

Informal Meeting of the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration New York, 7 December 2016

Chair's Summary

Background

On 7 December 2016, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Sierra Leone Configuration convened an informal meeting at the Ambassadorial level, chaired by H.E. Mr. Marc-André Blanchard of Canada. The meeting discussed the latest political and socio-economic developments, including preparations for the 2018 elections in Sierra Leone, and exchanged views on the recommendations of the second Peacebuilding Assessment Mission (PAM2) in March and the Chair's visit to Sierra Leone in June. Invited guests were UNOWAS (Mr. Patrick Buse on behalf of SRSG Mohamed Ibn Chambas), Mr. Sunil Saigal, UN Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone, Mr. Philip Karbo, Acting Executive Secretary for the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Dr. Abubakar Kargbo, Commissioner at the National Commission for Democracy (NCD), Ms. Marcela Samba-Sesay, Chairperson of the National Election Watch Civil Society Consortium (NEW), Dr. Nana Pratt, a gender and peace activist, Mr. Kofi Korma, Deputy Secretary-General of the Mano River Union (MRU) and Mr. Oscar Fernández-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support.

Opening Remarks

1. **The Chair** opened the meeting and welcomed the speakers from Dakar and Freetown via VTC. He recalled the overall findings and recommendations of the second expert-level Peacebuilding Assessment Mission (PAM2) to Sierra Leone in March that took stock of progress made on peacebuilding priorities since the last PAM in November 2013 and the PBC Chair's visit to West Africa in June, in which he participated. Both missions met with numerous national and international stakeholders, including government officials and civil society, and took away the sense that Sierra Leone has made significant and sustained progress in consolidating peace and democracy since the end of the civil war in 2002. He underscored stakeholders' unanimous appreciation for the role that the PBC has played since 2006. He also emphasized that national stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that the PBC has an important political accompaniment and advocacy role to play in the lead-up to the 2018 elections.

2. He stated that the PAM2 concluded that the PBC should continue to remain engaged through the 2018 elections, guided by principles of being field-focused, responsive, adaptable, and needs-based. He added that the PBC should revisit this engagement in early 2018 following the successful conclusion of the elections, which the PBC has every confidence will be free, fair, transparent, and peaceful.

Latest political and socio-economic developments, including preparations for the forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone

3. **Ambassador Sumah** thanked the UN in general, and the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration in particular for their support to the peacebuilding and peace consolidation architecture in that country. He stated that the PAM2 Report is balanced, informative and in the main, reflects the views of all stakeholders. The Permanent Mission having participated in the PAM, fully concurred with the recommendations of the report. He gave a brief update on the latest developments in Sierra Leone, stating that the impact on the economy of Sierra Leone by the twin shocks (Ebola crisis and drop in international commodity prices) is still being felt. The recent efforts of the Government include instituting public expenditure rationalization measures or austerity measures to address the economic situation and to improve revenue mobilization and fiscal sustainability. However, these measures are having a heavy impact on the ordinary Sierra Leonean in the short term, particularly the removal of fuel subsidies. Therefore, he appealed for support to the Sierra Leone Ebola Recovery Fund. He added that in October, the Constitutional Review Committee held its last plenary and came out with its final report which is due to be transmitted to the President following the resolution of remaining technical and procedural issues. On preparations for the 2018 elections, he assured the meeting that the Government is ready to take responsibility and hopes the international community will continue to support Sierra Leone in this venture.

4. **Mr. Buse** informed the meeting of the SRSG's recent visit to Sierra Leone from 6 to 8 November. He spoke to the challenges that the country might be facing in organizing the elections and how the PBC and other partners can best support Sierra Leone as it prepares to meet this milestone. The SRSG expressed UNOWAS' profound appreciation for the work that the PBC and its partners have carried out in Sierra Leone. The role of the Commission, with the support of the PBF, has been instrumental in accompanying Sierra Leone throughout its critical peacebuilding phase. Concerning his recent visit to Freetown, he noted the positive trend of democratic elections in the sub-region. He also highlighted the multiple tasks that need to be accomplished before the polls, including the finalization of a national census, the new delimitation of constituency boundaries, and the compilation of a new voters' register, and a possible referendum to conclude Sierra Leone's constitutional review process. Throughout the SRSG's consultations, he urged to focus on the main goal of holding timely and credible elections. He noted concerns raised by the stakeholders that could impact the electoral calendar, such as the NEC conducting the voter registration process in order to adhere to the timeline, a de-amalgamation exercise concerning chieftdom and a possible redrawing of district boundaries. He urged political parties to pursue national dialogue and come to an agreement over contested issues. On the issue of police conduct, crowd control and electoral security, SRSG Chambas offered to facilitate an exchange of best practices with counterparts in Ghana. He raised other issues of concern, including the need for a speedy enactment of the constitutional review report and the need for continued political dialogue. On these and related issues, UNOWAS welcomed the continuing engagement and support by the PBC.

