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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 had 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 its 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 (S/2008/751), dated 2 December 2008, until 18 March 2009, focusing, in particular, on the formation of the new Government, the tragic events of March 2009 and the general security situation.

II. Political developments

3. The period under review was characterized by growing political and security tensions within the political and military leadership of the country. These tensions and a degradation of the security and governance structures in the country culminated in the assassinations of the President, João Bernardo Vieira, and the Chief of the General Staff, General Batista Tagme Na Waie. Political tensions also preceded the formation of a new Government by the Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes, Jr., following the 16 November 2008 legislative elections.

4. On 1 March, at around 7.41 p.m., a bomb explosion killed General Tagme and destroyed part of the General Staff headquarters. Machine-gun fire, pistols and rocket-propelled grenades exploded a few hours later, at approximately 4 a.m., on 2 March, in the vicinity of the residence of President Vieira, until around 5 a.m. It was later confirmed that the assailants had taken over the residence and assassinated President Vieira. His wife, who had been with him during the attack, was not hurt and is safe. Local residents reported that the residence was looted.

5. Following the assassination of General Tagme, the General Staff established a Commission of Military Chiefs to manage the crisis and to control military personnel. On 2 March, the spokesperson of the Commission, Navy Commander



José Zamora Induta, released a statement informing the nation that the General Chief of Staff and three of his escorts had died in an explosion caused by a bomb set by unknown individuals. The statement also reported that a “group of unidentified citizens” had attacked the residence of President Vieira in the early hours of 2 March and had shot him dead. It also reaffirmed the armed forces’ commitment to remaining subordinate to the civilian authorities and their allegiance to their constitutional duties. Following an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers, held later on 2 March, the Government established a Commission of Inquiry to look into the two assassinations and declared a seven-day period of national mourning. On 3 March, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Raimundo Pereira, was sworn in as interim President of the republic, in keeping with article 71 of the Constitution, which mandates the election of a new president within 60 days. On 6 March, the Prime Minister informed my Representative that the Commission of Inquiry needed human and financial assistance from the United Nations to carry out its mission efficiently. This request is being processed by the Secretariat.

6. Reaction to and international condemnation of the two assassinations were swift. I issued a statement on 2 March expressing shock and dismay over the incidents. Several countries and organizations, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, and bilateral partners also condemned the assassinations and emphasized the need for a transparent investigation. The Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, ECOWAS and Angola sent delegations to Bissau to explore immediate measures that could be taken to stabilize and secure the country. On 12 March, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and current Chairperson of the African Union, visited the country in a demonstration of solidarity with the Government and people of Guinea-Bissau.

7. Prior to these tragic events, the country had taken modest steps to improve its democratic and governance profile. On 17 December 2008, the Supreme Court upheld the final results of the 16 November 2008 legislative elections announced by the National Electoral Commission on 26 November 2008, confirming that the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) had won an absolute majority of 67 out of 100 seats in the National Assembly. The Social Renewal Party of the former President, Mohamed Yalá Embaló, won 28 seats, while the Republican Party for Independence and Development won three seats, and the New Democracy Party and Democratic Alliance, one seat each. The Supreme Court ruling paved the way for the inauguration of the new legislature on 22 December and the election of the new parliamentary bureau, including the Speaker. The PAIGC candidate for the post of Speaker, Raimundo Pereira, was elected, with 60 votes for and 37 against. Mr. Pereira’s nomination as the PAIGC candidate, at a meeting of the Party’s central committee on 6 and 7 December, was mired in controversy and two of the losing candidates complained that the process had not been credible. The controversy surrounding the nomination once more raised fears of continuing divisions within PAIGC and created a fractious environment which later dogged the cabinet selection process and gave rise to concerns and speculation on the viability of the Government in the run-up to the first session of Parliament.

8. President Vieira signed a decree on 25 December nominating the PAIGC leader, Carlos Gomes, Jr., as Prime Minister. His nomination dispelled fears that previous tensions between President Vieira and Mr. Gomes might represent an

obstacle to his nomination and was greeted with relief by civil society groups. Mr. Gomes was sworn in as Prime Minister on 2 January 2009. The new cabinet of 21 Ministers and 10 Secretaries of State was sworn in on 8 January. It consists exclusively of PAIGC members, of whom six are women, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Economy. Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony, the Prime Minister stressed that the Government had been formed on the basis of political and technical consensus within PAIGC and that he would do his utmost to overcome the major structural obstacles to development.

