

Peacebuilding Commission
Informal meeting of the Liberian Country Specific Configuration
24 May 2012

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 24 May 2012, the Chairperson of the Country Configuration for Liberia, H.E. Staffan Tillander, presided over the eight informal meeting of the Configuration. The purpose of the meeting was to brief the Configuration on his first mission to Liberia.

Briefing on the PBC Chair's Mission to Liberia

The Chairperson provided an overview of the mission undertaken from the 14 to 18 May 2012. He informed members that details would be available in the report and that copies of his statement were available. He summarized some of the key activities highlighting the field visits to Grand Cape Mount and Bong Counties and a series of meetings with Government officials, diplomatic community and United Nations officials. He further expressed his appreciation to the Government, UNMIL, UNCT, DPKO and PBSO for all of their support in realizing the mission. The Chairperson also acknowledged the important role played by the Swedish Embassy in Monrovia during his visit.

The Chairperson first shared his principal impression with reference to his meeting with the H.E. the President. He found her vision for her second term, "transformation", as encapsulating the challenges facing the country. In the words of the President, "transformation" refers to undertaking radical reforms over the next five years, most notably in the justice system and in strengthening the security sector.

The Chairperson provided updates on the peacebuilding priorities. On national reconciliation, the Government was finalizing a Roadmap, which would lead to the preparation of a national policy and strategy for national reconciliation. The Roadmap is proposed to be vetted and validated by the public. The Chairperson had underscored the importance of ensuring that this process would be inclusive. He also highlighted his meeting with a local peace committee and with youth at a youth center in Grand Cape Mount. He praised the structural approach of the Land Commission and the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism being pursued for land disputes.

On justice and security issues, the Chairperson first summarized a meeting with the Chief Justice and four of his Associate Justices, whose briefing gave him a clear understanding of the breadth of reform needed to enable the justice system to respond to current demands. The urgency for reforming the system became evident from his visit to the Gbarnga prison, where an estimated 80 percent of the population comprised of pre-trial detainees. The Chairperson also commented on his visit to the Hub, which he found to be an impressive project but one for which monitoring and coordination activities needed to be strengthened. He highlighted that that the Government had given assurances that the recurrent costs would be integrated into the budget. The interest of the Government for a lead country in police training was equally raised and the Chair informed of his intention to hold a Steering Group meeting to look further into the issue.

In terms of PBC engagement, the Chairperson first emphasized the importance of national ownership, which was at the forefront during his trip. He was supportive of the Government's view that they should be leading national processes. At the same time he emphasized the invaluable role for the PBC to assist in providing advice and promoting accountability, transparency and results. On the issue of transparency, the Chairperson praised the Government for its recent briefings on the draft budget to the bilateral partners. He equally noted the need for greater coordination among partners. As regards the New Deal, he mentioned discussions with the Minister of Finance and Planning as well as with the Swedish and American Embassy colleagues. The common assessment is that this is an opportunity and one for which the discussions are still in their infancy.

Throughout his briefing, the Chairperson underscored the importance for the work of the PBC to be part of the broader context. He also highlighted the need for gender considerations to be better integrated into the work of the Commission. Concerning resource mobilization, his view was that the Justice and Security Trust Fund provided a means to facilitate a coordinated approach to fund raising. He also informed in relation to fundraising that Norway and Sweden were undertaking a review of the Justice and Security Trust Fund.

Prior to opening the floor to the Members, the Chairperson gave the floor to the Pakistani representative to brief on the Sanctions Committee's mission to Liberia, which had taken place at the same time as the PBC's Chair's mission. The representative provided a brief background to the work of the Committee noting that sanctions had been imposed in 2003. While their mission was focused on the sanctions, there were three relevant links: national reconciliation, Security Sector Reform and land issues. With regards to asset freeze and bans, he explained that Liberian Civil Society felt that lifting of these sanctions needed to be linked with progress on national reconciliation; whereas the Government expressed a view that lifting these sanctions would help the reconciliation process. The Representative clarified that the enumerated purpose of sanctions is not linked to transitional justice. Concerning the arms embargo, there was consensus that it should remain in its current form. The lifting of this sanction should correspond to the capacity of security actors. In their interactions, the issue of land emerged as a major source of concern. There was some concern that the Land Commission's work was progressing rather slow.

Subsequently, nine (9) Members took the floor. Members posed an array of questions. A few points concerning the status of national reconciliation were shared (Liberia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria), in particular thoughts on the role of the Independent National Commission for Human Rights, how the Roadmap links with other transitional justice issues, and the importance of the validation process. A few members (Germany, Nigeria, Ukraine) were interested in police training and how PBC could assist in responding to the requests for a lead country. Ukraine supported the focus on the police, informing that they are willing to consider increasing their force contribution to Liberia. Nigeria also observed that land disputes are a challenge throughout Africa. A few members (Canada, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa) spoke of the importance of coherence between the work of the PBC and actors in Liberia as well as between the PBC and the work of the Sanctions Committee. Australia commented that they would look forward to receiving the assessment of the Justice and Security Trust Fund. There was equally support for giving greater attention to gender issues (Liberia and South Africa).

5 June 2012