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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on 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 Security Council resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. The present report focuses on developments since my last report, dated 14 March 2006 (S/2006/162), in particular the slow progress in the reconciliation process and the political impact of the socio-economic hardships resulting from salary arrears in the public sector and a poor cashew export season.

II. Political developments

3. During the period under review, the political climate continued to be fundamentally marked by deep antagonisms, mistrust and intolerance among key actors, against the backdrop of weak State institutions and acute economic and social crisis. Although the National Popular Assembly (ANP) approved the Government's 2006 work programme on 16 March 2006, it has yet to discuss the 2006 budget proposal at its fourth session, to be convened from 26 June to 26 July 2006.

4. The fragility of the political situation in the country was vividly demonstrated by controversy and bitter tensions over military operations launched by Guinea-Bissau armed forces against a faction of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) on 14 March 2006, which prompted heated debates in Parliament and resulted in a grave humanitarian crisis. According to official sources, the operations aimed at protecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as protecting civilians against the actions of MFDC rebels. However, some ANP members, leaders of political parties, civil society organizations and the media questioned the wisdom of the military intervention in view of the financial and economic difficulties faced by the country. My Representative, João Bernardo Honwana, and the representatives of the Economic Community of West African



States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries called on relevant national actors to endeavour to contain and reverse the situation without delay and to find negotiated solutions to the crisis, both in its political and military dimensions.

5. In late March, President João Bernardo Vieira initiated a series of consultations with key national actors on ways to address the political and socio-economic challenges facing the country. He met with the Council of State, leaders of the main State institutions, political parties represented in Parliament, the military hierarchy, the President of the Bar Association, the President of the Supreme Court of Justice and women's groups. After those meetings, expectations arose that this process could lead to sustainable political dialogue that would allow the State to function more effectively and break the political deadlock that followed the presidential elections and the dismissal of the government of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde in October 2005.

6. Another encouraging factor is the continued strong commitment of civil society actors to constructive dialogue and the reconciliation process, as evidenced by the "Estados Gerais" initiative. Launched on 7 March 2006 by a group of citizens, under the joint auspices of UNOGBIS, ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, "Estados Gerais" is a dialogue initiative aimed at creating a space for consensus-building on the sources of instability and root causes of conflict, which has been endorsed by President Vieira, who identified it as a useful instrument for the reconciliation of all Bissau Guineans.

7. From 2 to 5 May 2006, an ECOWAS high-level delegation visited Bissau to assess the political, military, humanitarian and socio-economic situation and devise ways in which the organization can best assist through its conflict prevention mechanism. The findings of the delegation were presented to the meeting of ECOWAS Ministers for Foreign Affairs held in Monrovia on 15 May, which, among other things, discussed the ECOWAS proposal to establish a contact group on Guinea-Bissau whose main objective would be to harmonize international strategies in support of Guinea-Bissau and to mobilize resources for peacebuilding and reconstruction in that country.

III. Economic and social aspects

8. The socio-economic and financial situation in Guinea-Bissau, one of the most indebted poverty-stricken countries under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, remains difficult as the Government is unable to even cover costs related to the minimum functioning of the State and continues to accumulate external debt service arrears to most creditors. The projected financial gap of the national budget for 2006 amounts to €90 million.

9. From 16 to 30 March 2006, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission visited Bissau to assess the Government's performance under the 2005 staff-monitored programme, to conduct the article IV consultations and to negotiate a new staff-monitored programme for 2006. The mission reached an agreement on a staff-monitored programme for the period from April to December 2006, which helped the Government obtain €6 million in direct budget support from the European Union (EU). A follow-up mission took place from 19 to 20 June, which identified areas of concern in the implementation of the agreements reached in

March. If these concerns are effectively addressed, and the objectives of enhanced political stability, improved governance and the promotion of healthy economic and financial policies are realized, the conditions will be in place for convening a donors round-table conference before the end of 2006, which, in turn, could lead to an emergency post-conflict assistance package from the IMF. Within the framework of the staff-monitored programme for 2006, \$10 million from the World Bank is expected for general budget support. In addition, the World Bank will negotiate a \$15 million project proposal for multisector infrastructure rehabilitation.

10. On 6 and 7 June 2006, the President met with representatives of trade unions and employers' organizations to discuss the social tensions arising from salary arrears and the ever-increasing cost of living, as well as the cashew nut export problem. The President offered to mediate the dispute with the Government over working hours. At an extraordinary meeting on 9 June, the Council of Ministers issued a decree establishing the return to the previous schedule of the one-period working day for the public sector during the rainy season, from 12 June to 31 October 2006.