9. The Prime Minister's agenda was further bolstered when the PAIGC Central Committee, the highest organ of the Party, unanimously approved the draft Government Programme and passed a motion of confidence in the Prime Minister on 15 February. The five priority challenges identified in the Government Programme are: (a) promoting good governance and consolidating democracy and the rule of law; (b) ensuring political stability and social cohesion; (c) reforming and modernizing the State; (d) ensuring rapid and sustainable economic growth; and (e) re-establishing the internal and external reputation of the State. The Programme pledges that the reform of the security sector will continue and that the programme to combat drug trafficking and organized crime will be implemented. The Programme also provides for a review and overhaul of the defence sector through appropriate legislation. It also pledges that local elections will be held by the end of 2010. The first ordinary session of the National Assembly had opened on 27 February, was suspended on 3 March and resumed on 13 March. The Government Programme was adopted on 18 March, with 68 votes for and 28 abstentions.

10. In December 2008, the participatory dialogue programme led by the National Institute for Studies and Research in partnership with Interpeace, Voz di Paz, ended its grass-roots consultations held throughout the country over a 10-month period to identify the obstacles to the consolidation of peace. The dialogue sessions, during which more than 300 hours of video footage and audio recordings were produced, represent the widest in-depth national consultation on the root causes of conflict to date and enabled Voz di Paz to establish a mapping and genealogy of the conflict which will be validated nationally in March. The next phase includes prioritizing the main causes of conflict for further research and identifying solutions, using the same methodology and approach. The first phase was funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund, the World Bank, Finland and Portugal.

11. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery approved a US\$ 1.3 million programme, entitled "Building National Capacities for Dialogue and Collaborative Decision-making in Guinea-Bissau", in November 2008. The programme is aimed at strengthening the capacities and conditions for dialogue and collaborative decision-making through training and process assistance and has a strong focus on youth empowerment and participation in addressing conflict issues, such as cattle theft, promoting ethnic tolerance and mitigating urban youth violence. It will build on the lessons learned from the quick-impact pilot "Youth Advocacy Initiative" completed in December 2008.

III. Military developments and security aspects

12. Following the armed attack against the residence of President Vieira on 23 November 2008, the challenges of securing and protecting the President remained a major source of concern internally and for regional and international partners. On 25 November, an ECOWAS mission composed of the Deputy Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso, representing the Chair of ECOWAS, and the President of the ECOWAS Commission visited Bissau. On 14 December, the President of Cape Verde, Pedro Pires, and the Special Envoy of the President of Angola, General Higinio Cardoso, also travelled to Bissau for talks with the various stakeholders, including my former Representative, Shola Omoregie, on the political and security situation in the country. The Special Envoy of the Chairman of the African Union, Francisco Madeira, visited Bissau from 9 to 11 December to assess the political and security situation. On 28 January 2009, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, Luiz Amado, paid a two-day visit to Bissau within the framework of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries during the presidency of Portugal.

13. At the time, it was reported that the military authorities in Bissau had handed over seven military personnel alleged to have been involved in the 23 November attack to the civilian authorities. The Government of Guinea-Bissau had requested the extradition of the alleged ringleader, Navy Sergeant N'tchami Yalá, who is in detention in Senegal. The Office of the Public Prosecutor concluded its preliminary investigation on 30 January 2009 and charged the defendants with carrying out an attempt on the life of the Head of State and homicide related to the death of one of the presidential security personnel and inflicting damage to property, as well as undermining the rule of law. The case was referred to the Bissau regional court, but the lawyers for the defendants argued that it should be heard by a military court, since all of the defendants were military personnel. The Judicial Police confirmed that, at the time of the assassination of President Vieira, six of the seven military personnel and other detainees were set free from the detention cells of the Judicial Police by heavily armed uniformed individuals.

14. It should also be recalled that, after the 23 November 2008 attack on the residence of the President, the Prime Minister had also established a Commission of Inquiry, consisting of representatives of the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, the General Staff of the Armed Forces and a representative of the Civil Society Movement for Peace and Development, to carry out a parallel investigation into the case. The Civil Society Movement later withdrew, on the grounds that the inquiry did not have a legal basis.

