

11 February 2014

**Summary of the visit of H.E. Mr. Antonio Patriota, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration, Peacebuilding Commission to Guinea-Bissau
20-23 January 2014**

The Chair of the Guinea Bissau Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, conducted a visit to Guinea Bissau from 20 to 23 January 2014, accompanied by ASG Judy Cheng-Hopkins, at the invitation of SRSG Ramos-Horta. The objective of the mission was to begin the re-engagement of PBC in the country and identify new challenges and priorities in light of the changes over the past year. More specifically the mission had sought to support UN's efforts to assist the country in the restoration of constitutional order, in accordance with the relevant Resolutions and Statements of the Security Council.

Nearly two years after the unconstitutional change of regime, the mission took place at a time in which preparations are ongoing for elections which were then scheduled for 16 March 2014. The elections are an essential step towards the return to constitutional order and the subsequent full re-engagement of PBC in the country. It is important to emphasize that, in the absence of legitimate authorities, conditions were not present for the mission to hold strategic discussions including the review of the strategic framework. Nevertheless, the visit was useful to identify possible entry-points for the immediate post-election phase of the PBC's engagement, in support of SRSG Ramos-Horta's current efforts.

During the mission, The Chair and ASG Cheng-Hopkins had the opportunity to meet with a wide-range of interlocutors, including the President, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Defence and the Vice-Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces from the Transitional Authorities, as well as the National Electoral Commission (CNE) and the Technical Cabinet of Support to the Electoral Process (GTAPE). They also consulted extensively with the leadership of UNIOGBIS, UN agencies and IFIs, ECOWAS, AU, and the resident diplomatic corps in the country, including Portugal, France, Germany, China, Cuba, Senegal, Angola, Cape Verde and the EU and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). Moreover, the mission had the opportunity to also meet with the High-Level strategic commission and civil society organizations, including the key Human rights organizations and women organizations.

The main outcomes of my trip are summarised below and are structured around three main categories: 1) the political situation; 2) the socio-economic situation and 3) the position of international partners.

Key challenges in the country

The political situation, elections, civil-military relations

Since the military coup of April 2012, Guinea Bissau has been undergoing a protracted transition. Elections intended to restore constitutional order in the country were initially scheduled to be held before the end of 2013, but have been delayed several times. The elections were consequently planned to be held on 16 March 2014, but already during the visit several interlocutors expressed doubts about the feasibility of conducting elections on that date, given the delays in the voter registration process and disputes within the main political parties, in particular the PAIGC. Indeed, it was subsequently announced that the elections would be rescheduled in view of the delays in the registration process, and are now expected to take place on April 13. Despite such technical delays, the voter registration process represents a major step forward in the country's electoral capacity, as it will provide for the first digital registry in the country. The mission was reassured that funding for the elections had been secured thanks to contributions of over \$20 million from ECOWAS, EU, Timor-Leste, PBF and others.

It was gratifying to observe that despite the many political and technical obstacles, all interlocutors recognized the importance of holding elections and adherence to the registration process. Although there has been harsh criticism of the transitional mechanisms, this reflected more a desire to participate in political life rather than opposition to the transition itself.

With regard to the organization of the elections, the Chair stressed to the transitional authorities and relevant interlocutors the importance of holding elections in order to resume full and normal international relations and cooperation.

Throughout the mission, the Chair underlined that Guinea-Bissau is paying too high a price for its international isolation and needs to re-establish constitutional order as soon as possible. In addition to this, the Chair noted the positive developments in the region, including institutional, political and economic progress being made in neighbouring countries, such as Guinea, Senegal, and also in Liberia and Sierra Leone, even as challenges persist. The more constructive regional environment also presents an important opportunity and an incentive for renewed support to Guinea Bissau.

The mission also had the opportunity to discuss civil-military relations, which are seen as a critical element of instability in the country, with several interlocutors. The mission confirmed that simplistic notions as to the role of the military in politics are of limited value when it comes to identifying the right approach to tackle this complex issue. Discussions on how best to tackle the modernization of the security and defence institutions have been going on for eight years, with several internationally supported attempts such as the 2010 Security Sector Reform Roadmap. Brazil, in its role as Chair of the Configuration, has supported reform efforts in the past, including the establishment of a Special Pensions Fund for the Military forces, which also received PBF funding.

Considering developments since April 2012 and the absence of constitutional authorities since then, it is important to support current efforts of SRSG Ramos-Horta and advocate for a more comprehensive approach to improving civil-military relations, as opposed to looking solely at the reform of the Security and Defence Forces. All national and international interlocutors who engaged with the mission repeatedly stressed that the abuse of power by the military, including human rights violations and interference in the economic sphere, cannot be dissociated from the activities of a political class that often colludes with the armed forces for profit or political influence. For this reason, the political and military “problems” have to be addressed simultaneously. Interlocutors also pointed out the importance of addressing the historical context of specific social groups within the military and pay due consideration to broader social needs and expectations associated with the reform process.

