

Ambassadorial-level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission

Guinea-Bissau Configuration, 6 December 2017

Chair's Summary

Background

The Guinea-Bissau Configuration held an Ambassadorial-level meeting on 6 December 2017 under the chairmanship of Ambassador Mauro Vieira of Brazil to discuss the situation in Guinea-Bissau, including the legislative elections scheduled for next year. It also heard a briefing on the new projects for the country submitted to PBF. Senior officials attending included the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNIOGBIS, Mr. Modibo Touré; Mr. David McLachlan-Karr, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of UNDP in Guinea-Bissau; the Permanent Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the United Nations, Mr. Tanou Koné; Mr. Henk-Jan Brinkman, Chief of the Policy Planning and Application Branch of PBSO; and Ms. Maria Antonieta Pinto Lopes D'Alva, Chargée d'affaires, a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Guinea-Bissau to the United Nations.

Introduction by the Chair of the PBC Configuration

1. Ambassador Vieira reminded the participants that since the last PBC meeting held on 21 August, he delivered a statement to the Security Council, on August 24, when he presented a report of his visit to Bissau and Lisbon, from July 25 to 28. On that occasion, among other points, he reiterated the backing of the PBC to the various efforts made by international and regional stakeholders to assist the Bissau-Guineans in finding a solution for the current political impasse. He further informed the Council that the PBC urged all key political actors to engage in a dialogue with a view to implementing the Bissau Six Point Road Map and the Conakry Agreements. He also informed the Council of the political consultations which had taken place with the support of the Group of Women Facilitators, and noted that the PBC welcomed this initiative. The Chair's remarks were endorsed by the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP).

Current Political Situation and ECOWAS High-Level Mission

2. The SRSG Modibo Touré noted that since the last PBC meeting there had been no tangible progress in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and tensions continued to rise. On 25 October, 17 political parties, including the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) announced the creation of the “Collective of Democratic Political Parties United against Dictatorship” (sic). The group pledged to hold demonstrations until President Vaz implements the Conakry Agreement. The Collective held a march on 16 November which was marked by altercations with the police. The “Guinea-Bissau P5” facilitated negotiations between the Ministry of Interior and the Collective to ensure that the march of 17 November was held peacefully.
3. The SRSG noted that a high-level ECOWAS mission led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Togo visited Bissau from 1 to 2 December to assess the implementation of the Bissau and Conakry Agreements. The high level delegation met with a number of actors, including President Vaz, the Speaker of the ANP, Prime Minister Sissoko and representatives of PAIGC, PRS and the Group of 15. On 3 December, prior to its departure, the ECOWAS mission issued a press release that (i) expressed concern on the continuing political crisis; (ii) urged parties to respect public liberties, including the right to protest peacefully; (iii) underscored the urgent necessity for the parties to work towards the implementation of the Bissau and Conakry Agreements; (iv) underscored the importance of the organization of free, fair and credible elections within the constitutional time-frame; (v) and reserved the decision on the application of collective and individual sanctions and the maintenance or withdrawal of ECOMIB to the Heads of State and Government on the occasion of their 52nd Summit in Abuja on 16 December. The SRSG urged a continued engagement from the International Community towards the implementation of the Bissau and Conakry Agreements.
4. The Permanent Observer of ECOWAS, Tanou Koné, stressed that the PBC had an important role to play in the situation of Guinea-Bissau. He described the ECOWAS high-level mission and underlined the fact that no progress was found in the implementation of the Bissau and Conakry agreements. He also noted that the final communiqué of the high-level mission indicated that the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State reserved the right to make decisions concerning sanctions and the ECOMIB. He stressed the security risk related to a withdrawal of ECOMIB but noted, however, that the costs of maintaining that force was putting a substantial financial strain on ECOWAS. He thanked the international community for the support they have provided to Guinea-Bissau, as well as to ECOMIB and stressed the importance of not discontinuing it.

Preparations for Legislative Elections

5. The Chair recalled that the organization of legislative elections had been discussed during his visit to Guinea-Bissau, as well as during the last PBC meeting. On those occasions, the PBC underlined the importance of holding elections with the necessary preparations, in particular the update of the voter registration lists.
6. The DSRS David McLachlan-Karr informed that the National Electoral Commission (CNE) presented to the President of the Republic an electoral calendar with legislative elections to be held in May 2018. Technical preparations are underway in line with this proposed calendar. There has been some progress, including on: 1) the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process (GTAPE), which reports to the Ministry for Territorial Administration, is updating the electoral cartography, entirely through government funding; 2) the CNE prepared a budget for the elections, estimated at USD 5.1 million. This budget is under review by the Ministry of Finance, which is also considering options to provide governmental contributions.
7. There are still important technical challenges to address, particularly on the update of the voter registration list. The update is supposed to be done yearly between January and March but has not been done since 2014. GTAPE up to this point has not been able to finalize a plan or budget for this task and has requested technical assistance from UNDP, which was going to send a voter registration expert to Bissau. The Ministry of Finance indicated they would be able to contribute USD 300,000 to the voter registration update.
8. He noted that a Joint EU/UNDP Elections Task Force mission was deployed to Bissau from 27 November to 1 December to support GTAPE and CNE in drafting an elections project document. The Elections Task Force mission seemed confident that, should funding be available, the remaining technical challenges can be overcome in time for the legislative elections to take place in May 2018. In closing, he stressed that, ultimately, the organization of the elections is contingent upon the willingness of the key political actors—and he said that there were still no certainties on this front.

