
Challenges facing the international community in addressing peace-building priorities in Guinea-Bissau

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Remarks by Joseph Mutaboba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau, on the peace-building priorities in this country at the Elcano Royal Institute (Madrid) on 16 February 2011.

Preliminary Remarks

First of all, let me express my deep gratitude to the Elcano Royal Institute and to Madame de la Peña Corcuera, the Director for Africa at the Ministry of External Relations of Spain, represented here by her Deputy, for giving me this opportunity to engage with you on the challenges I, and other key international partners, face in supporting the authorities and people of Guinea-Bissau in their efforts to overcome recurrent instability and embark on the path to peace-building and economic development.

But before addressing some of these challenges, and the issues at stake today when it comes to the situation in Guinea-Bissau, I would like to give you a brief historical background of the developments that brought Guinea-Bissau to where it stands today.

Brief Historical Background

Following a decade of instability triggered by the 1998-99 civil war, and despite repeated efforts by national and international partners in Guinea-Bissau throughout that decade to address the root causes of the instability, in particular the complex relationship between the civilian and military leadership, it was only recently, at the beginning of 2010, that tangible prospects for reversing the negative dynamics that had hampered the stability of the country and the sub-region became visible.

The Government of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior, which emerged from the 2008 parliamentary elections, had managed within a short period of time to achieve tangible results in his efforts to place economic and fiscal reform at the core of his overall strategy for supporting economic recovery and reducing instability. For the first time in a decade, at the beginning of 2010, the Government of Guinea-Bissau was able to improve fiscal management and the payment of salaries in the administration.

Meanwhile, a change of leadership in the armed forces and the assassinations of President Vieira and the Chief of General Staff of the armed forces, General Tagme, in March 2009 contributed to creating the conditions, albeit fragile, for addressing the sensitive civilian/military relationship and the increasing linkage between insubordination of the military and drug trafficking and organised crime.

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By early 2010, progress made by the Government had generated a positive momentum among international partners, who had expressed their commitment to support the reforms in various sectors: the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank had resumed and increased their programmes in Guinea-Bissau; The EU had contributed to devising the overall SSR framework for Guinea-Bissau; ECOWAS and the AU had demonstrated continued engagement to support political dialogue and SSR efforts; and the UN strengthened its presence in the country, with the deployment of UNIOGBIS (SCR 1876 (2009)), to 'deliver as one' and assist the country in its peace-building efforts, with particular focus on the strengthening of State institutions, SSR, as well as the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime.

The 1 April Events: A Turning Point for the International Community in Guinea-Bissau

It is against the above background that the events of 1 April 2010 occurred. The brief arrest of the Prime Minister and the prolonged detention, since 1 April, of the Chief of General Staff of the armed forces not only constituted a serious breach of the constitutional order, but also underlined the fragility of key State institutions, due in part to the persistent insubordination of the military to the civilian leadership and the continuation of the negative practice of 'shifting opportunistic alliances'. These events also illustrated the widespread impact of drug trafficking and organised crime and its links with the absence of civilian control over the armed forces.

More importantly, these events demonstrated that despite the positive momentum and combined efforts by national and international partners to root out the causes and triggers of instability in Guinea-Bissau, the process was not irreversible and the weakness of State institutions deeper than anticipated.

Drawing on these conclusions, the international community immediately adopted a common and firm position to condemn the breach of the constitutional order, urge the armed forces to remain subordinate to the civilian authorities and request the national authorities to urgently resume political dialogue and demonstrate their commitment to advancing the reform agenda under the leadership of the Government of Prime Minister Gomes Júnior.

Since April, it is worth noting that the AU, ECOWAS, the EU, the UN and the CPLP continuously joined forces in that regard and have maintained that long-term engagement by international partners in Guinea-Bissau would be conditioned by the respect of the constitutional order, the designation of a credible leadership in the armed forces and immediate progress on the reform agenda, starting with SSR.