The modernization of the security forces in Guinea Bissau requires a thorough state reform process and the modernization of key state structures, from police and judiciary to ministries and public services. This cannot be undertaken in a meaningful way in the absence of strong political leadership and a political consensus, as the cases of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have shown in the sub-region. At the same time, according to some interlocutors, the unresolved issues of the 1998 conflict still influence the current instability. Thus, political dialogue, reconciliation and efforts to modernise security institutions are inextricably linked.

In order to tackle these important reforms, there is a consensus amongst the different interlocutors on the need for an ECOWAS-led international coordination mechanism to ensure sustained and coherent approaches to the modernization of security institutions. ECOWAS is best placed to lead these efforts having both the political mandate and the financial means, as well as a presence on the ground through ECOMIB. The Vice Chief of Staff reported that approximately half of the 4,000 members of the defence forces would like to “spontaneously” leave the army. The Chair praised ECOWAS for its commitment of funds to support this process.

It was unfortunate to hear from many actors that a dialogue on reforms of the state, which was supported by civil society groups such as Voz de Paz, had not progressed. The establishment of the High-Level Strategic Commission for Planning last June 2013, with the backing of SRSG Ramos Horta, has created a new opportunity for advancing this dialogue.

The mission also had the opportunity to discuss the issues of international crime and drug trafficking, which are very much linked to the institutional weaknesses of the country and remain a major concern among international interlocutors. These concerns continue to exist despite reports of a decline in the volume of trafficking, following the arrest of the Chief of Navy Bubo Na Tchuto by US authorities last April 2103. Interlocutors cited institutional constraints, the unstable political situation, and the weaknesses of law-enforcement institutions as important obstacles to tackle this challenge. Impunity as a result of weak institutions and of unstable civil-military relations was also mentioned as a challenge to political stability by many interlocutors, including human rights defenders.

Against this complex background, however, it is important to underline that Guinea Bissau is not short of skilled human resources and active civil society organizations that can play an important role in building peace. This is a pluralistic and diversified country, with no major underlying inter-ethnic or inter-community tensions. Shared values and respect for pluralism should continue to guide efforts for political reconciliation, unity and to build a unified national vision behind peacebuilding and sustainable development objectives.

Socio-economic issues

The economy of Guinea Bissau has declined dramatically over the past two years. The IMF reported that levels of growth prior to the coup were 4.5%, while only a year after the coup growth became negative, dropping to -1%. While this was partly due to the drastic decrease in the international market price of cashew nuts (the primary source of export revenue for Guinea Bissau), the collapse is also directly linked to Guinea Bissau's isolation and to the interruption of international funding as a consequence of the coup. The economic collapse has weakened the state's ability to ensure its minimal functions, including the payment of salaries for civil servants and especially school teachers, resulting in prolonged public service strikes and protracted closure of schools. Many interlocutors called on the PBC and the PBF to invest in socio-economic initiatives as a means to help stabilise the country and strengthen social cohesion in the short run as well as after the elections.

Interestingly, a number of interlocutors maintained that the withdrawal of international assistance did not particularly affect either the perpetrators of the coup or the political and military elites who supported it. Instead, it impacted negatively on public services and the economy as a whole, with the already weak education and health sectors suffering the most.

Moreover, interlocutors unanimously raised the pressing issue of food insecurity in Guinea Bissau, which represents a paradox for a country with abundant water, fertile lands and agricultural know-how. According to the WFP, the organization should not need to be in the country. FAO pointed out that food insecurity in Guinea-Bissau derives to a great extent from the on the country's heavy dependency on the production and export of cashew nuts. Alternatives to diversify the economy must therefore be developed including the introduction of new cash crops such as rice as well as the development of other sectors of the economy with high potential, including the mining sector and infrastructure (in this particular sector, the planned construction of a deep water seaport in Buba was mentioned as an important investment). Energy needs are relatively modest in the country (25MW of which 11MW are currently generated in the country), so energetic integration within the region may offer good prospects. Tourism also seems to offer potential gains.

The scale of problems and needs is relatively small compared to challenges faced by other post-conflict situations and therefore there should be a wide range of opportunities to promote sustainable development.

Worth highlighting was the meeting with the Commission of Women Workers (CMNT) and the Association of Women in Economic Activity (AMAE), two women's organisations that are currently being supported by a PBF project for Women's Economic Empowerment. These are the two organizations working at different levels to promote women's legal and economic empowerment, including access to justice, credit schemes, and research on the situation of women in the labor market. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss prospects for economic diversification and recognition of the central role of women as a workforce in the rural sector and the importance of promoting their economic rights. It is also noteworthy that women's organizations in Guinea Bissau bring together different ethnic groups, religious denominations and political affiliations around common agendas that of strategic value for peacebuilding efforts.

