Peacebuilding Commission
Informal meeting of the Liberian Country Specific Configuration
24 February 2014 (10:00 a.m., Conference Room 1)

Chair's Summary of the Discussion

Background

1. The Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an informal meeting on Monday, 24 February 2014 at the United Nations Headquarters. H.E. Mr. Staffan Tillander, Chair of the Configuration, briefed the Configuration on his recent mission to Liberia from 2 to 7 February. He was accompanied by Mr. Kenny Gluck, Director and Deputy Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and Ms. Kaori Minami, Peacebuilding Officer of PBSO. The Chair opened the configuration meeting by expressing his appreciation to UNMIL and PBSO for all the support for his visit. He also thanked the Permanent Representative of Liberia for taking part in his meetings with senior government officials in Monrovia. Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) of PBSO, also addressed the configuration meeting. The Chair and the ASG expressed their heartfelt condolences for the demise of Ms. Kathy Mangones, Representative of UN Women in Liberia.

Highlights of the mission to Liberia

2. The Chair shared the following key points on the outcome of his mission to Liberia, the report of which had already been shared with the Configuration prior to the meeting.

3. A number of in-depth discussions on the Statement of Mutual Commitments (SMC) were held in Monrovia including at the senior-level with the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Minister of Justice, UNMIL and other partners. The third review of the SMC was to be finalized by March. While the implementation of the commitments was on track, in a number of areas, important steps including implementation remained.

4. On the way forward of the SMC, 1) the SMC should be continued as a useful checklist of actions to be taken; 2) there should be a frank review of achievements and shortcomings; and 3) the SMC should be extended for one year as it is, and there is no need to revise the current targets and goals at this stage

5. Justice and security had been the focus of a number of the discussions held during the Chair's mission and also a subject of interest in the Security Council. Police training was one of the areas which required improvement in terms of both quality and quantity. After the mission, the Chair was informed that on 10 February, the Government of Liberia had organized a meeting with key actors in the security and rule of law sectors to discuss issues faced by the Liberia National Police including training and benchmarks related to

UNMIL's drawdown. A follow-up meeting had also taken place on 19 February. The strengthening of police capacity was important to fill in gaps as UNMIL was drawing down. In the broader context, a comprehensive approach to justice and security (a "second generation justice and security joint programme") that linked short and medium-term peacebuilding efforts to the country's long-term development. The Gbarnga Hub highlighted the need for this comprehensive approach.

6. The Gbarnga Hub, launched in February 2013, was operational. At the lessons learned workshop, discussions focused on its service capacity and the issue of access to justice. Service components in hubs 2 and 3 had been implemented only a year after the first hub which could have been expedited. Many challenges remain for the Gbarnga Hub including running costs and logistical issues. If this was a challenge for one hub, it might be even more challenging for two or more hubs. A comprehensive approach should take into account all necessary components to make the hubs successful. Mechanisms for comprehensive planning need to be in place and linked to short and long-term planning.

7. The ASG of PBSO emphasized that the hubs were an ambitious undertaking by the PBC and Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and was an important step towards decentralization, as most post-conflict countries trended to focus services in their capitals while people in remote areas were left out. The ASG cautioned, however, of the fear of creating "white elephants". Follow through of the hub projects was thus important. The Government must lead the process in order to achieve national ownership. She also praised the Government of Liberia for their contributions to the recurrent budget of the first hub as well as the capital costs for the next two hubs. Also noted was that constant surveys by a third party, preferably an NGO or a civil society organization (CSO) rather than the leading government agency, would be useful for gauging the effectiveness of the services of the hubs.

8. A coordinated approach for national reconciliation efforts needed to be maintained. The lack of capacity of the Independent National Human Rights Commission is a concern. Ambassador Weah's work for national reconciliation should also be coordinated and aligned with the overall Strategic Roadmap for National Healing and Reconciliation. The ASG of PBSO noted that a tranche of $15 million had been provided by the PBF in 2013, a part of which had been allocated for national reconciliation. The reason for the slow progress in the implementation of reconciliation projects was unclear and caused a concern. The ASG pointed out that the PBC and PBF needed to find their niche in the overall coordinated approach, which had been challenging.

9. The PBF has been catalytic in supporting national reconciliation, but the Government of Liberia needs to take the lead. Otherwise, there would be no base for donors to provide funding. On south-south cooperation, Liberia was looking towards other counties as models.

10. There was progress in land and natural resource management issues. UN-Habitat was working on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and collaborating with the World Bank and USAID. In Kakata, the Land Coordination Centre was engaging in community-level land disputes through a combination of traditional and non-traditional measures. A new land law and agency had been proposed. The World Bank and UNDP had been supporting the Government to address these issues and were currently conducting a study which was expected to be released in April.

