

**Visit of the PBC Delegation to Guinea-Bissau  
14-16 February 2023  
Report**

1. As part of my mandate as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I (Ambassador Ronaldo Costa Filho, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN), undertook a visit to Guinea-Bissau on 14-16 February 2023. I was joined by the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Elizabeth Spehar, and OIC Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and DSRSG Giovannie Biha, and the Permanent Representative of Guinea-Bissau to the UN, H.E. Mr. Samba Sané. We were accompanied by H.E. Ms. Cláudia de Borba Maciel Ambassador of Brazil to Guinea-Bissau; Mr. Alexandre de Lima from the Permanent Mission of Brazil, Ms. Aissatou Jobe and Mr. Richard Freeman from UNOWAS, and Ms. Rebecca Feeley from the UN Peacebuilding Support Office.

2. The objectives of the visit were to discuss ways to sustain progress towards the consolidation of democracy, including political dialogue and preparations for the 2023 legislative elections, as a key element of stability and sustaining peace, and to exchange views on further advancing Guinea-Bissau's peacebuilding priorities, particularly ways to support the expansion of socio-economic opportunities and ensure the long-term engagement of partners.

3. During the visit, the delegation met with H.E. Umaro Sissoco Embaló, President of Guinea-Bissau, and senior members of his government, including Mr. Nuno Gomes Nabiam, Prime Minister; Ms. Suzi Carla Barbosa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Communities; Ms. Teresa Alexandrina da Silva, Minister of Justice and Human Rights; Mr. Mamadu Baldé, Secretary of State for the Treasury; Mr. Fernando Mendes, Secretary of State for Territorial Administration and Local Government; Mr. Gabriel Djibril Baldé, Director-General of the Government Technical Office for Electoral Support (GTAPE); and Mr. Edmundo Mendes, Prosecutor-General. The delegation also met with Mr. Cipriano Cassamá, President of the Parliamentary Standing Committee<sup>1</sup>; Ms. Dan Yala and Ms. Gabriella Fernandes, First and Second Secretaries of the Parliamentary Executive Board respectively, as well as with representatives of political parties, including PAIGC, UM, PRS, APU-PDGB, and PND. We additionally met with representatives of ECOWAS, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, civil society organizations, the diplomatic community, and the UN Country Team.

4. We appreciate the hospitality extended by the government of Guinea-Bissau during our visit, and for the fruitful discussions with the President, Ministers, and Government senior officials. We also benefitted from our discussions with civil society, political parties and other interlocuters. We wish to thank the Resident Coordinator and UN colleagues for facilitating a comprehensive program during our visit and for their support.

5. During our mission, interlocuters welcomed the delegation with broad recognition of the Peacebuilding Commission's support for Guinea-Bissau and expressed high expectations for the visit. At each meeting, I underscored our supportive, facilitating, and non-interventionist role and the crucial importance of Guinea-Bissau itself spearheading the necessary changes. We

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<sup>1</sup> caretaker entity following May 2022 dissolution of parliament

emphasized that the goal of the delegation's visit was to identify entry points for additional support to Guinea-Bissau, whether it be through the accompaniment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the good offices of UNOWAS, or the investments of the Peacebuilding Fund.

6. In the following lines, we share our impressions and reflections on specific peacebuilding areas that were discussed with interlocutors.

*Dialogue and preparation for the legislative elections of 2023*

7. The legislative elections scheduled to be held on 4 June 2023 represent an important opportunity to consolidate democracy in Guinea-Bissau. In our discussions, top government officials emphasized the national ownership of the electoral process, informing that 70 percent of the electoral budget was nationally financed, while underscoring the need for more support – both material and financial – from partners to cover the remaining 30 percent. Voter registration was at 98 percent of projected participation, having been conducted by the National Electoral Commission (CNE) in liaison with the Government Technical Office for Electoral Support (GTAPE) and in the presence of party pollwatchers. Additionally, the delegation was assured that the extension of the voter registration process to ensure inclusion of the diaspora would not cause significant delays in the election timetable.

8. We perceived a strong determination for the conduct of peaceful, free and fair legislative elections as a critical milestone for the country, not least in terms of helping to rebuild trust in Guinea-Bissau's key institutions. There also appeared to be a certain sense of responsibility of the country as Chair of ECOWAS and their leadership role in the sub-region. It was well emphasized that seizing the opportunity to consolidate democracy was as crucial to the region as it was to Guinea-Bissau itself, particularly in view of the instability in some of its neighbor states.

9. While the government seemed confident of a smooth electoral process, opposition parties and civil society criticized the conduct of voter registration and continued to question the legitimacy of the CNE. Since early legislative elections were announced in May 2022, there has been a lack of consensus regarding the constitutional legality of the four-member Executive Secretariat of the CNE, given the expiration of its four-year mandate in April 2022 and the appointment of two of its four-member secretariat as judges to the Supreme Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors. The President of the National People's Assembly held consultations with political parties in December 2022 to build consensus on the question of the CNE, to no avail.

