

22 March 2016

To : Members of the PBC Liberia Configuration

**Informal Ambassadorial-level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission
Liberia Configuration
16 March 2016**

Chair's Summary

Background

On 16 March 2016, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Liberia Configuration held an informal Ambassadorial-level meeting under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog of Sweden to discuss the recent situation in Liberia amidst the ongoing security transition and to update the members on the finalization of the revised Statement of Mutual Commitments (SMC) between the Government of Liberia and the PBC. H.E. Mrs. Julia Duncan-Cassell (Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia) spoke on gender issues in Liberia, and Mr. Farid Zarif [Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)] on the latest developments and challenges in Liberia during the security transition. Ms. Mari Yamashita [Director and Deputy Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)] also spoke on the collaboration of the United Nations in preparing the current draft SMC and the assessment of the Peacebuilding Fund.

Introductory Remarks by the Chair

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the speakers and members of the configuration. He presented an overview of developments since the last meeting in December 2015 including the outcome of the PBC and United Nations working-level mission to Liberia (27 January to 3 February) to consult with partners on a revised SMC. Following the completion of the mission, the draft SMC had been discussed at the expert level in the configuration in February, after which further consultations were held with members and with the Government of Liberia. An updated version had been circulated the day before to the configuration members. The Chair also noted that he would provide an overview of the priority areas of engagement between the PBC and the Government of Liberia at the Security Council briefing on Liberia the next day. His draft statement to the Council had been circulated to the configuration members the day before.

On the situation in Liberia during the security transition

2. H.E. Mrs. Julia Duncan-Cassell underlined how Liberia had made progress for women's economic empowerment for security sector reform which was key to sustaining peace. Women's participation in dialogues on peace and stability of Liberia was also

highlighted in recent security sector reform review. She highlighted two peacebuilding projects for women supported by the Peacebuilding Fund: one on the economic empowerment of women which aims to increase the economic security of women and girls; build their skills and provide training; and increase women's participation in natural resources and land management. The other project was on women, peace and security which aims to strengthen their role as peace builders and peacemakers in communities. This project was successful in six counties and there was a need to extend it into others.

3. H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell pointed out that women's economic empowerment and access to participation and decision-making were essential to sustaining peace and were also part of the Agenda for Transformation of Liberia. She also noted the fragility of Liberia as well as Sierra Leone and Guinea with the recent developments in Côte d'Ivoire, which would affect peacebuilding gains. She alerted, in particular to UN Women and other peacebuilding partners, that the recent terrorist attack in Côte d'Ivoire illustrated the increasing need to consolidate peacebuilding gains. She also appealed to the United Nations for strong coordination efforts with security institutions in the sub-region to strengthen early warning. Furthermore, H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell pointed to the need for rapid delivery of peace dividends.

4. H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell emphasised the importance of increasing opportunities for education and social skills for not only women but also the youth, adolescents, girls, boys and the vulnerable which would allow them to enter the formal economy. Also highlighted were the Ministry's ongoing cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. She reaffirmed the need to sustain the peacebuilding activities aimed to strengthen women's land rights and community natural resource management. Also important was women's equal participation in the forthcoming 2017 elections. *[The remarks delivered by H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell were later circulated to configuration members by email.]*

5. Mr. Zarif shared his analysis that after the UN peacekeeping mission was established in Liberia, it had helped create an environment for Liberia to build peace and stability for 12 years. The Government and people of Liberia had made good use of the mission's presence. On the economic growth rate of Liberia, Mr. Zarif pointed out that it had reached 8.5 per cent in 2012 with the increasing employment rate, improvement in the health sector among other factors, which eventually helped boost confidence. Owing to the recent effect of the Ebola Virus Disease, however, the growth rate had decreased to 0.03 per cent (or even lower).

6. Mr. Zarif underlined the need for a stronger legal foundation in Liberia through the passage of legislation, i.e. the Police and Immigration Service Act, Domestic Violence Act, Local Governance Act, Fire Arms and Ammunition Act, Land Rights Act, Land Authority, among others. There needed to be a "whole-of- Government" approach during the security transition. On the justice sector, Mr. Zarif described the situation as "dismal". While the President of Liberia had been pressing leaders to move forward, more determined efforts were needed. The Government faced a challenge with the inadequacy of resources to continue its efforts made so far.

7. Mr. Zarif underlined that although there had been significant investments delivered by the international community by maintaining the peacekeeping mission (close to US\$7 billion for 12 years) and through the Government of Liberia, these investments could be at a risk of

loss if its gains could not be consolidated. There was a need to invest more. It was important to address the root causes of what kept the country vulnerable. There was an issue of perception that Liberia would be vulnerable to crises and incidents without international presence on the ground. In this regard, Mr. Zarif pointed out that hopefully by December 2016, the structure of the UN presence in Liberia would be decided by the Security Council, which would boost confidence knowing that the international community would remain engaged. He added that 80 per cent of the security responsibilities of UNMIL had been handed over to the Government, but continued support to institutions was needed. He emphasized that it was important to provide financial support for specific tasks.

8. Member States expressed their commitment to maintaining focus on the situation in Liberia and their support to the security drawdown of UNMIL. While Liberia was Ebola-free, they expressed concern about the impact of Ebola which remained and asked how Ebola could be eradicated. A Member State noted its contribution to good governance in Liberia which included support for women's participation. Other points raised by Member States included the need to better coordinate development efforts in Liberia as UNMIL drew down; how the United Nations could better assist border security in the region; and the need to include gender benchmarks in the UNMIL drawdown process.

9. H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell responded that the success of UNMIL in Liberia was due to its engagement with communities. She noted the importance of strengthening and increasing women's role in security institutions, in particular, within the army. She concurred that benchmarks for the security drawdown would be useful. Mr. Zarif pointed out that there had been an increase in the number of women in the ranks in some security institutions including the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the Bureau of Corrections and the Liberia National Police. However, the deployment of female officers to areas beyond Monrovia was a major challenge owing to a number of constraints, for example the role of women in the household.

10. On the border issues in the region, H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell indicated that regional and sub-regional approaches were key, including cooperation with the Mano River Union and the Economic Community of West African States. Mr. Zarif noted that a crisis in one country tended to spill over into its neighbouring country across the border. He added that in order to address the tension along the border areas, there were mechanisms of cooperation in place such as the MRU Framework, ECOWAS Framework and the quadripartite cooperation between UNOCI, UNMIL and the Governments of Côte D'Ivoire and Liberia. He also underlined the need for early warning and quick response systems. On Ebola, Mr. Zarif emphasized that a response mechanism had to be ready in case it should strike again. Furthermore, on multilateral and bilateral support to Liberia, H.E. Mrs. Duncan-Cassell indicated that with the decline in iron ore and rubber export earnings, Liberia was turning attention to agriculture, i.e. cash crops and value chains, which would boost the economy and also enhance the role of women.

11. Ms. Yamashita highlighted that the discussion at the meeting had reflected some issues that had been tabled in the ongoing negotiations on the Security Council and General Assembly resolution on the Peacebuilding Architecture. She expressed hope that the mandate would impact the peacebuilding needs also in Liberia. On the SMC, Ms. Yamashita assured members that the draft text had been prepared in close coordination with partners in the United Nations and in Liberia, which was important to keep a coherent approach. The draft SMC also took into account the various existing strategies in Liberia to avoid any

overlap. Ms. Yamashita also noted that the Peacebuilding Support Office would conduct and assessment of the peacebuilding impact of the Peacebuilding Fund support to Liberia in the last five years.

Conclusion

12. The Chair concluded by thanking all the speakers for their presentations on the latest situation in Liberia related to their respective areas and to the members of the configuration for their participation. As raised in the meeting, the Chair underlined that the coordination of donors was important, indicating that the SMC could be used to back up and support coordination efforts. The Chair announced that the draft revised SMC would be circulated for approval by the PBC through silence procedure by 21 March. Once the text was agreed upon, it would be translated and processed into an official UN document. The SMC would then be endorsed at an Ambassadorial-level meeting of the configuration, the timing of which would be communicated in due course.