

## **Peacebuilding Commission Informal Meeting on Sri Lanka**

**20 November 2017**

### **Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion**

On 20 November 2017, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting to discuss the peacebuilding experiences of Sri Lanka, upon the request of the Sri Lankan Government.

H.E. Mr. Indrajith Coomaraswamy, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mano Tittawella, Secretary General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM) attended the meeting and explained to the Commission the peacebuilding priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka. Mr. Jehan Perera of the Sri Lanka National Peace Council also delivered remarks.

From the United Nations, Mr. Miroslav Jenca, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, and Ms. Una McCauley, UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka addressed the meeting.

The meeting focused on Sri Lanka's comprehensive efforts towards sustainable peace and prosperity, in particular the efforts of the Government to promote socio-economic development, reconciliation and transitional justice. The meeting provided an important opportunity for the PBC to discuss ways in which the UN system could continue to support the Government in the future. Speakers also underlined the need for an inclusive and people-centered peace, highlighting the positive role of women, youth and civil society can play in Sri Lanka's peacebuilding process. The role of the Peacebuilding Fund in supporting the peacebuilding priorities of Sri Lanka was a particular focus.

1. The Chair opened the meeting emphasizing that the meeting had been convened at the request of the national authorities to discuss the peacebuilding priorities of Sri Lanka and ways in which the international community, including the United Nations, could support these priorities. The meeting testified to the convening power of the PBC and its ability to serve as a platform for countries that are interested in engaging with a broad range of stakeholders on their efforts to sustain peace, including learning previous good practices and lessons learned. He added that the PBC was looking forward to hearing the unique experiences of Sri Lanka in the areas of reconciliation, constitutional reform, good governance, human rights, and the participation of women, among others.
2. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, explained that the engagement of the UN with Sri Lanka would be critical for securing sustainable peace and development in the country. After explaining the history of the conflict, he underscored that the elections in 2015 sent a strong message by the people of

Sri Lanka against ethnic and religious divisions, extremism and impunity. Despite a myriad of challenges, the country was on a steady course towards democracy, rule of law, good governance, reconciliation and sustainable peace. He went on to commend the contributions of the Peacebuilding Fund in providing the resources to Sri Lanka at the right time in the areas of supporting resettlement, fostering reconciliation and transitional justice, and enhancing technical expertise. He noted that they were aware of outside perception that progress may be slow, but stressed that Sri Lanka had achieved much against multiple challenges. He explained in further detail the transitional justice and reconciliation processes, and highlighted the importance of achieving sustainable development to build and sustain peace in the country.

3. Dr. Indrajith Coomaraswamy, Governor of the Central Bank, informed the PBC of the strong nexus between development and consolidating peace in Sri Lanka, and stressed the importance of developing the economy to sustainably address the socio-economic and political injustices of the past. He explained Sri Lanka's national development priorities and pointed out that although Sri Lanka is making rapid progress in social development and economic growth, the country is still lagging in generating livelihoods and attaining inclusive development across the country as a whole. Therefore, the focus now is to strengthen the social sector and create wealth across geographical divides. Sri Lanka needed a new private sector export driven growth model, making use of its geographical location and the support of regional countries. Towards this end, several policies and legislation have been enacted to strengthen growth, instill fiscal and macroeconomic stability, manage domestic debt, enhance trade, improve the investment climate, and reform labor laws in favor of underrepresented women.
4. Mr. Mano Tittawella, Secretary General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM), talked about the ambitious transitional justice and reconciliation agenda that Sri Lanka has embarked with UN support to operationalize its commitments to Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 30/1. He pointed out the important role played by the PBF to support quick-win confidence building measures, such as the National Consultation Task Force to seek public and victims' views and opinions on transitional justice, Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) efforts to prioritize people-centered approaches to reconciliation, working better with the youth, establishing better partnerships among various ethnic, religious and social groups, and resettlement of IDPs. He explained the developments of the implementation of the four pillars under the comprehensive Sri Lanka Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP), and highlighted the slow but cautious progress on the sensitive transitional justice mechanisms that deal with truth seeking and healing, judicial issues, reparations and the Office of Missing Persons (OMP). He stressed the importance of international support for the efforts to pursue transitional justice and reconciliation, and highlighted the PBF's catalytic effect on the PPP that resulted in additional funding contributions from donors, such as the EU, UK, and Norway. The government's budget allocation of 11.3 billion Rupees on reconciliation for 2018 demonstrates the government's strong commitment to sustainable peace.
5. Mr. Miroslav Jenca, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, explained how the UN has been supporting the government to advance peace, reconciliation and

accountability in a comprehensive manner. He stressed the importance of constitutional reform to move towards a political settlement and ensure a sustainable end to violent conflicts, noting the recent debate in the Constitutional Assembly on this issue. Recent high-level visits from the UN to the country, deployment of a Reconciliation and Development Adviser, and PBF's support to reconciliation were indicators of the commitment of the UN to Sri Lanka.

6. Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, stressed that transitional justice is an essential element of the UN's peacebuilding work in Sri Lanka, and in the absence of a peace agreement, HRC resolution 30/1 established the framework by which the government, victims and civil society can address the root causes of the past conflict. He noted that the implementation of commitments was taking longer than originally envisaged, but there had been recent positive moves, such as steps taken towards the operationalization of the OMP. Democratic space had opened up and the human rights situation had improved. However, the long-awaited review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in line with international human rights standards, and the incorporation into national law of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance, the demilitarization of the North and East and the resolution of land disputes remained outstanding. With support from the PBF from April 2016, OHCHR was supporting the Government of Sri Lanka in designing transitional justice mechanisms, including the National Consultations on the Reconciliation Mechanisms. OHCHR would continue supporting the government in establishing the truth and reconciliation commission, and the prompt operationalization of the OMP.
7. Ms. Una McCauley, UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, pointed out that Sri Lanka was one of the best examples where the UN was able to speak in one voice. From the beginning of the transition process, the UN had played an important convening role, moving from coordinated UN action to coordinating the efforts of all donors and partners around the priorities of the government through the Peacebuilding Priority Plan. With the support of donors and funding from the PBF, the UN Country Team had been able to engage in confidence building and resettlement, and provide discreet technical assistance to the government.
8. Mr. Jehan Perera from the Sri Lanka National Peace Council voiced his gratitude for the international support in finding solutions to intractable issues in Sri Lanka. He pointed out that Sri Lanka has a diverse civil society fabric. He noted recent progress in achieving freedom from fear, ending impunity and human rights violations, and the expansion of space where the civil society could operate. Sri Lanka still has many problems which could only be addressed through inclusive approaches. Civil society with national and international support could play an important role in overcoming these problems.
9. Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, ASG for Peacebuilding Support, highlighted Sri Lanka's unique experiences on reconciliation, peacebuilding and economic development, and noted the centrality of implementing the HRC resolution 30/1 to its efforts to guarantee non-recurrence of past human rights violations and to put the country on the path to sustainable peace and development. He explained how the Peacebuilding Fund was

supporting Sri Lanka to build lasting peace, particularly by helping the government to coordinate and mobilize donor support around the PPP, support an inclusive Peacebuilding Board for strategic guidance, enable national consultations on transitional justice, support ONUR, enable land release and IDPs resettlement, encourage greater participation of women and youth in reconciliation and help foster greater UN coherence. He further encouraged countries like Sri Lanka and Colombia to share their unique lessons and experiences on reconciliation, accountability and development, and urged greater engagement of the IFIs on the development dimension of building peace.

10. In their statements, PBC members gave the following messages:

- The Sri Lanka case provided many valuable lessons on peace and development, including the importance of PBF engagement in a middle-income country, simultaneous efforts to address peace and development matters by aligning economic and fiscal fundamentals in support of long-term peace, and strong government ownership of various processes, including the comprehensive PPP.
- The Sri Lanka case was particularly important in prioritizing national ownership, ensuring comprehensive approaches with a focus on youth, as well as moving towards people-centered approaches. Aligning donor support to Sri Lanka with government plans, particularly the four pillars of the PPP, was of particular importance. The government's commitment to reconciliation, transitional justice, resettlement and the operationalization of the OMP was commendable.
- Sri Lanka's understanding of the linkages between reconciliation and development, and its efforts to achieve sustainable peace and reconciliation through comprehensive and ambitious development and fiscal plans were applauded.
- Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 had to be fully implemented with the support of Sri Lanka's international partners. Moving forward on constitutional reforms would help guarantee the non-recurrence of violations and abuses. Some members highlighted the importance of the government accelerating peace and reconciliation efforts in areas such as political reform, constitutional reform and returning land occupied by the military.
- PBF's strategic engagement, guided by a reliable and inclusive country-level Peacebuilding Board, was commended.
- Some members pointed out the similarity between the experiences of Sri Lanka and other countries, and called for a greater sharing of lessons and experiences through the PBC and PBF. The continued support of both the PBC and PBF to Sri Lanka would continue to be important in supporting Sri Lanka's transition to sustainable peace.

11. The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking all speakers for sharing their perspectives on the peacebuilding experience of Sri Lanka. He pointed out that the meeting illustrated how the PBC can help countries in their efforts to build and sustain peace, and also testified to the importance of strengthening the synergies between the PBC and the PBF, particularly when countries are declared eligible to receive funds from the PBF. He expressed his hope that the Commission will follow up on this meeting to see how it can provide Sri Lanka a platform to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, for it to meet its peacebuilding requirements.