15. On 11 February, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes, Jr., met with the military hierarchy to discuss security sector reform, the problem of drugs and the possible return of former Navy Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, who had fled to the Gambia following his arrest for involvement in an alleged coup attempt in August 2008. During the same period, Rear Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto's lawyer, Mr. Pedro Infanda, gave a series of media interviews indicating that his client wished to return to Guinea-Bissau to present himself to the Prosecutor General and clarify his legal situation. The announced return of the former Navy Chief of Staff on 13 February 2009 did not materialize, and a delegation of officials from Guinea-Bissau led by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence visited the Gambia on 24 and 25 February to discuss the matter and improve bilateral relations between the two countries.

16. The passing-out parade of the 250 rapid-intervention police trained under a security agreement with Angola in 2005 was held on 6 December 2008 after they had completed the last module of their training in Guinea-Bissau. The Public Order Police launched security operations in January 2009 to collect unregistered weapons and arrest illegal immigrants in the aftermath of an increase in violent crime during December 2008, which included the murder of two Lebanese citizens and the hold-up of a bank in broad daylight by armed robbers.

17. During the first half of December 2008, a joint delegation of the Defence and Security Reconciliation Committee and the Political Platform of Women, with the authorization of General Tagme, began a series of visits to all barracks in the country to discuss peace and reconciliation. Although the programme of visits in Bissau was completed, the visits to the interior were postponed owing to a lack of funds. The Women's Inter-ministerial Committee for Defence and Security was launched on 30 January 2009. However, women military personnel have not yet been authorized to participate in the work of the Committee.

IV. Security sector reform

18. On 16 January 2009, I approved the comprehensive recommendations submitted by the United Nations inter-agency security sector reform assessment mission conducted in Guinea-Bissau from 13 to 24 October 2008. These recommendations are addressed to the Government of Guinea-Bissau, to the United Nations and to the international community, including, in particular, ECOWAS and the European Union. We are consulting with the Government, and with the country's multilateral partners, especially the European Union and ECOWAS, with a view to prioritizing the implementation of the recommendations.

19. On 3 February 2009, at the meeting of the National Steering Committee for Security Sector Reform, the Minister of Defence, Artur Silva, who chairs the Steering Committee, announced the establishment of a new coordination structure, entailing the abolition of the Technical Committee and its replacement by a Secretariat. The Secretariat will be coordinated by the Minister of Defence and will include representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministries of Defence, the Interior, Justice and Veterans, and the General Staff of the Armed Forces. The meeting also reviewed security sector reform activities in 2008 and agreed that the national security sector reform strategy needed to be revisited. On 5 and 6 February 2009, the International Security Sector Advisory Team and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces held a workshop funded by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whose participants included future members of the new Secretariat, to review principles of security sector reform and produce draft terms of reference for the new body.

20. A census of veterans, funded by the European Commission, had been launched during a ceremony presided over by the Prime Minister in the southern region of Buba, on 14 February. A national sensitization campaign was carried out from 16 February to 1 March. The census, scheduled to be held from 2 March to 15 April, was rescheduled for the period from 12 March to 25 April owing to the unfortunate events of 1 and 2 March. During the ceremony, the European Commission delegate announced that a census for the various law enforcement bodies would also be commissioned in May 2009.

21. From 19 to 23 January, prior to the launching of the census of veterans, the Council of the European Union had deployed a mission to Bissau to assess the future of the European Security and Defence Policy mission in Guinea-Bissau after the expiration of its current mandate in June 2009. UNOGBIS also participated in the joint ECOWAS-African Union-Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries mission on Security Sector Reform, from 19 to 25 January, which sought to make recommendations on support for security sector reform. Following the mission, ECOWAS prepared a road map and draft plan of action for presentation and discussion at the meeting of the Committee of the ECOWAS Chiefs of Defence Staff, held in Praia from 4 to 6 March. It is envisaged that the plan of action will also be presented to partners of ECOWAS for funding.

22. Partly owing to the delay in the installation of the new Government, progress has been slow in implementing the project funded by Nigeria, and organized in partnership with the Governments of Guinea-Bissau and Brazil, ECOWAS, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UNOGBIS, to provide vocational training and basic capacity-building in Brazil for 30 demobilized senior personnel of the armed forces. The Minister of Defence held a meeting of all project partners in mid-February with the aim of reaching agreement on any outstanding issues in order to enable the implementation of the project. The pilot initiative was conceived within the framework of the Government's Security Sector Reform Programme 2007-2011.

