



REPUBLIC OF GUINEA BISSAU



ECOWAS

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GUINEA BISSAU REPORT

Members of the delegation

Hon. Califa Seidi (Delegation Leader)

Hon. Adja Satu Camará Pinto

Hon. Gabriela Fernandes

Hon. Caramo Camará

Hon. MarcianoIndi

May 2021

Your Excellency the Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament;

Honourable Deputy-Speakers,

Distinguished colleagues

Members of the ECOWAS Parliament,

Your Excellencies;

We are honoured and pleased to present this Country Report on behalf of the Guinea-Bissau delegation, which provides an account of the political and social situation of our country, Guinea-Bissau. We want to seize this opportunity to extend our greetings to all those present in this Parliament and hope that this Ordinary Session will be a great success.

This report is structured according to the outline provided to us by the General Secretariat of the ECOWAS Parliament, as follows:

1. Political situation
2. Security Situation
3. Human Rights Situation
4. Health Situation
5. Status of Implementation of Community Texts

I– Political Situation

The political situation of Guinea-Bissau in 2020 was marked by post-electoral political and institutional crisis following the legislative and presidential elections held in March and December 2019 respectively. Legislative elections were held on 10 March 2019. At the end of the elections, 102 members of the People's National Assembly came out victorious and took office on 18 April 2019.

The first and second rounds of the presidential elections were held in November and December 2019 respectively. A turbulent period of political and institutional crisis ensued as a result of the electoral dispute brought before the Supreme Court (acting as the Constitutional Court) by one of the candidates in the second round of the presidential election held on 29 December 2019.

Nine months later, on 6 September 2020, the Supreme Court publicly announced the final verdict of the electoral dispute, dismissing the allegations put forward by the aforementioned candidate as groundless.

After the announcement, the PAIGC (the party that initiated the legal proceedings) and its candidate accepted the verdict by the Supreme Court (acting as the Constitutional Court), which has the final say on the matter, although they disagreed with the verdict.

At the end of the judicial process, the PAIGC and its candidate expressed the hope that the requirements laid out in the Court's decision would be met, including the publication of the final results of the election, paving the way for a lawful inauguration of the President-elect and the fulfilment of all subsequent requirements.

The government formed following the parliamentary elections of March 2019, the members of which took office in July 2019, was dissolved by the President in February 2020. A new government was thus formed, made up of parties allied to the President-elect. Other parties that held seats at the National Assembly, including the PAIGC, the party that won the majority of seats in the March 2019 legislative elections, have been relegated to the opposition.

It should be recalled that the inauguration the President-elect in February 2020, before the verdict of the Constitutional Court, by the first Deputy-Speaker and not by the Speaker of the People's National Assembly, led to a fierce controversy among political actors of Guinea Bissau, thereby exacerbating the post-electoral crisis.

In view of this situation, ECOWAS decided in April 2020 to recognise Umaro Sissoco Embalo as President of the Republic, but nevertheless recommended the formation of a new government, in accordance with the Constitution of the country and based on the results of the legislative elections of 10 March 2019.

The position of ECOWAS caused much controversy at national and international levels and was viewed as one of the factors that led to the continuing post-electoral political instability.

II– Security Situation

Although the legislative and presidential elections were held peacefully in 2019, the post-electoral period of 2020 has been quite tumultuous. It was particularly marked by the decision of the new authorities to have the ECOMIB contingent stationed in Guinea-Bissau since 2012 confined and gradually withdrawn from March.

It should be recalled that the ECOMIB contingent is made up of approximately 700 military and police officers from Burkina Faso,

Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. ECOMIB's mandate is to protect government institutions, citizens and their property, and to train defence and security forces of Guinea-Bissau.

The authorities of the Ministry of Interior had been struggling to ensure the full security of citizens. As a result, kidnappings and beatings were reported in 2020 and 2021. These developments led the opposition parties to consider the situation to be very serious and to declare that the country was in a state of terror.

The abductions and beatings took place in 2020 and during the first quarter of 2021. Political party activists, members of parliament, journalists, entrepreneurs, among others, were the main targets.

However, measures are being taken to gradually curtail these acts that undermine the security of citizens in a democratic constitutional state.

III– Human Rights Situation

Despite the successive political crises and ensuing instability in Guinea-Bissau in recent years, the country has sustained some gains in respect of civil and political rights. These include press freedom and freedom of expression, which are considered fundamental principles of a pluralistic democracy.

Unfortunately, in the years 2020 and 2021, these achievements were called into question and the country witnessed acts and events that eroded such achievements, especially the values and fundamental principles of the rule of law and democracy.

Mainly, these are significant acts and events that constitute serious human rights violations in themselves, with negative repercussions on the country's reputation and image. These include:

- Kidnappings, arbitrary arrests and beatings of citizens.
- Intimidation and harassment of journalists in order to restrict and influence press freedom and freedom of expression.
- The lack of security for citizens and their properties, which culminated in the attack on and destruction, in 2020, of one of the private radio stations, Rádio Capital FM.

According to human rights organisations, the above-mentioned events are only a few examples of a grim picture of violations of human dignity, with adverse effects on the process of consolidating democracy and the rule of law.

