

Peacebuilding Commission

Ambassadorial-level Meeting on Peace consolidation in São Tomé and Príncipe

15 January 2024, 10:00AM-1:00PM (US Eastern time), CR 1

Concept Note

São Tomé and Príncipe is a young country that obtained its independence in 1975. As early as in the late 1980s, the country embarked on democratic reforms, introducing constitutional revisions that led to a multi-party political system, paving the way for free elections in 1991. São Tomé and Príncipe has had frequent peaceful transitions of power and has made significant strides on its socio-economic indicators, regularly ranking high on African governance indexes. It is on its way to graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category in December 2024.

This notwithstanding, more than a third of its population lives in extreme poverty. As a Small Island Developing State, the country is highly susceptible to external shocks and faces multiple disadvantages, such as a small market size, limited land mass and high transportation costs. It is the smallest sovereign country in Africa in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and the second smallest in terms of land area, with a population of mere 220,000 people. The country highly depends on external aid and imports, in particular fuel and food. With a maritime zone extending 160 times larger than its land mass, the country has a strategic position in the Gulf of Guinea, a globally important maritime corridor, where illicit activities are rampant. Climate change has had a disproportionate impact on the country, causing changes in rainfall patterns, rising sea levels, and increasing salination and erosion of coastal areas, which leads to natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Higher temperature of sea water has changed the migration patterns of the fish stock, further complicating many lives dependent on artisanal fishing.

The country has made tangible efforts in gender empowerment. Successive governments have implemented measures to promote gender equality and equity across the board. In September 2022, the President of the Republic promulgated the gender parity law, which ensures a minimum 40% representation of women in state institutions. A Ministry of Women's Rights was created also in 2022. However, women continue to face greater challenges in social, political and economic spheres. Furthermore, the country has a young population, with an average age of 18.6 years. This young population is particularly affected by migration trends, reflecting the growing desire of young people to seek opportunities abroad, which in turn raises concerns about the potential impact on the future demographic and socio-economic landscape of São Tomé and Príncipe. Investment in the country, in various areas, will enable sustainable economic development and create conditions for improving the living conditions of the population in general, favoring full access to water, energy, health, food, justice, and health services. Additionally, the creation of opportunities for the full empowerment of women and young people and their meaningful participation in decision-making remains essential in achieving sustainable development and durable peace in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Although São Tomé and Príncipe has been considered a model of democracy in Central Africa for peaceful alterations of power, the country's recent history has been marred by several attempted coups since the late 1980s. On 25 November 2022, a week after the installation of the new government, the country was deeply shaken by yet another alleged coup d'état. In the immediate aftermath, some members of the army are alleged to have committed serious human rights violations against individuals suspected of being involved in the alleged coup d'état. The interlinked recurrent coup attempts and the persisting security sector and rule of law challenges pose significant obstacles to sustainable peace in the country.

While the national authorities carried out various strategies to modernize the justice and defense sectors in the past in order to consolidate sustainable peace, some political instability and financial and technical challenges have made it difficult to achieve real transformative change in the justice and security sectors as key pillars of sustainable peace.

Mindful of the importance of addressing the underlying challenges in the areas of rule of law and Security Sector Reform (SSR) to foster sustainable peace in the country, at the request of the President and Prime Minister of São Tomé and Príncipe, the United Nations (UN) and the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) carried out a joint strategic assessment of the justice and security sectors in April 2023. The in-depth assessment highlighted critical gaps in both sectors, including the need for reorganization of the National Police, outdated equipment, personnel challenges in the army, as well as the justice system's resource constraints. The report's recommendations include: (i) strengthening the rule of law and justice system with a view to guaranteeing the population's equal and fair access to justice; (ii) investing in SSR in order to ensure that the country's security apparatus is capable of addressing internal or external threats; (iii) ensuring the effectiveness of oversight bodies in the justice and security sectors; and (iv) ensuring an inclusive national vision on rule of law through the active involvement of various stakeholders, particularly civil society, women and youth. Proposed measures include enhancing community policing to build trust between law enforcement and communities; providing specialized training to tackle gender-based violence, maritime crime, cybercrime, and corruption; and modernizing the justice system by implementing a Case Management System, rehabilitating court facilities, and promoting transparent recruitment practices to strengthen judicial integrity. These recommendations were subsequently validated by the Government. The envisaged justice and security sector reforms have a significant potential to strengthen political stability and foster sustainable peace in the country but will require important external support.

International partners

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for São Tomé and Príncipe recognizes the challenges in the justice and security sectors and aims to promote the establishment of transparent, responsive and gender-sensitive institutions by 2027, as a key pillar of sustainable peace. The UN is contributing to this goal by i) improving access to an equitable, gender and youth sensitive, and impartial justice system; ii) strengthening the implementation of international standards and best practices for rule of law, transparency, control mechanisms and

accountability; and iii) increasing capacities for disaggregated data and analysis in support of the acceleration for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and those left behind.

The World Bank's engagement in São Tomé and Príncipe has focused on supporting macroeconomic stability and national competitiveness, as well as reducing vulnerability and strengthening human capacity. The current World Bank portfolio, funded by the International Development Association (IDA), has eight projects, with a total net commitment of \$153 million.

Objectives of the meeting

This meeting will provide an important opportunity for São Tomé and Príncipe to share its experience and efforts in defining and consolidating the country's path toward sustainable peace through its ongoing efforts to address challenges in the areas of the rule of law and the security sector. This engagement will be based on the conclusions and recommendations of the UN-ECCAS strategic assessment and will enable the Government to present both opportunities and challenges pertaining to rule of law and security sector reform in São Tomé and Príncipe.

By addressing these key areas essential to sustaining peace, the meeting will provide the necessary platform for the international community, financial institutions, and donors to identify entry points to support the country's efforts to advance the rule of law, long-term stability, and the consolidation of democratic governance in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Agenda

Opening remarks by H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission

Briefings by:

- H.E. Mr. Patrice Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe
- H.E. Ms. Ilza Amado Vaz, Minister of Justice, Internal Administration and Human Rights of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe (Respondent)
- 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)
- H.E. Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President, Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) (TBD)
- Alexandre Zouev, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions
- Mr. Ousmane Diagana, World Bank Group Vice President for Western and Central Africa (TBD)
- Civil Society Representative (TBD)

Remarks by Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Interventions from the floor

Closing remarks by the Chair