

PBC Ambassadorial-level meeting on Sierra Leone
Tuesday, 22 January, 2019
Chairperson's summary of the Discussion

On 22 January 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Sierra Leone. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Marc-Andre Blanchard, Chair of the Sierra Leone Configuration. Sierra Leone Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mrs. Nimatulai Bah-Chang, and Deputy Minister of Planning and Development, Dr. Robert Tamba Michael Chakanda, attended the meeting via Video Tele-Conference (VTC), alongside the United Nations Resident Coordinator and World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Country Managers. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Government to share its peacebuilding and development priorities ahead of the release of the new National Development Plan (NDP). The UN, IMF and the World Bank all presented their partnership frameworks for Sierra Leone, including United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) preparations, the World Bank's new Country Partnership Framework, and the IMF's resumption of the Extended Credit Facility arrangement. The Resident Coordinator also provided an update on the political situation in the country and voiced concerns that political divisions might impede implementation of the ambitious development agenda.

Briefings:

1. **H.E. Mrs. Nimatulai Bah-Chang**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, acknowledged that the PBC has always aligned its actions with the aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone, and expressed the view that the successful transition from peacekeeping to a focus on peace consolidation and development benefitted from the advocacy of the PBC. She further explained that the peaceful transition of power after the recent elections would enable the country to move towards addressing key peacebuilding and development priorities, including through the NDP. The current development focus areas of the Government, articulated in the plan, were education, infrastructure, agriculture, anti-corruption, justice, accountability, health, security, macro-economic stability, water, sanitation and the empowerment of women and youth. Given the limited resources available for development, the Government is looking to increase government revenue through innovative ways to attract foreign direct investment and mobilize the private sector. Strengthening institutions such as law enforcement agencies and the Anti-Corruption Commission and building capacity in the judicial sector would be imperative for development. She appealed to the Peacebuilding Commission to focus on issues such as including infrastructure development for peace, youth employment, and sustainable economic development.

2. **Dr. Robert Tamba Michael Chakanda**, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development of Sierra Leone, explained that the development of the NDP was conducted in an inclusive manner, bringing together national stakeholders including government institutions, development agencies, schools, private sectors, district and city councils. He went on to clarify the eight pillars of the NDP: 1) human capital development; 2) population, youth, sports and migration; 3) diversifying the economy; 4) governance and accountability for results 5) infrastructure and economic competitiveness 6) empowering women, children, adolescents and persons with disabilities, 7) addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience; 8) means of implementation.

3. **Mr. Sunil Saigal**, the UN Resident Coordinator provided an update on the political situation in the country. He explained that anti-corruption efforts, including the establishment of three Commissions of Inquiry on investigating assets and unexplained wealth of former Ministers and Deputy Ministers and the questioning of former ministers by the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police, had

led to increased political tensions, which in turn had raised risks of ethno-regional divisions in some parts of the country. In this regard, the RC, together with development partners, the Mano River Union Ambassador, and ECOWAS Ambassadors had met with two opposition parties who presented their views on the current situation. A meeting was also held with the Government to receive its perspective, attended by the Chief Minister, Attorney General, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Minister of Information. Through these meetings, the RC and partners had encouraged constructive dialogue between the government and the opposition and had offered to help create space for such dialogue. The RC also gave an overview of preparations related to the UNDAF. The repositioning of the UN Development System and the new UNDAF guidelines would provide his office with better opportunities to coordinate development assistance around government needs. In response to the government's development priorities, he strongly welcomed the focus on education, as human capacity development, coupled with strong, peaceful and just institutions, were prerequisites for development. To attract private sector investment, instituting relevant legal policies to foster a conducive environment for private investment was key.

4. **Dr. Gayle Martin**, the World Bank Country Manager for Sierra Leone, noted that although Sierra Leone made notable progress on the peace and security side over the past 15 years and despite its vast natural resources, the country still ranked among the lowest on many development indices. Periodic political uncertainties and a seemingly persistent ethno-regional divide, coupled with the extreme vulnerability of the economy to climate related and other shocks, and weak institutional capacity, particularly poor management on natural resources and service delivery were hampering prospects for sustainable development. On the other hand, there was reason to be cautiously optimistic. There had been positive movements in several directions, including on wealth creation particularly around Freetown, development of urban areas and improvements in basic service delivery. The leadership's dedication to growth, commitment to anti-corruption and emphasis on human capital development were welcome. Based on its recently completed Systematic Country Diagnostic, the World Bank was developing its Country Partnership Framework, which would help frame programming priorities for the country. With an annual grant allocation of only \$100 million dollars, the World Bank activities focus on three focus areas: 1) human capital development; 2) economic diversification and competitiveness; 3) institutions, governance and resilience. Noting that private sector finance would not be able to meet the vast infrastructure needs in Sierra Leone, she stressed the need to attract private sector partners that could help support the country on its path to sustainable development.