The mission also had the opportunity to meet with the High-level Strategic Commission established in July 2013 thanks to the facilitation of SRSG Ramos-Horta. The Commission (jointly supported by DPA and PBSO) has drawn up reform plans to take place before the elections in the sectors of: 1) health; 2) education; 3) food security. The Commission is also currently working on a proposed plan of reforms for the post-electoral period to be submitted to

the legitimate Government following the elections. The Chair had the opportunity to meet with the Commission and discuss its assessments of priorities in the country, especially the actions envisaged as part of a national plan for stability and development. The meeting also served as an opportunity for detailed discussions on the diversification of economic activity away from the cashew nut dependency. Suggestions ranged from aggregating value to cashew nut through processing, rice cultivation as a way to foster greater food security, and production of other cash crops, to investment in the mining, tourism and services sectors. Irregular fishing and logging licenses were pointed out as emerging threats. Challenges to be overcome in the process of the modernization of the defence and security sectors were discussed, and the importance of strengthening local administration was raised. In spite of concerns regarding a possible overlap between the Commission's activities and those of ministries, Parliament and elected officials, a case was made for the value of a high-level planning mechanism, including as a way to bring about greater inter-ministerial coordination, and successful examples in similar settings in other regions were mentioned.

Key issues – Cooperation with the UN

The visit provided an opportunity to meet with relevant international partners and examine their different views. The mission found that regional and international actors seem to have overcome some of the main differences in their positions having rallied around the conduct of elections and the need to kick-start a number of crucial reforms after the elections as their primary – and shared - concerns. It emerged that Guinea Bissau's international partners have a strong role to play in stabilizing the country and aiding its constructive integration in the region. Strong international and regional coordination are key to ensure that positive trends are mutually reinforcing. There is a need to maintain political momentum by reinforcing common messages to authorities in Guinea Bissau on the urgency of normalising the situation in the country. This will be one of the priorities for the immediate re-engagement of the PBC.

Moreover, in light of the discussions held with the different partners and the High Level Strategic Commission for Planning, it became clear the importance of SRSG Ramos-Horta's advocacy and work towards mobilizing enhanced international support to state building in the post-electoral period.

Concluding remarks and entry points for PBC re-engagement

It discussions with various national and international interlocutors, PBC was encouraged to play an enhanced role of coordination amongst international and regional partners, including ECOWAS, AU, EU, and CPLP, to promote common positions and messages and as a platform to promote meaningful support for the stabilization of the country.

Apart from the priorities already identified in national plans, including economic revitalization, national dialogue, rule of law, capacity-building, among others, three achievable core medium-term strategic objectives emerged during the visit that can help mobilize international support after elections:

1- Institutional Development. It will be essential to encourage and support the completion of a full democratic electoral cycle in the country with a constitutional transfer of power to newly elected officials. In the post-electoral period, apart from the strong political engagement throughout the entire cycle, it will be necessary to encourage support for key public administration sectors to be strengthened by encouraging South-South cooperation schemes and other international programmatic support.

2-Modernisation of Security Institutions. PBC can help bring efforts together around the concept of a comprehensive modernization program based on a deep understanding of the civil-military relations in the country, including support for military pension schemes and mechanisms for the reintegration of retired military, along with civil-military dialogue, reform of relevant civilian security structures, and reconciliation.

3- Economic and social and political empowerment. It is important to make significant strides in basic social and economic indicators, with a focus on rural development and support to the social and economic needs of women and youth, through the identification with the newly elected Government of priority sectors of the economy in which targeted employment and economic empowerment programs can be promoted. As discussed during the visit, food insecurity in Guinea Bissau is a contradiction and the World Food Program should be able to envisage its departure from the country as soon as possible.

These objectives, which will need to be further explored with the elected authorities, can offer some clear milestones against which progress in peacebuilding can be assessed, and compacts with international partners can be established.

Despite considerable political instability, there is peace in Guinea-Bissau, a country with rich natural resources, human capital, a diversified society, in a region where positive peacebuilding experiences can be found and a constructive cooperative environment seems to be emerging. With relatively small-scale assistance, much can be done to consolidate peace and set the course towards sustainable development.

The Chair remains committed to continue to accompany Guinea Bissau in its path towards stabilization and peace.

In closing, the Chair and ASG Cheng-Hopkins wish to express their gratitude for the warm reception they received in Guinea-Bissau and for the spirit of trust and dialogue demonstrated by the SRSG and his Office in facilitating the visit.
