



Report of the g7+ Election Observation Mission (EOM) on the Legislative Elections in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau that was held on June 4, 2023

Context Of Election Observation

In the background of the experience in election observation that the g7+ accompanied in the elections in Timor-Leste (2017,2022) and Sierra Leone (2018), the group has institutionalized the g7+ Election Observation Mission initiative on 22nd of March 2023 at the premises of the Ministry of Planning and Development of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

As an intergovernmental organization of conflict-affected countries, the g7+ promotes peace and stability and observes the democratization process through the holding of free, fair, transparent, credible, and acceptable elections in member states.

Based on one of the g7+'s Fragile-to-Fragile Cooperation programs, the g7+ Election Observation Mission will not only help member states observe elections, but also provide an opportunity for learning and sharing of electoral experiences among member states.

The main objectives of this initiative include:

- ✓ To share experiences in election management.
- ✓ To contribute to strengthening democratic consolidation, peace and development by sharing experiences in the effective conduct of elections in g7+ member states.
- ✓ Improving the operations of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) through election observation recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Through a presidential Decree issued on Friday, 16th December 2022, His Excellency General Umaro Sissoco Embaló, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, called the electorate to the legislative elections to be held on Sunday, 4th June 2023.

In this election, 22 political parties and coalitions of political parties (*Annex I*) were authorized to run in the process, in a country where there are more than 50 legalized parties. This diversity of parties and coalitions reflected the political plurality present in Guinea-Bissau's electoral scenario.

The Electoral National Commission (CNE) of Guinea-Bissau reported that a total of 893,618 voters (434,009 men and 459,609 women, including 35,816 (22,181 men and 13,635 women) from the diaspora were registered to participate in the elections. These voters are divided into 3,516 polling stations across the country.

Although there are more women voters registered than men voters, however, in terms of women's participation, only 25.98% were registered as candidates on the political parties' lists. This percentage is lower than the 36% provided in Law 48/2018, is Guinea-Bissau's parity law that establishes a minimum quota of 36% women in candidate lists for legislative elections.

Following the invitation letter N.Ref: 098/GP/CNE/2023 from the President of the National Elections Commission (CNE) of Guinea-Bissau (*annex ii*) to the g7+ to participate as an International Observer, alongside other international organizations such as; ECOWAS, African Union, CPLP, International Organization of Francophonie, European Union, as well as the Representatives of the Russian Federation, Venezuela Republic, Brazil and also has more than 200 monitors of the Civil Society in the Legislative Elections of the country.

The main objective of the Mission is to observe the stages of the electoral process, to assist and share lessons with the institutions and other parties involved in the elections to work towards free, transparent, and peaceful elections.

The g7+ Election Observation Mission (EOM) consists of 7 observers including CNE representatives from some g7+ member states and technical teams from the g7+ Secretariat.

The members of the g7+ EOM delegation were the following:

- (i) Dr. Helder da Costa, General Secretary of g7+ (Head of Mission).
- (ii) Carlito Martins, Representative of the CNE of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.
- (iii) Nito de Sousa Viegas de Abreu, Representative of the CNE of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe.
- (iv) Philips Fara Kargbo, Representative of the National Electoral Commission of the Republic of Sierra Leone
- (v) Ezequel de Rosa das Neves, TV Education Journalist from Timor-Leste.
- (vi) Elísio Francisco Monteiro Valadares, Protocol and partnership Liaison Officer of g7+.
- (vii) Reliquia Mendes Gonçalves, Executive Assistant for GS and DGS of g7+.

The mission was also joined by Mr. Fernando Borja Araújo Monteiro, Representative of the CNE of Guinea-Bissau, and Mr. Francisco Zacarias Costa Pereira, g7+ Focal Point in Guinea-Bissau, who actively accompanied and collaborated in all stages of the process.

Pre-Election

The g7+ MOE delegation began its mission in Guinea-Bissau on the 1st of June 2023, and observed the last day of campaigning by political parties in the city of Bissau. It was surprising to see several opposition parties and the current ruling party campaigning in the city of Bissau without any reports of inappropriate behavior or disturbances. The security agents were also sociable. This is a clear demonstration of the political maturity of the people of Guinea-Bissau with respect to political opponents and political tolerance. This lesson will certainly be shared with other g7+ member states.

During its mission, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to His Excellency the Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, who is the g7+ focal point in the country. The g7+ General Secretary who is also Head of Mission of the g7+ EOM outlined the work that the g7+ has been developing and involved in over the last few years.

In addition, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to the interim president of the CNE, to thank him for the invitation made to g7+ to participate as an International Observer in this election and to thank the president for having sent a representative of the CNE of

Guinea-Bissau to the Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste last 21st of May 2023. g7+ also expressed its cooperation to include a representative of the CNE to the elections in the next months in the member States of the organization. This meeting also provided the interim president of CNE with a broad understanding of the electoral procedures, the ongoing preparations, and the perspectives of the different political actors, thus contributing to a comprehensive and informed analysis of the electoral situation.

The delegation had the opportunity to visit the Cellule de Monitor Election, the Electoral Monitoring Cell works directly with Guinea-Bissau's civil society with the support of UNDP and provided statistical data on Guinea-Bissau's elections (*annex iii*).

The Chief of Mission also had a meeting with the Chief of Mission of the CPLP and representatives of the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF).

The delegation also held meetings with the leaders of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) parties. The head of the EOM presented the objective of the Mission and made available the cooperation to give continuity to the work developed with Guinea-Bissau to date. For his part, the party leader clarified the main objectives of the party in leading Guinea-Bissau to a better future. However, the PAIGC deplored the interference of the President of the Republic in the electoral campaign. It also reported the refusal of airport authorities to allow the party's-chartered plane carrying all campaign material to land at Bissau airport. But this incident luckily did not hinder the smooth running of the process. (*Doc. In annex iv*).

