



Security Council

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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999) of 6 April 1999, by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report every 90 days on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

2. Members of the Security Council will recall that when my Representative in Guinea-Bissau, S. C. Nana-Sinkam, briefed the Council on 23 February 2000 on developments in the country, he updated them on the democratization process subsequent to my last report to the Council on 27 December 1999 (S/1999/1276). He highlighted, in particular, the main events related to the conduct of the second round of presidential elections held on 16 January 2000, which brought to an end the post-conflict transitional period in Guinea-Bissau. He also informed the Council of the outcome of the elections, the inauguration of the new pluralist parliament in the country, the investiture of President Kumba Yala and the formation of a broad-based Government.

3. This report will concentrate on developments in the country since that briefing, highlighting, in particular, the challenges confronting the new Government during the post-electoral period and the contributions of UNOGBIS in support of the Government's efforts. As members of the Council may recall, the revised mandate of UNOGBIS in this post-electoral period was approved by the Council on 10 March 2000 (S/2000/202).

II. Political developments

4. Since the formation of the new Government on 19 February, the authorities in Guinea-Bissau, fully aware of the need to respond to popular demands for change reflected in the overwhelming victory of President Kumba Yala who obtained 72 per cent of the votes, have set about establishing post-electoral priorities for the short and medium terms.

5. These efforts have been guided by two tenets. The first is to strengthen reconciliation among Bissau Guineans and promote the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. The second is to continue to improve relations with neighbouring States as well as revitalize cooperation with the international community as a whole.

6. Among the concrete tasks identified by the Government as its priorities are the consolidation of the country's nascent democracy, the depolitization of the military, the demobilization and reintegration of retired military personnel, the revitalization of State institutions and the relaunching of the economy. In the formulation and execution of its plan of action, the Government is consulting with a broad cross-section of society to develop a national consensus in support of the new vision.

7. In a move aimed at broadening the base of the new Government and promoting national reconciliation, the Chief of Staff and a member of the former military junta was appointed as Defence Minister. However, under pressure from the military establishment the Minister has since resigned and efforts are under way to identify a replacement.

Negotiations are also under way between the Government and the former military junta to redefine the role of the military in a new, democratic Guinea-Bissau. These negotiations are led by a group of mediators from civil society, including the Bishop of Bissau. My Representative is also providing his good offices as needed.

III. Military and security aspects

8. Despite the recent restoration of constitutional rule in the country, the military continues to maintain a high public posture. It continues to perform routine police functions, even as the presence of police units, especially in Bissau, increases. The maintenance of public law and order is severely constrained by a serious lack of appropriate training and poor logistic support for the police. This underscores the need for the international community to assist in this regard.

9. The continuing circulation of large quantities of small arms in civilian communities further compounds the security situation. In this connection, efforts continue, under the coordination of UNOGBIS, and with the active support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), to develop a package of incentives to encourage civilians to surrender their weapons. With reference to initiatives to promote the demobilization and reintegration of the military into civilian life, a World Bank mission is expected to arrive in early April to pursue discussions with the Government on these issues.

10. Relations with neighbouring countries continue to improve. Bilateral cooperation to resolve concerns over border security issues, especially along the border with Guinea, is evolving in the right direction. President Konaré of Mali, as current Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has strongly supported the adoption of confidence-building measures among the neighbouring States of the subregion. In this connection, my Representative intends to continue consultations on this and other issues with the neighbouring countries that he had initiated before the legislative and presidential elections of 28 November 1999. In this regard, he plans a visit to the Gambia, and consultations with the Chairman and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, as well as a return visit to Guinea.

IV. Human rights situation

11. During the period under review, UNOGBIS continued to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law in Guinea-Bissau. In this connection, my Representative maintained close contact with the new authorities, the judiciary, the military establishment and civil society, at a time when human rights issues in Guinea-Bissau have gained further prominence since the conclusion of the electoral process. One of the early acts of the new President was to visit a detention centre.

12. The trials of those who have been detained following the events of May 1999 finally began in late February. From the original 385 detained, only 50 now remain in detention, others having been released for lack of evidence or pending further investigation. In order to ensure a free and fair judicial process, UNOGBIS observed some of these trials and invited human rights organizations and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to also send observers to these trials.

13. UNOGBIS has also provided assistance to the Supreme Court of Justice by training 37 new judges in order to increase the capacity of the judiciary to speed up trial proceedings. UNOGBIS has also supplied office equipment to the Regional Tribunal of Bissau to enhance its working capacity and efficiency.

