

Final Report of the PBC Working Group on Lessons Learned

“Transition of UN Missions: What Role for the PBC?”

Executive Summary

The Peacebuilding Commission’s Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) addressed the issue of “Transition of UN Missions and the Role of the PBC” during 2014. The WGLL identified two major challenges faced by post-conflict countries after the withdrawal of UN missions, namely, 1) funding and technical capacity gaps for peacebuilding priorities and 2) sustaining inclusive political processes. While the UN has been developing its capacity to respond to these challenges, further efforts are needed inside and outside the UN.

The PBC can contribute to creating an enabling environment for transitions in its agenda countries, including through its advisory function to the Governments concerned, to the Security Council and other relevant stakeholders.

I. Introduction

This year, as proposed by the Chair during a formal meeting of the Organizational Committee held on 29 January, the PBC’s Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) focused its work programme on the issue of transition of UN missions to UN Country Teams, as a crucial phase in the transition from conflict to sustainable peace. In recommending the establishment of the PBC in 2005, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in his report titled, “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All” (A/59/2005), that “there [was] a gaping hole in the United Nations institutional machinery: no part of the United Nations system effectively address[ed] the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace.”

The particular objective of the WGLL was to draw lessons from ongoing transition processes in three countries on the PBC agenda, namely, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Liberia. The transition in Sierra Leone was of particular focus for the WGLL in view of the drawdown and subsequent closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) in March 2014.

As part of its political accompaniment function, the PBC supports the efforts made by the countries on its agenda to create an environment conducive to a successful and smooth transition. The PBC has engaged in this accompaniment exercise during and following UNIPSIL’s

transition. The PBC is also accompanying Burundi's efforts as it prepares for the drawdown and closure of the United Nations Office in Burundi (BNUB) towards the end of 2014. The Chair of the Burundi Configuration participated in the Steering Group that oversaw the planning of the transition under the leadership of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the SRSG. In addition, the phased-downsizing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has begun, although the scope and timeframe of the transition is currently being reconsidered by the Security Council due to the outbreak of Ebola. In this connection and as a New York-based intergovernmental body with an advisory function to the Security Council, the PBC is expected to draw the attention of Member States to the priorities of and challenges facing countries experiencing UN missions' transitions.

Through three expert-level meetings held on 3 April, 6 May and 10 June 2014, the WGLL provided a platform for Member States and the representatives of the countries on the agenda to exchange views with lead UN operational entities (DPA, DPKO, UNDP) and PBSO on lessons learned from recent transitions. The discussions addressed the progress made in managing transitions of UN missions, as well as outstanding challenges requiring greater commitment from the countries concerned and the international community. The Chair shared some of these points during the first PBC annual session held on 23 June.

This report intends to summarize the outcome of these discussions with a view to providing clarity on the practical role that the PBC can play in support of the countries experiencing these transitions. This clarity can be particularly helpful as the upcoming 2015 review of the 'peacebuilding architecture' seeks to identify ways to adapt the functions of the PBC to the current and emerging realities and needs of the UN and the countries emerging from conflict.

II. Challenges resulting from UN missions' withdrawal

The Working Group affirmed that efforts aimed at strengthening national institutions and capacity during and beyond the UN missions' drawdown need to be further stepped up in ways that respect the national ownership of the transition process. The Working Group noted that the following challenges may negatively affect these efforts, namely, 1) funding and technical capacity gaps for peacebuilding priorities; and 2) sustaining inclusive political processes.

1) Funding and technical capacity gaps

The withdrawal of Security Council-mandated UN missions can be economically destabilizing as discontinuing activities by the missions and the departure of its personnel usually lead to increased financial burden on countries in transition. The sizeable footprint that a mission may have had on the local economy is also reduced as only a margin of its activities is shifted accordingly to the UNCTs. At the same time, a direct and indirect financial impact can worsen by decreased attention by donors and partners, as well as funding for the UN on the ground. This decreased attention takes place at a stage when the country requires targeted financial and technical support for re-building critical institutions.

In addition, UNCTs have different funding arrangements from those of UN missions. They are dependent on donor preferences, as well as on changing realities and priorities of the countries concerned. These changes require a calibrated and focused response from the UN System as a whole, the UNCT and the international community.

On the other hand, the “financial cliff” caused by the drawdown of UN missions can be offset by early focus on building the capacity of the country concerned to mobilize domestic resources and to create an environment conducive to private sector growth and investment.

Therefore, a key lesson drawn from the experiences of countries that have undergone UN mission transitions is the need for partners to step up and target their financial and technical support to peacebuilding-related priorities and activities that are most affected by the emerging “financial cliff.” Partners also need to support national capacity development programmes for domestic resource mobilization and private sector growth. The UNCT, especially the agencies, funds and programmes, should focus more on and give further priority to identified state- and peacebuilding goals. In addition, to ensure a smooth and seamless transition, it is critical that recruitment and deployment of UN personnel is completed in a timely manner in order to avoid gaps in the implementation of critical programmes.

