

Security Council

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Antonio de Aguiar Patriota,
Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations
Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission**

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Madam President,

I thank you for convening this meeting and for the invitation to brief the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta, for his briefing and his outstanding leadership in this very crucial moment of Guinea-Bissau's history.

As it has been mentioned, I accepted the SRSG's invitation to visit the country late last month. I take this opportunity to thank the SRSG, all UNIOGBIS personnel and PBSO for their support to the visit. I also thank ASG Judy Cheng-Hopkins for joining me, in a demonstration of her sustained engagement.

Madam President,

During my 4-day visit to Bissau, I spoke with a wide spectrum of interlocutors, including transitional authorities, political actors, civil servants, civil society organizations and international partners. In each of these meetings, I stressed that free and transparent elections and the return to constitutional order are essential for the full resumption of much needed international cooperation.

I found a country in serious economic distress, in spite of its human and material resources and potentials. The consequences of the 2012 *coup* hit the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest, has not seemed to have affected its perpetrators. It seems that an urgent reflection on the part of the international community is needed to avoid such twisted consequences.

In contacts with international partners I was able to identify a scenario of improved regional and sub-regional coordination. A positive regional context is a key factor for stability in Guinea-Bissau. I will continue to work for such positive trends to gain even more traction.

Madam President,

In meetings with various transitional authorities, including in the military, I could observe the very complex realities related to the modernization of the security and defence sectors.

While there seems to be a national consensus on the urgency of, and even the main modalities for, the modernization of the security sector, simplistic notions about the role of the military in politics, with little consideration of civil-military relations and the conduct of political elites, are of limited practical assistance.

A more comprehensive approach is necessary. Meaningful modernization entails an adequate understanding of underlying historical and sociological factors contributing to political instability since independence and also since the conflict of 1998. It will require sustained support to political dialogue, State reform, and the modernization of key State structures, from the police and the judiciary to public administration and services.

Any effective process will have to ensure that no social group or stakeholder be -- nor perceives itself as being -- relegated to second-class citizenship, and that the various contributions to the process of institutional progress be recognized in a plural and democratic national environment with equal opportunity for all.

International coordination among key actors supporting SSR in Guinea-Bissau will remain important. ECOWAS is positioned to play a central role. The international community should be ready to rally behind the SRSG's lead and support efforts decisively and swiftly.

I was impressed by the willingness of key regional and international partners in Bissau, such as ECOWAS and the European Union, to heed this call. Following the elections, my own country, Brazil, will reassess the prospects for resumed cooperation in this field.

Madam President,

International crime and drug trafficking remain major concerns among international interlocutors, in spite of assessments pointing to a relative decline. The issue of irregular fishing and logging licenses was raised by national interlocutors as an emerging challenge. Institutional constraints, the political situation, and lack of law-enforcement resources remain significant obstacles. A focus on increasing transparent revenue collection and strengthening local capacities to promote social and economic development stands a good chance of garnering support.

I am all the more convinced that impunity in Guinea-Bissau is a result of persistent political instability, weak institutions and unresolved hurdles in civil-military relations. An integrated approach capable of reinforcing national ownership of a renewed commitment to democracy and a more inclusive society will yield the best results.

Madam President,

While in Bissau I could testify to Timor-Leste's invaluable contribution in support of the voters' registration process. The importance of the registration process transcends the upcoming elections. It enables the exercise of civil and political rights, but can also serve planning and policy-making purposes.

In face of the extension of the voters' registration, the resulting rescheduling of elections does not necessarily imply lack of commitment. The technical quality of elections, for which the registration process is key, is just as important.

I welcome the election of a new leader of Guinea-Bissau's major party, PAIGC. The nomination of candidates by various parties and the success of the registration process in difficult conditions can help to generate a positive dynamics for democratic restoration, in spite of the many challenges ahead.

I fully concur with the SRSG's call on all political actors to overcome their political divides, move to the next phase, and march peacefully and decisively to a new chapter in the country's political life. A new chapter which is possible and in which I believe the PBC can play a constructive strategic role.

Madam President,

On the economic front, the impact of political instability on the economy is devastating. There is a widespread sense of weariness in the country. People want to move on. Public finance is in a very poor state. Withdrawal of international assistance has had a direct impact on public services and economic activity.

Food insecurity in fertile Guinea-Bissau is a crying contradiction. Dependency on cashew nut was pointed out as a major challenge. As stated in the Secretary-General's report, nearly half the population rely on cashew nut sales for their primary income. Alternatives to diversify the economy range from processing cashew nut, stimulating other crops production, including rice, and promoting fishery, to investments in the mining and tourism sectors. The logistic services sector can play an important role, with the planned construction of a deep water port in Buba, where natural conditions are favorable.

Madam President,

In the absence of legitimate authorities I was not able to discuss strategic, long-term peacebuilding priorities with national decision-makers. Nevertheless, I would like to present some conclusions that may help strategize our collective engagement with Guinea-Bissau and measure progress in the peacebuilding agenda, including with a view to engaging with legitimate authorities in the future.

Firstly, Guinea-Bissau's international partners, specially those in the region, have a decisive role to play in fostering stability. For this contribution to materialize in the most effective way, strong political coordination is central. This is one clear area for the immediate engagement of the PBC.

Secondly, I wish to highlight the vision of SRSG Ramos-Horta of intensive international support to a state-rebuilding program following elections. The Guinea-Bissau Configuration can play an important role in supporting the SRSG's vision.

Thirdly, I would like to propose, for further discussion, three achievable, modest medium-term strategic objectives, in institutional, social-economic and security areas, that can guide the PBC in its resumed engagement and also contribute to this Council's subsequent deliberations:

1) On the institutional track, the completion of a full democratic cycle with a constitutional transfer of power to elected officials.

Apart from the strong international political engagement, in which the PBC finds a natural place, this can be supported by technical cooperation in public administration, aligned with the SRSG's proposals, and support to political dialogue, including through social communication.

2) On the social and economic track, make significant strides in social and economic indicators, with a focus on food security and rural development.

The World Food Program should be able to envisage its departure from Guinea-Bissau. Responsible economic diversification is key. The economic empowerment of women, responsible for more than 80% of the workforce in cashew nuts harvesting, is an essential dimension. Moreover, I was impressed by women's organizations in Guinea-Bissau and the way they bring together different ethnicities, religious denominations and political affiliations under the common objectives of economic empowerment. They are obviously an important driving force for peacebuilding efforts.

3) On the security sector track: provide a platform for coordination and strategizing of the international support to the "modernization" of the security sector.

The Guinea-Bissau Configuration can help bringing key actors together, deepen the understanding of political and social dynamics in play, and assess the need for comprehensive mechanisms of support to the reintegration of retired military, along with political civil-military dialogue and reconciliation.

Once again, Madam President, and specially after visiting the country, let me stress that in contrast with the current crisis, Guinea-Bissau has a clear potential as a stable and prosperous nation.

With modest resources invested in national capacities, a great deal can be achieved. I was struck by the conversations I had with deeply committed, highly-educated officials, dynamic civil society organizations, and wise cultural and religious leaders. A plural, peaceful and vibrant society is ready to fully emerge from decades of poverty and instability, and deserves our active solidarity.

I thank you, Madam President.