

Summary of the visit of H.E. Olof Skoog, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration, to Liberia from 4 to 7 April 2015

Program

1. During his visit to Monrovia from April 4 to 7, 2015, the Chair engaged with a wide range of national and international stakeholders. The program included meetings with H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the co-chairs of the Peacebuilding Joint Steering Committee, the co-chairs of the Justice and Security Trust Fund Board, civil society organizations, the diplomatic community, the leadership of UNMIL and the UN country team. The program also included a field visit to Lofa County to meet with local government and community leaders and to the Justice and Security Hub in Gbarnga. The Chair wishes to express his gratitude to the Government of Liberia for their warm hospitality and to UNMIL for organizing the visit.

Government of Liberia Priorities

2. H.E. President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson noted that Liberia had been severely affected by the Ebola crisis. The economic situation, which was already negatively affected by low commodity prices, has been further damaged by the Ebola outbreak. The national Ebola recovery plan, which would be presented to partners at the World Bank Spring meetings, was comprehensive and complemented the national development plan "Agenda for Transformation". The President welcomed the PBC engagement and encouraged the Chair to go to Washington to support the plan.

3. The President also stressed the need for international partners to support the UNMIL transition plan. The Government would commit to parts of the plan, but it was impossible to assume the entire budget of 106 MUSD. The President highlighted access to justice, including addressing the issues of pre-trial detention, as well as the correction system as areas in need for international support. The Hub concept to improve access to justice had been an important contribution, but it was important to reflect on lessons learned from the first Hub before rolling out Hub 2 and 3.

4. The President also noted the need to support continued regional cooperation. The decision by the Mano River Union leaders to join efforts in a regional Ebola recovery plan was significant. Active regional cooperation was also important for the maintenance of security, especially in view of upcoming elections in the region.

5. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Morris Dukuly, noted that considerable progress had been made to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was now need to review the reconciliation roadmap and to fast-track the implementation of remaining projects focusing on local reconciliation. The Minister suggested that the PBC Statement of Mutual Commitment should be updated to reflect progress made and new priorities. The need to focus on justice and security sectors and to further develop the Hub concept was also emphasized.

6. The Minister of Justice, Hon. Benedict Sannoh, underlined the need for a holistic approach to justice and security. The Hubs were an important concept in this regard, but there were also other areas in the sector that needed international support, not least in light of UNMIL's upcoming transition. More resources should be invested to strengthening security and justice services at the community level. The Judiciary highlighted the need to build more magistrates courts and to invest in the capacity of the magistrates.

Local communities and civil society

7. Local representatives from the judiciary and the police, as well as elders, chiefs, representatives of local peace committees, youth and women groups in Lofa County, recognized that there were still high levels of intercommunal tensions which occasionally led to violence. These conflicts were often related to land, but fell along ethnic/religious lines which divided communities in the civil war. The difficulty in controlling mob violence was highlighted as a major concern, especially in view of UNMIL's transition. Representatives emphasized the need to enhance accountability and increase state presence and capacity to deliver in the communities, including the justice and security sector. Empowering communities had been the winning formula in the fight against Ebola. It was suggested that this positive experience should be built upon also in the process of decentralization and the strengthening of local governance mechanisms.

8. Representatives of civil society underlined the importance of the constitutional review process but expressed concerns about the divisions which emerged in the recent National Constitutional Conference held in Gbarnga. They also highlighted the need to strengthen institutions such as the National Elections Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission in order to ensure confidence in state institutions and the electoral process. Concern was raised about the slow progress in implementing the national reconciliation roadmap. The problem of state-society relations, which surfaced during the Ebola crisis, did not emerge merely from the state's lack of capacity to deliver. Lack of trust in state institutions, they felt, was also generated by perceptions of exclusion, mistreatment by security forces, as well as political manipulation. The many outstanding grievances made the reconciliation process important for ensuring social cohesion.

UN country team and diplomatic community

9. The UN Country Team highlighted the deterioration in socio-economic conditions which resulted from the Ebola epidemic. Sixty-four percent of the population lived below the poverty line. With alarming shortfalls in the quantity and quality of education services, only thirty-four percent of children were attending primary school. The Ebola crisis had a negative effect on the economy and was straining government finances. A large number of women engaged in small business had lost their livelihoods due to the crisis and needed support. The reconciliation process was also important, and needed to

be more closely integrated with economic development and efforts to improve governance.

10. Representatives of the diplomatic community stressed the need for better international coordination. For partners to effectively support national priorities there was need for a single harmonized and integrated framework, including both Ebola recovery initiatives and UNMIL's transition. The issue of public financial management was key for expanding international financial contributions and for support to be channeled through national systems. The need to start preparing for the 2017 elections was also highlighted.

Conclusions and next steps

11. Liberia is at an important juncture in 2015. The post- Ebola recovery efforts are beginning; the third phase of UNMIL's drawdown will soon commence; and preparations will begin in the coming months for the 2017 presidential elections. Continued strong and well-coordinated support from the international community will be important in this period. The PBC should continue to play a role in safeguarding that peacebuilding gains be sustained and strengthened. Strong Government leadership and ownership of these processes will be critical.

12. There is an opportunity to draw lessons from the Ebola crisis. The crisis has demonstrated fragility of state institutions despite years of international support. There might therefore be need for even more emphasis on strengthening of state institutions, including in the justice and security sectors. The national de-concentration platform, launched by the President in February, will be an important part of this effort. Continued progress on the reconciliation roadmap seems to be another important element for continued improvement in state-society relations.

13. The Ebola crisis has demonstrated the importance of a regional approach. Enhanced collaboration and cooperation among the Mano River Union countries should be supported. ECOWAS also has an important role to play in supporting Liberia, including on security related issues as UNMIL withdraws. The PBC should therefore seek to engage even more closely with these regional organizations in the Ebola recovery process and UNMIL's transition.

14. The PBC should continue efforts to mobilize and coordinate international support for Liberia, building on impressive international engagement in the Ebola response. Close coordination between the UN Security Council and international and regional partners will be needed to ensure the link between support for Ebola recovery and the transition of UNMIL. In this regard, it will be important that the different national plans, including the Ebola Recovery Plan and the UNMIL transition plan, can be harmonized as far as possible. It will also be important to support efforts to strengthen public financial management, including the capacity to generate revenue for the national budget, to enhance sustainability.

15. The Chair intends to outline his findings from the visit in his briefing to the PBC Liberia configuration on 29 April. Conclusions from this configuration meeting will be conveyed to the Security Council at its meeting on Liberia on 5 May. Pending the finalization of one harmonized national plan for recovery and UNMIL transition, the PBC Liberia configuration would later convene to consider the need for updating its framework of engagement.