

Peacebuilding Commission
Informal meeting of the Liberian Country Specific Configuration
29 April 2015 (10:00 a.m., Trusteeship Council Chamber)

Chair's Summary

Background

1. The Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an informal meeting on Wednesday, 29 April 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters to discuss PBC's engagement in Ebola recovery efforts and UNMIL's transition. The purpose of the meeting was to get an update on peacebuilding priorities in the Ebola recovery efforts and the UNMIL transition and initiate discussion on how the PBC could best support these processes.

2. H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog, Chair of the PBC, presented to the Configuration the key elements of his findings from his recent visit to West Africa from 5 to 10 April. [The summary of his visit was shared with the configuration members in advance.] Ambassador Marjon V. Kamara (Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations) spoke about Liberia's Ebola recovery plan; Ms. Nannette Ahmed, (Director of Africa II Division, DPKO) briefed on UNMIL's drawdown plan; and Mr. Samuel Doe (Senior Policy Adviser for Crisis, Fragility and Resilience UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support) on the key findings in the Ebola Recovery Assessment on Liberia in the areas of peacebuilding and the way forward. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco (Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support) also spoke on PBSO's support to the PBC and Liberia in the Ebola recovery phase.

Key points of the findings from Chair's visit to West Africa

3. The Chair expressed his sincere gratitude to the Government of Liberia for the warm hospitality accorded to him during his recent visit to Liberia, as well as to UNMIL for organizing his visit to Liberia on 5-7 April. He raised the following key points from his visit which, if agreeable, would be used as a basis for his statement to the Security Council on 5 May:

- 1) There is an urgent need to improve the socio-economic situation in Liberia, including increasing access to primary education and creating employment opportunities for youth. The situation had further deteriorated compared to Liberia's pre-Ebola period.
- 2) There is a need to further improve state-society relations and trust in state institutions. Strengthening national institutional capacity and accountability, as well as enhancing state presence and capacity to deliver in the communities as part of the decentralisation process were needed. The national reconciliation process also needed to progress.
- 3) There is a need to enhance our support for regional cooperation and regional goods. The Ebola crisis demonstrated the importance of a regional approach which was reflected in the Mano River Union regional Ebola recovery plan. Such active regional cooperation, including at the highest level, would be important also for future maintenance of peace and security.
- 4) The focus of the PBC in Liberia should continue to be to safeguard that peacebuilding gains can be sustained and strengthened. The PBC could enhance efforts to mobilize and facilitate coordinated international support, including by building on the impressive international engagement in the Ebola response. In the shorter term, close

coordination between the Security Council and international and regional partners is important to ensure that support for Ebola recovery and the transition of UNMIL is well coordinated.

4. On the Statement of Mutual Commitment (SMC), the Chair noted that the fourth review of the SMC had been delayed by a few months due to the Ebola crisis. PBSO and partners in Liberia were in the process of updating the progress report and the draft report would be circulated for the Configuration members' inputs later that week. By building on a harmonized national plan for Ebola recovery and UNMIL transition, the chair added that we should consider the need for updating our future framework of engagement with Liberia.

Liberia's Ebola recovery plan

5. Ambassador Kamara stated that as Liberia waited until 9 May to reach the 42 days to declare itself free of Ebola, 'sustaining' the zero infection rate was as important as getting to zero cases. The impact of the Ebola Virus Disease had demonstrated the importance of outreach and delivery of services to communities which resulted in the recent launch of the National De-concentration Policy. Building the capacity of people and institutions in rural areas was crucial in order to be able to respond to any outbreak.

6. The Ambassador expressed appreciation for the support from the international community including the UN Ebola Multi-partner Trust Fund. She noted, however, the issue of budget constraints for Liberia to be able to sustain the services provided. She also expressed hope that foreign investors would return to Liberia to resume their businesses, noting that the mining sector had not yet recovered at full speed.

7. Ambassador Kamara shared some of the priorities in Liberia's national and regional plans. They included immediate recovery in education and health sectors; the deployment of social security nets; resuming commercial activities and flights; an economic stimulus programme; and a strategic plan for security and rule of law (including sustainability, peace and security, accountability, and reinforcement of national institutions). The Government's plan for UNMIL's transition had significant funding gaps. There was a need to discuss how to harmonize the government plan for UNMIL's transition with the Ebola recovery plan. For the costing of the UNMIL transition, US\$76.2 million was required for FY 2015/2016, and it was unclear whether it could be covered by the national budget. She added that there was still some apprehension about UNMIL's drawdown, and also noted that the Minister of Justice might speak at the Security Council briefing on 5 May to introduce Liberia's plan to the Council.

