

Background Paper on Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau

Introduction

1. Concerns about drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau have been increasingly expressed, particularly since early 2006, not only by the foreign and local press but also by international partners involved in political stabilization efforts and cooperation activities in the country. According to the UNODC, there is evidence that Guinea-Bissau “is being used as part of a major transshipment route”.¹ Since the start of 2007, joint cooperation efforts were stepped up by international partners, including the UNODC, UNOGBIS, the UNDP, the EU, and ECOWAS, among others, to support the Government in fighting drug trafficking and confronting its challenges.

Analysis of the drug trafficking situation in Guinea-Bissau

2. Given the illegal nature of drug trafficking operations and the weaknesses of surveillance and law enforcement in Guinea-Bissau, the difficult task of compiling accurate statistics is compounded by the fact that a complete drug trafficking operation involves a triangular pattern of points of origin, transit (Guinea-Bissau) and destination. With over four hundred kilometers of coastline dotted by over ninety islands mostly uninhabited, Guinea-Bissau lacks proper maritime, land and air space control and surveillance. Examples of drug-related incidents that have occurred over the past two years underline the extent of the problem and the impact it could have on stability and socio-economic development. In September 2006, 674 kilos of cocaine were seized in an operation by the Judiciary Police. An anti-narcotics operation carried out by the Judiciary Police in March 2007 led to the capture of a vehicle carrying over 635 kilos of cocaine and the arrest of those involved. Two other vehicles escaped during this operation. It was estimated that about two and a half tons of cocaine could have been involved in that single operation alone. In August 2007, a unit of the Judiciary Police arrested two Colombian nationals in a residential area of Bissau and seized a number of items, including high amounts in cash (euros), arms, ammunition and flowcharts with information about public officials and members of the Government of Guinea-Bissau.

3. The political, socio-economic and security impacts of drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau cannot be underestimated. Guinea-Bissau is currently being used mainly as a transshipment point for South American drugs destined for European markets. On account of the grinding poverty and woeful employment conditions in the country, drug money and other enticements by powerful syndicates of international drug traffickers could undermine the democratic process and

¹ See *Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: the Threat to Stability and Development; (with special reference to Guinea-Bissau)*, Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), December 2007.

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lead to political instability. With legislative elections scheduled for 16 November this year, there is a growing concern that money from drug trafficking could infiltrate the electoral process.

4. Given the size and market value of cocaine seizures in 2006 and 2007, the value of drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau could be greater than the annual GDP. There is a growing concern over the ability of drug traffickers and their accomplices to conduct their operations and perform money laundering transactions, given the low ratio of the risks of detection relative to the high financial returns and their sophisticated communications technology and efficient transport logistics.

5. Despite the best efforts of law enforcement authorities to bring detained persons to justice and secure confiscated drugs and other items, there has been no drug-related prosecution to date; detained persons are released after initial investigations and confiscated drugs disappear without trace. This was the case of the 674 kilos of cocaine seized in September 2006, which subsequently disappeared. Investigations were carried out under the Government of Prime Minister Cabi when it assumed office in April 2007, and a report published has implicated law enforcement officials and two ministers in the previous Government.

Ongoing efforts by Government and international partners to combat drug trafficking

6. Acknowledging the threat posed by drug trafficking and criminality to peace and stability, the Government took a series of measures aimed at combating the phenomenon, including the adoption in July 2007 of an Emergency Plan to Combat Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime; and the ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption. International partners joined these efforts.

7. In consultations with other partners, UNODC assisted the Government to prepare its three-phase Antinarcotics Operational Plan 2007-2010, budgeted at US\$ 19.1 million: (US\$ 301,000 for Phase I – November to December 2007, posting of a UNODC Officer to work with the Judiciary Police; US\$ 6.5 million for Phase II – January to December 2008, aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Judiciary Police to combat drug trafficking and organized crime; and US\$ 12.6 million for Phase III – January 2009 to December 2010, aimed at consolidating law enforcement and rule of law). These cooperation efforts culminated in the holding in December 2007 of the Lisbon International Conference on Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, at which US\$ 6.7 million was raised, in addition to assistance in kind.

8. Following the Lisbon International Conference, the Government and international partners started work to address two main challenges to the implementation of the Government's Antinarcotics Operational Plan: the setting up of an organizational and operational framework and the slow pace of resource-mobilization efforts. To address the first challenge, in January this year, the Government, with the assistance of UNODC, consulted with partners on the terms of reference of the National Committee for the Implementation of the Antinarcotics Operational Plan, which was sworn in on 8 May and held its first meeting on 23 May to discuss updates in the combat against drug trafficking. To address the challenge of resource-mobilization, UNOGBIS facilitated meetings on 22 January and 22 May this year, with the participation of

UNODC, the Government and other partners, to review resource-mobilization efforts following the Lisbon International Conference.

9. During recent consultations, information received from UNODC indicate that so far, out of the pledges totaling US\$ 6.7 million made at the Lisbon International Conference, 2 million euros (about US\$ 2.9 million) earmarked from the EU would be released by mid-June following the signing of the project document and related contract by the EU, UNODC and Government of Guinea-Bissau. The US\$ 150,000 pledged by Italy and deposited in UNODC accounts in early January has been partially used to cover urgent procurement needs for the Judiciary Police and refurbishment work on its premises in Bissau. The United Kingdom and Germany have also respectively deposited US\$ 200,000 and US\$ 350,000 with the UNODC, ready for disbursement. In May, Portugal announced the transfer to UNODC of US\$ 150,000 as first part of the US\$ 3 million pledged in Lisbon. Arrangements are underway by ECOWAS to hold a regional conference on drug trafficking in West Africa this year. UNOGBIS, UNODC and UNOWA are providing ECOWAS with political and technical assistance. This regional conference will provide an extra platform to highlight drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau and help tackle the phenomenon within a sub-regional framework.

Expectations from the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and Support from PBF

10. The PBC engagement in Guinea-Bissau since December last year has been contributing to highlight the country's socio-economic and political challenges to peacebuilding, including drug trafficking and organized crime. While being on the agenda of the PBC requires a commitment from the Government to continuing with good democratic and economic governance and the adequate implementation of national programmes aimed at post-conflict reconstruction and development, an added value is also brought in by the convening power of the PBC, as well as its holistic approach to resource-mobilization efforts aimed at coordination through complementarities rather than duplication.

11. Engagement of the PBC in Guinea-Bissau is expected to lead to the development and adoption of a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding that will contribute to an integrated approach to post-conflict peace consolidation. Meanwhile, the PBF has offered support for the rehabilitation of a prison in Bissau and the provision of equipment to the Judiciary Police within the framework of the Government's Antinarcotics Operational Plan. The National Steering Committee will meet on 29 May to approve this project so that funding can be made available for implementation to start.