

**Special Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission: Update on the Ebola Recovery
14 April 2015, New York**

Chairperson's Summary

Background

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held a Special Meeting on 14 April 2015 to update on the Ebola recovery process and provide guidance for continued PBC engagement in support of the peacebuilding-related aspects of the recovery efforts. The meeting was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Sweden, Chair of the PBC and addressed the following agenda items: 1) Briefing by the Chair on his visit to West Africa; 2) Update by UNDP on Ebola recovery; 3) Other matters.

Briefing by the Chair on his visit to West Africa

1. The Chair stated that his visit to West Africa (Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal (UNOWA) from 4 to 10 April 2015), provided an important opportunity to engage with a broad range of stakeholders from the three affected countries, including the three Presidents. He underlined that the extensive time and attention devoted to the visit by the three Governments show recognition of the continued relevance of the PBC and its potential to ensure improved political, technical and financial support for the countries and the region.

2. The Chair noted that reaching zero new cases of Ebola was the focus in the three affected countries. At the same time, he underlined that building the necessary systems and capacity for staying at zero was no less important. He also emphasized that the Ebola epidemic had revealed extensive continued challenges in poverty reduction, access to education, and youth employment. A commitment ensuring sustainable peace in these countries and minimizing the risk of renewed conflict, the Chair cautioned, would require continued investments in these areas and in measures to reinforce trust in state institutions.

3. The Chair also welcomed the interest expressed by many stakeholders for renewed sub-regional cooperation as reflected in the joint Mano River Union regional Ebola recovery strategy. He underlined the need for a more holistic and well-coordinated approach by the UN system and the international community (including donors) to the Ebola recovery efforts, especially at the relevant high-level meetings on Ebola, including the Secretary-General's pledging conference planned in July 2015.

4. Based on the findings from his visit, the Chair suggested to convey on behalf of the PBC the following messages at the World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings this week:

- International community must maintain commitment to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea also in the recovery phase, to ensure that progress on peacebuilding is sustained.
- Build on successful national and local community leadership in the Ebola response, also for the recovery phase.
- The fight against poverty, including the generation of employment and ensuring access to education, is critical for sustainable peace.

- Building national and local institutional capacity should be the focus, including as a way to support improved state-society relations.
- Need for a regional approach, supporting regional frameworks and capacity.
- Need for more holistic and integrated support, overcoming barriers between institutional silos.

Update by UNDP on Ebola recovery

5. Mr. Stan Nkwain (Deputy Director of Bureau for Policy and Programme Support of UNDP) noted that much has been achieved in terms of assessment and planning since the PBC requested the Secretary-General in November 2014 to assess the impact of the Ebola crisis on peacebuilding gains in the affected countries. Echoing the Chair, Mr. Nkwain stressed the need to pay attention to ‘staying at zero’ just as much as ‘getting to zero’, which would require support that works hand-in hand with the ongoing response. He also commended the Governments and the Mano River Union Secretariat for the prompt development of their national and regional strategies.

6. Mr. Nkwain noted some of the gaps and challenges identified in the areas of governance, peacebuilding and core government functions within the national Ebola recovery plans as follows:

- While most plans emphasized ‘limited capacity’ as the issue in responsive governance, the aim should be to foster state-society relationship, to promote civic engagement, and to strengthen cohesive societies that hold government to account. Reconciliation efforts should not be disregarded in this regard;
- Articulation of post-Ebola peacebuilding should be strengthened: peacebuilding issues in the national plans are limited to security and administration;
- The role of civil society needs to be strengthened in all national plans.
- The means of implementation of the recovery strategies should draw upon the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile states.

7. In light of the above, Mr. Nkwain highlighted the need for strong advocacy and support by the international community, including the PBC. Noting the peacebuilding and fragility challenges in the affected countries, he emphasized the need for continued improvements in:

- The security sector with an emphasis on improving relations between communities and the security forces;
- Decentralized governance with strong accountability mechanisms;
- The national and local level political cultures in all three countries; and
- Livelihoods and employment opportunities, especially for women and youth.

