

## **Letter of the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Security Council on the UNOWAS mandate review**

(16 December 2019)

The Peacebuilding Commission would like to bring to the attention of the Security Council the following peacebuilding priorities in West Africa and the Sahel. This draws from the Commission's engagement over the last years in the respective sub-regions and individual countries, in collaboration with UNOWAS and UNOCA and in line with Security Council resolution 1645 of 2005 and 2282 of 2016 and presidential statements S/PRST/2017/2 and S/PRST/2018/3.

These activities included a number of regional, thematic, and country-specific PBC discussions, as well as visits to the region by the PBC Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Chairs of PBC configurations since 2017. In all of these activities, the PBC's focus has been on supporting national ownership of peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a particular focus on engaging the countries of the region and sub-regional actors, including ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the African Development Bank. Based on these activities, the PBC would offer the following observations:

There has been considerable progress in building and sustaining peace in the region, in particular with peaceful elections and transitions of power in Sierra Leone and Liberia, peaceful resolution of the crisis in The Gambia, and successful transitions of peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The PBC commends the important role the UNOWAS has played in supporting these efforts, in partnership with regional actors. During the recent PBC visit to the countries of the Mano River Union, the Government of Sierra Leone expressed their readiness to exit from the formal agenda of the PBC in recognition of the progress their country has made in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Serious challenges remain across the region, including a deteriorating security and humanitarian situations in some parts of West Africa and the Sahel, rising levels of displacement, social and economic inequalities, environmental degradation, and cross-border risks including illegal armed and terrorism groups, trafficking in small arms and light weapons and drugs, rising tensions between pastoralists and farmers related to transhumance, high levels of youth unemployment, adverse effects of climate change, low levels of gender equality. These are complex challenges which require a comprehensive approach to address root causes of conflict in the Sahel and West Africa, prevent further escalation of conflict, and build and sustain peace. Regional approaches need to be strengthened, with a particular focus on cross-border challenges and the need to strengthen engagement with regional partners. Moreover, each country's unique context and challenges must be taken into account so that the international community can better support nationally-led peacebuilding efforts.

Through its convening role, the PBC has helped to mobilize support for implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), in collaboration with Sahelian countries, the G5 Sahel, the African Union, the European Union and other regional and international organizations. Through their engagement with the PBC, countries of the region have

called for more help from international partners to address the challenges they face, including the need for sustained funding for actions that directly benefit the concerned populations, and better coordination of international efforts.

Several Member States have called for the need to strengthen coordination among the range of local, national, regional, and international efforts, including alignment of an overarching regional strategy with country-specific peacebuilding priorities. It is important to note that no single entity has the authority and capacity to coordinate the implementation of UNISS through UN Country Teams and regional offices throughout the region. It is also important to bear in mind that, under the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Notwithstanding, UNOWAS does have a role in supporting cross-pillar peacebuilding efforts.

Based on these observations, the PBC in line with its advisory role to the Security Council would like to offer the following advice on the role UNOWAS can play:

- UNOWAS could support a more integrated and system-wide collaboration on current and emerging threats, including by contributing to risk analysis, horizon scanning, and strategy development, which could help support an integrated and cross-pillar approach with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the region.
- UNOWAS could support strengthened coordination and partnerships with national and regional actors in the subregion, including ECOWAS, G5 Sahel, MRU, Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the African Development Bank.
- UNOWAS mandate could prioritize the support for meaningful participation of women and youth in political processes and peacebuilding efforts in the region.

The PBC could assist UNOWAS in accordance with its mandate, in the following ways:

- Supporting a focus on cross-border and regional approaches, including sharing lessons learned from PBF programming;
- Convening relevant discussions in New York with a focus on coordination, and bridging discussions among the relevant bodies;
- Serving as a platform for international partners and other stakeholders to exchange information and coordinate activities, mobilize international attention, and marshal resources;
- Strengthening engagement with development partners and IFIs in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace;
- Continuing engagement with relevant countries of West Africa and Sahel, including with Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Liberia; and
- Providing advice at the request of the Security Council in advance of upcoming mandate renewals in Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

Overall, the Peacebuilding Commission's engagement in West Africa and the Sahel has been a concrete illustration of the Security Council's call (S/PRST/2017/2) for close and effective cooperation between UNOWAS and the Commission. The Commission remains committed to continue supporting UNOWAS central role in contributing to coordination and coherence of

efforts to address the peacebuilding and sustaining peace priorities in the region, and to continue close cooperation with other key actors present in the region including the G5 Sahel, the African Union, the European Union, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries and other regional and international organizations.