

Peacebuilding Commission
Sierra Leone Informal Country-Specific Meeting
Preparations for the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections
July 25 2007

Summary Note of the Chair

1. The primary purpose of this meeting was to provide an update on the preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Frank Majoor, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands. The Government of Sierra Leone was represented by H.E. Umaru B. Wurie, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
2. Updates on the status of electoral preparations were provided by the representatives of the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Sierra Leone Police, the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, the European Community, the UK High Commission, the United Nations, and the International Crisis Group.
3. All participants noted that the upcoming elections represent a critical milestone for peace and democracy consolidation in Sierra Leone. As the second post-conflict elections, they will test the maturity of state institutions and the democratic process. The government of Sierra Leone, recognizing its own primary responsibility in ensuring that the elections are conducted in a peaceful, fair and transparent manner, thanked the international community and the members of the Peacebuilding Commission for their steadfast support.
4. Although the elections are being held in a challenging environment with a new electoral system, constituency boundaries and registration process, the technical preparations for the elections have gone well and are on schedule. The National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission have actively engaged in outreach and confidence-building activities with the civil society, political parties and the media. The National Police has developed a comprehensive strategy to ensure security and public order for the elections period. Codes of conduct for the media and the political parties have been developed and agreed to by all relevant actors. Perhaps the most positive sign has been the level of interest and commitment to the elections demonstrated by the people of Sierra Leone. They have registered in overwhelming numbers and expect that the government, with the support from its international partners, will ensure that the elections are peaceful, free and in compliance with international and regional standards.
5. Notwithstanding these positive developments, a number of challenges remain. The possibility of violence continues to be a lingering threat. Recently there have been some isolated violent incidents, especially in the south and southeastern parts of the country. Tensions among political parties are also growing. A number of peacebuilding challenges will also have to be addressed by the new government immediately after the elections.

The continued engagement of the PBC was mentioned as critical in this regard. It was also noted that the international support to institutions such as the National Electoral Commission should not be seen as one-off activities but rather as part of overall support to democracy consolidation and must continue through local elections in 2008.

Recommendations:

6. The government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations stressed the importance of elections observers in monitoring and reporting on the fairness of the elections and, in this regard, encouraged members of the PBC to consider sending observer teams to join those already in the country. To date, the following countries and organizations noted their intentions to send observer teams: the Commonwealth (eight), ECOWAS (thirty), the European Union (eighty), UK (sixteen), the US (fifteen) and the US-based National Democratic Institute (eighteen). Participants also encouraged political parties and civil society organizations to deploy monitors to every polling station on the elections day to avoid irregularities and strengthen transparency.

7. The participants stressed that all parties should continue to adhere to the voluntary Code of Conduct on the elections. In particular, political party leaders should instruct all officials and supporters to refrain from violence and raise awareness that violence, or calls to violence, will be investigated and punished. The government of Sierra Leone should continue to ensure that state-run media cover the election impartially and in accordance with the Media Code of Conduct.

Next Steps:

8. The Chair noted that the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to monitor closely the electoral developments in Sierra Leone and invited all those who will be sending observer missions to share their reports and observations with the Commission. The Chair also indicated his intention to visit Sierra Leone, with the agreement of the new government, in September to participate in the government-led consultations on the draft Sierra Leone Framework for Cooperation. The next meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the draft Framework is scheduled for September 19, 2007.