

Peacebuilding Commission
Ambassadorial-level meeting on peace consolidation in São Tomé and Príncipe
15 January 2024

Chair's Summary

On 15 January 2024, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on São Tomé and Príncipe, with Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, accompanied by the Minister of Justice, to discuss the country's experience and efforts in consolidating its peace and stability through the reform of its justice and security sectors as recommended by UN-Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) strategic assessment mission conducted in April 2023 and its strategic assessment report's recommendations in November 2023, which formed the foundation for mobilizing resources, coordinating, and implementing the necessary reforms in those two critical areas. The Commission commended the Government's resolve to advance democratic governance and maintain stability by addressing challenges. Developing a national vision for the justice and security reforms, grounded in inclusion and participation of all key national stakeholders, was described as paramount in achieving the required changes. Given the challenges the Government faces in terms of financial resources to achieve urgent reforms and the preventive approach it adopted by engaging with the PBC, the international community's support to the Government's efforts was deemed critical.

1. On 15 January 2024, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović, convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on peace consolidation in São Tomé and Príncipe, focusing on justice and security sectors reform as pathways to foster sustainable peace in the country, and providing a platform for the international community to identify entry points to support the country's efforts in this regard.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair noted the global challenges to building and sustaining peace, including geopolitical, economic, and environmental (particularly climate change) factors, which acutely impact São Tomé and Príncipe. He highlighted that São Tomé and Príncipe, as a small Island Developing State, was prone to external shocks. The Chair however recognized São Tomé and Príncipe's great achievements in democratic governance despite these existing challenges and the need to ensure that the gains achieved are not lost.
3. **H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe** informed of the country's still fragile democracy whilst recalling the strong commitment to preserving and advancing the rule of law, peace, and stability. Underlining significant achievements in development and legislative reforms, the Prime Minister also highlighted the factors that undermine progress, such as geographic isolation, climate change, dependence on imported fossil fuels and the insufficient development assistance to the country. He also described the impact of globalization, including the effect of international terrorism and criminality. He expressed his concerns over the current international financial architecture and assistance scheme, referencing in particular the conditions for the IMF's short-term funding as being socially costly. Given the current fragility of his country, he called on the international community to increase its assistance stressing that prevention was a better investment especially when the country concerned is doing everything to avoid a crisis. He

noted the Government's tangible efforts in advancing various reform agendas that promote human rights, democratic governance and equality. He exemplified this engagement by referring to a number of initiatives adopted, such as the Gender Parity Law that mandated a 40 per cent quota for women in state institutions. While the country was proud of its engagement in the area of human rights, the Prime Minister noted that it also faces a number of challenges in delivering justice for the 230,000 habitants. Stressing the size of the population, he noted that the reforms are feasible so long as the resources were invested in the key areas. For the Prime Minister, justice was at the core of São Tomé and Príncipe's current challenges alongside the security sector. He explained the risk factors should those two issues not be addressed urgently and underlined the lack of resources as the main stumbling block in moving forward with the reform process. He therefore called on the PBC to support them in mobilizing the necessary financial support.

4. **Mr. Abdou Abarry, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA)** noted that São Tomé and Príncipe was a model of democracy in Central Africa and welcomed the Government's ongoing efforts in various areas such as in climate action and gender parity. He underlined the need for international support to assist the country to achieve its goal for stability and sustaining peace. He noted the current vulnerability of the national institutions in facing external and internal shocks as exemplified by the violent events of 25 November 2022. The country's call for support to build stronger justice and security sector institutions was therefore well founded and inter alia aims to address current grievances regarding the justice and security sectors. He informed of the UN-Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) strategic assessment mission conducted in April 2023 and the Government's endorsement of the strategic assessment report's recommendations in November 2023, forming the foundation for mobilizing resources, coordinating, and implementing the necessary reforms in those two critical areas. He appealed to the international community to contribute to the implementation of the assessment report's recommendations. Referring to the country's strategic location as an important maritime corridor, he also reiterated the need for such investments as a way to prevent the country from becoming a hub for illicit activities. Lastly, he stressed the importance of inclusive dialogue involving a wide array of political and civil society actors, especially women and young people.
5. **H.E. Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President of the Commission of ECCAS** commended São Tomé and Príncipe's efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. He informed that the UN-ECCAS mission's objective was to conduct a strategic assessment of the security and justice sectors with a view to producing a plan to support the necessary reforms. The strategic assessment report's recommendations were developed through an extensive consultation process, with around 75 interlocutors and partners being interviewed. He welcomed the consensus among stakeholders on the need to create a national commission to promote and defend human rights as well as develop targeted technical projects in support of justice and security sector reforms, with the support from the partners. He concluded by stressing the need for collaboration and support to undertake the necessary institutional reforms, and that those reforms should not be hampered merely due to financial constraints.