The EOM also had a meeting with the leaders of PRS (Partido Renovação Social). The party leader explained the objectives of the party and outlined these objectives in the campaigns and rallies. the PRS also raised the same complaint to the CNE regarding the use of the image of the President of the Republic in the political campaign by one of the parties. And expressed the party's indignation at some unhappy statements made by the Head of State.

After the election, by invitation of His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior and Public Order the EOM delegation had a courtesy visit to his office. The General Secretary of the g7+ (Head of Mission of the g7+ EOM), presented his congratulations for the way the government and authorities of Guinea-Bissau conducted the election successfully and peacefully. The Chief of Mission also submitted a copy of the statement of the g7+ EOM released for the joint session of observers.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE POLLING DAY

On voting day, the g7+ EOM delegation was divided into three teams with 2 members in each team. Each observer was equipped with observation worksheet with questionnaires to guide them (*in appendix v*). The teams were able to observe 68 polling stations, covering 7 constituencies (Círculo Eleitoral) in 2 regions (Bissau and Biombo).

Opening of the polls:

- ✓ It was observed that in all polling stations visited, voting started on time, as polling station staff were already in the various polling stations before 7:00 am. There was adequate voting material in all polling stations visited and most of the layout of the polling stations was in accordance with CNE procedures.

Voting Process:

- ✓ During the voting process, the team observed that most polling stations were well organized and orderly. Polling station members were easily identified with their vests and ID cards. However, political party agents could not be easily identified with any kind of identification. Nevertheless, what caught the observers' attention was the grouping of some polling stations in a certain area and the fact that some polling booths were exposed, which did not fully guarantee the secrecy of the vote.
- ✓ Electoral cards were requested by polling station staff at all polling stations to prevent any individual from being allowed to vote without an electoral card. However, there were several complaints concerning people with electoral cards but whose names were not on the electoral roll. This prevented them from exercising their civic rights.
- ✓ In most cases assistance was provided to voters with special needs. Nevertheless, in some polling stations this procedure was not followed accordingly. Most voters were familiar with the voting process. This helped in processing voters in a timely manner.
- ✓ The participation of other international observers on the ground during the g7+ EOM team's visit to polling stations was remarkable. This helped to provide confidence to both voters and polling staff during the voting process.

Closing and counting:

- ✓ Polling stations closed on time as there were no voters in the queue. Polling station members observed all closing procedures. The ballot boxes were opened in the presence of political party agents and observers present.
- ✓ Reconciliation was carried out accordingly, with the consent of the political party agents. Counting was conducted in accordance with CNE procedures. However, the counting process could be improved in the future. Political Party agents signed the results and unused ballots. Copies of the results were delivered to party agents and copies were posted accordingly.
- ✓ In all polling stations where the team observed the counting process, only two invalid votes were recorded. This demonstrates voters' level of understanding of the process.

Recommendations

Given the observation, the g7+ EOM leaves the following recommendations:

- ✓ The CNE should make a conscious effort to update the voter registers before any election is held. This will help avoid the anomaly and guarantee the right of citizens to vote in the next elections.
- ✓ The need for the CNE to provide accreditation of political party agents to allow their identification and avoid any form of identity usurpation.
- ✓ In order to make the electoral process more effective and efficient, it is necessary to strengthen and invest in adequate capacity building for polling station staff;
- ✓ The counting process needs to be more standardized at the national level and simplified to speed up the tabulation of results.

Post-Election

In the post-election period, the g7+ EOM recorded a relatively high turnout and noted that the situation was peaceful and orderly and that procedures were well controlled.

Joint Session for the Preliminary Results Declaration

The g7+ EOM was invited to participate in the joint session of the Heads of Mission in the presentation of the preliminary results of the legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau. The joint session took place in the auditorium of the Hala Hotel in Bissau on June 06, 2023, at 15:00 hours, with the participation of ECOWAS, African Union, CPLP and International Organization of Francophonie (IOF). In the presence of national and international press as well as the presence of high international entities accredited in Guinea-Bissau, (*Statement in annex vi*).

CONCLUSION

Despite the restricted circulation of vehicles on voting day, the electors turned out in large numbers to vote for the political party of their choice.

The elections took place in a peaceful environment with no evidence of intimidation, campaigning or vote buying inside the polling stations.

The experiences of Timor-Leste (May 21, 2023) and Guinea-Bissau (June 4, 2023) will be replicated in the upcoming months in some of the g7+ member states that will hold elections in their respective countries, such as the Republic of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

On behalf of the g7+ Election Observation Mission, we would like to congratulate the government and people of Guinea-Bissau for holding their legislative elections in a very peaceful environment. We would also like to thank the President of the CNE of Guinea-Bissau for inviting us to witness the conduct of the legislative elections in Guinea-

Bissau. We must state that we admire the behavior of all political parties and supporters during the campaigns and on election day.

We commend the people of Guinea-Bissau for having shown political maturity and tolerance in choosing the direction of their country's destiny. As representatives of post-conflict countries such as Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Sao Tome and Principe, we were able to learn many lessons during the conduct of these elections that are worth sharing. The civilian nature of security during the campaigns and on election day is commendable.

Finally, the g7+ EOM calls on all stakeholders in the electoral process to respect the regulatory channels for publishing the results of signed agreements and refrain from any proclamation of results outside the official channels. The Mission also encourages the parties involved to resort exclusively to legal means in case of dispute.