

PBC Ambassadorial meeting on Liberia

20 June 2019

Chairperson's summary of the Discussion

1. On 20 June 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Liberia. The meeting, chaired by **H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog** of Sweden, Chair of the Liberia Configuration, was convened to provide a platform for the Government of Liberia to address its opportunities and challenges in peace and development, and for Member States to be updated on the situation in Liberia. A high-level delegation from the Liberian Government attended the meeting via video conference, represented by: Hon. Samuel D. Tweah, Jr, Minister of Finance; Hon. Varney A. Sirleaf, Minister of Internal Affairs; Hon. Archi Bernard, Legal Advisor to the President; Hon. Abraham Korvah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Cllr. Nyanite Tuan, Deputy Minister of Justice and Hon. Jefferson Karmoh; National Security Advisor, together with the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Yacoub El Hillo, as well as partners, including the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and representatives of civil society in Monrovia. Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of UNOWAS, also joined the meeting via video.
2. In his introductory remarks, the Chair noted the “7 June protest”, and welcomed efforts made by the Government as well as the organizers of the protests to ensure the peaceful conduct of democratic expression. He highlighted the mandate of the Commission to help improve coordination of all relevant international actors within and outside the United Nations in support of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Peace and Development (PAPD). He introduced the draft statement of the PBC that had been circulated prior to the meeting as a demonstration of the Commission's commitment to continue to support Liberia in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.
3. **Hon. Samuel D. Tweah, Jr.**, Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Liberia, provided a comprehensive overview of the national development agenda. He appreciated support of the PBF in areas including women's empowerment and youth political engagement, transitional justice and human rights, and looked forward to its continued role. He underscored the severe macroeconomic instability faced by Liberia, which risked exacerbating political and social tensions in the country. In this regard, he noted that the cabinet had approved measures to stabilize the economy, and the government was working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The focus was on addressing macroeconomic imbalance and attracting investment.

The Minister outlined plans for a budget in which government spending was close to its revenue potential, in order to avoid deficit financing. The government was addressing the exorbitant wage bill of approximately \$330 million per year; including conducting a salary

harmonization exercise. He explained that the government would also improve effective cash management and that bonds have been issued by the Central Bank. To tackle the situation of insufficient foreign currency, the government was looking, for example, to adjust regulation of foreign remittances. With respect to investment, the Minister introduced the government's efforts to reform the business environment, including by reducing the cost of electricity and shipping. The Minister noted that there was currently \$2 million allocated in the budget for investments in agriculture, while more resources were needed from partners across a range of areas, including to support youth participation.

The Minister highlighted progress underway on the Government's PAPD. He welcomed the \$47 million World Bank Project on secondary education in Liberia, and further appreciated support from development partners in education, health and social protection, outlined as priorities in the PAPD. He flagged that a key challenge of the economic situation and job creation was infrastructure, including roads and electricity, and he commended the financial support from the World Bank, UK and France to the Liberian Infrastructure Trust Fund. However, he also expressed his concerns over the country's debt, and the heavy burden that could hinder the development of the private sector.

With respect to sustaining peace, the Minister noted the political tensions in Liberia, evidenced by recent protests. He reported that the President was paying special attention to security sector reform. In addition, he said that the government planned to establish a corruption court to fast-track corruption cases, strengthen the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, and fund integrity and transparency institutions to strengthen accountability. In conclusion, the Minister informed the PBC that the President was calling for an inclusive national economic dialogue to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the country.

4. The **Minister of Internal Affairs, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Minister of Justice of Liberia** made brief complementary remarks. They noted that the Government continued to make progress on decentralization since the signing of the decentralization law in September 2018; highlighted that the Government is committed to promoting peace, security and rule of law; and reflected on the valuable role played by regional and sub-regional organizations, such as the AU and ECOWAS.
5. **Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas**, the SRSG for West Africa, recalled his visit to Liberia on the eve of the 7 June protest, as part of the "troika" (UN, AU and ECOWAS), emphasizing that efforts by all partners and stakeholders to ensure the peaceful conduct of the protest showed the strengthening of democratic practices in Liberia. Underscoring that dialogue was the only means to resolve tensions, he encouraged the Government to maintain its commitment to dialogue with the opposition, and for the opposition to sit down with authorities in pursuit of peaceful solutions. He commended the PBC for supporting, through its advocacy role, inter

alia, the country's democratic institutions, efforts to promote accountability, and the fight against corruption. He commended the audit report published by the Minister of Justice of Liberia, and further assured that his office, together with partners within and outside the UN, would continue to support the country in consolidating peace.

6. **Mr. Yacoub El Hillo**, the UN Resident Coordinator in Liberia, outlined the strong partnership within and outside the UN in Liberia, working closely together and following the lead of the Government. He noted that the UN Country Team was finalizing the new sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) with Liberia. The Resident Coordinator acknowledged the PBC for its efforts to draw attention and resources to support the new development framework of Liberia, commended Liberia's commitment to peace, and called upon the collective responsibility of the international community to continue its support to the country.
7. Member States welcomed the meeting and made the following observations:
 - They commended the Government of Liberia for its efforts to promote sustainable peace and development, and welcomed the inclusive process of developing the PAPD. They welcomed the PAPD's attention to the peace and development nexus and addressing root causes of conflict, such as human capacity development, job creation and private sector engagement, national reconciliation, good governance and rule of law, transparency and accountability, including anti-corruption efforts, and the empowerment of women and youth.
 - They noted the peaceful conduct of the recent protest and encouraged all stakeholders to continue to exercise restraint and resolve disputes through dialogue. In this regard, the Government of Liberia was encouraged to continue to work closely with the UN, AU and ECOWAS.
 - They committed to aligning future support with the Government's PAPD. In this regard, they also encouraged the Government to continue working with the World Bank and IMF, and to establish plans to guide and monitor the PAPD.
8. **H.E. Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah**, Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations, extended gratitude to the international community for its continuous and unwavering support. He called on all stakeholders to commit to dialogue, and further assured that the Government would protect the fundamental rights of all Liberians. He reiterated the call for assistance the country needs in key sectors, including job creation, electricity, forest, agriculture, health, education, youth and women empowerment.
9. **Ms. Barrie Freeman**, Director and Deputy Head of PBSO, underlined that national ownership and leadership, supported by international partners, lies at the heart of the sustaining peace framework. She noted that the resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture

reinforce the comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred vision of the 2030 Agenda, and the role of the PBC as a forum for international and multilateral cooperation to ensure coherent and coordinated approaches in conflict-affected settings, such as in Liberia. She further highlighted that the Peacebuilding Fund has provided sustained and catalytic funding to Liberia since 2010 and will continue to align its support with national peacebuilding priorities. The National Peace Hut Women of Liberia, as the winner of the 2019 United Nations Population Award, was recognized as an example of a successful Peacebuilding Fund investment in the fields of population and reproductive health.

10. The Chair underscored the positive outcome of deliberations and close dialogue between both sides leading up to the 7 June protests. He encouraged the Government of Liberia to make efforts to address concerns raised by actors in the country. He welcomed the President's invitation to all stakeholders to a national economic dialogue, and emphasized that women's equal and meaningful participation was encouraged, in order to properly reflect the composition of the Liberian population. The Chair also welcomed the continued commitment by the President to uphold fruitful cooperation with the international community, including recent initiatives in the field of anti-corruption. The PBC will continue to follow the developments and the Configuration will continue its efforts to support the country.