



STATEMENT BY MR. ABDELLAH BENMELLOUK, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, ON AGENDA ITEM 7 (H): AD HOC ADVISORY GROUP ON AFRICAN COUNTRIES EMERGING FROM CONFLICT, DURING THE GENERAL SEGEMENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (GENEVA, 17 JULY 2003)

Ms. Vice-President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, at the outset, to thank you, Ms. Vice-President, for giving me the opportunity to present to the Council the supplementary report by the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau, submitted to the Council as document E/2003/95. This document contains updated information on the activities of the Group since its previous report to the Council, namely document E/2003/8 of 10 January 2003, which is also at the disposal of delegations.

May I remind you that the Ad Hoc Advisory Group, following its first visit to Bissau in November 2002, formulated short- and long-term recommendations for development assistance to this country and, among them, proposed a partnership approach under which the international community would provide emergency assistance to the country, while authorities would take measures to promote political stability. This approach has been endorsed by ECOSOC in its resolution 2003/1 adopted on 30 January. The resolution also extended the mandate of the Group to the current substantive session of ECOSOC. Since then, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group has continued to closely follow the situation in Guinea-Bissau and to monitor how its recommendations were followed-up at the country level and by international development partners.

The supplementary report submitted to the Council highlights the role of the Group in keeping the momentum around development assistance to Guinea-Bissau. The meeting convened by the Group earlier this year in New York, with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Economy and Finance of Guinea-Bissau, as well as with donors and the Bretton Woods Institutions testify the willingness of the Group to keep Guinea-Bissau high on the agenda. This is certainly a major achievement of this exercise, which asserts the capacity of ECOSOC itself to promote development assistance and draw attention on a country in need.

The report also stresses the growing working relationship between the Ad Hoc Advisory Group and the Security Council over the last months. It enumerates actions taken by the two Councils to complement their work and mutually strengthen the message they send to the authorities of Guinea-Bissau and their international development partners. These relationships have been greatly facilitated by Amb. Gaspar Martins, Chairman of the Security Council Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, who took part in the work of the ECOSOC Group and has invited its members to attend a meeting of the Security Council working group on Guinea-Bissau in June. Furthermore, on 19 June, the President of the Security Council invited the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group to participate in a public meeting on Guinea-Bissau. I will not go into further details of these interactions here, as they are described in the report, but I need to highlight what has certainly been a height in the collaboration between the two bodies, namely the joint mission to Guinea-Bissau from 26 to 28 June 2003.

The Ad Hoc Advisory Group joined the Council in Guinea-Bissau, the first country visited during its mission to West Africa. They held a series of meetings with President Kumba Yalá, the Prime Minister and a number of Ministers, the Chief of Armed Forces, political parties, business leaders,

civil society representatives and international development partners, including donors. These meetings provided an opportunity for the two bodies, each within their respective mandate, to express to the authorities of Guinea-Bissau their concern on the deterioration of the situation in the country as well as their expectations on the short to medium run. The Ad Hoc Advisory Group worked in a remarkable manner with the Security Council mission, capably led by Ambassador Aguilar Zinser, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations.

The recent mission has only but strengthened the conviction of the Group that, in this critical phase, concrete support to the electoral process in Guinea-Bissau is deeply needed to avoid a relapse into conflict, ensure a return to the constitutional order and restore confidence with development partners. I should add that the work accomplished during the joint mission to Bissau seems to bear fruits on the ground. Commitments taken by President Kumba Yalá and recent developments concerning the electoral process indicate that the messages of the international community have been heard and that a constructive momentum around the organization of legislative elections and the granting of international assistance to that effect is taking place. Earlier this month, President Yalá has announced that the elections would be held on 12 October 2003, and some donor institutions have recently committed financial support, including the European Commission and the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa. Now that the electoral process seems to be back on track, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group recommends through this report that the Council further appeal to donors to support financially the organization of the elections through contributions to the UNDP Trust Fund specially established to that end.

Ms. Chairperson,

I would not end this presentation of the report before the Council without expressing the gratitude of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group to all those who have contributed to or facilitated its work over these last six months, with a special word of gratitude for Mr. David Stephen, Representative of the Secretary General in Guinea-Bissau and Chief of UNOGBIS, and Mr. Alberic Kacou, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Guinea-Bissau, and their respective teams, who have always responded promptly to our request for information and have been of considerable help for the organization of our recent mission to Bissau.

I hope that the Council will find the supplementary report of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group useful in its consideration of the situation in Guinea-Bissau and that it will continue to play an important role in the follow-up provided to the situation in the crucial post conflict phase that this country is going through.

Thank you very much for your attention.