

## **Background Paper on Guinea-Bissau legislative elections on 16 November 2008**

### ***Introduction:***

1. Following the request for electoral assistance made in a letter addressed by Prime Minister Cabi to the United Nations Secretary-General in early June 2007, the Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who is also the UN Coordinator for Electoral Assistance, dispatched a mission to Guinea-Bissau in September 2007. The mission involved consultations with the Government and international partners, and had as its main objective to assess the political context and identify the necessary conditions for the provision of assistance for the 2008 legislative elections. As a result of the mission, the Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs wrote to Prime Minister Cabi on 6 November 2007 to confirm the readiness of the UN to provide electoral assistance to Guinea-Bissau.
2. The following recommendations were made: (1) UNDP should formulate an electoral support project for the legislative elections, by updating the October 2006 operational plan to include a more detailed electoral budget and calendar reflecting existing legislation. UNDP should also develop national capacity for the planning of electoral operations, including logistical aspects; create a donor coordination mechanism to avoid gaps and overlaps, and support the National Electoral Commission (CNE) civic and voter education campaigns. (2) Within a peace and stability framework, UNOGBIS should have the overarching role of promoting an environment conducive to the holding of credible elections, including in the run-up to the elections, particularly in light of threats from drug trafficking and long-simmering political, military and social tensions. If requested, UNOGBIS should also coordinate international observers and give political backing to UNDP's resource-mobilization activities.
3. As a result of a subsequent technical mission from UNDP in November 2007 a project document for electoral assistance was finalized in February 2008. In April 2008, the President of Guinea-Bissau announced that legislative elections would be held on 16 November 2008. The following key issues and challenges have been identified in this context: voter registration, civic education and the payment of salary arrears.

### ***Voter registration***

4. In Guinea-Bissau the voters' roll is subject to annual updates which should be held during the months of January and February (up to March for Bissau-Guineans abroad). However, no updates have been conducted since April 2005, when a complete re-registration of the entire electorate was carried out. The exercise resulted in a total count of 533,053 voters. It is estimated that between thirty to thirty-three thousand citizens have turned 18 years in the interim period, and a similar number has changed residence.

5. The Registration Law (1998) attributes to the CNE the supervision and oversight of voter registration updates, while assigning to the Government the tasks of organizing and conducting those updates. The Government has carried out these tasks through the Ministry of Interior by establishing registration commissions throughout the

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10. While the Government of Guinea-Bissau and its international partners acknowledge the continued need for strengthening democratic governance and participation through the provision of assistance, the pace of preparations and the resource-mobilization drive have remained slow and urgently need enhanced commitment and concrete proposals from all stakeholders.
11. The total electoral budget amounts to US\$ 8,557,522. The Government sovereignty costs of US\$ 4,320,000, to cover payment of electoral staff, payment of arrears and registration of voters in the Diaspora are not included in the project overall budget.
12. On the side of international partners, the EU has contributed € 600,000 through UNDP, and a further € 200,000 for its own preparations for and monitoring of the electoral process. While it is expected that partners will come forward with additional support, there is serious concern about the very slow pace of electoral assistance, as echoed by Prime Minister Cabi on 31 March 2008 in an official ceremony to present the Government's electoral budget to the international donor community. He expressed concern that despite pledges of electoral support from the international community, so far only the EU had made good on its promise. Prime Minister Cabi also announced that the Government would resort to pursuing bilateral initiatives with donors to ensure that assistance was available on time.
13. There is an urgent need to quickly establish a functioning coordination mechanism to ensure an integrated resource-mobilization drive for electoral assistance. Failure to do so may lead donors to opt for bilateral financial or technical assistance mechanisms, which could lead to overlap and duplication.
14. The Government has recently submitted a short-term quick-impact concept note for financial support to the elections from the Peacebuilding Fund. This project would focus on urgent assistance for biometric voter registration and civic education. While the concept note has been approved in Ne