As you are aware, as a result of the 1 April events, and acknowledging the lack of political will to advance the SSR in Guinea-Bissau, the EU Commission and Council decided to cease their operational support to the country's authorities. This legitimate and understandable decision, however, left the other international partners with an important vacuum. The US took a similar decision following the appointment of the current Chief of Defence Staff, General Indjai, who was responsible for the 1 April events.

At that point, the United Nations was faced with the delicate challenge of creating the conditions for trying to sustain the gains already made by national and international partners on some aspects of the reforms agenda and, at the same time, of avoiding having to compromise the unity among international partners and maintain pressure on the national authorities for their firm commitment to address our concerns in earnest.

In this context, it is worth stressing that the combination of pressure and disengagement by major partners has left the country, and the UN, with a narrow path and little options to implement the key tasks under SCR 1876 and SCR 1949, such as the SSR programme and the fight against drug trafficking.

Current Priorities of the United Nations in Guinea-Bissau

Allow me now to address the key priorities of UNIOGBIS, in line with its mandate, as given by the Security Council in its resolutions 1876 and 1949. The priorities for UNIOGBIS can be summarised under five areas, as follows:

- (1) To enhance the protection of State Institutions as a means to increase civilian authority and oversight over military structures and contribute to the stabilisation of the Institutions. With the departure of the EU-SSR Mission, the focus has been placed on mobilising CPLP and ECOWAS Member States to complement the internal capacities of UNIOGBIS to support the reform of the Police Sector, for which Spain directly contributed with two UNPOL, and to avoid losing momentum. However, despite the recent launch of Angola's bilateral support to the rehabilitation of military and police installations and equipment, the core of the SSR support package is yet to be endorsed by the Heads of State of ECOWAS.
- (2) To contribute to the establishment of a genuinely inclusive political dialogue. The UN has been particularly involved for the past few months in maintaining and improving the dialogue between the President and the Prime Minister. This dialogue, that also involved the Speaker of the Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court, helped, in certain instances, make tremendous progress in resolving contentious issues.
- (3) To fight against impunity and strengthen the Rule of Law and democracy. The United Nations continued, through the past months, to insist on the importance of bringing to a close the investigations of the assassinations of 2009 without political interference as a step to consolidating State Institutions and increasing trust in the State. Similarly, the continued pressure by the UN, together with other partners such as the EU and the US, contributed to the release of the former Chief of Defence Staff Zamora Induta and his co-detainees on 22 December 2010.
- (4) To combat drug trafficking and organised crime in a more robust fashion. Guinea-Bissau is one of the four pilot countries selected in the context of the West African Coast Initiative (WACI), that brings together ECOWAS, UNOWA, DPA, DPKO, UNODC. The recent establishment of a Transnational Crime Unit (TCU) in Guinea-Bissau put the country at the forefront of implementation of the WACI. It is important to stress, however, that in order to root out this phenomenon that has corrupted all segments of society in Guinea-Bissau, in particular the armed forces, a more robust and concerted approach is needed from the international community. This approach should combine the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring the activities of organised crime networks, for enhancing the maritime surveillance of the islands and for creating intelligence sharing mechanisms within the region and beyond. Another positive development is the negotiations on the establishment of a MoU for Maritime Surveillance, under which vessels of partners will be allowed to patrol the territorial waters of Guinea-Bissau, along the lines of what is already done with Cape Verde and Senegal. Expectations are also running high on the French initiative to convene a G-8

ministerial meeting on drug trafficking, which will bring together the countries of origin, transit and destination of drugs.

- (5) To coordinate the actions of international partners for their assistance in Security Sector Reform. This support is crucial for the benefit of other listed priorities. As indicated before, besides mobilising partners such as ECOWAS and CPLP, the priority of UNIOGBIS has also been to ensure that ties are maintained between the authorities and other partners. It is expected, in that regard, that the upcoming political consultations between the EU and the Government of Guinea-Bissau will produce tangible results, so as to enable the acceleration of financial and technical support for the reforms in Guinea-Bissau. However, it is worth noting that while partners talk about coordination, very few actually like being coordinated.