V. Drug trafficking and organized crime

23. Although there were no major drug seizures in the period from December 2008 to March 2009, reliable sources from international and local law enforcement agencies continue to indicate the use of the country for trans-shipping large consignments of cocaine from Latin America to markets in Europe, and emerging markets in Africa and Asia. Changes in the political leadership of neighbouring Guinea and the announced crackdown by the Guinean authorities on alleged drug traffickers residing in that country have given rise to concerns regarding an increased presence of foreign drug traffickers in Guinea-Bissau.

24. On 4 February, the Council of Ministers rejected, because of a lack of evidence, the decision by the Office of the Public Prosecutor on 28 January to close its investigation into the case involving an aeroplane that had allegedly been used to transport illicit drugs into Guinea-Bissau in June 2008. The Council of Ministers directed that the case be reopened. The armed forces, for their part, also announced their intention to sue the Judicial Police for having spread what the military said were unsubstantiated accusations of their involvement in drug trafficking. The new Government has signalled a strong commitment to vigorously combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The new Minister of Justice has reappointed the Director of the Judicial Police, and the Prime Minister has appointed the former Minister of Justice as his Special Adviser on anti-narcotics and organized crime.

25. On 3 February 2009, the Minister of Justice, Mamadú Djaló Pires, officially inaugurated the new premises of the Judicial Police, which had been completely refurbished through a project of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime financed by the European Union. Operational equipment procured by the United

Nations Office on Drugs and Crime under the same project, including vehicles, motorcycles and radios, was handed over to the Judicial Police. In February, 25 officers of the Judicial Police returned from a three-month training course in Brazil. South Africa has contributed cash donations to the Emergency Anti-Narcotics Fund of the Ministry of Justice. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has also strengthened its presence in the country by posting a senior officer on the temporary assignment. At the same time, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime completed the recruitment procedures for two additional senior officers of the Office, who are expected to take up their duties in the second quarter of 2009.

VI. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund

26. The Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission continued its engagement with the country, following the successful elections and the nomination of the new Government on 7 January 2009. The Guinea-Bissau National Steering Committee for Peacebuilding, the primary point of contact for the Commission's engagement with national stakeholders, was reconstituted, on 10 February 2009, under the leadership of the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Manuel Saturnino da Costa.

27. Following the assassinations of President Vieira and General Tagme, the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, issued a statement in which she condemned the violent acts, and encouraged all stakeholders to maintain their commitment to the peace consolidation process in the country. In particular, she encouraged the international community to support the preparations of the presidential elections, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. In that regard, the Guinea-Bissau configuration will organize a meeting in late March with a view to mobilizing support for the preparation of the elections. In addition, the Peacebuilding Commission will explore opportunities for further support in other key priority areas identified in the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau.

28. The Guinea-Bissau national Peacebuilding Fund secretariat, which is provisionally hosted by UNOGBIS, was established in early December 2008. The office comprises a national Peacebuilding Fund programme officer and a national Peacebuilding Fund administrative assistant. It will provide administrative and organizational support for the engagement of the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission in Guinea-Bissau, monitor progress and report on the short-term projects of the Peacebuilding Fund under implementation, and provide direct support for the activities of the National Steering Committee.

29. The ongoing implementation of the Peacebuilding Fund-approved quick-impact projects involves partnerships between United Nations organizations and their national implementing partners. With respect to the UNDP/Ministry of Youth project on youth employment, a technical mission to assess capacities of national professional training institutions, with the participation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) regional office in Dakar, was carried out in Bissau from 24 November to 31 December 2008. Project partners are currently working to finalize the setting up of the project coordination unit and the steering committee, to conduct a sensitization campaign aimed at ensuring the participation of targeted

youth in the employment scheme, and to define the financial and support mechanisms for the project.

30. With regard to the implementation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/Ministry of Justice project for the rehabilitation of detention centres and prisons in the country, the Office forged a partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Ministry of Justice of Brazil through which to carry out an expert assessment for the purpose of identifying both infrastructure and training needs. An expert evaluation was also carried out on prison data systems management to ensure that the prisons targeted for rehabilitation would be adequately equipped with computer-based registration and filing capacity. Preparation of the engineering plans for the refurbishment work is on course.