8. Ambassador Kamara underlined that there was a desire to restore an enabling environment in Liberia for the return of business and flights and to invest in justice and security service at the community level. As a lesson learned from the Ebola crisis, the government was willing to empower communities. She added that the implementation of programmes under the National Reconciliation Roadmap should be accelerated, and national institutions such as the Anti-corruption Commission and the Independent National Commission for Human Rights.

9. On the preparation for the 2017 elections, Ambassador Kamara raised the need to discuss how the PBC can contribute. She also underlined the importance of empowering women in the elections, noting that the percentage of women in the Legislature had decreased from 14% to 11% in the latest senatorial elections.

10. On the SMC, she also agreed with the Chair on the need for a new framework on the engagement between Liberia and the PBC and expressed her hope that the timing of discussion on the SMC would be set soon.

UNMIL's drawdown plan

11. Ms. Nanette Ahmed (Director of Africa II Division, DPKO) stated that following the Security Council's decision to postpone the drawdown of UNMIL because of the Ebola Virus Disease, the Council had recently authorized to resume the drawdown under Security Council resolution 2215. The drawdown would reduce the number of military troops from about 4,800 to 3,600 by September 2015 while maintaining the strength of the police component at around 1,500. The SRSG of UNMIL would provide further clarification on the drawdown at the Security Council briefing on 5 May.

12. Ms. Ahmed noted that the Government of Liberia and UNMIL had been working closely together on the transition plan, and the Government Plan for UNMIL's Transition had been approved by the National Security Council of Liberia in early March. As the threat environment had not changed since the pre-Ebola period, the drawdown plan would continue as planned, and the government's plan would be the basis for the ongoing planning by both UNMIL and the Government of Liberia for UNMIL's transition.

13. She also highlighted some gaps that had been identified in UNMIL's transition process which included the sub-regional dimension to security, VIP protection, prison security in Monrovia and Zwedru, static security duties, and management of government weapons stocks. Increasing security sector personnel outside Monrovia was also an important issue as UNMIL's uninformed personnel reduced its presence. In the coming months, issues related to military enablers that have been supporting Liberia would also need to be addressed. Road networks needed to remain open and operational for the Mission's operations and humanitarian access.

14. As Ambassador Kamara had pointed out, it was unclear whether the cost for the transition could be covered by the national budget. Meanwhile, some no-costs activities had moved forward including the Firearms and Ammunition Control Act, the Police Act and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Act. Ms. Ahmed also point to the need to address the capacity-building objective in the drawdown process aiming to increase number of the Liberia National Police from 4,950 to 6,600 by August 2016.

15. Ms. Ahmed underlined the importance of the role of the PBC and its added value in identifying peacebuilding challenges, gaps and opportunities for the drawdown. She also expressed confidence that Liberia would be able assume full responsibility of its security in line with the timeline set by the Security Council. She assured that DPKO would maintain close cooperation with the Government of Liberia and the PBC in this regard.

Key findings in the Ebola Recovery Assessment on Liberia in the areas of peacebuilding and the way forward

16. Mr. Samuel Doe (Senior Policy Adviser for Crisis, Fragility and Resilience of the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support) shared some key findings on Liberia in the Ebola Recovery Assessment (ERA). On the positive side, he pointed to the rate at which

Liberia had controlled Ebola compared to the other affected countries and also the level of cohesion amongst political, religious and traditional leaders to mobilize their communities.

17. Mr. Doe further stated, however, that there were still some fundamental issues in Liberia threatening the country's peace and stability which needed to be addressed and required further investment. They include the following:

- 1) *Strengthening state-society relations* (including the perception of corruption and the perception of unequal access to basic services) – Liberia should not go back to pre-Ebola governance and basic service delivery system, but build on the gains made in the response. Access to basic services was a peace and security issue, and the PBC should invest in this issue.
- 2) *Youth restiveness* – recovery efforts should be youth sensitive and keep attention on services and opportunities for the youth, children and orphans.
- 3) *Civilian-security relations* – Justice and security sector reform should include investment more in software, as had been done in Sierra Leone, which would enhance confidence in security institutions.
- 4) *Implementation of the National Reconciliation Roadmap* – The Roadmap is central to the recovery process.
- 5) *Poverty reduction and the improvement of livelihood*, in particular for women, youth and orphans.
- 6) *Other issues* – over-centralization of core government functions, food production, investment in health and agriculture, and loss of revenue.