The Way Forward

After more than a decade of actively engaging with Guinea-Bissau, the international community should not, at this stage, condemn the country (and the sub-region) to a scenario of unpredictable consequences for its political stability, the application of rule of law and its socioeconomic development. The decision by Bretton Woods institutions, in December last year, to alleviate some US\$1.2 billion of Guinea-Bissau's external debt was a major positive step and should be welcomed by all Guinea-Bissau's partners.

It remains urgent for the UN and other key partners such as the EU, the AU, ECOWAS and the CPLP to continue to impress upon national stakeholders the need to: (a) create the conditions for a sustained and constructive dialogue between not only the President and the Prime Minister, but also the opposition, and other key State institutions; (b) address the weakness of the civilian leadership vis-à-vis the armed forces by strengthening civilian State institutions; (c) expedite the implementation of the SSR programme with quick-win projects focused on the armed forces, the police and the judiciary, and inclusive of the civil society; (d) fight effectively against impunity, organised crime and drug trafficking; and (e) maintain the unity of action of international partners and put pressure on potential spoilers in the political and military leadership to prevent a repetition of cycles of violence and instability.

The decision, earlier this month, of the EU leadership, to engage in political consultations with the authorities of Guinea-Bissau, consistent with Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, could serve this purpose if exploited in a positive manner. The authorities of Guinea-Bissau are offered a unique opportunity to clean their records and reverse the negative effects of the 1 April events, by entering in a frank and direct dialogue with their EU counterparts, and possibly re-engage their support for long-awaited reforms in the country at the end of the process.

Concluding Remarks

From the EU and UN perspective, I believe it is high time to identify, within Guinea-Bissau, those partners who could genuinely contribute to the reform of the State. In this regard, it is crucial to recognise that the *status quo* benefits those who should actually be targeted by immediate reforms both in the defence and security sector, and also in the administration.

Therefore, the main question is: do we benefit from maintaining a firm stance, without engaging in constructive dialogue and trying to sustain progress where and when possible? This question raises the issue of the right balance between the carrot and the stick, and the necessary recourse to pragmatism.

It is important to keep in mind that, if not addressed in earnest, the challenges facing Guinea-Bissau today could have a spill-over effect on other countries in the sub-region, considering the scourge of drug trafficking and organised crime. This danger also affects countries that have recently successfully embraced democracy but remain very fragile institutionally speaking, such as Guinea (Conakry).

Within the country itself, we need to ask ourselves and the leadership of Guinea-Bissau, how long can the reforms be delayed without causing trouble to society? More so when the age pyramid of the armed forces, police institutions and other administrations are reversed compared with the proportion of youth in the population.

Over a decade, and given the combination of lack of political will in the country and the international partners' legitimate fatigue, this country, if left to its own fate, risks coming under the growing influence of international drug lords, given its inability to discipline the armed forces and security institutions and to establish the rule of law.

We may still prevent such a transformation scenario and reduce the risk of the country turning into a haven for terrorist groups, given the emerging inter-linkage with drug trafficking and organised crime. It is therefore critical to address the main challenges that the country is facing, including the weakness of the civilian institutions, the absence of a republican army, the un-finished transformation of a liberation movement into a republican system, the lack of constitutional clarity between key State institutions and the absence of the rule of law and security and their impact on major reforms, including SSR.

Despite this negative picture, it is my firm belief that Guinea-Bissau has reached a crossroads, a turning point, and that the country has a real opportunity to address state-building priorities in an integrated and holistic manner, provided that the national actors continue to demonstrate their willingness to advance on the reforms agenda in the country and that international partners continue to enhance their support for building credible and reliable republican institutions. The onus is now on the Government and armed forces of Guinea-Bissau to demonstrate their firm commitment to address the key challenges and obstacles that are hampering the long-term prospects for stability and state-building priorities in their country. In parallel, it is our obligation, as the international community, to assist in steering the country along the path to the consolidation of stability. It is in the interest of all of us.

Thank you.

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