

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration

15 April 2020

Chair's Summary

1. On 15 April, the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on the socio-economic situation in Liberia in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, Chair of the Liberia Configuration of the PBC. The objective of the meeting was to explore ways to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic development and bring attention to the various risks of reversing peacebuilding gains in Liberia in light of the pandemic.
2. In her opening remarks, the Chair recalled the PBC meeting held on 8 April on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and noted that this meeting of the Liberia configuration was the first country-specific meeting on the same topic. She stressed that the PBC had an important role to play in Liberia to help ensure that the peacebuilding gains made over the past years were not lost due to the pandemic, including in the area of economic development and its implications for peacebuilding priorities. In addition, the Chair emphasized that the meeting offered a platform to show solidarity with the Government of Liberia and its people.
3. H.E. Samuel D. Tweah, Jr., Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Liberia, recalled the Ebola crisis during which over 4000 people had died in Liberia and that had caused serious economic challenges from which the country had not yet fully recovered. Drawing on the lessons learned from the Ebola crisis, the Government had responded quickly with preventative measures to the COVID-19 pandemic in February before the country had its first positive case and a national state of emergency had been declared on 8 April, which was currently under debate in the legislature. The Minister stressed the importance of a coordinated response that included a medium- and long-term perspective to help prepare for future crises and highlighted the need to consider adapting the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (2018-2023) to the current challenges. The Minister expressed appreciation for the many international partners that had rallied behind the Government in support of its COVID-19 response at an early stage, especially highlighting the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) debt waiver for six months and 17 million USD in World Bank support. Recognizing the importance of food security for peacebuilding, he further announced that the Government planned to provide food for households for 60 days in cooperation with the World Food Programme, the World Bank and the IMF. He stressed the importance of supporting every household during the crisis and noted that growth projections were now worse than during the global financial crisis in 2008. He further informed that the National Elections Commission would present a response plan to

the Government on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the timeline for the elections planned for October 2020.

4. H.E. Varney A. Sirleaf, Minister of Internal Affairs of Liberia, underscored that the COVID-19 outbreak had significantly affected the socio-economic dynamics in Liberia with the potential of reversing important peacebuilding gains if not contained as quickly as possible. The pandemic had exacerbated already serious economic challenges and strained the weak health care system, especially affecting the most vulnerable population. He highlighted that one of the steps taken by the Government to prevent an escalation of the situation was a roundtable discussion held on 2 April, arranged by the Ministry of Internal Affairs' peacebuilding office, with international partners and civil society to discuss how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on peacebuilding priorities. He underlined that responding to the peacebuilding implications required collaborative efforts with the international community focusing on strengthening the health care system; promoting national reconciliation; and resuscitating the national economy, while addressing issues related to decentralization, human rights, gender-based violence, small- and medium-sized enterprises and conflict prevention.
5. H.E. Mary Tanyonoh Broh, National Response Coordinator for the Executive Committee on Coronavirus in Liberia, updated on her appointment on 7 April to coordinate the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date the country had 69 positive cases of COVID-19, with four recoveries and six deaths. She underlined that the current health crisis would have far-reaching socio-economic, political and peace and security implications, which called for a multi-pronged national response. She highlighted that the response built on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis, during which she had served in a similar position. Coordination and prioritization had been her guiding principles, and she had ensured that the meaningful participation of women and youth was fully embedded in the response. The measures taken so far included preventative action at community level and mitigation of the impact of the State of Emergency on livelihoods. She underlined that the national response was carried out in close coordination with international, regional and bilateral partners and thanked partners for their continuous support.
6. Dr. Kingsley Amaning, Resident Coordinator a.i. in Liberia, recalled that the COVID-19 pandemic had hit Liberia at a time when the country was looking forward to a period of recovery from serious economic challenges. Given the current situation, the UN had adapted its programs and was finalizing a comprehensive UN Response Plan to support the Government. He commended the Government for its commitment and praised the national actors for coming together in crisis response across the political divide. The Resident Coordinator informed the Commission that the UN was working closely with the Government to assist in developing the national response plan and to galvanize communities and strengthen their resilience, while sustaining focus on sustainable development. He highlighted that the silver lining of the current

situation was the opportunity to help the country build back better and stressed the importance of coordination with regards to the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus. He emphasized the need for additional financial resources for the response and assured the Commission that the UN would continue to work with partners to safeguard value for money.