5. **Mr. Saigal** provided an update on situation in the country, emphasizing that austerity measures established by the government in the short-term will impact on price of goods, particularly, rice. The removal of fuel subsidies and increase of customs/tariffs will stimulate national production in the long-term, but will cause price increases in the short term. He said that, based on the recently released State of Food Insecurity report, 3.5 million Sierra Leoneans are food insecure and without access to sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food. Of these, about 600,000 are severely food insecure out of a 7.5 million population. He informed that an inter-agency task force has been formed to identify possible measures to be discussed with the government to mitigate the consequences of austerity measures on vulnerable households. Concurring with SRSG Chambas on the concerns related to election preparations, he stated that the UN system is working closely with the government and NEC to support their efforts. He mentioned that a project was being developed to address conflict prevention and mitigation during the electoral cycle, which captures discussions held by SRSG Chambas with stakeholders during his mission to Freetown, with PBSO, DPA and UNDP. He also mentioned that UNDP is also working on a project to support the election preparation in collaboration with NEC and donors.

6. **Mr. Karbo** (NEC) spoke about the preparations for the election process, particularly the timeline and various milestones that need to be met. He informed that the NEC will carry out the voter registration exercise in collaboration with the National Civil Registration Authority, as part of the civil registration exercise. He stated that consideration is being made to review the nomination fees for candidates, which have been a reason of concerns of the candidates. He reiterated that the constitution review referendum might take place in October 2017. In addition to ongoing discussion with UNDP, he urged the international community to support the funding for the elections, which is estimated to be \$43m, out of which the Government has committed the large majority and the current gap is identified at \$15m. NEC is working closely with the President to announce the election date, which will most likely take place in February 2018. The announcement of the date will need to be made at least 12 months prior to the holding of elections, to allow possible candidates to step down from their current roles, in line with constitutional provisions.

7. **Mr. Kargbo** (NCD) stressed the important role of NCD in the preparations for the elections, includes facilitating dialogue, and providing civic education, capacity building and support to Sierra Leone in order to promote transparent, accountable and responsive democratic processes and institutions as well as strengthen civil society. He opined that the 2018 elections are likely to be contested and the election process requires constant monitoring and attention. He underscored the importance of informing and educating the general public about the elections process.

8. **Ms. Samba-Sesay** spoke about the need to give more space for civil society for the preparations for the elections. She informed that NEW recently called on NEC to release the specific date for elections in 2018. She reiterated the main concerns around new processes that have been proposed and might impact on the electoral cycle and delay the election process, such as the boundary delimitation, de-amalgamation of chiefdoms,

and the Constitutional Review. She also stressed the importance of nominating a Chair for the Political Parties Registration Commission. She added that NEW was working with the Security Planning Committee on early warning issues.

9. Dr. Pratt provided views on the important role and right of women to participate in the political process and elections. She stated that political parties must ensure a 30 per cent representation of women among their candidates. On the PAM2 report, she requested the dissemination to a wide range of stakeholders. She called on and expected the international community and the PBC to assist the UN system through the UNCT to provide funding and support to promote and develop women's empowerment, particular since the upcoming elections have no guarantor, as was the case during previous elections conducted with the presence of a Security Council-mandated UN mission. She referenced the women's situation rooms that were established in the context of the 2012 elections as a good practice that helped to prevent and contain violence in 2012, and urged the UN to support a similar initiative in the lead up to the 2018 elections.

10. Mr. Koman informed the meeting of the MRU's views on the upcoming election from a regional perspective, and in particular with regard to border security. He stated that the sub-region is peaceful and elections were planned for neighboring Liberia in 2017. The withdrawal of UNMIL remains a concern. MRU members are sharing experiences and lessons through regular meetings and election boards. He concurred that civic education was important, especially for the youth. On border monitoring, he stated that 15 border units were set up by MRU, but only a few are operational at this time.

11. Mr. Fernández-Taranco emphasized that Sierra Leone is a good example for PBC engagement throughout the UN transition process which has many lessons and good practices to offer for others. To ensure that the international community and national stakeholders come together, the PBC should "pick up its tempo" in 2017. Recalling the importance of the sustaining peace resolutions, he underscored the importance of PBC's bridging role between security, development and human rights engagements and with UN principal organs, intergovernmental bodies, UN system; in achieving coherent and coordinated action within the UN; and the PBC-PBF synergy, which would also be discussed at tomorrow's PBC retreat. He highlighted that the PAM2 report and today's meeting raised concerns in certain sectors that are critical for peace consolidation, including work with political parties, media, civil society and youth, which may warrant closer attention in the run-up to the 2018 elections. He mentioned that in the wake of the Ebola crisis, there was also a renewed sense of urgency in moving forward with decentralization and local governance reforms. He informed that PBSO is working closely with UNCT and UNOWAS on the next PBF project on conflict prevention in view of the upcoming elections. There is a need to translate these critical issues into programmes, including community security through youth participation in Kono District, women's situation rooms, civic education, human rights and cross-border work, as mentioned by the briefers and the report.

12. Member States took the floor and welcomed the conclusion of the PAM2 report. They recognized the progress Sierra Leone has made through the shocks and commended

their resilience. One member state added that Sierra Leone ranked 8th among African countries in the Global Peace Index. They reiterated their support to the country and offered to share their own country experiences in the key identified areas. One member state emphasized that elections, the constitutional review process, political parties, civil society and the judiciary are in much need of the international community's support to provide aide and assistance, including financial. Member States emphasized the important role of the PBC, which would contribute to MRU and ECOWAS' vital role in Sierra Leone. A neighboring Member State said that conducting peaceful and fair elections in Sierra Leone was important for the sub-region, as peace in Sierra Leone meant peace in neighboring countries.

13. In closing, **the Chair** urged partners to continue to support Sierra Leone through this critical phase, and informed that an expert-level meeting would be convened next week to hear the views of partners and finalize the PAM2 report.