2) Sustaining inclusive political processes

The drawdown and withdrawal of UN missions invariably results in a gap in political acumen which is a key mandate for UN missions. The role of the UN presence in support of political processes is crucial to sustain the focus on outstanding and continuing democratic processes in the countries concerned. These processes include national reconciliation, transitional justice and the processes leading to putting in place or further building effective mechanisms and institutions that ensure and successfully manage inclusive dialogue among the various actors in the country. Compared to UN missions, however, UNCTs and UNDP presences on the ground do not play an explicit role in support of political processes, despite the need for such a role in many situations (e.g. Guinea, Sierra Leone and Burundi). The improved coordination between UNDP and DPA through such initiatives as the Peace and Development Adviser Programme and the establishment of DPA liaison offices and the creation of stand-alone human rights offices are among those measures that helped address the gap to sustain political engagement created as a result of the withdrawal of UN missions. The follow-up to the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) also provided an interesting example as a DPA liaison office was established as part of the UN Country Team. This office was funded through voluntary contributions and tasked with ensuring continued political engagement following UNMIN’s withdrawal.

The United Nations has thus developed various measures to respond to the need for continued political engagement. Yet, experience has proven that the limited capacity for political accompaniment by the United Nations once a mission departs represents a major gap that continues to challenge the effective and timely response to threats that can jeopardize peace consolidation efforts.

From the programmatic side, the drawdown of UNIPSIL represented a good model in transition planning. The political, security and human rights aspects of UNIPSIL’s mandate were residual tasks that needed to be gradually and continually addressed by relevant entities of the

UNCT at the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner in order to ensure a smooth transition. To this end, a well-articulated Transition Plan was developed in consultations with the government and all other relevant UN actors. The Transition Plan helps clarify the responsibilities for the implementation of ongoing political processes and address the gap in attention and programmatic focus.

In addition, Burundi offers another good example of transition planning. A similar transition plan was developed by the Steering Group, highlighting residual tasks and relevant UNCT entities responsible for the continued support. In the meantime, an Electoral Observer Mission mandated by the Security Council will accompany the electoral process in 2015. And, with the Government's agreement, the High Commissioner for Human Rights will operate a stand-alone office in Burundi to take forward the Human Rights agenda and accompany the transitional justice process. Burundi's transition plan, therefore, represents a model that would reinforce the need to design and implement programmatic tasks within a broader and more strategic accompaniment framework.

III. PBC's Support for UN Transitions

It is worth noting a number of observations from the PBC's engagement in Sierra Leone, Burundi and Liberia, particularly in the case of the drawdown of UNIPSIL. These observations can help shed light on the potential role of the PBC during and beyond the transitions of UN missions in two main areas, as follows:

Creation of an enabling environment for transitions by:

- 1) Offering a broad-based political platform for drawing greater international attention to emerging opportunities and needs in the countries concerned as they transition to a more development-focused UN presence. In this connection, the PBC can play a preventive role helping to mitigate risks of relapse into conflict. The PBC can also help position the countries concerned in a more positive light internationally to help attract investment and build greater confidence in its economy.
- 2) Pointing to challenges and gaps, including national capacity development, requiring greater national and international commitment. In some cases, this might involve the revisiting of benchmarks for transitions. In order to address those challenges and gaps identified, the PBC can provide an intergovernmental forum for countries in transition to engage their partners in peacebuilding issues and processes requiring additional and sustained attention, including political processes, preparations for elections, security sector reform, youth employment, empowerment of women, domestic resource mobilization and natural resources. In Liberia, the PBC continued to call for increased training for security sector officers in light of the UNMIL drawdown and the need to be able to fill in the gaps when the drawdown is completed.
- 3) Closely engaging regional and sub-regional organisations, including by providing support to regional and sub-regional initiatives, to ensure their sustained engagement in accompanying critical political processes in support of national efforts. The PBC can help highlight the

perspectives of regional actors among New York based actors, while also ensuring greater coherence in messaging between regional and international actors. Political support for south-south cooperation may also facilitate the mobilization of additional assistance from the region and beyond.

- 4) Engaging peace and development actors in New York, in close collaboration with operational actors in the field and with other international financial institutions. Such engagement should take place at the earliest stages of the UN transition process, as well as during and after the closing of a UN mission in order to facilitate greater alignment between development and peacebuilding-related priorities. In Sierra Leone, the PBC accompanied and helped to link the transition plan with key aspects of the Agenda for Prosperity. It also accompanied the conduct of the fragility assessment in the context of the development of the Mutual Accountability Framework in implementation of the New Deal. Efforts are also being made by Liberia to develop its own compact with partners.
- 5) Providing the political support for the PBF to engage in funding targeted projects and programmes that would address potential financial gaps resulting from UN missions' drawdown.

PBC's Advisory Role to the Security Council's Discussion of Transition Strategies

While the Security Council has the primary responsibility to decide on the withdrawal of UN missions, the PBC can support the Council's efforts to ensure smooth transitions by offering a broad-based membership forum¹ to help identify areas requiring increased attention and support for successful transition.

