

Guinea-Bissau: Guebuza Committed to Peace in Guinea-Bissau
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Maputo — Mozambican President Armando Guebuza, speaking in his capacity as chairperson of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), declared in Brussels on Monday that he is willing to continue working to establish a climate of peace in Guinea-Bissau.

He was speaking at a meeting with CPLP ambassadors in the Belgian capital on the eve of the European Development Days (EDD), a two day event due to begin on Tuesday. The crisis in Guinea-Bissau, where the legitimate government was deposed in a military coup in April, was the main theme of the meeting.

"We stand beside the people of Guinea-Bissau, and we shall continue to do all in our power so that the difficulties they face today may be overcome, and they return to living in peace", Guebuza said.

For Guebuza, coordination of action between various regional and international organisations is fundamental in searching for a solution to the current political situation in Guinea-Bissau.

He added that, during the latest meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, it was decided to send to Bissau a joint mission of the CPLP, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and the UN itself to assess the situation and recommend measures to stabilize the country.

But Guebuza warned that it was up to the Guinean actors themselves to play the central role in solving their country's problems, prioritizing channels of dialogue, which he regarded as "a powerful mechanism for building consensus".

As for participation in the EDD, Guebuza regarded this as a further opportunity for strengthening the relations between the European Union and the CPLP member states, and "to express our appreciation for the support we have received for the various development programmes in our country".

The ambassador from Sao Tome and Principe asked Guebuza to use his position to reactivate the organisation of the African countries that use Portuguese as their official language (PALOP).

Guebuza replied that there was no need to reactivate PALOP since, at the 2011 summit in Luanda, when Angola was coordinating the PALOP, it was decided that, whenever there is a CPLP meeting it should be preceded, if possible, by a conference between the PALOP members.

At the latest CPLP summit, held in Maputo in August, such a PALOP meeting took place "and the importance of these meetings was clear, because there are forums such as the African Union, in which the other members of the CPLP are not present".

Guebuza also held a meeting with the ambassadors to Brussels of members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a second international organisation that he currently chairs.

He announced that in 2013 Mozambique will host a high level conference to mobilise resources for the infrastructures of the region. This decision follows the SADC Maputo summit in August, which approved a SADC master plan for infrastructures.

"This plan is in line with the African Infrastructure Development Plan which was adopted by the African Union in January this year", said Guebuza

The Maputo conference will bring round the same table the SADC member states, representatives of the public and private sector and international development partners. He urged the SADC ambassadors to the EU to help ensure that the meeting is a success.

Assessing the current situation in the region, Guebuza said it was encouraging to note that SADC members are committed to good governance, the consolidation of democratic institutions, and dialogue for the peaceful resolution of disputes. He cited as examples the peaceful leadership transitions in Zambia, Malawi and Lesotho.

As a region, he added, SADC was working with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other partners to support the Democratic Republic of Congo, and help it overcome its current challenges. These include a rebellion in the east of the country, allegedly supported by Rwanda.

Guebuza stressed that SADC is consolidating the Free Trade Area that came into effect in 2008, and is preparing the next stage in regional integration, which will be the creation of a Customs Union.

Speaking at the meeting, the Namibian ambassador, and dean of the diplomatic corps accredited in Brussels, Hanno Rumpf, deplored the positions taken by the European Commissioner for Trade, Karel de Gucht, who is demanding the conclusion of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group, despite the existence of pending, unresolved issues.

The EPAs are designed to set up a free trade zone between the EU and ACP members. They are intended to eliminate all trade preferences between the EU and the ACP, and gradually remove of all trade barriers.

Rumpf warned that it will be very difficult in democratic countries to persuade parliaments to ratify binding agreements when there are still pending problems, which could have serious implications in the future.

He urged all ACP heads of state and government to join efforts and continue the negotiations until a definitive resolution of all pending issues. "We all want the EPAs", said Rumpf, "but we want agreements that are advantageous and fair for both sides".

Also on Monday, Guebuza was received by the Minister-President of the Belgian region of Flanders, Kris Peters, and attended an official dinner offered by the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso.

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