31. The implementation of the United Nations Office for Project Services/Ministry of Defence project for the rehabilitation of military barracks is also ongoing. The project partners have continued to hold technical meetings and consultations and to exchange technical architectural designs and data, to be validated as input for the preparation of the public contracts bidding process manual, which is expected to be ready in March. The public contracts bidding process will then be launched for the refurbishment work.

VII. Economic and social aspects

32. The economic situation remains fragile. The precarious fiscal situation in the country remains a major concern, as the country faces severe cash flow difficulties. The Government is challenged by pressures to clear civil service salary arrears that are four months outstanding and debts to regional and local commercial banks. So far, the Government of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes, Jr., has focused its efforts on improving revenue collection. Prior to his appointment as Prime Minister, Mr. Gomes had indicated that the Government would need €60 million to pay all salary arrears and embark on the much-needed public administration and security sector reforms.

33. The Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided in December 2008 to extend the Emergency Post-conflict Assistance programme, running from January to December 2008, until the end of June 2009. An IMF mission visited Bissau from 17 February to 3 March 2009 to discuss the programme in 2009 and work with the Government on a 2009 budget based on realistic assumptions regarding revenue and donor support. The IMF mission stated that if results were encouraging at the time of the next review, in mid-2009, it would be possible to discuss putting in place a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility arrangement. However, it was stressed that the country had to show fiscal stability and must not accumulate further arrears. Difficulties linked to the global economy could affect cashew exports, impacting on revenue, remittances and trade credits. On 7 January, the Council of the African Development Bank approved the mid-term review of the Guinea-Bissau results-based country strategy paper (2005-2009) and access to the Fragile States Facility. African Development Bank sanctions were suspended until 2010 and disbursements for current projects and funds, amounting to approximately US\$ 3 million, resumed. The European Union, the World Bank, France, Portugal and Spain have initiated discussions with the Government, with a view to setting up a mechanism for the framing and monitoring of future budget support. The World

Bank is preparing its Interim Support Strategy for the period from May 2009 to December 2010.

34. In January 2009, the trend of rising prices for basic foodstuffs was reversed. The price of local rice had decreased by 33 per cent and the price of black millet by 17 per cent. The Government set the price of rice at CFAF 290 per kilo and has promised to take tough action against traders who speculate. The World Bank has granted Guinea-Bissau US\$ 5 million to finance a mechanism to assist the most vulnerable populations and help small farmers increase agricultural production. The European Commission is providing €6 million for emergency aid in the form of agricultural inputs which will be channelled through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Bank. The price of fuel was also reduced by an average of about 30 per cent in January. Although the national utilities company, EAGB, had received two new 1.5 megawatt generators under the World Bank infrastructures programme in the last quarter of 2008, power supplies have not improved because EAGB faces serious cash flow problems which have also impacted on water supplies in the capital.

35. On 6 February, the Government officially declared the end of the cholera epidemic which had affected the country since May 2008. According to the final report, there had been 14,229 cases of the disease and 225 deaths. The United Nations country team is working closely with the Government to develop a strategic plan to prevent and control future epidemics. One of the main objectives of the United Nations country team for 2009 is to support the Government in setting up an inter-ministerial emergency preparedness and response mechanism. The general population census, which had been scheduled to be carried out from 2 to 15 March 2009, was rescheduled, following the tragic events of 1 and 2 March, for the period from 15 to 29 March.

VIII. Human rights aspects

36. During the reporting period, the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Human Rights Day were celebrated through an official ceremony on 10 December 2008. Visits to detention centres, radio programmes and debates were organized in collaboration with the Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos, the European Union, the French Embassy and the United Nations country team. Meanwhile, the UNOGBIS human rights unit monitored and reported on the proceedings in respect of the hearings for the suspects allegedly involved in the 23 November 2008 attack on the President's residence, with regard to the rule of law and human rights standards conducive to a fair trial. Although UNOGBIS had been invited to participate as an observer, it did not attend the hearings, as there was no provision for observers in the national penal code.

37. The human rights unit also participated in the governance and justice thematic working group chaired by the Ministry of Justice with the support of the UNDP rule of law project. The working group, composed of the United Nations, the European Union, ECOWAS and bilateral partners working in the justice sector, aims to draw up a single harmonized operational matrix for the justice sector in order to optimize resources, avoid duplication and create synergies and complementarities among partners. On 13 January 2009, a new oversight Commission was created to oversee the work and financial management of civilian judiciary personnel. The UNOGBIS

human rights unit also participated in the review of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, from 28 to 30 January, with a view to mainstreaming human rights into the UNDP governance and justice framework and the United Nations Development Assistance Fund results matrix.