7. Dr. Khwima Nthara, Country Manager for Liberia, World Bank Group, commended the leadership of the Government that had earned the confidence of the population. He expressed appreciation for the rapid coordination and mobilization of the international community in the country to help the Government respond to the pandemic, especially highlighting the coordinating role of the UN and the support provided by the World Health Organization to the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute. He noted that international and bilateral partners had already mobilized financial support as well as much needed health care materials. The Country Manager underlined the importance of putting a program in place to address the economic and social impact of the pandemic that would have implications for the consolidation of peace. In this regard, he commended the Government for addressing food security, as the global supply chains that Liberia was dependent on were likely to be disturbed, and for the community-based approach that fostered local ownership. In conclusion, he reiterated the commitment of the World Bank to continue supporting Liberia together with development partners to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. Member States, and other partners, welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They praised the Government for the comprehensive national response and recognized the advanced coordination and cooperation among national actors and the international community. They stressed the need to build on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis, including related to the importance of communication and information to the population, and were encouraged by how the country had come together in crisis response.
 - They emphasized the importance of short-, medium- and long-term approaches to mitigate the socio-economic impact and preserve peacebuilding gains with a view to building back better. In addition, they called for a people-centered approach protecting the most vulnerable, while ensuring the meaningful participation of women and youth in the response. The particular situation for women related to the lockdown measures was also raised. Some Member States stressed the need to take human rights into full consideration.
 - They welcomed the appointment of the National Response Coordinator for the Executive Committee on Coronavirus in Liberia and expressed support for the State of

Emergency, while recognizing the need to balance emergency measures with supporting Liberians in the already strained economic situation. They stressed the importance of maintaining focus on sustainable development through the implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development. Furthermore, they noted the need to further peacebuilding efforts, including in the area of national reconciliation.

- They emphasized the need for timely international assistance in strengthening the health care system as well as for promoting economic recovery, and asked the Government to communicate their specific needs to the donor community. They emphasized the added value of the regional response under the leadership of ECOWAS to coordinate efforts to strengthen health care systems and address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, including to ensure food security across the region.
- They reiterated their support for the Government of Liberia and its people and highlighted the value of the PBC as a platform for coordination and for sharing best practices on COVID-19 response in relation to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

9. H.E. Mr. Gbehzohngar Milton Findley, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, thanked partners for their engagement and reiterated that the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a clear threat to the stability and peace that Liberia enjoyed today, noting that Liberia was still a fragile country. He stressed the importance of continuing to build on the national peace process with a view to ensure sustained stability after the pandemic, in cooperation with partners, and expressed full support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

10. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, emphasized the potential of the PBC as a platform for solidarity and for learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including for drawing on the lessons learned from the Ebola crisis. He reiterated that effective response to the pandemic required strong coordination among national actors as well as with regional and international partners, and underscored that the PBC offered a platform to help avoid duplication of efforts. He stressed the need for a whole-of-society approach, backed by coordinated international partners, with women, youth and community leaders at the center to complement the Government's response. In addition, he highlighted the importance of communication to the population in times of crisis to promote a sense of community across the entire country, while keeping an eye on potential cross-border challenges as a result of the pandemic. In conclusion, he updated on the ongoing dialogue with the Resident Coordinator on how the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) could complement the current response.

11. In his closing remarks, H.E. Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Sr., Ambassador Extraordinary Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Liberia to the UN, recognized that the

COVID-19 pandemic would have multidimensional effects, including on the socio-economic situation, and highlighted that the crisis also offered an entry point for peacebuilding and for strengthening social cohesion. He expressed support for the Secretary-General's call for global solidarity and for developed countries to assist those less developed. In this regard, he was encouraged by the Commission's engagement in the pandemic's impact on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and highlighted the important role of the PBF to support the Government's peacebuilding priorities during this time.

12. The Chair thanked the briefers and took note of the need to continue peacebuilding efforts while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. She stressed in this regard the importance of utilizing the convening role of the PBC to bring together relevant actors, including women's organizations and civil society, to further coordination, strengthen partnerships and mobilize resources. She highlighted that many root causes of the conflict required further action, notably in the areas of national reconciliation; inclusion of women; youth unemployment; land rights; and decentralization. The Chair committed to keep the PBC updated on follow-up discussions with partners on next steps for accompanying Liberia and adjourned the meeting.