



Security Council

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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report every three months.

2. The present report focuses on developments since my predecessor's last report, dated 6 December 2006 (S/2006/946), in particular the persistent political and social tensions and the deterioration of the economic and financial situation of the country.

II. Political developments

3. During the period under review, the political climate was marked by increasingly bitter disputes among, on the one hand, parliamentarians supporting the Government and, on the other, supporters of the Speaker of the National Assembly over the appointment of proxy parliamentarians, the disturbances following the killing of the former Navy Chief of Staff, Lamine Sanhá, and the attempted arrest of the leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and former Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior.

4. The rift between the Speaker and the supporters of the Government has been developing since the fall of the previous PAIGC Government headed by Mr. Gomes in November 2005. The current disagreements centre on the appointment of parliamentarians to replace six PAIGC legislators, five of whom had broken ranks with the party and supported the election of President João Bernardo Vieira, whose Government they have since joined. The Speaker of Parliament, a member of PAIGC, recently complained to my Representative that the Government was attempting to subvert the constitutional separation of powers and parliamentary rules by dispatching two legal officials and the police to the National Assembly to push for the appointment of the six proxy legislators.



5. On 4 January 2007, Commander Lamine Sanhá, a former Navy Chief of Staff and loyalist of the assassinated Junta leader, Ansumane Mané, was shot and critically wounded by unidentified gunmen outside his home, and died on 6 January. In August 2006, he and another senior officer had been summoned to the Military Tribunal, which was investigating an alleged plot against General Tagmé Na Waie, the Chief of General Staff. Commander Sanhá had been critical of the military reconciliation process and had received death threats. His death was followed by disturbances in the Bairro Militar suburb in Bissau, where he lived. Two people were killed in clashes between demonstrators and security forces, and property was damaged. The Government expressed concern over the incidents and opened an inquiry into the assassination of Commander Sanhá. On 8 January, I issued a statement expressing my distress at the loss of life and calling on all national stakeholders to find negotiated solutions to their differences and avoid allowing impunity to prevail.

6. On 10 January, the PAIGC leader, Mr. Gomes, came to United Nations premises in Bissau to request protection after the Rapid Intervention Police had attempted to serve an arrest warrant issued against him by the Ministry of the Interior in connection with a telephone interview to a news agency on 8 January. Mr. Gomes is reported as having alleged in the interview that Commander Sanhá's death was a settling of scores over the 1998/99 military conflict. Mr. Gomes said his comments to the media had been misinterpreted. Although, as a member of Parliament, Mr. Gomes enjoys parliamentary immunity, the Minister for the Interior explained that the warrant had been issued to prevent an escalation of public disorder. On 10 January, various civil society organizations issued a communiqué holding the Government responsible for the worsening social and political situation, and called on the President to take corrective action. A march by civil society organizations to express concern over growing crime rates and insecurity was prohibited by the police on 13 January. The organizers of the march met with my Representative and expressed their fear over what they saw as a deteriorating security situation.

7. The crisis over the arrest of Mr. Gomes coincided with a brief visit to Bissau on 20 January by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, followed, on 22 and 23 January, by the troika of the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau. The two delegations had come to consult the authorities of Guinea-Bissau on the preparations for the next meeting of the Contact Group, to be held in Lisbon. The two missions called for a resolution to the crisis through dialogue.

8. After several days of mediation between the authorities, the National Assembly and representatives of Mr. Gomes, my Representative announced, on 27 January, in the presence of the Ministers for Justice and the Interior and representatives of the diplomatic corps, that the Government had withdrawn the arrest warrant and guaranteed the safety of Mr. Gomes and his family. Mr. Gomes left United Nations premises on 29 January after my Representative had received a letter from the Ministry of Justice confirming that the arrest warrant had been withdrawn. On 30 January, I issued a statement welcoming this positive development. Subsequently, Mr. Gomes assisted the Prosecutor's office with its inquiries into the death of Commander Sanhá.