- 6. Mr. Alexandre Zouev, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI)** underlined the rule of law as fundamental to lasting peace and security, as well as a foundation for conflict prevention and peacebuilding and commended UN-ECCAS strategic assessment report. He welcomed the initiatives by the Santomean authorities to further enhance the country's justice and security systems, including by advancing a national justice sector reform policy towards strengthening the judiciary and improving access to justice. He underlined the importance of fostering a people-centered approach and sustaining public confidence and trust in the rule of law. He continued by noting that inclusive, representative, responsive and accountable justice and security institutions are fundamental to supporting good governance and enhancing service delivery and trust among the population. He outlined options for further collaboration, including strengthening internal and external control mechanisms of the justice and security sectors; enhancing corrections systems and rehabilitation and reintegration approaches; and conducting an assessment of the country's security threats and needs with a view to developing a security sector reform plan and contributing to stability and sustainable development. He concluded by emphasizing that support from partners would be critical, and that the cost to engage in such efforts at this stage was viewed as a smart and cost-effective investment in peacebuilding.
- 7. Ms. Carla Derise Barros Agostinho das Neves Vera Cruz, Association of Women Jurists of São Tomé and Príncipe**, informed of the work of her organization, including advocacy for the protection of human rights, fostering increased women's participation in civic engagement, and eradicating all forms of discrimination against women in São Tomé and Príncipe. In that regard, she noted legal studies as essential to achieving equality in rights and opportunities as well as the development and enactment of legal statutes, focusing on gender. She underlined the challenges in the advancement of women's rights and opportunities in order to shape public policies and practices towards realizing a more just and equitable society. Furthermore, she informed of the continued violence against women and the lack of support for victims and underlined the need for further support to address these challenges. While acknowledging the strides in advancing gender equality, particularly the Gender Parity Law, she noted the lack of women's active political participation. She concluded by reiterating that the realization and protection of women's rights, facilitated by legal mechanisms and public policies, is critical to sustainable development.
- 8. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:**

 - They welcomed São Tomé Príncipe's engagement with the Commission and appreciated the Government's focus and actions around conflict prevention.
 - The Commission commended São Tomé and Príncipe for the significant accomplishments in advancing democratic governance and gender equality.
 - Member States acknowledged the country's strategic significance to peace and stability in the Central African region and stressed the importance of advancing cooperation on maritime security and cross-border challenges.
 - They acknowledged the Government's commitment to strengthening rule of law and security, underlining the importance of legitimate, inclusive, accountable, transparent, and people-centered justice as well as a security apparatus that operates in compliance with human rights.

- They welcomed the UN-ECCAS strategic assessment mission report as providing a comprehensive roadmap to justice and reiterated the importance of national and political ownership in advancing the recommendations, and ultimately, in sustaining peace.
- They highlighted the importance of developing a national vision for the reform processes based on broad participation and inclusion. They underlined in that regard the importance of trust-building and national consensus.
- They commended the Government's efforts and measures to improve gender equality and women's empowerment and encouraged it to further continue with its efforts.
- They acknowledged the importance of socio-economic opportunities, particularly for youth as well as the need to invest in critical infrastructure for socio-economic development and deal with impacts of climate change.
- They underscored the need for adequate, predictable and sustained financial, technical, and material resources to support the reform processes. In that regard, they called for the international community's support to assist the Government to fully address its structural needs and support the envisaged institutional reforms. They also expressed support for the catalytic funding from the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in the country.
- They noted the current challenges in the international financial architecture and accessing critical financing and encouraged enhanced engagement with the international financial institutions (IFIs).
- They underlined the need for strengthened, coherent and coordinated partnerships and collaboration between the national authorities, the UN, and regional and international organizations and financial institutions based on national ownership and priorities.
- They expressed readiness to accompany and support São Tomé and Príncipe in its efforts to consolidate peace, stability, democratic governance, and sustainable and inclusive development. They recommended São Tomé and Príncipe's continued engagement with the Commission and proactive follow-up.

9. **Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support**, acknowledged São Tomé and Príncipe's efforts to strengthen its key institutions and processes, including enshrining gender parity in public institutions. She reiterated the importance of international community support to the country, particularly in a preventive context and to advance sustainable peace. She welcomed the UN-ECCAS strategic assessment mission report's recommendations and underscored the importance of an inclusive and meaningful dialogue process leading to the definition of a common national vision for the justice and security sector reforms. She further expressed the importance of sub-regional collaboration, embodied in the UN-ECCAS strategic assessment. From the Peacebuilding Support Office's (PBSO) point of view, she outlined potential areas for collaboration and support, including the catalytic funding of the PBF, the strategic engagement and alignment with the IFIs, and developing a national action plan on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS). Within this context, she stressed the importance of prioritization based on national ownership.

10. In his concluding remarks, **H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe**, reiterated that the rule of law and access to justice were key for the stability and consolidation of peace in the country. He provided a number of key examples showing the challenges the country was facing in meeting its international human rights

obligations but also in maintaining its stability. He noted that his country was a clear and achievable prevention case. He went on by showing how the limited capacity and equipment of judges eroded the trust by the population in the justice system. He said that the few judges were handling an average of 1,000 cases each annually – all manually. He informed of cost-effective solutions to address this, such as the digitalization and capacity-building of the justice system, which would in turn improve transparency, accountability and confidence in the justice system. He also provided examples on the shortcomings of the security defense system and its infrastructures and stressed the need for advancing maritime security and the envisaged decentralization of the national army. With these examples, he reiterated the critical urgency for implementing the envisaged reforms especially given the fast-evolving regional dynamics. He noted the need for a tailor-made mechanism to enable those prompt actions. He concluded by emphasizing the potential of São Tomé and Príncipe to be a success story of prevention for the international community, also given its size and strong resolve of the Government to address the above-mentioned challenges.

Chair's recommendations

- Continue advocating for the necessary political and financial support for São Tomé and Príncipe to achieve its reform process and consolidate peace and sustainable development, including dealing with impacts of climate change.
- Calling the UN and the international community to support the development of a national vision and a strategic framework for the justice and security sector reforms based on national ownership and inclusivity.
- Advocating for regional partners and international financial institutions, to ensure their continued engagement and coherent and coordinated support to São Tomé and Príncipe.
- Encourage São Tomé and Príncipe to continue its engagement with the Commission to ensure that its efforts towards enacting its reform agenda is provided with the necessary support.