

Peacebuilding Commission
Informal meeting of the Liberian Country Specific Configuration
6 September 2011

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 6 September 2011, the Chairperson of the Country Configuration for Liberia, H.R.H. Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, presided over the seventh informal meeting of the Configuration. The purpose of the meeting was to hear a briefing from Mr. Amara Konneh, Liberian Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs.

The Chairperson welcomed Minister Konneh acknowledging the Government's efforts in making considerable strides towards fulfilling their commitments as agreed upon in the Statement of Mutual Commitment (SMC). The Chair further referred to the PBC's commitments, encouraging members to forward summaries of their countries' contributions towards the realization of the eight PBC commitments.

Briefing by H.E. Amara Konneh, Liberian Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs

With reference to the draft report¹ that had been approved by the Joint Steering Committee (JSC), the Minister highlighted some of the key achievements made by the Government and its partners in relation to the SMC. He first focused **on rule of law and security sector reform**. Starting with the Justice and Security Regional Hubs, he informed that the first Hub in Gbarnga should be significantly functioning by December and at a 70% operational rate by March 2012. With regards to the other four (4) Hubs, the Government has moved forward in terms of identifying the following locations: Tubmanburg, Buchanan, Zwedru, and Harper. The Land Commission is in the process of securing the land rights.

The Minister also reported that the National Security Act has most recently been enacted into law following serious deliberations in the Legislature. This fills a critical gap in the security sector legal framework and will provide the necessary legal basis to complete the restructuring of the security sector. The Legislature had also approved increased budgetary allocations for the Police. The Minister explained that a key consideration in increasing their budget was the risk of possible violent incidents during the elections. The need for additional legislative reform is being further considered by the Law Reform Commission and the Land Commission with the former examining any needed changes to the Constitution and the latter focusing on land rights. Finally, the Minister made clear that while the engagement with the PBC and the work undertaken has been new, it has been incorporated into the development of the next development strategy: Liberia Rising.

On **national reconciliation**, the Minister updated the Configuration on work being carried out under the umbrella of the National Visioning Exercise, which is an integral part of the preparations for the

¹ A hardcopy of the draft report was shared with all Delegates during the meeting with an electronic version forwarded after the meeting.

next development strategy - Liberia Rising. This development strategy aims for Liberia to reach middle income status within the next 17 years. The strategy focuses on social, political and economic issues within which matters of direct relevance to national reconciliation, namely marginalization and decentralization, are analyzed. The Minister explained how a series of studies have been undertaken to develop a national vision. It is planned for these studies to be discussed further with small focus groups and then for a national consultative process to be organized after the elections.

Elections and the recent rejection of the four (4) propositions of the referendum were then discussed. The Minister shared his views on the advantages the adoption of the different propositions would have had if they had been approved. He focused primarily on the proposition between a simple majority versus an absolute majority putting forward how a simple majority would prevent the need for a run-off. He concluded on this point with an appeal for the PBC to urge all election monitors to arrive well in advance of the elections.

Before opening the floor, the Chairperson expressed his appreciation for the Minister's briefing and sought clarity on the budget. Specifically, he inquired how the budget would be impacted by the passage of the Omnibus Security Act with reference to the security sector budgetary figures provided in the draft report. The Minister clarified that budget had been passed before the Act and would be revised accordingly noting that prior to this various administrative matters needed to be decided including severance pay to staff in government security agencies that have been eliminated.

Subsequently, four (4) Members took the floor. All commended the Government and its partners for the progress realized offering their support in surmounting challenges. Questions were posed about the elections, security reform, the Minister's view on the engagement with the PBC and the countries' greatest challenges.

On elections, the Minister, qualifying that he is not a legal expert, informed that numerous meetings were being held between the different political parties to find a solution. Civil society groups were also engaging with a focus to prevent violence. He further elaborated upon the logistical challenges facing the National Election Commission (NEC) emphasizing the support of the UN family; he pointed out how dependant the NEC is on international partners, primarily UNMIL. The delivery of ballots was cited as an example of the degree of dependency and also used to illustrate the disadvantages of this dependency in view of printing error on the ballot. The Minister further highlighted the great likelihood for a run in view of large numbers of candidates per each elected positions illustrating this point with reference to the number of candidates running for legislators position- approximately 7 to 8 candidates per position.

On security questions, the Minister touched on a range of issues related to the Police. He commended the Police's work with communities and how the Hubs are facilitating decentralization efforts of the Government. He felt that it was too early to comment on the right size of the Hub. South-South support from Botswana in the form of police training was also highlighted alongside the importance of identifying the right staff and properly equipping them to perform their job.

On transition issues, the Minister added that the departure of UNMIL will not only create gaps in the area of security but in other areas such as work with local government.

The Minister put forward unemployment as his greatest worry noting that the Government is looking at how multinational corporations might be able to help alongside education and skills training for unemployed.

On the engagement with the PBC, the Minister praised his close working relations with the Chairperson, who was commended for taking the time to understand the culture of Liberia, as a key reason for the success of the Liberia Configuration. Additionally, the Minister advocated for more video-teleconferences between the PBC and stakeholders in Liberia.

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