9. During the period under review, divisions also continued to affect the Party of Social Renewal (PRS), the country's second largest party. Some members of PRS, including a government minister, took legal action to challenge the victory of former

President Koumba Yalá in the PRS leadership contest in November 2006. Following a meeting on 2 February, the PRS National Political Commission noted that the political and institutional instability in the country was jeopardizing the disbursement of pledges made by international partners to Guinea-Bissau.

10. President Vieira visited Guinea from 3 to 5 February to discuss the escalating political crisis in that country. He warned that Guinea-Bissau was not in a position to host refugees should the crisis there escalate. He also described as “negative speculation” reports that forces of Guinea-Bissau had been sent to Guinea to support President Lansana Conté. He stressed that an intervention was out of the question, since the crisis in Guinea was over labour grievances, while the defence pact between the two countries covered solely external threats.

11. The activities of the Estados Gerais dialogue have stalled over resource constraints. The initiative organized a regional meeting in the Oio Region on 28 November 2006, which was attended by the Chairman of the Commission on Reconciliation and Reintegration of the Defence and Security Forces. Preparations for a regional meeting in the provincial capital of the south have been halted owing to a lack of financial resources. UNOGBIS and the Estados Gerais dialogue are assessing the results and impact of the process to date with a view to enhancing its effectiveness. Various stakeholders have also put forward proposals for dialogue and reconciliation initiatives, which UNOGBIS is examining. The United Nations Democracy Fund has approved a project aimed at strengthening the capacity of Parliament. The project, which includes strengthening conflict resolution skills for legislators and a specific module to enhance the role of female parliamentarians in promoting sustainable peace and development, will be coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and jointly implemented by UNOGBIS, the Netherlands Development Organization and the National Democratic Institute of the United States. The Fund has also approved a project proposal presented by the International Peacebuilding Alliance and the National Institute for Studies and Research of Guinea-Bissau to support inclusive national dialogue and provide a policy framework to address the deep-seated political and governance challenges confronting the country.

III. Economic and social aspects

12. The socio-economic situation in the country remains very fragile. Most of the financial pledges made at the donors’ round table at Geneva in November 2006 remain outstanding. In mid-December, the World Bank decided to suspend its support for a multisector infrastructure rehabilitation project after concluding that the joint venture agreement between the Government and a foreign energy company was incompatible with the project it had envisaged. That decision compromised the expected disbursement by the Bank of US\$ 10 million in budgetary support, as well as the disbursement of budgetary support by other partners, such as the European Union and the African Development Bank. At discussions held on 22 December with representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, my Representative appealed to them to take into account the concerns of the Government over the World Bank process. Following the Government’s decision at the beginning of January to terminate the disputed joint venture, the Bank sent a mission to Bissau to discuss technical issues related to the rehabilitation project and to identify urgent power needs, as the power grid in Bissau

is close to total collapse and is affecting the critical provision of electricity, including to hospitals, as well as the water supply.

13. An IMF mission is scheduled to visit Bissau to assess 2007 budgetary requirements. An agreement on emergency post-conflict assistance is contingent upon filling the identified budget gaps. The African Development Bank has applied sanctions to the country following the Government's failure to make a scheduled repayment on 31 January.

14. Talks between the Government and the European Union over a new fisheries agreement began on 6 February. The Government claims that the current annual compensation of €7.2 million is insufficient. The Ministry of Fisheries has also announced that the seizure of over 40 fishing vessels in 2006 brought in approximately \$7 million in fines. A technical and cooperation agreement was signed by Guinea-Bissau and China during the visit of the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs to Bissau on 3 and 4 January. In addition to the \$8 million agreed to in 2006 for the construction of a government secretariat, the Government of China has also agreed to provide \$4 million for infrastructure projects.