14. With specific reference to the protection of the rights of women and children, UNOGBIS organized a seminar, in collaboration with women members of parliament, on 8 March, in observance of International Women's Day. The seminar was attended by 150 women drawn from different parts of Guinea-Bissau to discuss women's issues in the country. In response to demands for action in that area, the Government recently announced the creation of an institute for women and children as well as the appointment of more women to senior positions in State institutions.

V. Humanitarian aspects

15. During the period under review, the humanitarian situation in the country has improved significantly, as more and more Bissau Guinean refugees and internally displaced persons have returned to their homes in different parts of the country. The continued improvement in relations between Guinea-Bissau and

its neighbours has helped facilitate the smooth and rapid return home of Bissau Guinean citizens and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently engaged in efforts to repatriate the last significant caseload of Bissau Guinean refugees from the Boke region in Guinea.

16. However, the return of many refugees and internally displaced persons to Bissau has put additional pressure on the already high demand for social services, in particular water and electricity. To meet this demand, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the non-governmental organization community have begun digging wells and rehabilitating small water refilling systems in Bissau and in the countryside. UNICEF is also actively involved in initiatives to repair damaged hospitals, to restart inoculation projects and to stockpile and distribute medicines. These returnees continue to receive aid in the agricultural sector and in the health area. WFP is providing food assistance to vulnerable groups and is participating in the rehabilitation of infrastructure at the provincial level, through self-help "Food for Work" programmes.

VI. Social and economic aspects

17. As normalcy returns to the country, the new Government is striving to cope with the most immediate economic and social needs of the population. Health, education, agriculture and good governance have been identified as requiring urgent attention. The Government has just elaborated an urgent transitional programme for the first 100 days, which it intends to submit to the donor community and the United Nations system present in Bissau. During this interim transitional period, the Government will be developing a medium- to long-term strategic plan.

VII. Observations

18. As members of the Security Council are aware, the transitional process in Guinea-Bissau was based on the Abuja Accord (S/1998/1028, annex) of 1 November 1998 negotiated under the auspices of ECOWAS, and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council under resolution 1216 (1998) of 21 December 1998. This enabled a constructive partnership combining the efforts of the national and regional parties and the

United Nations for the benefit of the people of Guinea-Bissau. With the successful completion of the transitional process, Guinea-Bissau now stands at a critical crossroad, energized by the progress made so far but conscious of the enormous challenges that lie ahead. The people of Guinea-Bissau have shown a clear desire for peace, but the daunting needs that remain are a reminder that this is not a time for complacency.

19. I wish to commend, once again, ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) on their key roles in the transition. I especially commend the Government and the people of Guinea-Bissau for ensuring the success of the transition through their commitment to a fair, transparent and peaceful electoral process.

20. With the electoral process, the investiture of President Kumba Yala, the inauguration of the new National Assembly and the formation of a new Government, the transitional institutions deriving from the Abuja Accord and its additional protocol and other related agreements have completed their role. It is therefore reasonable to expect that all such extra-constitutional structures would give way to the newly established constitutional institutions.

21. The international community, through the efforts of ECOWAS, CPLP and the United Nations system and friendly Member States, rendered invaluable support to initiatives to restore peace to Guinea-Bissau. President Kumba Yala has written to me to convey the deep appreciation of his Government and people for the constructive and timely political role played by the Security Council and the Group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau. Their support helped create a propitious climate for the effective international response to the conflict that erupted in that country.

22. Following consultations with a new Government, I proposed and the Security Council approved the extension of the mandate of UNOGBIS for a year after its present one expires on 31 March. By this action, members of the Council have demonstrated renewed political will to continue to support the consolidation of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau.

23. Guinea-Bissau today represents a case where it can indeed be said that the United Nations, with the full cooperation of national actors and with the sustained support of the international community as a whole, can, at modest cost, make a meaningful

contribution to a country's efforts to move from a state of war to one of peace and gradual return to constitutional order. I am grateful to those Member States that have made contributions to the Trust Fund established to support the activities of UNOGBIS in Guinea-Bissau. I should like to mention in particular France, the Netherlands and Cyprus, and I appeal for continued and additional support to enable the United Nations to continue to play its critical facilitation role in Guinea-Bissau.

24. I also urge those countries that pledged assistance for Guinea-Bissau at the May 1999 Geneva round table to support the Government's three-month transitional programme, pending the organization of a new round-table conference. Sustained support of the international community is crucial for the consolidation of the progress achieved so far, and for helping Guinea-Bissau lay a durable foundation for a better life for its people.

25. Finally, I should like to pay tribute to my Representative, Mr. Nana-Sinkam, the staff of UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team in Bissau for their dedicated and effective contributions to the orderly organization, conduct and observation of the recent elections.