11. In his meetings with senior government officials, the Chair shared the recommendations indicated in the letter from the Chair of Sanctions Committee on Liberia dated 12 December 2013. The interlocutors were aware of the recommendations. It was important that the international community continued to work closely with the Government of Liberia on this matter.

12. The democratic process and inclusivity are important for the peacebuilding process in Liberia. The Chair met with civil society organizations and community leaders during his visit as they were agents of change and also played important roles in gender issues. The PBF also provided support for activities on gender issues. The Chair noted that he would host an event in mid-March at the Permanent Mission of Sweden on women's empowerment in Liberia in the context of peacebuilding and natural resource management.

Comments from delegations

13. Comments raised from several delegations include the following:
    - As indicated in paragraph 27 of the Chair's mission report, women played important roles in national reconciliation efforts, and the PBF strategy on reconciliation should be supported in this regard.
    - The PBC should focus on taxation and revenue issues in light of land and natural resource management in the next one or two years. It is hoped that this would also be included in the Chair's briefing to the Security Council in March.
    - Plans for the revised justice and security programme, progress in the New Deal, and the study on land and natural resources by the World Bank and UNDP should be followed up.

14. The Chair underlined that that gender issues must be a priority for the reconciliation agenda. Related issues that are of sensitive nature have been discussed at the local level. Women take part in various mechanisms including traditional ones. The Palava Hut talks are important in this regard. A broad range of support to facilitate the talks should be encouraged, and the PBC could play a strong role in this regard.

15. The ASG of PBSO shared the discussions she previously had with Ms. Kathy Mangones of UN Women in Liberia on cross-border trade issues and the relation to peacebuilding.

The ASG stressed her hope that activities to tackle the issue would be activated, and that lessons learned would be shared. The Chair also noted that there were cases when security institutions made the issue of women and cross-border trade even more difficult. It was a complex issue, and different measures had to be put in place at the same time.

16. The Chair agreed to keep in mind the issues related to land and natural recourses as he prepared for his briefing to the Security Council on 20 March. He also noted that while different measures had been taken to address transparency and accountability issues, concessions still had been established without resolving all issues. He added that he had sent an initial reply in December in response to the letter from the Chair of the Sanctions Committee, and another reply would follow shortly.

17. On the plan for a new second generation justice and security joint programme, the Chair indicated that there were no concrete plans yet. He emphasized that the programme had taken too long to get into place. Relevant actors needed to come together to plan the next course of action. He also noted that the PBC would continue to work together with UNMIL on rule of law, justice and security and national reconciliation as indicated in Security Council resolution 2116.

18. On the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, the Chair stated that if Liberia prepares a New Deal Compact, then the work of the PBC and the SMC should be aligned to it. There should be one instrument to guide dialogue and the PBC's work.

19. The representative of the Peacebuilding Office (PBO) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) informed that the Joint Steering Committee would, in its next meeting, discuss the 2014 targets and inform the respective government institutions of the outcome. Meanwhile, with regard to the two targets in the SMC specifically dealing with the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and recommendations, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and the MIA were planning a review meeting in June 2013. On national reconciliation, the Government, through the MIA, was organizing a peacebuilding and reconciliation forum to be held at the end of March 2014 that would: 1) review all conflict factors as captured in policy-related documents, conflict mapping reports, and hotspot assessment across the country; 2) determine the level of synergies and alignment of various programs and policies to address these conflict issues with the Agenda for Transformation, National Vision 2030 as well as the National Reconciliation Roadmap; 3) set in place an overarching peacebuilding and reconciliation action plan (work plan) for the implementation of the reconciliation programme and related programmes; 4) discuss and foster the establishment of a peacebuilding and reconciliation trust fund; and 5) conclude the resource mobilization strategy intended to mobilize resources domestically that will help ensure the sustainability of peacebuilding and reconciliation programme for implementation. The concept paper for the forum was being developed and would be shared with all key actors. UNMIL, UNDP, the UN Country Team, CSOs, international NGOs and other multilateral and bilateral partners were expected to participate.

20. On south-south cooperation, the Minister of Internal Affairs had talks with the Foreign Ministry on ways to accelerate this process. It was being proposed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs designate a focal person on the south-south cooperation engagement. Other avenues have also been explored to learn from experiences of other counties and institutions. As a joint initiative, the University of Liberia, PBO and other key stakeholders were planning to conduct a National Reconciliation Barometer Survey in Liberia. The objective would be to assess and analyze various dimensions of reconciliation, including people's understanding of reconciliation, their views on progress made since 2003, how to take reconciliation forward, and other areas. A pilot survey was expected to be done in 2014.

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