15. During the period under review, social tensions continued to rise as trade unions embarked on a series of public sector strikes, protesting, among other things, about salary arrears and the lack of dialogue between the Government and its social partners. Military veterans also carried out protests over pension arrears. The Government is likely to face continuing difficulties in paying arrears and current salaries and meeting basic social obligations if budget support is not forthcoming.

16. The school year started in January, two months behind schedule, owing to strikes by teachers and students and budgetary shortfalls. Work on developing a national education plan was started in November, with support from UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In January, the Government, assisted by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF, began to develop a national health plan for the period 2008-2012.

17. In view of the political and social tensions in neighbouring Guinea, United Nations agencies have updated their inter-agency contingency plan. There have been several inter-agency missions to the border areas. Social services, especially water and sanitation, in possible refugee entry points, have been identified.

IV. Military and security aspects

18. During most of the period under review, momentum in security sector reform stalled. The activities envisaged to raise public awareness of the process and to put in place a plan of action, have not been conducted. However, on 5 March, the Government convened a meeting with international partners with a view to discussing ways of making the strategy plan for security sector reform operational. The security sector reform steering committee, which had not met since the donors' round table in November 2006, met on 12 March to review activities undertaken and a proposal for an implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework to oversee implementation of the strategy plan. The framework provides for an inter-ministerial committee and a streamlined steering and technical coordination committee. The new framework will be presented to the Prime Minister for approval. At the

meeting, the proposed technical coordination committee was mandated to draw up a plan of action for 2007, with priority actions to be implemented depending on the availability of financial resources. The Commission on Reconciliation and Reintegration launched the fifth round of its activities in Bissau on 26 January, and regional consultations started late in February. UNOGBIS offered logistical assistance.

19. The recently formed national commission to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has made considerable progress since its inception late in October. The Commission includes representatives of the main State stakeholders, civil society, veterans associations, the Economic Community of West African States and UNOGBIS. The commission is in the final stages of completing a work plan and preparing a bill for submission to Parliament. UNOGBIS is working with the Department for Disarmament Affairs to mobilize funds for a pilot project. The Department is planning to send an inter-agency mission to Bissau in April.

20. On 22 December 2006, about 300 former soldiers staged a protest at the Secretariat for Veterans Affairs over the non-payment of pension arrears. A group of protesters later prevented people from entering and leaving the Prime Minister's office for two hours. On 14 December, the commander of the border guards was held hostage by subordinates who were also protesting about salary arrears and demanding improved conditions of service. General Tagmé Na Waie, the Chief of General Staff, intervened in both cases to appease the protesters.

21. Drug trafficking continues to grow, as shown by the increase in the reported seizures of drugs during the period under review. A mission from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was in Bissau on 1 and 2 March for talks with the national authorities. According to the Office, the State's inability to control its own borders facilitates the undetected operations of traffickers. The authorities have expressed concern over the growing activity of traffickers and admit that they have neither the means nor the expertise to fight organized crime. The authorities are concerned that, as other countries in the subregion step up controls to restrict illegal drug activities in their territories, traffickers will be increasingly attracted to Guinea-Bissau, which is seen as particularly vulnerable.

22. In December, the National Mine Action Coordination Centre, supported by UNDP, ended its emergency deployment programme in São Domingos for lack of continued funding. In Bissau, removal of explosive remnants of war continues. The national non-governmental organization, Lutamos Todos Contra as Minas, and the international non-governmental organization, Cleared Ground Demining, have continued to remove a wide variety of ordnances. From October 2006 to the end of January 2007, approximately 71,385 square metres were cleared and 3,705 large-calibre items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed. The first phase of a joint evaluation of military storage points was also carried out by the Centre and the armed forces. The evaluation revealed that most munitions storage points contain munitions that are in a compromised state and are therefore no longer usable. The munitions should be destroyed as soon as possible in order to avoid a major accident.

V. Human rights aspects

23. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS continued to maintain contact with the authorities regarding the 12 people detained without charge since March 2006 in

connection with fighting on the northern border with the Senegalese province of Casamance. Following a preliminary hearing from 16 to 19 February, three of the detainees were charged for treason and collaboration with separatists from the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance.