11. This year, the commercialization of cashew nuts, the country's top export, has been seriously affected by a 30 per cent increase in the reference price established by the Government. With the buyers waiting for the price to drop, and the onset of the rainy season, the cashew nut-rice exchange is not taking place and food stocks are at a low point. This prompted the Government to appeal for a response to a "food crisis" in the southern part of the country. According to Government sources, by mid-June only 8,000 tons of unprocessed cashew nuts had been shipped from the port of Bissau, in contrast with about 50,000 tons exported at the same time last year.

12. Given disastrous socio-economic conditions in Guinea-Bissau, which are threatening to complicate further the already fragile political and security situation, Nigeria and the ECOWAS secretariat indicated that they would offer an emergency financial package to the Government of Guinea-Bissau in the total amount of \$4 million (\$2.5 million from Nigeria and \$1.5 million from ECOWAS) to help pay salary arrears.

13. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported the Ministry of Health in undertaking the first national measles campaign from 15 to 29 May 2006. The campaign aimed at vaccinating all children between the ages of six months and 15 years, and a coverage rate of 82 per cent was achieved. In April, WHO further supported a yellow fever vaccination campaign in the border region of Gabu for children under the age of five.

14. The military operations referred to in paragraph 4 of the present report resulted in the displacement of about 10,000 people (internally displaced persons (IDPs)), mostly women and children, and isolated some 20,000 people from farming and fishing communities, while landmines and improvised explosive devices were reportedly planted in the disputed area by MFDC forces. In spite of the end of hostilities, the conditions in the affected villages are not yet conducive to the definite return of IDPs, mainly owing to mine risks and the destruction of and damage to their property during the clashes. Mine contamination has a particularly negative impact on the economic performance of the country since it prevents the harvest of cashew nuts in many areas in the northern region.

15. The United Nations, in collaboration with civil society organizations, provided assistance from existing contingency and regular resources, with the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Population Fund and WHO distributing food and non-food items to affected populations. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) played a key role in coordinating the response of the United Nations country team and partners and in the preparation of resource mobilization requests. The United Nations agencies have submitted a \$1.5 million request to the Central Emergency Response Fund to finance a plan to address the urgent needs of the affected population. The Central Emergency Response Fund and the flash appeal would allow Guinea-Bissau to cover humanitarian assistance for six months.

IV. Military and security aspects

16. As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, on 14 March 2006 the Bissau-Guinean armed forces launched a military operation against an MFDC faction led by Salif Sadio, near the border with Senegal. The military authorities declared the operation successfully concluded on 22 April and stated that Salif Sadio's camps within the national territory had been dismantled and his fighters expelled beyond the national borders. No official estimate of casualties was made public.

17. With United Nations Mine Action Service and Central Emergency Response Fund assistance, mine risk education and sensitization, as well as mine survey and identification, have begun in the areas in the northern part of the country affected by the recent clashes. The work is being implemented by the UNDP-supported National Mine Action Coordination Centre and field demining operations are under way. In the capital of Bissau, the removal of unexploded ordnance continues, and it is likely that Bissau will be declared mine-free by the end of July 2006.

18. UNOGBIS has continued to play a critical advisory role in support to national efforts in the domain of security sector reform. However, conflicting schedules and salary arrears have hampered progress in the security sector review process and the drafting of a national security sector reform strategy document. Both exercises will follow a template developed with the assistance of the United Kingdom Security Sector Development Advisory Team, which visited the country in October 2005 and February and March 2006.

19. The two previous Advisory Team visits to Bissau were instrumental to the progress currently being made in the security sector reform process, both in terms of enhancing the capacity of UNOGBIS to play its facilitator role and the extremely valuable advice given to Bissau-Guinean officials, especially those responsible for the review process and the drafting of the national security sector reform strategy document. A third visit by the Advisory Team to Guinea-Bissau is planned later this year to assist Guinea-Bissau officials with the conclusion of the review process and the finalization of the strategy document. Brazil has also remained engaged in assisting with military restructuring, having provided an additional contribution of €205,900 on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries to the UNDP-managed trust fund.

20. From 2 to 5 May 2006, UNOGBIS participated in a workshop on small arms and light weapons organized by the Canadian International Development Agency, as

a way to ensure harmonization among the different initiatives, including an integrated plan of action on small arms and light weapons.

V. Human rights aspects

21. The media coverage of the military operations in the northern part of the country underscored the need for additional efforts aimed at consolidating a responsible and free press and preventing tendencies to manipulate the media to score political points. To strengthen the capacity of Bissau-Guinean media to play a constructive role in the overall peacebuilding process, UNOGBIS has elaborated a programme of training courses, workshops on conflict transformation and reconciliation and other sensitization activities, which began with a training course for 18 journalists from State and private print and radio, as well as the State-owned television and news agency, from 5 to 9 June. The course covered basic journalistic skills such as interviewing techniques, coverage of press conferences, ethics and editorial principles, and the partnership between the United Nations and the media.

