

Message of the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission
At the ECOSOC Management Segment

Virtual Meeting, 21 July 2020

[as prepared for delivery]

Your Excellency Mr. Munir Akram, Vice-President of ECOSOC,
Excellencies,

- Thank you for inviting me to brief ECOSOC on the work of the Peacebuilding Commission with conflict-affected African countries.
- This is a critical time for countries affected by conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic is both a public health emergency and a human crisis, devastating communities throughout the world and impacting especially the poorest and most vulnerable. In this connection, it is important to ensure that the pandemic does not reverse progress in gender equality, women's empowerment, and the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.
- Hard-won peacebuilding gains are at risk as the pandemic has destroyed livelihoods, threatened social cohesion, strained the capacity of governance institutions, and increased instability. The crisis may potentially exacerbate underlying tensions, as well as compounding already dire humanitarian situations in affected countries. The socio-economic impact of the crisis on people in vulnerable situations is a particular concern.
- The challenges of this pandemic underscore the imperative of coherent, multi-dimensional and coordinated UN system response, along the integrated logic of the SDGs, in support of national peacebuilding priorities.
- This calls for enhanced collaboration between the PBC and ECOSOC to advance conflict-sensitive and inclusive assistance that help address the present health and humanitarian crisis and contribute to durable peace and sustainable development. Responses to the

pandemic must recognize the importance of leaving no one behind and ensure that the most vulnerable are protected and empowered.

- At its thematic meetings on the “*Impact of COVID-19 on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*” and “*Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19*”, on 8 April and 5 June respectively, the Commission echoed the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire and urgent action within the framework of his plan and report entitled «*Shared Responsibilities, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19*» to fight the pandemic and deliver on national priorities, including basic services.
- Additionally, since April, the PBC convened a series of virtual consultations to hear from countries and regions how they are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and foster a coherent response by the international community.
- These consultations highlighted the urgent need to support countries to safeguard their capacities to fight the pandemic while continuing to accompany them in advancement of their medium- and long-term national peacebuilding priorities, taking into full account the most vulnerable and women and youth. They also called for predictable and coordinated financial support as well as regional initiatives to combat exploitation of the crisis.
- The various consultations also served as a platform for exchange of lessons learned and good practices among the countries, including lessons from the successful fight against Ebola in West Africa.
- In Guinea Bissau, in March 2020, the de facto Government established an Inter-ministerial Committee with the dual task of focusing on the health response and the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, and developed a national response plan with the support of the United Nations. The UN Resident Coordinator, WHO and World Bank have assisted in operationalizing the national action plan and for resource mobilization. Despite these efforts, the economic outlook for Guinea-

Bissau remains dire. The World Bank had projected 4.5% GDP growth for the country but now estimates a contraction of roughly 3%.

- In Liberia, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have far-reaching social, economic, and political implications. The Commission called for a multi-pronged national response and collaborative efforts with the international community focusing on strengthening the health care system; addressing concerns including food security; promoting national reconciliation; and resuscitating the national economy, while addressing issues related to decentralization, human rights, violence against women and girls, small- and medium-sized enterprises and conflict prevention. International partners have rallied behind the Government, including the World Bank and IMF.
- In the Central African Republic, in the context of its advice to the Security Council during the renewal of the MINUSCA mandate, the PBC has been involved in bringing attention and building consensus on the socio-economic dimension of peacebuilding efforts in CAR, including the implementation of the National Peacebuilding and Recovery Plan (RCPCA). In the early days of the pandemic, the PBC has also convened relevant stakeholders to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on electoral and socio-economic recovery efforts, both with important implications on the peace process.
- Regional meetings on West Africa and the Sahel, Central Africa, and the Great Lakes have revealed similar challenges, as well as concerns about food security and the impact on displacement amid ongoing humanitarian crises.
- As discussed in country-specific and regional PBC meetings, the pandemic may lead to delays in electoral preparations planned for this year in several countries considered by the PBC, notably Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Niger, and pose challenges to organizing planned elections in Central African Republic later this year. In view of possible implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increased risk of a shortage of funds to organize elections in these countries and the need for improved coordination among relevant stakeholders in this regard.

- In response to COVID-19, the Peacebuilding Fund has reallocated funds where needed in support of national priorities, such as local peace initiatives and community engagement in implementing ceasefires, inclusive dialogues, strategic communication to prevent the spread of misinformation and hate speech, strengthening engagement of women and youth in COVID-19 responses and exploring programs to support the Secretary-General's call for global ceasefire.
- Member States have recognized that an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, security and development actors, within and outside of the United Nations system, consistent with their respective mandates, and the Charter, is critical to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and essential for improving respect for human rights, gender equality, empowering women and youth, strengthening the rule of law, eradicating poverty, building institutions, and advancing economic development in conflict-affected countries.
- While the unprecedented challenges from COVID-19 are testing trust in institutions and systems of governance, they also offer opportunities to strengthen institutions, reduce inequalities, and build back better so that no one is left behind. In view of the important synergies between peacebuilding and development, a strengthened partnership between ECOSOC and the PBC will be essential to this. I look forward to working with the President of ECOSOC and the members elected by ECOSOC in the PBC to advance these efforts.