



REPUBLIC OF GUINEA-BISSAU

68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Speech

by

His Excellency

Mr. Manuel Serifo Nhamajo

Transitional President of the Republic

New York, September 26, 2013

Mr. President

Mr. Secretary-General

Excellency Heads of States and Governments

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to begin my intervention by congratulating His Excellency Ambassador John William Ashe on his election as President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would also like to extend our congratulations to your country, Antigua and Barbuda, which is honored by the selection of one of its sons to preside this year over the most representative of the institutions of the world.

You carry on your shoulders, Mr. President, the responsibility for guiding the work of this Session of the United Nations General Assembly at a time that all consider politically very critical for the international community.

Indeed, the reality that the international community faces today is that of a world troubled by:

- dangerous global geopolitical tensions;
- an international financial and economic crisis as deep and wide as we have not seen

since the 1930' s. The intensity of this crisis has thrown millions of people into the unemployment roles and created millions of new poor throughout the world;

- new fears, new dangers, and new threats around the world – from transnational terrorism to arms and drug trafficking, as well as frightening interfaith tensions that often result in bloodshed;

- the brutal return of old-style piracy to the modern age, not only off the coast of Somalia but also in the Gulf of Guinea – threatening important routes through which oil is transported to fuel the world economy, creating insecurity for the international merchant marine, and facilitating illicit fishing and all manner of illegal maritime trafficking, such as of arms, human beings, and psychotropic substances;

- the persistent outbreaks of ethnic violence that cause enormous human suffering;

- unimaginable humanitarian disasters here and there.

Mr. President

Mr. Secretary-General

Ladies and gentlemen

I come from a small country on the westernmost tip of the African coast. We are a poor country but we have not lost the hope of building, in peace, the progress to which we are entitled.

We just celebrated, two days ago, the 40th anniversary of our national independence, and this is a good time for us to reaffirm, to your Excellencies, the following: during the entire period of armed struggle for national liberation, the people that I represent believed in the United Nations and in International Law, and my country today reiterates, maintains, and further reinforces this old belief.

We achieved national independence in 1973. Indeed it was not given to us by anybody. But it became possible only as a result of the international solidarity of some and, ultimately, the recognition of all.

To all, without exception, I wish, on behalf of Guinea-Bissau, to express our feeling of eternal gratitude, to declare our firm desire to strengthen longstanding ties of friendship, and to affirm our willingness, despite all that has transpired, to rebuild the foundations of solidarity that united our peoples in the past.

Mr. President

Mr. Secretary-General

The person that addresses you at this time has risen to this podium to ask for your patience and understanding, and hopes for your solidarity. I am one who believes that expressions of generosity are not at all inconsistent with the cold rationality of relations among sovereign States.

I am the Transitional President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and this title, as your Excellencies are well aware, indicates something that is particular and exceptional.

Indeed the political and military events of April 12, 2012, created a new political environment in my country. A military coup had ousted the Interim President of the Republic and a self-suspended Prime Minister who had launched an inconclusive campaign to run for the Presidency. Faced with this situation, we then wondered: What are we to do?

Fortunately, the best option available at the time, in our opinion, ultimately prevailed.

We were able to avoid political mishaps that, had they taken hold, could have thrown the country into a political and military tailspin with consequences that would have been unpredictable and, certainly, much graver than what we nonetheless had to face and, in some ways, continue to face.

Therefore we had to circumscribe the dynamics of the military coup, control its political effects, limit its institutional reach, and, as if it were not enough, we had to deal with two opposing positions that emerged both internally and abroad.

One of them was very detrimental to the peaceful return to constitutional normality in my country; but the other was much more realistic and thus more promising for the gradual reestablishment of constitutional order.

We had to deal with the first so-called position, which was both curious and dramatic. This position was taken by people who preferred the worst possible situation for Guinea-Bissau. And do your Excellencies know why? The answer is this: they betted on the degradation of the political situation in my country in order to justify their theses, confirm their predictions, operationalize their political concepts of how to resolve the crisis in Guinea-Bissau. Indeed they made every attempt to apply the formula that dictated that “ the worse for Guinea-Bissau, the better.” Yes, the better indeed but only to serve their own interests. With such a radical position, they really managed to touch on the deepest sensibilities of a people that is humble but refuses to be humiliated.

We are a true democracy, notwithstanding all our flaws, the violations of the democratic purpose of the State, and so many detours. We are the first to recognize this. But we must not forget that we are, first, a State born out of “ centuries of pain and hope,” and of a hard and victorious struggle for national independence, which has a strong influence on the determination of the political values to be defended.

In order to enable the second option on the table to go forward, we were able to rely on the realism and prompt solidarity of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). With the important support of the United Nations Security Council, ECOWAS became solely responsible for managing the agreed Transition Period, and created a reduced stabilization military mission that became known as ECOMIB.

On the political and institutional level, the parliament elected by the people of Guinea-

Bissau – our People' s National Assembly – remained standing and thus was able to provide the Political Transition with a legitimate and legitimizing institutional basis. In fact, the Constitution of the Republic had never been suspended.

Mr. President

Mr. Secretary-General

Ladies and gentlemen

That is the origin of the Transitional President of the Republic. It did not come from a military coup. It came, rather, from an elected Parliament and, therefore, from a political and institutional process. This makes all the difference.

I combined the position of Member of Parliament, elected to the position four times in a row, as well as that of First Vice-President of that body of sovereignty – in other words, all modesty aside, I am a democrat with a mature conviction, and never ran a coup d' état nor ordered any such actions.

Indeed, with the inauguration of the Transitional President of the Republic, the Political Transition process per se began.

