

Guinea Bissau: A call for peaceful, free and fair elections

“WADEMOS Network calls for the contribution of all stakeholders in ensuring the peace and stability of Guinea-Bissau and resolving the governance and political crises plaguing the country.”

On June 4, 2023, Guinea-Bissau heads for elections to elect a new set of 102 deputies to its National People's Assembly (NPA) for the 2023–2027 parliamentary term. This follows the dissolution of the NPA by President Embaló in May 2022, a move he attributed to persistent differences between the NPA and other branches of government. Specifically, President Embaló cited the NPA's refusal to have its accounts audited and the rejection of an attempt to rescind some deputies' immunity from prosecution as the basis for his action.

The forthcoming election is important not only because its success is crucial to the realization of some degree of harmony in the Bissau-Guinean government but also to the stability of the country going forward and to the prospect of consensus in the ensuing debates on constitutional reforms. It is therefore imperative that every precaution be taken to ensure that the legislative elections observe an undeniable measure of transparency and, above all, inclusivity.

As the election approaches, the major concerns remain, that:

- Following the end of the tenure of the immediate past Executive Secretariat of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), a new Executive Secretariat is yet to be inaugurated, owing to the absence of the NPA, which, per the constitution, is the body responsible for the election of the chairperson and members of the Executive Secretariat.
- Even though a consensus has been reached among the major political parties to facilitate the appointment of an interim chairman for the Executive Secretariat of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the absence of a complete and fully inaugurated Executive Secretariat going into the legislative elections presents questions of legitimacy that may adversely impact efforts at resolution in the event of an election dispute.

- Given its troubled context, the media remains vulnerable and susceptible to many forms of political patronage that compromise its independence, threaten its integrity, and aggravate the prospect of misinformation over the duration of the election.

The success of the election is largely dependent on the successful cooperation between the government and the opposition and remains crucial to the prospect of stability and harmony beyond the election. It is equally essential that there be transparency and fairness during this election. The government and the opposition must maintain open communication between themselves on emerging challenges over the course of the election. This will enhance the spirit of cooperation between the government and the opposition and diminish the prospects of any growing mistrust that stands to aggravate a context that is already volatile. Expertise and financial contributions from the country's immediate neighbours and development partners across the world must be deployed to ensure that the Bissau-Guinean media, and particularly journalists, can uphold neutrality in their reportage and are not susceptible to any forms of political inducements or patronage.

The WADEMOS Network calls for the contribution of all stakeholders in ensuring the peace and stability of Guinea-Bissau and resolving the governance and political crises plaguing the country. The intervention of the country's international partners, such as the ECOWAS, AU, UN, EU, and Community of Portuguese Language Countries, remains crucial in this effort to achieve political consensus, successful legislative elections, and stability in the long term.

Last but not least, there is the need for Bissau-Guineans, as the ultimate stakeholders in the forthcoming election, to maintain peaceful conduct that engenders trust, good neighborliness, and mutual respect throughout the coming legislative elections.