24. There are growing concerns among media organs over violations of the freedom of the press. The media have come under increasing criticism from the authorities, who accuse them of abusing press freedoms. UNOGBIS is pursuing initiatives to provide training in practical skills, ethics and peace issues for journalists, to enable the media to operate more effectively and impartially.

25. President Vieira has called for a parliamentary debate on a proposed general amnesty for all those involved in coups d'état from 1980 to October 2004. Parliament did not table the debate in its November-December 2006 session, and parliamentarians decided not to debate the amnesty bill during the current session from 28 February to 28 March on the grounds that the bill needed to be reviewed. UNOGBIS, following consultations with parliamentary leaders, will organize a seminar for parliamentarians on existing legislation and to draw attention to the provisions of resolution 1580 (2004) on amnesty and the issues of justice and impunity.

26. The National Assembly ratified the International Labour Organization Conventions 138 and 182 on the minimum age for employment and on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, respectively. UNOGBIS participated in the validation of the national education policy on human rights, citizenship, culture of peace and dialogue supported by UNESCO. It continues to provide technical assistance to the parliamentary special commissions on human rights and constitutional affairs.

VI. Observations and recommendations

27. On 5 December 2006, President Vieira wrote to my predecessor requesting that UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team be transformed into an integrated office. I informed him that I would bring his request to the attention of the Council.

28. The persistent and bitter divisions among key national stakeholders, both political and personal, threaten to compromise the independence and authority of two vital State institutions, the judiciary and the legislature. I have strongly urged all actors to use the proper constitutional channels to resolve their disputes and allow the various State institutions to focus on discharging their functions in the interest of the people of Guinea-Bissau. Efforts by the Government to take the lead in improving living conditions in the country and to strengthen national reconciliation and democratic governance are unlikely to attract regional and international support if the independence and authority of the judiciary and the legislature are undermined.

29. I am pleased to note that the Bretton Woods institutions and the Government are engaged in constructive discussions to strengthen cooperation. I hope that these positive developments will result in the disbursement of the much-needed budgetary support to the country. I welcome reports that IMF intends to begin negotiations with the authorities to arrange emergency post-conflict assistance to Guinea-Bissau. I have also urged support for the IMF proposal to appoint a resident technical

adviser to enhance the fiscal management capacity of the Ministry of Finance. Partnership is a two-way street and I trust the Government will do its part to engage its international partners and enhance confidence by actively pursuing good governance and fighting corruption.

30. The Government of Guinea-Bissau was commended in my predecessor's last report to the Council for its smooth organization of the donors' conference in November 2006. It is vital that the efforts by the Government to implement its reform strategy be maintained, especially those commitments it has undertaken since the conference. It is crucial that the Government remain particularly focused on public administration and security sector reforms, which are key platforms for the poverty reduction strategy and the promotion of stability and development. While international support is important, the Government must remain the driving force if those reforms are to succeed. For its part, the United Nations will continue to support government efforts by coordinating the delivery of assistance across a range of activities and by providing capacity-building to security sector institutions in the areas of management and oversight.

31. With regard to the security sector reform process, the Government of Guinea-Bissau faces immense challenges in combating the growing danger of international drug trafficking and organized crime. This worrying trend must be reversed, but the Government cannot do that effectively on its own. The destabilizing activities of drug trafficking and organized crime are felt not only in the country but also throughout the subregion and beyond. I urge the international community to respond generously to the Government's appeal for financial and material assistance to help Guinea-Bissau tackle these grave challenges. I urge the Government to continue to show political resolve and determination to fight impunity in general, and organized crime and drug trafficking in particular.

32. I should like to conclude by commending the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my Representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as the personnel of the United Nations country team as a whole, for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau to contribute to the consolidation of peace and progress in that country, often in challenging circumstances.