8. The Permanent Representatives of the three Ebola-affected countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) expressed their appreciation to the international community for its global effort in the fight against the Ebola Virus Disease. They particularly welcomed the PBC for its efforts to maintain focused attention during these challenging times, and UNDP for its initiative in producing the Ebola Recovery Assessment. They also expressed appreciation for the Chair’s first visit to West Africa and agreed to the key messages he would deliver at upcoming high-level meetings on Ebola.

9. The Permanent Representatives noted that as the number of Ebola cases had decreased recently, the situation in the countries remained fragile. The Ebola Virus Disease had demonstrated how difficult it was to move from fragility to resilience as the virus has had a multi-dimensional effect. Getting to ‘zero cases’ of Ebola was a priority for the three countries.

10. They also highlighted the importance of strengthening relations between the state and citizens. Revitalization of economies with the help of international financial institutions was crucial in this regard. Other national priorities pointed out included the re-opening of borders to resume trade, resuming flights, social cohesion, strengthening health and education systems, human resource mobilization, reducing vulnerabilities (in particular, in security and rule of law), accountability, legitimacy and stigmatization.

11. The Permanent Representatives indicated that the PBC should focus its attention on the long term recovery, noting that there were other epidemics in addition to the Ebola Virus Disease that required attention. They also highlighted that, in view of the regional nature of the Ebola crisis, reinforces the need for a regional and coherent response. The High-level Conference on Ebola in Brussels (3 March 2015) is a good example in this regard as it strengthened coherence among the international community and the affected countries.

12. The Permanent Representatives also emphasized that, while examining the gains achieved so far, it was also important to look ahead and think of how to improve the response to new emerging threats. ‘Prevention’ was key, they emphasised. They also raised the need to resume national policies and strategies in accordance with changing circumstances. They expressed hope that peacebuilding interventions would resume, with particular regard to national reconciliation and reform processes.

13. The Permanent Representative of Guinea underlined that the recent anti-government protests in Conakry were not related to the Ebola response and that the opposition was manipulating people to stop them from cooperating with response activities.

14. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, highlighted the appreciation shown towards PBC and PBF, which was expressed during the Chair’s visit. The PBC was welcomed for having played an important early warning role at the beginning of the Ebola crisis, and the PBF was appreciated for being a key strategic instrument with concrete and valuable impact.

15. Mr. Fernandez-Taranco added that the upcoming elections in Guinea present a number of risks, as they will take place in the wake of the Ebola crisis, which has made the political situation more fragile. He reaffirmed PBSO’s commitment and support to sustain the efforts to eradicate Ebola and give more space to dialogue and work towards a consensus for peaceful elections. Mr. Fernandez-Taranco noted that many projects funded by the PBF had been delayed because of the Ebola epidemic. Projects are currently being reviewed to see how to better adapt them to the situation in each affected country, especially in light of the ERA report and the Chair’s recommendations from his visit.

16. Member States welcomed the briefings by the Chair, UNDP and PBSO, as well as the update by the Permanent Representatives of the three most affected countries. Delegations focused their interventions on the following issues:

- The Ebola crisis exposed the vulnerability of the countries' economies and their difficulties in delivering effective state services. Recovery efforts should focus in particular on strengthening resilience and local institutions to prevent the impact of future crises in the long term;
- The international community, through the PBC, should maintain a constant attention to the peacebuilding implications of the crisis;
- The crisis has significantly undermined state-society relations. Therefore, recovery efforts should address comprehensive confidence- and trust-building measures;
- Particular attention should be given to youths and women;
- Engaging with national and regional partners is a key element to ensure recovery.

17. The Chair concluded that there seemed to be support for the suggested key messages that he intends to deliver to the World Bank. The overall direction for the PBC was to advocate for maintained international attention and support in Ebola recovery and peacebuilding priorities to be included in the recovery effort. As next steps, the Chair would participate in the World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings on Ebola and the PBC should contribute to the UN high-level meeting on Ebola recovery in July. The country configurations would be taking forward the country specific work, while the PBC OC would continue to provide an overarching framework to address the long-term recovery efforts, including in support of regional approaches to these efforts.
