

Peacebuilding Commission Meeting on Guinea-Bissau

27 October 2020

Chair's Summary

1. On 27 October, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission's Guinea-Bissau Configuration, H.E. Mr. Ronaldo Costa Filho, convened a virtual Ambassadorial-level meeting to update members on political developments and progress made towards the reforms agenda in Guinea-Bissau as well as to hear the perspectives of representatives of ECOWAS, the African Development Bank, and the National Women's Council of Guinea-Bissau about the current needs and challenges in supporting the country's socio-economic development.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair noted that the completion of the UNIOGBIS transition was just two months away and expressed hope that the international community would continue to explore new opportunities to support the people and government of Guinea-Bissau to achieve its national peacebuilding priorities after the UN transition. He informed that the Guinea-Bissau's parliament had recently approved a new national development plan and noted that the immediate and longer-term needs of the population were heightened due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, he stressed that the importance of international community's support for the new plan. The Chair briefed on his meeting with the IMF Resident Representative in Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Patrick Gitton, underlining that the political stability provides a new opportunity for engagement from an economic standpoint. He informed that the IMF is currently negotiating an extended credit facility program with the new authorities that will focus on reforms in public governance. The Chair also updated on his meeting with Dr. Aissatu Forbs, President of the National Youth Council who informed of the Council's activities in increasing youth participation in dialogue, elections monitoring and institutional reforms. He recalled the devastating impact of COVID-19 on youth given the rising unemployment rates and reiterated the importance of the continued engagement of young men and women in shaping and sustaining peace.
3. Ms. Rosine Sori-Coulibaly, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau and Head of UNIOGBIS, provided an update on progress made towards peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau. She noted that the political situation in the country has evolved and remains stable following the National Assembly's adoption of the government's programme on 29 June and the ruling by the Supreme Court on 4 September that confirmed Umaro Sissoco Embaló as President. Regarding the country's reforms agenda, she informed of the tensions related to the two parallel and competing Constitutional review processes, noting that initiatives to reconcile the two processes have so far been unsuccessful. She informed that the review of the electoral and political party laws by the Parliament had progressed with the UN's technical support but the planned high-level platform on the reforms process had been halted due to lack of support by President Embaló. She underscored that the Peacebuilding Fund will

continue to be critical mechanism for the implementation of peacebuilding priorities and promotion of socioeconomic development of the country and also stressed the important role of the Peacebuilding Commission in providing a platform for the government and partners to discuss and advocate support for national peacebuilding priorities. Lastly, she updated on the UN transition, informing that a UNCT capacity mapping had been completed and that a comprehensive assessment of the government and other partners' capacities was underway. The SRSG informed that she and the Resident Coordinator were engaging with the national authorities to ensure that the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) is aligned with the national development plan and processes and that the Government recently approved the UNCT's proposal to extend the current UN Partnership Assistance Framework (2016-2020) for one year to allow time for preparation of the UNSDCF.

4. H.E. Mr. Emmanuel Ohin, ECOWAS Permanent Representative to Guinea-Bissau, reviewed recent political developments in Guinea-Bissau, informing that on 7 September, the ECOWAS Conference of Heads of State and Government congratulated the President of Guinea-Bissau on his country's recent encouraging political developments such as the parliament's approval of the government's programme and the adoption of its budget. He also noted that the Conference announced the withdrawal of ECOMIB forces by 15 September 2020. He underscored that, in view of the position expressed by the Conference and the confirmation of President Embaló by the Supreme Court, the institutions established after the presidential elections of 29 December 2019 in Guinea-Bissau now enjoy full legitimacy and legality. He recalled the importance of accompanying Guinea-Bissau in the reforms as envisaged by the Conakry Agreement. The Ambassador acknowledged the parallel constitutional review processes, noting that the President could resolve the issue through a referendum. He expressed the readiness of ECOWAS to accompany Guinea-Bissau with the Constitutional reform process through the provision of experts and consultants to the country.
5. Mr. Serge N'Guessan, Deputy Director-General of the African Development Bank (AfDB) briefed on the socio-economic situation in Guinea-Bissau and presented AfDB's activities in the country, noting that AfDB is one of Guinea-Bissau's oldest development partners. He informed that while the country continues to face the same development challenges since the 1970s, such as high poverty, income inequality, poor governance, and weak infrastructure, AfDB recognizes the country's incredible potential in human capacity and in the sectors of agriculture and fishery, tourism, extractive industries, and renewable energy. He informed that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted cashew nut exports and rice production, causing the AfDB to revise the country's GDP growth for 2020 from +5 percent to -3 percent in the worst-case scenario. He added that the government's debt is expected to reach 79.8 percent of GDP in 2020, an increase of 20.2 percent in one year, further weakening the government's ability to invest in its country's development. Mr. N'Guessan informed that the AfDB's strategy in Guinea-Bissau focuses on two pillars: strengthening governance and foundation of the state; and developing inclusive infrastructure. He underscored that AfDB has invested \$125 million in the last four years in the energy, agriculture and road sectors, and encouraged partners to invest in these areas as well. He briefed that because of COVID-19,

AfDB had shifted some of their investments to the health sector to rehabilitate health facilities, as well as purchase health-related supplies and equipment.

6. Ms. Ana Turé, Coordinator for the Women's Council of Guinea-Bissau for the Facilitation of Dialogue briefed on the background Council and its work on peace and security, political participation, women's rights, and inclusion as well as protection against sexual and gender-based violence. She informed of the Council's mission to promote inclusive dialogue and gender mainstreaming in peace processes, in concert with Bissau-Guinean civil society, with a view to political and government stability through the establishment of a common agenda for women. She informed of a 12 August 2020 letter to the UN Secretary-General by the Council and 15 other women's civil society organizations, as well as various press conferences, to voice concerns about the recent increase in violence, in particular violence against women, and the degradation of women's living conditions due to the pandemic's impact on the economy. Ms. Turé informed that the Council's areas of intervention include promoting women in high-level political dialogue on reforms, strengthening women's participation in political parties as well as in the ongoing constitutional review. She appealed to the PBC to give more impetus and continuity to the work of joint analysis, evaluation and change, through frank, structured and permanent dialogue with women, young people and civil society with a view to finding, implementing and monitoring mechanisms that effectively advance peace processes.
7. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They expressed hope that recent positive political developments would create an enabling environment to overcome the country's political and institutional challenges and thanked UNIOGBIS and ECOWAS for their efforts in promoting inclusive dialogue regarding the country's reform processes.
 - They emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations as well as with international financial institutions in support of stability and socio-economic development in Guinea-Bissau to ensure continuity of effort, preserve peacebuilding gains and combat the devastating impact of COVID-19.
 - They noted the need to safeguard the support to gender issues and equality during the transition period and commended the PBF's continued support to women, youth and civil society in Guinea-Bissau.
 - They expressed concern about the UN transition taking place in the context of considerable challenges to Guinea-Bissau's institutional capabilities and socio-economic development and underscored their support for the PBC to mobilize resources and to continue providing a platform for furthering system-wide coherence between the UN, Guinea-Bissau and its partners during and after the transition of UNIOGBIS.