5. **Mr. Brian Aitken**, the IMF Mission Chief for Sierra Leone, noted the importance of securing macro financial stability, building resilience to external shocks and building capacity in Sierra Leone. The government remained dependent on short-run measures to finance its ambitious agenda. The IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement, which was relaunched in November 2018, aimed at improving the prospects for long-term growth. He commended the Government's drive to deliver, while highlighting the need to balance development-related ambitions with enhancing transparency and accountability, building government institutions particularly to advance public finance management and central bank governance, building capacity, and the establishment of financial sector and tax administration. Debt distress remained a major risk: while the government wanted to prioritize infrastructure development to generate growth and facilitate delivery, the heavy indebtedness of the country did not leave much room to maneuver. In the longer run, sustainable solutions would have to be sought to address the government's inability to generate resources to meet its needs. The mining sector was important, but it realistically would not suffice to focus solely on the mining sector to promote growth. He concluded his remarks by suggesting that Sierra Leone needed a platform to connect to other growth and development opportunities.

Discussion among PBC members:

- PBC members stressed that Sierra Leone had made great strides in sustaining peace. Last year's credible, transparent and peaceful elections and the orderly transition of power was proof that Sierra Leone has reached a degree of maturity and political stability. Despite numerous developmental challenges and risks, the successful transition process, together with the government's commitment and willingness to prioritize the country's peacebuilding and development need, left room for optimism.
- Members commended the Government's efforts and ownership in drafting its ambitious National Development Plan, and particularly welcomed the efforts of the Government to enhance inclusiveness, empower women and youth, promote the private sector and improve the business climate for investments. They also welcomed the *Free Quality Education Programme*, which has a special focus on women and girl's education. Delegations welcomed the presence of the World Bank and IMF as particularly helpful in presenting a comprehensive picture of the challenges.
- Several PBC members recognized that anti-corruption measures were necessary to advance the development agenda. Yet, it was important to control negative reactions and send strong messages that the anti-corruption agenda was not targeted at specific individuals or parties and were carried out fairly in rule of law and due process. Some delegates called on the Government to hold dialogues with all political parties in support of national cohesion. In this regard, the setting up of the Commission for Peace and National Cohesion was highly commended.
- Given the immense needs of the country, the PBC's role in galvanizing support from both traditional and non-traditional donors was emphasized. Many countries had gone through similar peace and development challenges such as Sierra Leone, and the PBC could serve as a platform to collectively identify ways to address them. The potential role of the PBC in fostering regional cooperation in West Africa to support national developmental priorities was brought up, as the countries of the Mano River Union face similar peace and development challenges.
- Some Members echoed the IMF's call for a need for an international platform to enable the country to connect to various growth and development opportunities. In response, the Resident Coordinator explained that there was a coordination mechanism chaired by the UN and the World Bank that could serve as such a platform. Several Members mentioned the potential of the PBC to better link up various financial instruments, help identify potential gaps, and support better international coherence. One delegation stressed that the international community could extract inspiration, motivation and good ideas for Sierra Leone from the UN – World Bank Report "*Pathways for Peace*".

Closing remarks:

6. In closing remarks, Ms. Barrie Freeman, Political Director and Deputy Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office, underscored that national ownership and leadership lies at the heart of the sustaining peace framework and in this context, the meeting provided a valuable opportunity for the government to present its development ambitions and for the international community to demonstrate how they planned to formulate and coordinate their efforts in support of national priorities. She commended the government for placing inclusivity at the heart of their development plan. She congratulated Sierra Leone's leading role in galvanizing global commitment to the SDG framework and noted that the reform of the development system will ensure the UN system in Sierra Leone to support the

implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a more strategic and coherent manner. The Peacebuilding Commission would continue to serve as a platform to discuss options for supporting sustainable development in Sierra Leone and coordinating international efforts and plans. The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which has provided sustained and catalytic support to Sierra Leone since 2007, investing nearly \$60 million in support of a wide range of peacebuilding projects, would continue to provide support to Sierra Leone aligned with the national priorities articulated during today's meeting, and in coordination with the World Bank, the IMF and other partners.

7. **H.E. Mr. Francis Mustapha Kai-Kai**, the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, in his remarks at the end of the meeting, noted that this was the first meeting of the PBC he had attended and had strongly appreciated the support and intervention from all briefers and participants. He emphasized that the fight against corruption was essential to spur economic growth and there was strong political will to address this issue. In this context, he welcomed the international community's sharing of advice and guidance on addressing corruption and avoiding pitfalls when dealing with persistent corruption. He underscored that various interventions throughout the meeting should help guide the PBC's efforts and plans for the following year, and called on more international cooperation in reducing poverty, galvanizing private sector support and supporting the peacebuilding needs and priorities of Sierra Leone through the PBC platform. He was hopeful that the Chair's next visit to Sierra Leone would be an opportunity to help facilitate private sector investment in Sierra Leone.

Action points for the Peacebuilding Commission:

- Continue to provide the government with a platform to present its needs and priorities to the international community as the national development plan unfolds and is put into implementation, while bringing a strategic approach and coherence to international peacebuilding efforts in support of the peacebuilding and development priorities of the government.
- Use the Chair's upcoming visit to Sierra Leone as an opportunity to explore the possibilities for using the PBC to support national cohesion and dialogue, galvanize strategic and coherent international approaches, and support approaches that could positively contribute to growth and development.
- Bring focus on the regional angle, by fostering conversations on peacebuilding and development challenges in the countries of the Mano River Union, including the sharing of good practices and lessons learned in peacebuilding.