

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone

9 December 2021

1. On 9 December, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Sierra Leone. The meeting was held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Mr. Osama Abdelkhalek, the Chair of the PBC. The main purpose for the meeting was for the Government of Sierra Leone to update the PBC on progress in the roadmap for engagement with the PBC. The meeting also provided a platform for an exchange on the lessons learnt in peacebuilding efforts, and the mobilization of additional support for youth and women empowerment in Sierra Leone. In his opening remarks, the Chair noted that the meeting provided an opportunity for the international community to continue to accompany Sierra Leone in the implementation of the roadmap to ensure lasting peace and sustainable development.
2. The Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, H.E. Ms. Mamadi Gobehe Kamara, informed that the country has continued to consolidate peace gains within the identified roadmap priorities, focusing mainly on national cohesion, human capital development, economic diversification, institutional resilience and governance as well as COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. She mentioned some of the successes so far, such as the inclusion and engagement of youth into the political and socio-economic sectors, free quality education and the adoption of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy.
3. The Minister of Planning and Economic Development, H.E. Dr Francis Mustapha Kai-Kai, described progress made in peacebuilding priorities outlined in Sierra Leone's PBC roadmap, explaining that COVID-19 had further increased inequalities and caused additional funding and resource constraints. He described his government's efforts to address governance and development challenges, with a focus on the role of women and youth. He was accompanied by the Director of Planning, Research and Policy at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Sheka Bangura, who presented in more detail activities that aim to economically empower youth, including through the promotion of entrepreneurship and investments in cocoa and coffee plantations, rice cultivation, waste management and car washing. He noted that more support is needed to provide market-based livelihood opportunities for vulnerable youth, school retention and reintegration, reduction of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, and to increase the public awareness of drug abuse. He described efforts to increase national school enrolment of girls and boys in primary and junior secondary schools, and to reduce maternal mortality, infant mortality and under-five mortality rates. He also highlighted the importance of the recently adopted Gender Empowerment Bill and associated efforts to increase the representation of women in higher political offices and managerial positions.

4. The Minister of Youth, H.E. Mr. Mohamed Oman Bangura, acknowledged the support provided by the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to the Government and other key stakeholders in the development of a joint report on youth outreach in Sierra Leone, which led to PBF funded pilot projects in Tonkolili and Kenema districts focusing on empowering youth at risk (women and men) as resources for sustaining peace and community resilience, with over 800 beneficiaries (46% women). The projects aim to empower and include youth (targeted at 15-35 years) in all spheres of the decision-making processes, including at the cabinet, national, district and village levels. He emphasized the need to empower youth in communities, for example through the establishment of youth councils and youth and development groups, and to enable youth at risk to meaningfully reintegrate into their families and seek livelihood opportunities. He explained that these efforts are crucial to the prevention of violence and sustaining peace within communities.
5. The Founder and First President of the 50/50 Group Sierra Leone, an all-woman-led civil society organization, Dr Nemata Majeks-Walker, briefed the Commission on the organization's work on the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women, strengthening the role of women in building social cohesion, the promotion of local-level accountability, and women's participation in electoral processes. The organization was actively involved in the development of Sierra Leone's National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, as well as the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (2020). The organization also participated in consultations of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023), which established a dedicated cluster on the empowerment of women, children and persons with disability. She described her organization's contributions to the establishment of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion and stressed the need for further action, based on existing government policies and strategies, to address gender inequality and gender-based violence, which cause the marginalization and exclusion of women from governance processes.
6. The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovannie Biha, noted that Sierra Leone is a successful example of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. She commended President Bio's commitment to the development of human capital through the establishment of a free and quality education in Sierra Leone, which will help create opportunities for the young people. She noted that with the support of the UN Country team, the Government had launched a new National Youth policy and made efforts to increase access to livelihoods for young men and women. She welcomed the efforts by the civil society to launch of the implementation of the UNSCR 2250 Youth, Peace and Security in Sierra Leone. She also noted the creation of community-based organizations for sustainable livelihood and their contribution to peacebuilding. She cited the steps taken, with the support of PBF, to address the reported

increase in drug and substance abuse and increased recruitment of young boys and girls into gangs, which has facilitated the reintegration of about 500 young people engaged with gangs and provided them with psychosocial support, life skills and knowledge of their civic rights.

7. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- They commended Sierra Leone for progress in consolidating peacebuilding dividends, national ownership, reconciliation, and social cohesion. They recognized the PBC accompaniment of Sierra Leone over the past 14 years as a platform for the mobilization of international support for the country's peacebuilding efforts. They appreciated the valuable role played by the PBF in providing targeted and catalytic funding.
- They expressed support for national reconciliation efforts and underscored the role of the independent commission for peace and national unity, building on lessons from the truth and reconciliation process. They took note of the need to further consolidate democratic space, pursue policy and institutional reforms, and strengthen national and local institutional capacity and accountability. They expressed concern about increasing political polarization and called for peaceful and transparent elections in 2023.
- They welcomed progress regarding the rights of women and encouraged further action to empower women and youth, including through their meaningful participation in decision-making processes and inclusion in social and economic development. They underlined the critical role played by women in peacebuilding and sustaining peace and called for more action to address sexual and gender-based violence and prevent youth violence and conflict.
- They noted the need for economic diversification as well as the country's vulnerability to climate change and related pressures to natural resources that cause instability and stressed the importance of empowering youth green entrepreneurs.
- They committed to continue supporting the country's efforts to address inequalities, which are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to invest in human capital development with a focus on women and youth.
- The Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Alhaji Fanday Turay, delivered concluding remarks. He expressed appreciation for the engagement of the PBC in support of inclusive dialogue, resilience and sustainable development in Sierra Leone. He requested PBC support in mobilizing resources for women and youth empowerment, and suggested a future briefing by the Minister of Gender