18. On the role of the PBC, Mr. Doe encouraged the PBC to should review and accelerate the Liberia Peacebuilding Programme together with the Government of Liberia, civil society, private sector and others, and redesign it to fit new challenges. The PBC should also build on the lessons learned in the Ebola crisis, in particular on social mobilization and organized communities to accelerate decentralization of governance and basic service delivery. Other areas to focus upon include the software of the security sector in light of UNMIL's drawdown, socio-economic needs of women and youth, capacity development and the regional dimension of recovery.

19. Mr. Doe emphasized that recovery was 'time sensitive' and it should start quickly. While a number of communities had managed to stop Ebola, they were still waiting for recovery support. Furthermore, the recovery phase would be an opportunity to bring the New Deal Compact proves in line with the Statement of Mutual Commitment. It was also a time for new national dialogue, and the advisory role of the PBC was critical in this regard. Mr. Doe also noted that there would be a workshop on the regional dimension for ERA partners in early June to prepare for the UN Secretary-General's high-level Ebola meeting in July.

PBSO's support to the PBC and Liberia in the Ebola recovery phase

20. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco (Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support) praised the government and people of Liberia for their vigilance and fight against Ebola and at the same time, noted that while the situation in Liberia had improved, we still needed to remain cautious as Ebola still prevailed in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

21. Mr. Taranco welcomed the government's plan for UNMIL's transition and underlined the need for continued government leadership and local ownership. He also emphasized that

we could no longer go back to 'business as usual' and that we must help Liberia restore public confidence in state institutions. The international community must also align its strategies with Liberia's mechanisms, and regional coordination and cooperation need to be strengthened.

22. The impact of the Ebola Virus Disease had drawn attention to the role of the justice and security sectors and also the role of civil society. Mr. Taranco encouraged the further strengthening of these roles further, particularly in light of the UNMIL drawdown. While challenges still remained including lack of capacity, insufficient resource allocation and accountability of the Government with regard to the justice and security sectors, the government's plan had to be taken forward in an inclusive manner. The PBSO, together with the PBC and other partners, would assure that a smooth transition as UNMIL completes its drawdown by June 2016. Mr. Taranco agreed with the Chair that coordination was needed between the Ebola recovery plan and the Government of Liberia's UNMIL transition plan.

23. On the Peacebuilding Fund, Mr. Taranco indicated that while some projects had been understandably delayed last year because of the Ebola Virus Disease, others were able to continue to move forward, including the rolling out of justice services in south-east Liberia. The PBF would contribute to recovery through supporting the full resumption of activities with required adaptations. He added that PBF team members had recently visited Liberia and, with the Joint Steering Committee, agreed to a reorganization of support structures to help contribute to this programme acceleration. In particular, PBSO was of the view that the Reconciliation Roadmap could now be helpfully reviewed by all partners to highlight (a) how it may need to be adapted post-Ebola and (b) re-commit to its full implementation. PBSO would also continue its activities towards the empowerment of women.

Comments from Member States

24. Members States commended the leadership and resilience of the government and people of Liberia during the challenging times of the Ebola crisis and also praised the work by health workers. However, West Africa was not free from Ebola yet, and attention must remain focused and sustained. The affected countries were fragile, and an outbreak in one country can clearly effect its neighbouring countries. Member States also emphasized the importance of sustaining 'zero cases' of Ebola and resilience in affected countries. A delegation also expressed hope to work closely with the new head of UNMEER, Mr. Peter Graaff.

25. Member States welcomed the recent visit by the PBC Chair to West Africa stating that it had contributed to assessing the challenges of peacebuilding in Liberia. Liberia still had a number of challenges to address including poverty reduction, financial and social mobilization, strengthening regional action and security sector reform. Natural resource management was also important to revitalize the economy. Also raised was the need to address issues caused by inter-ethnic and inter-regions tensions, and the importance of preventive intervention to avoid the recurrence of similar crises. National reconciliation efforts would help strengthen relations between citizens and the state. In this regard, peacebuilding issues needed to be addressed under an overall strategy.

26. On regional Ebola recovery efforts, the Member States expressed appreciation for the contributions by the World Bank and African Development Bank. They also welcomed small-scale investments, including in communities, which could also have impact.

27. On the drawdown of UNMIL, Member States raised the need to accelerate security sector reform, technical assistance, and the strengthening of the national police. They expressed their solidarity and support for Liberia's endeavours and believed that the relevance of the PBC was now stronger than ever.

Conclusion

28. The Chair thanked all members of the Configuration for their participation in the meeting, and concluded that he would circulate to the members his draft statement for the Council briefing on Liberia taking place on 5 May. He would also initiate discussions on the way forward for the Statement of Mutual Commitments as soon as possible. The Chair also called on the Configuration to stay engaged and focused, and to continue conveying coherent messages to partners at this time of vintage for the PBC.
