

## **Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration**

**9 March 2021**

### **Chair's Summary**

1. On 9 March, H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations and Chair of the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting focused on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia.
2. In her opening remarks, the Chair acknowledged the timeliness of the meeting in the lead up to the 65th Commission on the Status of Women and highlighted the meeting as an important contribution to the implementation of the recently adopted PBC Gender Strategy Action Plan. She stressed that promotion of gender equality was a matter of women's full and equal enjoyment of human rights as well as a prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. In this regard, she emphasized that Liberia had a history of women's participation in building and sustaining peace, including in ending the violence in the civil conflict leading to the peace accords in Accra in 2003. She further welcomed the national statement by the President of Liberia in observance of International Women's Day 2021, in which he had declared himself feminist-in-chief of Liberia and pledged to address the challenges faced by women. The Chair noted that the persistent challenges included wide-spread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and chronic underrepresentation of women in politics. She commended the Government of Liberia for its ongoing efforts while underscoring the continued commitment of the Commission to support efforts to tackle remaining challenges and further advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia.
3. H.E. Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Sr., Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, emphasized that gender equality and women's empowerment remained central to Liberia's peacebuilding agenda. He recalled that Liberia had elected Africa's first female president in 2005 as well as its currently serving first female Vice President. Despite progress made, the Minister stressed that women remained underrepresented in the legislature and underscored the commitment of the Government to change that trajectory. He commended the leadership in advancing gender equality demonstrated by the President of Liberia by passing the Domestic Violence Act, the Local Governance Act and the Land Rights Act. The President of Liberia had also declared rape a national emergency; appointed a special prosecutor for rape; set up a National Sex Offender Registry; established a National Security Taskforce on SGBV; and allocated an initial amount of 2 million USD to help combat rape and other forms of SGBV across the country. The Liberian Government had, with support from partners, developed an Anti-SGBV Roadmap for 2020-2022, which was in need of additional funding for its full implementation. The Minister recognized the important contributions of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to advance

gender equality in Liberia, and especially highlighted the role of the Fund in establishing gender desks in all security-related institutions and in increasing the number of female officers and their promotions in the national police and military. In conclusion, he underlined the need for sustained and increased international support for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia, including through the PBF.

4. H.E. Mrs. Williametta E. Saydee-Tarr, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia, underscored the centrality of women's full participation at all levels of decision-making to ensure lasting peace and reconciliation. She highlighted important strides made towards gender equality and women's empowerment with support from partners in alignment with the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development for 2018-2023, including the finalization of the Revised National Gender Policy and the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2019-2023. In addition, Gender and Social Inclusion Units had been established in ministries, agencies and commissions to promote gender responsive planning and budgeting. The Minister informed that 3451 extremely poor and food insecure households – of which women had made up 82 per cent – had received cash benefits through the Liberia Social Safety Nets Project, and that 180 at-risk adolescent girls had received vocational training through the Spotlight Initiative. Nonetheless, she noted that the Government had experienced challenges in delivering programmes geared towards gender equality in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted a significant funding gap that was hindering the full implementation and scale-up of ongoing programmes. The implementation of the Anti-SGBV Roadmap had a funding gap of 4 million USD after the Government's allocation of 2 million USD, while the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security had a funding gap of over 12 million USD. Recognizing that the existing gaps required increased support and strengthened coordination, the Minister requested the Commission's support in advocating for resource mobilization. In follow up to questions, the Minister gave powerful testimony on the commitment of the Government to addressing the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations for Liberia, including with regards to all forms of SGBV such as female genital mutilation; and the challenges faced; highlighting the importance of public education and awareness at the local level, to bring about attitudinal change and support for law reform.
5. Mr. Niels Scott, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Liberia, commended the Commission for its efforts to sustain attention and support to Liberia for building and sustaining peace and congratulated the Government on the substantial progress made, including through the numerous measures presented to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. He welcomed initiatives to strengthen women's role in peacebuilding and reconciliation at the local level and stressed the vital role played by civil society in promoting peacebuilding and advancing gender equality in Liberia. He noted that women, particularly rural women, continued to face gender disparities, including underrepresentation in public service, harmful traditional practices, SGBV, child marriage and lack of access to education, resources and