In this context, the PBC can support the Security Council's consideration of transitions strategies by:

- 1) Providing an intergovernmental platform to support the Council's efforts during pre-drawdown consultations with national and other relevant stakeholders. The results of these consultations aim to help the Security Council factor in its decisions on drawdown public perceptions, priorities and concerns linked to mission drawdowns, as well as the vision/need for the post-transition UN presence.
- 2) Advising the Council on the holistic progress towards sustainable peace and development that countries undergo (in particular political dialogue and institution building processes) prior to, during and after UN transitions. Indeed, transition of UN missions in a country is only a part of the overall transition that countries undergo when emerging from conflict. The PBC can advise the Council on national preparedness for assuming key functions performed by UN missions with support of development actors from both within and outside the UN system.

¹ For example, the PBC Configuration for Sierra Leone consists of PBC Organizational Committee members (31 Member States) and additional members (39 members), that include Member States (Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Ireland, Italy, Liberia, Portugal, Sierra Leone and Turkey), International Financial Institutions (World Bank, IMF, AfDB), regional organizations (MRU, ECOWAS, AU, OIC, EU) and the wider UN System (ECA, UNIPSIL, UNOWA, UNODC, Interpol and IOM).

- 3) Providing a broad-based membership forum/platform to consider the practicality for UNCTs to take up tasks which UN missions implemented prior to drawdown, particularly in light of different funding arrangements from those of UN missions.
- 4) Providing a political forum to help sustain political accompaniment and engagement from the international community, including from regional organisations, beyond the Council's periodic consideration of the situations concerned. The PBC should also help forge a more organic relationship between the Security Council and regional organizations, such as the African Union.
- 5) Alerting the Security Council of possible risks that may cause relapse into conflict in the countries concerned. Coordinated and concerted actions may be taken jointly by the PBC and the Security Council.

IV. Way Forward

The PBC has an important role to play during the transition of UN missions which represents a critical phase in the overall transformation of a country from conflict to sustainable peace and development.

Yet, when contemplating its role during the transition, the PBC needs to be realistic about what it can offer; the PBC is neither present in the field nor has an operational mandate.

As indicated by this report, the Working Group's discussions this year have clarified that the broad-based membership would enable the PBC to leverage the collective political weight of its members to contribute to creating an enabling environment for transitions in its agenda countries, including through its advisory function to the Governments concerned, to the Security Council and other relevant stakeholders.

Going forward, the Chair of the Working Group would like to suggest the following two points with regard to appropriate modalities of PBC engagement during and after transition processes: 1) modalities for effectively engaging important international, regional and bilateral partners and 2) modalities for engaging with the Security Council.

1. Modalities for effectively engaging important international, regional and bilateral partners in New York and in close cooperation with the operational actors in the field

Flexible modes of engagement with various partners in support of countries in transition is greatly needed so that the PBC can accommodate emerging needs on the ground and help address gaps resulting from the transitions of UN missions.

The case of Sierra Leone is particularly relevant in this regard. The transformation of the UN presence in the country was accompanied by a complementary evolution in the PBC's role. The PBC had planned to scale down its engagement in the coming year by adopting a lighter and more responsive approach. As such, the PBC has been moving towards a flexible mode of engagement that is based on requests from peacebuilding partners in the field, including the Government of Sierra Leone, international partners and the UNCT. Such engagement would

continue to be based on national peacebuilding priorities, as outlined in the Agenda for Prosperity. To this end, the Chair of the Sierra Leone Configuration proposed to establish a smaller advisory group with open membership, but focused on those most directly engaged with and committed to sustaining their support to Sierra Leone. This advisory group can be convened as needed. A light stock-taking is planned to be undertaken in the first quarter of 2015 in order to assess this approach and to establish the most appropriate timing and potential areas of engagement for Sierra Leone's exit from the PBC's agenda. This process will be guided by and dependent on the evolving situation on the ground.

2. Modalities for engaging with the Security Council during and beyond transitions processes

The PBC should continue to provide advice to the Security Council after a UN mission departs, in particular with respect to progress made towards peace consolidation and the level of attention and commitment from regional and international partners. The Council can invite the PBC to report annually during the first three years following the drawdown on the mandated mission in the country concerned. The Council can either identify specific areas on which the PBC should be expected to report or can set broader guidelines for monitoring developments in the country concerned.

Towards the 2015 Review

In closing, the Chair of the Working Group on Lessons Learned expresses his hope that this report will provide useful insight in clarifying the areas in which the PBC can contribute to facilitate UN missions' transitions. In this context, the Chair is looking forward to consideration of the PBC's role in this area in the forthcoming and mutually reinforcing 2015 review of the peacebuilding architecture and the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations appointed by the Secretary-General, particularly with regards to:

- 1) the broader challenges of long-term and sustained engagement of regional and international partners in support of peace consolidation;
- 2) The variety of modalities of PBC's country-specific engagement and its evolution over time, including establishing specific criteria and recommendations for PBC's own transition from agenda countries; and
- 3) The scope and added value of the PBC's advisory role to the Security Council.