IX. Implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008)

38. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS contributed to the review of the gender thematic working group framework plan to develop the capacities of women's organizations to raise awareness on the rights of women and mechanisms to implement and report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the same time, UNOGBIS facilitated the launch on 30 January of the Women's Inter-ministerial Committee on Defence and Security.

X. Staff security

39. The crime rate in Guinea-Bissau remains relatively low, although criminality is generally seen as rising and becoming more violent. No incidents involving United Nations staff members were reported during the period under review.

XI. Observations and conclusion

40. I acknowledge the efforts undertaken by the national authorities of Guinea-Bissau to investigate the assassinations of President Vieira and General Tagme Na Waie, and continue to call for a credible and transparent process of investigation. It is important for the State to cover all the legal grounds to ascertain the facts behind the 23 November 2008 attack and the two assassinations of March 2009, in order to end impunity in Guinea-Bissau, uphold the rule of law and maintain the integrity of the State. It is also important that the rights of the defendants be protected and that they receive a fair hearing. I continue to appeal to the international community to support national efforts to conduct a thorough investigation and to bring those responsible for the criminal acts of 1 and 2 March 2009 to justice.

41. At the same time, these two assassinations underscore the urgent need to implement the reforms of the justice, defence and security sectors in Guinea-Bissau. I urge the Government to enhance its engagement with and commitment to the implementation of the Government public administration and security sector reforms. I also urge partners to review their strategies for providing support to the Government on security sector reform-related projects so as to ensure that all material and technical support is provided, as pledged and on time. It is vital that activities in the national reform agenda be carried out as scheduled, both to strengthen the Government and to serve as a confidence-building measure among the national population, who have continued to demonstrate a genuine desire for reform, progress and development.

42. The Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and my Representative are exploring ways of speeding up the implementation of key, prioritized components of the approved recommendations of the United Nations inter-agency security sector reform assessment mission of October 2008. As they do

so, efforts will be focused on elaborating and implementing quick-impact projects based on the recommendations. I urge the international partners of Guinea-Bissau, in particular ECOWAS and the European Union, to enhance their assistance in this area in close cooperation with UNOGBIS. Efforts are under way to strengthen the capacity of UNOGBIS to play a leading and coordinating role in mobilizing support for the implementation of security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau. In this connection, the development of a software and implementation matrix, as recommended by the United Nations security sector reform assessment mission, will help promote this objective and I call on all partners to support the project.

43. At his swearing-in ceremony as interim President, Mr. Pereira pledged to do his utmost to organize the presidential elections within the period stipulated in the Constitution, namely, 60 days, and urged the international community to support Guinea-Bissau in this regard. I appeal to the friends of Guinea-Bissau and to the international community as a whole not to abandon the country at this critical moment and to provide technical and financial assistance. The international community needs to stand as one and assist Guinea-Bissau in abiding by its Constitution by organizing the elections in a timely and peaceful manner.

44. The electorate, in the exemplary legislative elections of 16 November 2008, voted for hope and improvement in their daily lives. Instability in the past decade has been a major stumbling block to peace and development, and has resulted in the squandering of opportunities for recovery. I urge all political actors to put aside personal ambition and to work collaboratively towards finding consensus on how best to serve the critical needs of the people. Priorities to that end must include pursuit of policies that favour economic recovery and the creation of a propitious environment for maximizing the country's potential and the opportunities for peace, stability and prosperity.

45. I wish to renew my appeals to the partners of Guinea-Bissau to continue to extend as much support as possible so as to enable the Government to meet the huge challenges facing it in its endeavours to rebuild the State through public administration-related and economic reforms. However, all partnerships require mutual understanding and burden-sharing if they are to flourish. I therefore call on the Government and its partners to engage in continuous dialogue and to set out realistic objectives, expectations, timelines and benchmarks for effective cooperation. Our collective efforts towards peacebuilding need to translate into tangible dividends that the population can benefit from in their daily lives.

46. I should like to conclude by commending the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my new Representative, Joseph Mutaboba, who had arrived in Guinea-Bissau on 12 February, just ahead of the tragic events that engulfed the country, for working intensively with national, regional and international partners to find lasting solutions to the problems that confront the country. I also wish to pay tribute to the personnel of the entire United Nations country team for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau.