

15 November 2016

To : Members of the PBC –Liberia Configuration

**Informal Ambassadorial-level meeting of the Peacebuilding
Commission Liberia Configuration, 9 November 2016**

Chair's Summary

Background

1. On 9 November 2016, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Liberia Configuration held an informal Ambassadorial-level meeting under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog (Sweden). The Chair briefed the PBC on his recent visit to Liberia on 19 to 21 October as well as the Multi-stakeholder Forum that he co-hosted with the Government of Liberia on 20 October. Ms. Larisa Leshchenko, Country Manager of the World Bank for Liberia, and Mr. Daniel Boakye, Economist of the World Bank, gave a briefing on the latest economic and social situation in Liberia. This was followed by a briefing by the UNMIL leadership (SRSG Farid Zarif; DSRSG for Political and Rule of Law Waldemar Vrey; and DSRSG for Peace Consolidation/RC/RR Yacoub El Hillo) on the latest thinking on transition planning in the UN system.

Introductory Remarks/briefing by the Chair

2. The Chair noted that the written report of his recent visit to Liberia was being prepared and would be shared with the PBC shortly. He stated that the objective of the visit was to hold discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in Liberia to identify peacebuilding priorities during and beyond the transition, and to complement the Strategic Assessment Mission led by DPKO. During his visit, the Chair co-hosted together with the Government of Liberia, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, “Sustaining Peace through Transition in Liberia”. The Forum was attended by a large range of stakeholders, including the President of Liberia, key ministries, youth representatives, civil society organizations, political parties, the legislature, the international community, and other partners in Liberia.
3. During the visit, he held meetings with the President of Liberia and other senior representatives of the Government, the UNMIL Leadership, members of the international

community, and civil society. He expressed his appreciation to all those who helped to make his visit was successful.

4. The Chair stated that there was general agreement among Government and international actors that several root causes of conflict in Liberia remain unresolved and demanded concerted attention. National reconciliation had not yet fully been carried forward, which had also been recognized by the President. The Chair added that “Addressing reconciliation in Liberia is as much about political will as it is about resources,” and called for political leadership in advancing the reconciliation agenda. Priority issues raised during the Chair’s meetings and in the Forum included the need for a common national identity, filling gaps in institutional capacities, social cohesion, providing basic social services in rural communities, strengthening the rule of law and access to justice, strengthening relations between the state and citizens and building stronger trust in security institutions. The Chair stated that these issues required long-term efforts and must be underpinned by political reform.
5. The Chair also noted the progress made in legislative reforms, but stressed the need to pass the Land Rights Act. [The SRSG of UNMIL noted in the meeting that it was expected to be discussed at the special session of the Legislature from 8 November to 8 December.]
6. Reflecting on the Presidential and Legislative Elections in 2017, the Chair underlined how successful elections and a peaceful transition would further consolidate democracy and good governance. To avoid the risk of tensions around the electoral process, early efforts to establish solid mechanisms for dispute resolution were important. A successful election process also required outreach to the largely disenfranchised population and a special focus on women’s active participation.
7. On the socio-economic situation, the Chair highlighted the need to continue focussing on education: 63 per cent of Liberian children did not attend school. The Chair also called for further attention on curtailing the incidence of Sexual and Gender-based Violence.
8. The Chair underlined how important the presence of UNMIL had been for the people of Liberia. He paid special tribute to the contribution of SRSG Farid Zarif and his team in this regard, and highlighted the need for the good offices function which had been led by the SRSG. The Chair also pointed out the need to resource the UN Country Team in order to enable it to take over critical peacebuilding functions when UNMIL draws down. He called for further international support to the residual peacebuilding tasks, some of which address root causes of conflict.
9. The Chair called on international partners and the national authorities to jointly define the kind of support that should be offered to the next administration after January 2018. Continued advocacy was also needed to continue pursuing reforms that are central to state-building. He also encouraged the wider UN system to intensify collaborative strategic planning, and he requested regular updates on how this was proceeding.