22. To increase awareness of the need to respect human rights and the role of the police in defending the welfare of civilians, on 1 and 2 June 2006, UNOGBIS organized two seminars for a total of 127 police officers in the regions of Bafata and Gabú. The seminars focused on ethics, national and international police legislation, and the use of force and firearms and their impact on society.

23. Gender mainstreaming remains high on the UNOGBIS agenda, especially in the police sector, where there is a lack of legislation on domestic violence and intervention or preventive measures in this regard.

24. Further to its follow-up visit from 23 February to 2 March 2006, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime has formulated a strategic programme framework for Guinea-Bissau, as a contribution to the security sector reform process and to rehabilitate some of the existing detention centres. Together with officials from the office of the Attorney-General, UNOGBIS has continued to monitor the conditions of detainees in order to ensure that they benefit from judicial guarantees. UNOGBIS and WHO are collaborating in an effort to find a sustainable solution to the lack of medical services in the detention centres.

VI. Observations and recommendations

25. Once again, the situation in Guinea-Bissau presents limited progress in the consolidation of peace and stability. The slow pace of the country's reconciliation process delays not only political normalization but also the restoration of donors' confidence, without which the resumption of the critically needed flow of international assistance to the country cannot be guaranteed.

26. I welcome the important steps taken by President Vieira to launch a constructive dialogue with the organs of the State, political parties, business, trade unions, civil society and other social partners, which raise hopes that institutional stability can be achieved. I also welcome civil society reconciliation initiatives, whose momentum increases the prospects of sustainable peace.

27. I deplore the loss of lives, the displacement of populations and the political tensions felt in the capital city of Bissau in the wake of the operations in the north. The end of hostilities is encouraging, but it is now essential to enable the displaced population and refugees to safely return to their homes and livelihoods. In this regard, I would like to call on the international community to respond positively to the flash appeal under way. It is equally important to find comprehensive and durable solutions to the complex causes of the crisis, which require joint efforts by all States affected by the Casamance question, namely Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and the Gambia.

28. The severity of the challenges confronting Guinea-Bissau allows no room for complacency. However, complex and difficult as it is, the situation is not intractable. It simply requires key national stakeholders to recognize the crucial nexus among political stability, security and development. They must also recognize their sovereign responsibilities and find political will to resolve their differences constructively, to build the peace through vigorously pursuing reconciliation and reconstruction. Nobody can replace the country's leadership in those endeavours.

29. Preventing, managing and resolving conflict to consolidate the peace is a large-scale process of change that is neither linear nor short-term. It is normally marked by progress, regression and, sometimes, even collapse. The frustration of the international community at this uneven evolution is understandable, but we must persevere and stay the course. Fostering an enabling environment for positive transformation requires a crucial addition to national efforts and political will — the engagement of the international community.

30. In that regard, I wish to commend the continued commitment of Guinea-Bissau's partners. I call on States and institutions to seek innovative ways to help the country organize and conduct the dialogue and reconciliation process, ensure better coordination and harmonization of socio-economic and financial assistance packages, engage more vigorously in the preparations for the donor round table on Guinea-Bissau later this year and further assist in the security sector reform process.

31. In that connection, I encourage the Government to cooperate fully with IMF and urgently address the obstacles to progress with the security sector reform process, so as to pave the way for the resumption of preparations for the donor round table.

32. I am particularly pleased with the close cooperation among UNOGBIS, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and ECOWAS, which has ensured an integrated approach to peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. The synergies and complementarities developed thus far have played a key role in promoting the dialogue among the institutions of the State, generating the momentum around civil society reconciliation initiatives, and fostering the security sector reform process. I am also encouraged by the continuous collaboration between UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team.

33. A mission dispatched by the Department of Political Affairs to Guinea-Bissau from 22 to 27 May 2006 reported to me that the political and socio-economic challenges confronting the country continue to constitute an obstacle to the full recovery from the consequences of the 1998/1999 conflict, with many social indicators being even lower than before that conflict. The mission also reported that its interlocutors inside and outside the country considered the lack of financial

resources as a critical factor impeding the Government's post-conflict recovery efforts. They underscored the nexus between the lack of resources and instability or absence of peace and security. In that regard, I am pleased to say that the mission's interlocutors expressed strong appreciation for the positive and constructive role played by UNOGBIS in the stabilization of Guinea-Bissau. I shall revert to the Council with recommendations on the role of UNOGBIS in the immediate future and beyond.

34. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my Representative, João Bernardo Honwana, the staff of UNOGBIS, and the entire United Nations country team to consolidation of peace in Guinea-Bissau.