Peacebuilding Fund Projects (PBF) in Guinea-Bissau

9. Mr. McLachlan-Karr informed that his office had submitted a package of six (6) project proposals, with an aggregate value of approximately USD 7 million, for the consideration of the Peacebuilding Fund under the PBF's Immediate Response Facility (IRF). The projects are the result of a comprehensive national consultative and prioritization process. The six proposals are designed to complement each other with the aim of making tangible contributions to peace-building and the longer-term political and institutional stability of Guinea-Bissau.
10. He stressed that the projects will strengthen the capacity of key stakeholder groups—with a special focus on women and youth. The projects also aim to mitigate factors of

instability that may increase in the upcoming electoral period, while seizing on the longer-term opportunities for change that they will create.

11. Mr. Henk-Jan Brinkman of PBSO stressed the importance of the continued support by the PBC and by the international community to the ECOWAS led process. He recalled the financial pledges made by the international community to support the Terra Ranka programme in 2015. However, the paralysis of the government has made it difficult to provide development cooperation.
12. He went on to note the PBF is still operating under the framework of the 2015-17 Peacebuilding Priority Plan, which would expire by the end of 2017. In anticipation of this expiration, PBSO has developed a new phase of support to Guinea-Bissau implemented through a portfolio of IRF projects running from January 2018-June 2019. One project (“Support to Political Dialogue and National Reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau”) aims at strengthening mediation and dialogue initiatives, in particular focusing on the Women’s Forum for Peace. Two projects concentrate on the institutional or sectoral stabilization. One of them is the project “Supporting Political and Institutional Stabilization of the Justice Sector for Peace Consolidation in Guinea-Bissau”, which will strengthen the formal and informal justice sector in order to make appropriate forms of justice and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms more accessible for the population. The other project, “Boosting the Media Sector for Greater Peace and Stability in Guinea-Bissau”, will increase the contribution of the media to peacebuilding, in particular during the upcoming electoral cycle. Another group of projects will focus on approaches that highlight the added value that civil society can bring and will aim towards increasing the inclusion of women and youth in decision-making processes. PBSO hopes that through the diversity of the portfolio operating at different levels, its implementation can be better shielded from negative consequences of the political impasse. PBSO has supported the elaboration of these projects and conditionally approved them on 29 November. The projects are currently being revised and prepared for government signature for full approval and the transfer of funds before the end of the year.

Discussion

13. There was general concern over the fact that no progress had been made in the implementation of the Bissau and Conakry Agreements during the three month extension period which was provided by ECOWAS on their Summit of June. Members congratulated ECOWAS for their continued engagement and reaffirmed their support to the process the Community has led. Members called upon all political actors to take concrete action to implement the Bissau and Conakry Agreements. There was also broad agreement on the significant role played by ECOMIB and on the need for the international community to continue to support it.
14. Participants underlined the fact that the active support and coordination of the international community, including through the “Guinea-Bissau P5” (UN, AU, EU, CPLP, ECOWAS), had proven crucial in seeking a political solution for the crisis, and that the PBC had played a key role in this process.

15. Concern was also expressed that the proposed dates for the election were now approaching but that it did not seem to exist a clear vision and agreement among political actors on this issue. Participants underlined the need for the elections to be held according the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau. Attention must also be given to make all necessary technical preparations. Participants reminded all actors of the need to respect the right for peaceful demonstrations.

Conclusion

16. The Chair took note of the recent developments in the country. He welcomed the report on the ECOWAS ministerial mission and mentioned that he looked forward to the outcome of the 16 December Summit. He underlined the importance of the support from the international community, including the role of the ECOMIB. He welcomed the new PBF projects and expressed his hope that these would provide a concrete contribution to the peacebuilding process in the country. He informed members that he would circulate a draft press statement based on the views expressed during the meeting, calling upon the Guinea-Bissau political actors to implement the Bissau and Conakry agreements, stressing the importance of free and fair elections in accordance with the Constitution and the respect of the right to demonstrate peacefully.