Other Speakers

10. The World Bank (the Country Manager of Liberia and Economist of the World Bank) described the vulnerable nature of Liberia's economy, identifying the twin shocks of the Ebola crisis and the decline in commodity prices, as major factors contributing to the country's poor economic performance. Economic growth had not increased over the past three years, and the IMF projection for 2016 was -0.5 per cent. Economic growth will be required to help lift half the population out of extreme poverty. There is a need to move forward with the Economic Recovery Plan to enable economic diversification, but the foundation is weak. The economy faces huge challenges such as the decline in government revenue, over-reliance on concessions, social exclusion in the governance structure, and the need for structural reforms to improve the business environment. Liberia's institutional challenges to deliver services are accompanied by limits in individual skills and knowledge. For example, the capacity of girls, to find employment needs strengthening, while opportunities for young people are stymied by major deficits in the education system. . The World Bank called on donors to address these deficits and to help ensure the sustainability of the economy.

11. The World Bank also noted that the mid-term outlook for economic growth was improving (aiming for a 3.5 per cent target) with the recovery in the mining sector and improvements in infrastructure and agriculture productivity. There is still a need for macro-economic stability and domestic resource mobilization.

12. The SRSG of UNMIL underlined critical nature of the current transition phase, and this will define the future of Liberia. In this regard, sustaining the engagement of the international community, including the PBC, remained important. The DSRSG of UNMIL (RC/RR) stressed that national capacity was a collective challenge, and he encouraged the PBC to be fully engaged. He described the forthcoming UN Liberia capacity mapping exercise, which is designed to assess the Country Team's existing institutional capacities and identify the areas where the UNCT will need to assume responsibility from UNMIL, to ensure a smooth transition process. The DSRSG noted that the UNDP-UNMIL joint programme on Rule of Law (US\$16.8 million) was moving forward, while governance, justice, security sector reform, national reconciliation and human rights would remain priority areas of the UN in Liberia. Learning from other examples of transition, such as Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, could be useful but it was important to take into account the different national contexts.

13. The Chair opened the floor for comments, soliciting the following observations:
 - While Liberia had been making progress on its path towards sustainable peace, challenges such as the impact of Ebola on the economy, health system and lives of the people, had stalled the country's development. The decline in prices of main exports affected the economy, while the political will of Liberia existed but was not sufficient. Concrete measures are required to strengthen capacity to mobilize resources.
 - The drawdown of UNMIL needs to be carried out in a responsible and careful manner that takes into account of the psychological impact it will have on the people of

Liberia and safeguards the gains and achievements that have been made. It is important to strengthen solidarity in Liberia and the region.

- Management of the process leading to the 2017 elections will be important to ensure peaceful results.
- The PBC needs to assume more responsibility as the transition process moves forward. The recent visit to Liberia of the PBC Vice-Chair was timely and appreciated in this regard.
- The residual tasks need to be carried out in order to ensure sustainable peace. International financial institutions need to be more involved in the transition process.

14. PBSO expressed a deep appreciation of the Government of Liberia's US\$50,000 contribution to the PBF presented at the pledging conference in September. PBSO underlined that the situation in Liberia remained fragile, and that there was a role for the PBC to play after the drawdown of UNMIL. PBSO recommended that a comprehensive assessment should be conducted on the root causes of conflict and the long-term needs of Liberia for the next 15 years, in reconciliation, education, employment, youth (SCR 2250), and the SDGs. PBSO support to the UN-World Bank partnership, particularly in relation to Gender and Youth Promotion Initiatives and a cross border initiative with Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire, will strengthen Liberia's transition process.

Conclusion

15. The Chair will share the report of his visit to Liberia with the PBC and the Security Council ahead of the Council's deliberations in December on the report of the Secretary-General on UNMIL's future. The Chair also proposed to prepare a non-paper which would present specific recommendations for the Liberia's transition period, and describing the role that the PBC could play in the process. The Chair will have some informal discussions on these conclusions with Security Council members before the Council formally meets in December.
