

Peacebuilding Commission
Ambassadorial-level meeting on peace consolidation in São Tomé and Príncipe
15 January 2024

On 15 January 2024, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on São Tomé and Príncipe, with Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, accompanied by the Minister of Justice, to discuss the country's experience and efforts in consolidating its peace and stability through the reform of its justice and security sectors as recommended by UN-Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) strategic assessment mission conducted in April 2023 and its strategic assessment report's recommendations in November 2023, which formed the foundation for mobilizing resources, coordinating, and implementing the necessary reforms in those two critical areas. The Commission commended the Government's resolve to advance democratic governance and maintain stability by addressing challenges. Developing a national vision for the justice and security reforms, grounded in inclusion and participation of all key national stakeholders, was described as paramount in achieving the required changes. Given the challenges the Government faces in terms of financial resources to achieve urgent reforms and the preventive approach it adopted by engaging with the PBC, the international community's support to the Government's efforts was deemed critical.

1. On 15 January 2024, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonovi , convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on peace consolidation in São Tomé and Príncipe, focusing on justice and security sectors reform as pathways to foster sustainable peace in the country, and providing a platform for the international community to identify entry points to support the country's efforts in this regard.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair noted the global challenges to building and sustaining peace, including geopolitical, economic, and environmental (particularly climate change) factors, which acutely impact São Tomé and Príncipe. He highlighted that São Tomé and Príncipe, as a small Island Developing State, was prone to external shocks. The Chair however recognized São Tomé and Príncipe's great achievements in democratic governance despite these existing challenges and the need to ensure that the gains achieved are not lost.
3. **H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe** informed of the country's still fragile democracy whilst recalling the strong commitment to preserving and advancing the rule of law, peace, and stability. Underlining significant achievements in development and legislative reforms, the Prime Minister also highlighted the factors that undermine progress, such as geographic isolation, climate change, dependence on imported fossil fuels and the insufficient development assistance to the country. He also described the impact of globalization, including the effect of international terrorism and criminality. He expressed his concerns over the current international financial architecture and assistance scheme, referencing in particular the conditions for the IMF's short-term funding as being socially costly. Given the current fragility of his country, he called on the international community to increase its assistance stressing that prevention was a better investment especially when the country concerned is doing everything to avoid a crisis. He

noted the Government's tangible efforts in advancing various reform agendas that promote human rights, democratic governance and equality. He exemplified this engagement by referring to a number of initiatives adopted, such as the Gender Parity Law that mandated a 40 per cent quota for women in state institutions. While the country was proud of its engagement in the area of human rights, the Prime Minister noted that it also faces a number of challenges in delivering justice for the 230,000 habitants. Stressing the size of the population, he noted that the reforms are feasible so long as the resources were invested in the key areas. For the Prime Minister, justice was at the core of São Tomé and Príncipe's current challenges alongside the security sector. He explained the risk factors should those two issues not be addressed urgently and underlined the lack of resources as the main stumbling block in moving forward with the reform process. He therefore called on the PBC to support them in mobilizing the necessary financial support.

4. **Mr. Abdou Abarry, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA)** noted that São Tomé and Príncipe was a model of democracy in Central Africa and welcomed the Government's ongoing efforts in various areas such as in climate action and gender parity. He underlined the need for international support to assist the country to achieve its goal for stability and sustaining peace. He noted the current vulnerability of the national institutions in facing external and internal shocks as exemplified by the violent events of 25 November 2022. The country's call for support to build stronger justice and security sector institutions was therefore well founded and inter alia aims to address current grievances regarding the justice and security sectors. He informed of the UN-Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) strategic assessment mission conducted in April 2023 and the Government's endorsement of the strategic assessment report's recommendations in November 2023, forming the foundation for mobilizing resources, coordinating, and implementing the necessary reforms in those two critical areas. He appealed to the international community to contribute to the implementation of the assessment report's recommendations. Referring to the country's strategic location as an important maritime corridor, he also reiterated the need for such investments as a way to prevent the country from becoming a hub for illicit activities. Lastly, he stressed the importance of inclusive dialogue involving a wide array of political and civil society actors, especially women and young people.
5. **H.E. Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President of the Commission of ECCAS** commended São Tomé and Príncipe's efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. He informed that the UN-

6. **Mr. Alexandre Zouev, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI)** underlined the rule of law as fundamental to lasting peace and security, as well as a foundation for conflict prevention and peacebuilding and commended UN-ECCAS strategic assessment report. He welcomed the initiatives by the Santomean authorities to further enhance the country's justice and security systems, including by advancing a national justice sector reform policy towards strengthening the judiciary and improving access to justice. He underlined the importance of fostering a people-centered approach and sustaining public confidence and trust in the rule of law. He continued by noting that inclusive, representative, responsive and accountable justice and security institutions are fundamental to supportTJETpfons are

obligations but also in maintaining its stability. He noted that his country was a clear and achievable prevention case. He went on by showing how the limited capacity and equipment of judges eroded the trust by the population in the justice system. He said that the few judges were handling an average of 1,000 cases each annually – all manually. He informed of cost-effective solutions to address this, such as the digitalization and capacity-building of the justice system, which would in turn improve transparency, accountability and confidence in the justice system. He also provided examples on the shortcomings of the security defense system and its infrastructures and stressed the need for advancing maritime security and the envisaged decentralization of the national army. With these examples, he reiterated the critical urgency for implementing the envisaged reforms especially given the fast-evolving regional dynamics. He noted the need for a tailor-made mechanism to enable those prompt actions. He concluded by emphasizing the potential of São Tomé and Príncipe to be a success story of prevention for the international community, also given its size and strong resolve of the Government to address the above-mentioned challenges.

recommendations

Continue advocating for the necessary political and financial support for São Tomé and Príncipe to achieve its reform process and consolidate peace and sustainable development, including dealing with impacts of climate change.

Calling the UN and the international community to support the development of a national vision and a strategic framework