's registration lists. However, the information that I have is that the country has so far not received all the necessary equipments to carry out this process.

Allow me to add that the President of the Supreme Court informed me that while the organization of the elections in November and the compression of electoral time period should be done by political agreement, there is a risk that, if this consensus is lost, the legitimacy of the whole process could be put into question. The situation can also become worse if the current government is dismissed.

I must stress that ultimately, the organization of the elections is contingent upon the willingness of the key political actors to mutually cooperate.

Madame President,

My meeting with the Prime-Minister Aristides Gomes highlighted the need to avoid the recurring situation witnessed in Guinea-Bissau, as mentioned by many of my interlocutors, of "*normally peaceful elections that are followed by political problems* ". I would also like to thank him for his welcome and support during my visit.

The Prime Minister expressed his strong commitment to facilitate a Stability Pact and I was informed that the government

already has a **draft framework document** that could form a basis for a comprehensive Pact

Some of my interlocutors also underlined the importance of enabling civil society and other actors an opportunity to submit their contributions for the Pact. On reconciliation, the Organizing Committee of the National Conference (OCNC) presented to me its report “*Em Nome da Paz*” (*In the Name of Peace*), with the findings and recommendations of consultations carried out with more than 3,000 Bissau-Guineans on the causes of conflict and instability in the country.

Representatives from the Women’s Council informed that their organization had evolved from the former Women’s Facilitators Group and was currently engaged in monitoring the preparations for the upcoming legislative elections and advocating the adoption of a gender Quota Law. Following my visit, we received positive news that on 2 August, the **National Assembly passed the draft Gender Parity or Quota Law** mandating a minimum of 36 per cent women candidates in the legislative and local government elections.

The military continue to maintain its distance from the political crisis and to respect the constitutional order, while the police force continued their efforts to maintain order and to respect human rights. These are commitments that we should encourage to be maintained.

Stakeholders acknowledged the key role that ECOMIB continues to play in this context, and urged ECOMIB and UNIOGBIS to continue providing support during the electoral cycles. There is also support for the need to reform the defense and security sectors, and continued UNIOGBIS and International Community assistance to monitor and provide technical assistance in the post-election period.

Before I finish my report, allow me to make some comments on the importance of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). The PBF over the years has assumed a strategic position in Guinea-Bissau. Currently

UNIOGBIS and the United Nations Country Team are implementing PBF projects with a combined budget of US\$ 7 million that are mutually reinforcing to the political engagement. In this regard, allow me to underline that the two important initiatives from the Civil Society that I had contact in Bissau, the Women's Council and OCNC, are both beneficiaries of the PBF

Madame President,

On 13 August, I convened a meeting of Configuration to present my report to the PBC, when we also received updates from a series of "briefers", including Mr. José Viegas Filho, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNIOGBIS.

On that occasion, Ambassador Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria, in his capacity as Chairperson of ECOWAS, also commented on the most recent summit of the Community, held on Lomé on 31 July.

Ambassador José Luis Fialho Rocha of Cabo Verde, as pro tempore President of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, informed us about the recent decisions taken during the CPLP Summit held in Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, last July. He underlined that the Heads of State and Government expressed their support for the ongoing electoral process in Guinea-Bissau and the holding of legislative elections on 18 November, as well as their readiness to contribute materially to its realization. They also called for the solidarity of the international community to ensure the timely implementation of the contributions already announced.

In that occasion, we also briefly discussed the mission of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union that visited Guinea-Bissau on 27 and 28 July, under the Chairmanship of Togo.

Madame President,

Following the discussions that took place on 13 August, I would like to make the following recommendations:

I would like to welcome the visit of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union to Guinea-Bissau.

I also would like to take note of the Final Communiqué of the 53rd ECOWAS Summit, held in Lomé, Togo, on July 31, and to take note of its conclusions and recommendations, specially its urge to respect the date of 18 November for the legislative elections. I also take note of the decision to lift the sanctions imposed by the Community on certain political actors of Guinea-Bissau .

I take note of the decisions regarding the country that were approved by the CPLP Summit in Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, on 18 July.

I would like to welcome the approval of the gender Quota Bill and to welcome the development of an inclusive Stability Pact;

The Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the PBC will continue to focus on the implementation of the Conakry agreement and the preparations for 18 November elections. We will work with all international partners to this end. ECOMIB and UNIOGBIS have an important role to play in these crucial Guinea Bissau electoral cycles.

We will continue to work closely with SRSV Viegas to ensure that the upcoming legislative elections will be held according to the constitutional framework and in a credible and fair manner. It is necessary to once again reiterate the importance of having elections on November 2018 as a conclusion for the transition towards stability In this regard, we will continue to be active in mobilizing the resources to enable that elections take place in the established date.

We will also support the UN and International Community, in consultation with the Government, to consider ways to strengthen the institutions of the State, especially the justice system.

I would like to reaffirm that Guinea-Bissau remains an important example of a ‘sustaining peace’ approach that offers useful lessons on global partnerships for peacebuilding.

Finally, allow me to inform that, upon his request, I will host, tomorrow, a High-level meeting of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration with Prime Minister Aristides Gomes. This will be an opportunity for the Prime Minister to have a dialogue with the members of the PBC.

Thank you.