10. Recognizing that a lack of consensus regarding the CNE's legitimacy could constitute a basis for electoral contestation, the delegation explored the disposition of stakeholders to engage in further dialogue. Opposition parties were, however, steadfast in their views that consensus through dialogue would remain elusive, noting that parliament was best placed to conduct such dialogue and it had been dissolved. They expressed a willingness to seek resolution of their stated grievances through the courts, but, at the same time expressed little confidence in the justice system.

11. The dispute over the CNE was cited as a 'red herring' by government officials and governing coalition political parties, who noted that those with grievances about the CNE and other issues have not opted to take up a legal challenge at the Supreme Court. Government interlocutors

underscored the need to settle any pre-electoral and electoral disputes through the appropriate legal processes to ensure inclusive electoral participation by all political parties.

12. In our discussions with civil society representatives, they acknowledged that the electoral preparations were occurring in a climate of strong political division and criticized both the lack of constructive dialogue as well as the exclusion of CSOs. They also noted a lack of communication and sensitization of the citizenry regarding the elections and described an apathy and inertia of the population as the elections approached.

13. Despite a continued lack of consensus on the CNE and complaints about the voter registration process, none of the stakeholders seemed to suggest that the elections should be further postponed. Our discussions also confirmed that a more transparent and credible process, culminating in a broadly accepted outcome and peaceful post-electoral environment, would be essential to restoring confidence and creating an enabling environment for needed reforms. In this vein, we continued to encourage stakeholders to pursue inclusive dialogue to resolve outstanding issues, in order to help ensure peaceful and credible elections.

#### *Socio-Economic Development and Partnerships*

14. While the upcoming elections were top of mind for the majority of interlocutors, the socio-economic situation in the country was a consistent backdrop in all our discussions. Government officials highlighted that socio-economic development and the provision of basic social services to the population was a top priority, particularly in view of current global economic shocks, and the importance of addressing these needs was underscored by civil society. CSOs described a worsening of socio-economic conditions, including increased food insecurity, and informed of poor social service delivery, particularly in the health and education sectors. They also noted that youth, representing over 60 percent of the population, and women were particularly affected by the deepening social inequalities.

15. It is to be recalled that Guinea-Bissau's Strategy for Development, Employment, and Industrial Promotion for the period 2020-2024, also known as the *Hora Tchiga*, recognizes the increased poverty and unemployment initially caused by COVID-19, particularly among women and youth, and notes that the resultant "exclusion of Guinean citizens from the circuit of value creation" constitutes a threat to the country's political stability and sustainable development. The *Hora Tchiga* aims to transform the socio-economic crisis into an opportunity to restructure the Bissau-Guinean economy.

16. We were encouraged to learn of Guinea-Bissau's recent strides in macro-economic stabilization. A few weeks before our arrival in country, the IMF approved a 3-year Extended Credit Facility arrangement totaling roughly USD 38.4 million for Guinea-Bissau, with the objectives of securing debt sustainability while supporting economic recovery, improving governance, reducing the risk of corruption, and creating fiscal space to address development needs. Senior government leadership evoked the IMF arrangement as a sign of confidence and expressed hope that it would help facilitate increased donor and private sector confidence.

17. In our meeting with the World Bank and IMF Country Representatives, they noted the goodwill of the government to achieve macro-economic stabilization and improve governance. The World Bank informed of the expansion of their team in Guinea-Bissau and upcoming

discussions on the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework as well as the Public Expenditure Review. The World Bank also stressed the importance of implementing structural reforms over the medium term to support economic recovery and strengthen resilience. We further discussed challenges in public sector reform and were informed of a new World Bank program to create a biometric civil service registry. Both the IMF and World Bank emphasized their cooperation with UN entities to ensure coordination and alignment with national priorities.

#### *Gender equality and women's empowerment*

18. During the visit, ASG Spehar and I had the opportunity to meet future female leaders of Guinea-Bissau and witness the impact of a UNDP project supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, in partnership with the ministries of National Education and Territorial Administration, aiming to strengthen the capacities of young women to become agents of change. At an awards ceremony for nearly 200 young female students who completed a 6-month "Female Talent Activation Program" at the Leadership Academy in partnership with Mozambican NGO [GirlMove](#), we were privileged to hear from the young women about how the project helped them to recognize their potential and supported them in enhancing their leadership skills and competencies.

19. The graduates informed of the social and cultural barriers to gender equality in Guinea-Bissau and described the ongoing challenges faced by women and girls in Guinea-Bissau, including discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence. They also remarked that female representation and meaningful participation in political decision-making remains limited. The young women highlighted the necessary participation of women as leaders and agents of change for the future of Guinea-Bissau and stressed the need to provide women with the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The program helped the participants to adopt a gender-sensitive lens, gain self-esteem and self-confidence, and made them more aware of their rights and duties. The graduates expressed their determination to replicate what they learned and to promote gender equality and female leadership. They also called for the continuation of the program and its implementation across Guinea-Bissau, including in rural areas.