In view of the foregoing, civil society organisations and human rights advocates wrote an open letter to the heads of institutions responsible for safeguarding the sovereignty of the state in mid-2020, urging them, among other things to:

- a) Urgently create a conducive environment for the full exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms by citizens, in accordance with the Constitution of the country, and international conventions ratified by Guinea-Bissau;
- b) Promote dialogue among institutions and stakeholders, with a view to appeasing the situation and the political and social tensions prevailing in the country.
- c) Deter all acts that constitute human rights violations and the resulting threat to peace and national cohesion.
- d) Conduct urgent judicial investigations into acts of kidnapping and beating of citizens that occurred recently in the country.

IV– Health Situation

Like other countries in the world, the health situation in Guinea-Bissau is characterised by the global crisis caused by the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19.

In Guinea-Bissau, the first cases of COVID-19 were officially reported on 24 March 2020, with a sharp increase in the number of cases over the following weeks, leading the government to set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee to deal with the pandemic.

However, six months later, the Inter-Ministerial Committee was dissolved and replaced by a High-level Commission against COVID-19 to instil a new impetus and enhance efficiency in the prevention and control of the pandemic. The High-level Commission against COVID-19, made up mainly of experts trained in epidemiology, reports directly to the President in close collaboration with the Government, through the Ministry of Public Health.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, states of emergency and health emergencies have been declared in order to curtail and stop the spread of the virus.

A number of sensitisation activities have been carried out to educate people on the lethality of the virus, and on the best means of prevention, such as the mandatory and correct use of face masks, the

frequent washing of hands with soap and water, physical distancing and the rules of respiratory protection.

Between 24 March 2020, when the first cases were reported, and early May 2021, there have been officially 3,740 cases of infection and 67 deaths from COVID-19. However, in the last 2-3 months, a small number of cases have been reported; this is partly due to inadequate screening, owing to the strike by staffs assigned to this task.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily affected the economy of Guinea-Bissau. In December 2020, the country recorded a negative economic growth of -2.4%, as compared to about 4.9% growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) projected before the health crisis.

The containment measures imposed by the state of emergency and, by extension, by the pandemic, had a considerable impact on employment, consumption and investment. The closure of borders and the restriction of movement have delayed the launching of the cashew nut marketing and export campaign for 2020; and have severely affected the agricultural sector, which employs about 70% of the rural labour force.

As part of the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has assessed the needs and rolled out a campaign to mobilise financial resources to the tune of 30 billion CFA Francs, out of which 15 billion came from the cashew nut marketing campaign. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the laudable contribution of nearly 30 million CFA francs made by the members of the National People's Assembly.

This campaign helped to mobilise funding from the World Bank (WB), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the West African Development Bank (BOAD).

V– Status of Implementation of Community Texts

From 2019 to date, there have not been any new development with regard to community texts, due to the agenda of the National People's Assembly. Thus, out of the 54 Community texts, 37 have already been ratified, and only 17 are pending ratification. Some of these texts have already been translated and submitted to the Council of Ministers, then forwarded to the People's National Assembly for adoption and onward ratification by the President.

The texts concerned have to do with protocols relating to the following areas:

- Judicial sector – 2 texts
- Health sector – 1 text
- Education sector – 2 texts;
- Banking sector - 1 text;
- Free movement of persons and goods – 1 text;
- Community preferential regime - 3 texts;
- Financial sector - 1 text.

V.1– Status of Implementation of the Community Levy

The authorities of Guinea-Bissau have fully complied with the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the government of Guinea Bissau and the ECOWAS Commission on the payment of arrears and non-accumulation of new debts.

According to data from the Treasury and Public Accounting Directorate, the amount of arrears noted under this memorandum of understanding amounts to 4.359 million CFA francs. In February this year, more than 3.773 million CFA francs, representing 87% of the total amount, was deposited into the ECOWAS account at the Central Bank (BCEAO).

There has been no delay in the payment of the proceeds of the Community Levy for the current fiscal year. The amounts received in the ECOWAS Commission's account at the Central Bank of West African States in Bissau are regularly transferred at the end of each month.

V.2– Free Movement of Persons and Goods

The process of issuing ECOWAS ID cards to citizens, which began in March 2018, is moving smoothly and is currently at a very advanced stage.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Free movement of persons and goods has been implemented in a satisfactory manner, despite some challenges faced at the borders.

V.3 - Equality of Rights Between Women and Men

The gender equality law passed by the National People's Assembly and enacted by the President, is now being implemented. It provides for a

minimum quota of 36% for both sexes in elective positions, notably for legislative and municipal elections.

Unfortunately, although the Supreme Court was required to submit the list of candidates for the elections to Parliamentarians, the gender equality law did not reflect in the final results of the legislative elections held on 10 March 2019. Only 13 women out of a total of 102 Parliamentarians were elected.

In contrast, in the government formed shortly after the March 2021 legislative elections, 50% of the 16 ministerial portfolios were allocated to women.

Currently, following the last ministerial reshuffle, the country has unfortunately suffered a severe setback in terms of women's participation in government positions. Only 2 ministerial positions out a total of 22 have been allocated to women.

This should be a cause for concern for the civil society of Guinea-Bissau, especially women's rights organisations, such as the female politicians platform and the Female Parliamentarians Association. Political parties should capitalise on existing mechanisms to promote more women to leadership positions, and among their candidates for elective positions.

Furthermore, it is key for human rights organisations to undertake sensitisation activities to boost women's participation and involvement in politics at national level.

Thank you all for your attention.