

Updated briefing on the situation in Guinea Bissau

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Tomorrow (12 December) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1126th session to receive an updated briefing on Guinea Bissau as one of the two agenda items that PSC is set to consider during this session.

Following the opening remark of the PSC Chairperson for December, Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the AU, Victor Adeleke, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye is expected to deliver a statement. Ovidio Manuel Barbosa Pequeno, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission for Guinea Bissau and Head of AU Liaison Office in Guinea Bissau is scheduled to make a statement. The representative of the Economic Community for West Africa States (ECOWAS) is also expected to brief the PSC. The representatives of the United Nations Office to the AU (UNOAU) and of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries are expected to make a statement. The representative of Guinea Bissau as the country concerned is also expected to make an intervention.

The last time the PSC held a session on Guinea Bissau was in January 2020 at its 905th meeting. The session was held during the time where the country was experiencing an electoral dispute following the presidential runoff vote between two candidates, Domingos Simões Pereira (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde – PAIGC) and Umaro Sissoco Embaló (Movimento para Alternância Democrática (MADEM) G- 15). Despite the National Election Commission's confirmation of Umaro Cissoko Embalo as winner of the December 2019

presidential run-off vote, Domingos Simoes Pereira contested the result at the Supreme Court with allegations of fraud. After contention between several institutions including the National Election Commission, the Supreme court and the Assembly, Umaro Sissoco Embaló was sworn in on 27 February 2020 while his victory remained highly contested.

The political tensions that arose during the electoral process in 2019 continued to affect the political environment of the country and disagreements have persisted. The dispute particularly between the President and the Assembly which is dominated by the opposition party PAIGC has resulted in the President dissolving the legislative body and calling for a snap election to take place in December 2022, although this will not take place as planned. The dissolution of the parliament came after corruption allegations of members of the Assembly by the President. Moreover, Embaló justified his decision by making reference to 'persistent and unresolvable differences' with the parliament.

Beyond electoral disputes, the political upheaval in Guinea Bissau is a result of long standing governance challenges. Guinea-Bissau has experienced successive military interventions including the last military coup in 2012 and the most recent attempted coup in February 2022. The AU, United Nations and the ECOWAS reacted quickly to the concerning development. The AU Commission Chair called upon the military to return to their barracks and to ensure the physical integrity of the President. UN Secretary General called for restraints after the attempted coup.

Apart from the political crisis, tomorrow's session would also serve for discussing the support that the region has mobilized for stabilising the country. ECOWAS has been involved in mediating in the various political crises in the country including the 2012 military coup and the presidential dispute of 2019. Most recently in February 2022, ECOWAS convened an extraordinary summit two days after the attempted coup in

which it expressed solidarity with the President and decided to deploy a force towards 'supporting the stabilization of the country'. Following this decision, the stabilization force was deployed last June comprising troops and police from countries including Nigeria, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana for a one-year period. Hence, the main focus of tomorrow's session would be the update the PSC would receive on the deployment of the force and the mission's operational, logistical and financial conditions since its deployment in June and the kind of support that the AU is expected to mobilize for the effective operation of the ECOWAS mission.

This is in not the first time for ECOWAS to deploy such a mission. Following the military coup that ousted prime minister Carlos Gomes Junior in April 2012, the bloc had deployed a force for stability and security in Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS Mission in Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB). The force left in 2020 after staying in the country for eight years. It would be of interest for PSC members to enquire of the lesson learned from the 2012 ECOWAS's experience and how it can be applied in making this new force even more effective in preventing military coups and supporting the country's endeavor in advancing democratic value. Certainly, the efforts of promoting good governance and constitutionalism would require interventions that are broader than military response.

An important factor in Guinea Bissau's political crisis is the complex relationship between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary branches of government. The ambiguity around the division of power continues to fuel dispute and the semi-presidential system has been characterized by power struggle between the various centers of power. After the election of Embaló, ECOWAS has called for the revision of the constitution to properly address these structural challenges that continue to trigger political crisis. Embaló in May 2020 had established an independent commission to draft a revised constitution with also the objective of reforming the semi-

presidential system. Although the constitutional reform is a much-needed step the approach pursued by the President created displeasure in the parliament. Through the establishment of the commission not only was the President's move in violation of the provisions of the constitution itself with regards to amendment but it also duplicated the mandate of the already existing parliamentary constitutional review committee.

The interference of drug trafficking and related crime in the political process of the country is also another major complicating factor affecting security issues and political stability. In the recent attempted coup President Embaló has also indicated of the possibility of drug traffickers being behind the plot to overthrow the government, although there is still no evidence to support these claims.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC may condemn the February 2022 attempted coup in Guinea Bissau and may express the need for addressing the conditions that have made the country to coups. It may welcome the deployment of a stabilization mission by ECOWAS and applaud the regional bloc's leadership in promptly responding to the crisis. The PSC may endorse the activities of the ECOWAS mission in Guinea Bissau and express its support for the mission. The PSC may also call on the AU Commission to mobilize the requisite financial and logistical support for the ECOWAS mission and request it and ECOWAS to report to the PSC on the activities of the mission. The PSC may also call on international actors including the UN Security Council and the European Union to support to the mission. The PSC may reiterate its previous decision on the need for institutional reform and constitutional review in the country to provide a more sustainable solution to the continuing political crisis in the country. The PSC may underline that such reforms need to take place in full compliance with the procedures laid down in the Constitution of the country and the participation of all political and social forces in the country. The PSC may

express concern over the continued dispute between the President and the Assembly and it may call on the parties to resolve their disagreement through peaceful means to prevent any further disruption to the country's efforts towards political and constitutional stability. The PSC may also express its concern over the challenges related to drug trafficking and the deep impact it has on the political stability of Guinea Bissau. In this respect the PSC may call on the AU Commission working with AFRIPOL and ECOWAS to put in place a regional framework for addressing the threat that drug trafficking poses to Guinea Bissau and the region. It may further reiterate the importance of strengthening institutional mechanisms including security sector reform in Guinea Bissau to effectively fight against drug trafficking.