20. The ASG and I were inspired by the young women, and we left the ceremony confident in the positive impact they will make in their communities and beyond. The fact that the program's mentorship model was successfully implemented in Mozambique prior to its application in Guinea-Bissau not only shows the added value of sharing best practices between countries, but also highlights the importance of considering the program's further dissemination across the country.

21. Also of note, in our discussions with government officials, political parties and civil society, there was broad recognition of the importance of women's political and civic participation. Government officials informed of progress in women's political participation, noting the number of women ministers, but also acknowledged that more work needed to be done to reach the 36 percent gender quota for the participation and presence of women in the lists of candidates of political parties to the legislative elections.

#### *Rule of Law, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime*

22. In our meetings with civil society and political parties, concerns were raised about violations of civil liberties and human rights and the need to strengthen human rights protections. Senior government officials informed of their commitment to improving the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and addressing violations of human rights, and reiterated, in particular, the challenges of combatting drug trafficking and transnational organized crime.

23. It is to be recalled that, since the early 2000s, Guinea-Bissau has had to face high levels of illicit activity, particularly drug trafficking, impacting the country's stability. The coastal topography of the country, composed of an archipelago of 88 islands, favours the conduct of illicit activities and has created the conditions for the country to be a hub for transnational organized crime and drug trafficking.

24. One official described Guinea-Bissau as "always being one kilometer behind when chasing after drug traffickers." The delegation was informed of significant logistical challenges in combatting drug trafficking through the islands, highlighting the need for more boats and enhanced maritime surveillance equipment.

25. Despite the ongoing challenges of fighting drug trafficking in the archipelago, we were encouraged to learn of efforts underway to strengthen the justice and security sector response to drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in a more effective and transparent manner and inclusive of community representatives and views. The ASG and I had the privilege of visiting a drug inspection facility at Bissau International Airport, together with the Minister of Justice, and to tour the installations that included new equipment provided to the Judiciary Police, through a UNDP and UNODC project supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, for the detection, inspection, and seizure of drugs, as part of capacity-building of government and community representatives to tackle the drug trafficking problem. We met with the National Director of the Judicial Police, who informed us of the strengthened operational capacities of the judicial police and the Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force in criminal investigations and drug seizures. This training, he informed, coupled with the provision of new equipment such as a scanner and cameras, resulted in a recent significant confiscation of cocaine at the airport.

26. In the following points, we identify opportunities and actions for follow-up to our visit.

#### *For the Peacebuilding Commission*

27. I will debrief the PBC, along with the ASG and DSRSG, during our next meeting of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration, based on this report of the visit. In coordination with the Government of Guinea-Bissau, I also plan to convene additional meetings of the Configuration in 2023 to allow for further exchange between Guinea-Bissau and its partners in support of the country's peacebuilding priorities, including in the post-electoral context.

28. Additionally, as Chair of the PBC Guinea-Bissau Configuration, I encourage a continuation of high-level engagement by the international community in advance of the 2023 legislative elections that can build upon our visit and reinforce the importance of a resumption of political dialogue.

29. Building on prior engagement with representatives of civil society, including women's and youth organizations, at meetings of the PBC Guinea-Bissau Configuration, I am also committed

to continuing to include their active participation at the PBC to increase the international community's awareness of the concerns of the Bissau-Guinean citizenry and their calls for effective support.

*For DPPA/PBSO, UN System support*

30. PBSO will continue to work with the UN system, including DPPA-Africa and the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), UNOWAS and the UNCT in Guinea-Bissau to ensure coordinated support to the country's peacebuilding priorities in pre- and post-electoral contexts.

31. Based on the visit and upon the Government of Guinea-Bissau's continued confirmation of these priorities, the PBF will aim to support/continue to support Guinea-Bissau in key peacebuilding areas such as inclusive and meaningful political dialogue, political stabilization and reforms, the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime, social cohesion, enhancing human rights protection mechanisms, improved health sector governance and women's and youth participation and empowerment. The PBF could also consider supporting additional efforts at strengthening key institutions and constituencies in advance of the legislative elections as well as with a view to 2024 presidential elections.

32. In line with its regional mandate on peace and security, UNOWAS will remain actively engaged in Guinea Bissau through good offices and technical support for preventive diplomacy in collaboration with key partners. In particular, UNOWAS will work closely with the Resident Coordinator to promote dialogue among national stakeholders, for peaceful legislative elections as well as to create conducive conditions for post-electoral stability.

33. In this regard, UNOWAS will engage together with other UN entities (including DPPA, UNDP, PBSO, RC, RCO/UNCT and the PBC) to help advance critical reforms including the constitutional review, electoral law, political parties' law, Security Sector Reform and public administration reform.

*Conclusion*

34. We wish to reiterate our appreciation for the excellent collaboration and support that we received from the Government of Guinea-Bissau and from other stakeholders in the preparation and conduct of our trip to Bissau, and in New York through the Permanent Representation of Guinea-Bissau to the UN. We look forward to our continued collaboration and engagement.