employment opportunities, which were all obstacles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. He underlined that the underrepresentation of women in politics could be reversed by adopting the proposed 30 per cent gender quota on candidate listings and in the leadership of political parties and coalitions, which was currently under consideration in the legislature, while recognizing that the quota needed to be complemented by sufficient funding for female candidates and an enabling and secure environment. The Resident Coordinator was joined by the UN Women Country Director, Ms. Marie Goreth Nizigama, who highlighted the PBF-funded Peace Huts as a good practice of community-based peace infrastructures that had promoted dialogue, mediation and access to justice. She further emphasized that the behavioral change needed for gender equality and women's empowerment was a long-term process that required buy-in at the community level.

6. Ambassador Juli Endee, Founder and the Executive Director of The Liberia Crusaders for Peace, informed the Commission of the work of her organization in support of peacebuilding across Liberia. She highlighted that The Liberia Crusaders for Peace was instrumental in the National Kukatornun Peace Festival held annually since the civil war, and that the organization was currently supporting the democratic process and promoting women's political participation as part of the Liberia Election Observation Network and contributing to the elimination of violence against women and girls through the Spotlight Initiative. She reiterated the importance of realizing women's leadership potential at all levels and stressed the need for the 30 per cent gender quota on candidate listings and in the leadership of political parties and coalitions. She further underscored the necessity of adequate financial and technical resources for response and in particular prevention efforts to combat SGBV at the community level, including psychosocial support. In conclusion, she encouraged the Commission to continue supporting civil society actors in Liberia through promotion of capacity-building, community engagement and dialogue efforts.
7. Member States and other partners welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
  - They recognized the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and development, and commended Liberia's commitment to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, including through the second Liberia National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, the Anti-SGBV Roadmap and the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.
  - They congratulated Liberia on the elections of December 2020, while emphasizing the importance of women's full and effective political participation and representation. They underscored the need for preparations and continued attention ahead of the presidential election 2023 in this regard. They encouraged the Government in its ongoing efforts, and the President's expressed commitment, to address the

underrepresentation of women in politics, including through the proposed electoral reform bill submitted by the National Elections Commission seeking concurrence to institute an enforceable 30 per cent gender quota on candidate listings and in the leadership of political parties and coalitions.

- They expressed concern at the persistent challenge of SGBV, noting that the President had declared rape a national emergency, and encouraged the Government in further advancing its efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. They also highlighted the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in exacerbating social and economic disparities and security concerns for women and girls.
  - They underscored the important role of civil society, including women and women-led organizations, in advancing efforts to build and sustain peace in Liberia. They further recognized the importance of regional and cross-border cooperation, including through ECOWAS and the Mano River Union, to promote peacebuilding and development in Liberia and the broader region.
  - They emphasized the need for sustainable and predictable financing for peacebuilding, especially in transition settings such as Liberia. They welcomed the support of international partners to gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia, including through the PBF, and encouraged increased support to fill identified gaps in the implementation of national priorities.
8. In his closing remarks, Mr. Israel Davies, Chargé d'Affaires, Mission of Liberia to the United Nations, echoed the significant progress made and the remaining challenges highlighted by previous speakers. He also highlighted the additional national public health emergency faced in Liberia in February, of an outbreak of polio, and the response of the Government and Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners in establishing the first national polio emergency center in Liberia. He assured that the discussion in the Commission would inform the continued efforts to advance gender equality in Liberia and thanked the Commission for its support. In addition, he congratulated the Government and the people of Liberia on the transparent and peaceful elections of December 2020, noting that Liberia had reached a point of no return in its young democracy.
9. The Chair thanked the briefers and commended the ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia. She stressed that the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the promotion of gender equality must be front and center of all peacebuilding and development efforts, and especially underscored the importance of broad civil society participation. She underlined the need for effective implementation of the measures introduced

by the Government, civil society and partners and reiterated the full support of the Commission in that endeavor.

10. In follow up to the meeting, the Commission issued a press release on 16 March 2021.