After some time, Parliament approved the revised Transition Pact and corresponding Political Agreement, and, later on, the Program and General Budget for the State submitted by a Government with a broad political base, which I, as Transitional President of the Republic, appointed and installed by Presidential Decree.

With these steps, the Political Transition truly took off. I have signed a Presidential Decree setting November 24th as the date for legislative and presidential elections. What remains – which is not little – is to ensure the availability of funds to carry out an effective, transparent, and unquestionable electoral process. To this end, we must create reliable voter registries, which can only be accomplished through an accurate census or voter registration process. This is where the Political Transition stands in Guinea-Bissau.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Guinea-Bissau is the victim of two dramatically interlinked evils: poverty and political instability. In fact, in a society such as that of my country, poverty creates the propensity for political instability. In turn, political instability impacts the economic order, reduces the rate of growth and thus increases poverty rates.

The challenge ahead of us consists precisely of escaping these two traps – the poverty trap and the political instability trap. Overcoming this challenge obviously goes well beyond the goals for this exceptional period of Political Transition. Therefore I will not go into further details in this regard.

In light of this enormous economic and political liability, which is yet to be resolved, achieving the Millennium Development Goals within the established timeframe is truly beyond our means, at least for the foreseeable future.

But this recognition does not mean that the government, civil society and Guinea-Bissau's bilateral and multilateral development partners in general – including the specialized UN agencies – have given up on the effort. Much to the contrary.

In Education, Health, Gender Equality policies, fight against Poverty, Environmental policies for Sustainable Development, as well as other areas, our country has made progress, though moderate and below satisfactory levels.

As to following up on the recommendations emerging from the “ Rio+20 Summit – The Future We Want,” Guinea-Bissau will make every effort to carry out the commitments undertaken. We hope that the more developed countries, our partners, do their part in the fight against poverty, which is one of the greatest scourges that afflict states such as Guinea-Bissau, which are fragile and therefore very vulnerable, and are still suffering the grave consequences of armed conflict.

Guinea-Bissau supports the establishment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on September 24, 2013, which replaces the Commission on Sustainable Development and will develop Post-2015 International Development initiatives.

As a country with islands, Guinea-Bissau congratulates the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his initiative to convene the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, in Samoa, in September 2014.

Ladies and gentlemen

I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations and particularly Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for the attention that he has dedicated to my country and for appointing former President of Timor-Leste José Ramos Horta as his Special Representative to Guinea-Bissau. Mr. Ramos Horta has made excellent contributions to the political normalization of Guinea-Bissau.

The State of Guinea-Bissau has never been and is not aloof of the evolution of the international political environment, and has never been indifferent to the hopes and suffering of the peoples of the world.

In this regard, we are deeply solidary with our ECOWAS brothers in Africa. We wish great successes to the people of Mali, which has just demonstrated their great level of maturity, going to the polls with civic pride in their recent general elections, which marked the end of the period of Political Transition and, at the same time, sent a strong signal of national reconciliation and the beginning of their effort to rebuild a country destroyed by terrorist acts and unacceptable irredentism.

We take this opportunity to congratulate France for their crucial role in safeguarding the integrity of the Malian territory, which is the basis of the people of Mali's national sovereignty.

We repudiate the terrorist attacks that have taken place in Nigeria and Kenya, which have been spurred by radicalism and made so many victims in the name of religious intolerance. We hereby offer our full solidarity to our sister nations of Nigeria and Kenya, Presidents Goodluck Jonathan and Uhuru Kenyatta, their Governments and the families of the victims.

We hope that our neighboring Republic of Guinea may complete its electoral process successfully and thus open a path to a true national reconciliation in our sister nation.

In Egypt and in ravaged Syria, we hope that dialogue and diplomacy prevail over force, so that the sacrifice of so many human lives may be avoided.

In the Middle East, we continue to defend the Palestinian cause with as much conviction as ever. It is crucial for the Palestinian people, in particular, and for the political stability of and peace-building in the Arab world in general that the negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel advance toward the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State, in accordance with the relevant Resolutions of the United Nations.

In Europe, a special word of recognition to France, which has never abandoned us and continues very active in seeking better ways to help Guinea-Bissau overcome its political crisis. And to the Kingdom of Spain, whose Ambassador among us has been instrumental in the efforts toward political normalization.

Our friend Timor-Leste, a small country within the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) has shown an admirable spirit of cooperation with my country, thus demonstrating that friends do come through during the most difficult moments.

The Timorese authorities realized something very simple: supporting an institutional process of political normalization is not the same as supporting a coup d' état. Much to the contrary. Thank you, President Matan Ruak, thank you very much Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão.

Thank you very much, President Armando Guebuza, current President of the CPLP, for your fair assessment of the political process in my country, for your encouragement and appeal to the international community to provide financial support for the general elections in my country. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Murade Murargy, a Mozambican national who currently serves as Executive Secretary of the CPLP, for his dedication to the political normalization process in my country.

With the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, we hope one day – and may this day come soon – to see the full normalization of our relations, which is in the interest of all our peoples and sovereign States.

With respect to Cuba, we call, as we have always called, for the end of the two-decade embargo, the advancement of the reforms that are underway in that friendly nation, with which we have so many and so deep ties of friendship and solidarity.

With respect to Asia, we wish to express our profound gratitude to the People's Republic of China for the extent and intensity of their cooperation with my country. The fruits of this cooperation – particularly in the construction of key public buildings – will enter history as indelible symbols of a friendship that dates back to our armed struggle for national liberation.

I express the profound gratitude of the people of Guinea-Bissau to His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and current President of ECOWAS, and to His Excellency Mr. Goodluck Jonathan, President of the Federative Republic of Nigeria and President of the Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, as well as to all the Heads of State and Heads of Government of the member countries of ECOWAS.

Thank you for your attention.

