

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on The Gambia

15 June 2020

Chair's Summary

1. On 15 June, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on The Gambia. The meeting was held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Mr. Marc-André Blanchard, Chair of the PBC, and subsequently chaired by H.E. Mr. Kimihiro Ishikane, Vice-Chair of the PBC. H.E. Mr. François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, joined the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the immediate and long-term socio-economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia, with the aim of mobilising support to address the resource gaps generated by the reorientation of the state's budget towards health and food security needs of the population, and to help address the impact of COVID-19 on ongoing reform processes related to the sustaining peace agenda.
2. In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. François-Philippe Champagne commended the Government of The Gambia for the progress made towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the areas of reconciliation and rule of law as well as efforts towards prosperity. The Minister welcomed the country's priority focus on Security Sector Reform (SSR), transitional justice, human rights and empowerment of women and youth. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic risked exacerbating inequalities. In this regard, he stressed the importance of working together to address the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic to foster long-term resilience, with particular focus on human security, gender equality and youth engagement.
3. H.E. Mr. Abubacarr M. Tambadou, Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of The Gambia, recalled that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Government had declared a State of Emergency on 18 March and introduced a number of emergency regulations to mitigate the spread of the virus. He recognized that while the reform processes had been affected by the pandemic, important steps had been taken to stay on track. He highlighted that the draft constitution had been published in the National Gazette on 28 May, and explained that the referendum on the constitution was linked to the electoral cycle and the electoral reforms that were underway. The Independent Electoral Commission, along with a newly created task force, was working on a revised timeframe in light of COVID-19 for activities to be carried out before the elections in 2021. He further noted that the hearings on the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) had resumed on 8 June after a period of suspension due to the pandemic. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission had advised the Government on reducing overcrowding in prisons and detention centers to limit the spread of COVID-19. In the area of SSR, a draft workplan had been prepared for 2020 that identified low-cost activities that could be implemented in the current situation. The Minister welcomed

the meeting that demonstrated the commitment of the PBC to continue accompanying The Gambia towards a more democratic society.

4. H.E. Mr. Mambury Nije, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of The Gambia, recognized the significant development challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that a 2% GDP loss due to COVID-19 was projected for 2020. This would slow down the implementation of the National Development Plan (2018-2021) and the negatively impact the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the pandemic risked reversing investments made in priority areas of the Government's peacebuilding agenda, including transitional justice, SSR, empowerment of women and youth, social cohesion and inclusivity, resolution of land conflict, climate change induced tensions, press freedom and human rights. The Minister underlined that particular attention must be directed towards reducing inequalities that had been exacerbated by the pandemic, especially affecting women with increased risk of gender-based violence and household burdens. The Government had reoriented the 2020 budget to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic with increased focus on food security, health, education and other social protection measures. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs was engaging its development partners, including the UN, to undertake COVID-19 related assessments aimed at informing evidence-based policy responses. He concluded by emphasizing that the Government's medium- and long-term response would be guided by its peacebuilding agenda and the principle of building back better.
5. Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, commended the Government for its pro-active handling of the pandemic, while noting that several key reform processes had been hampered due to COVID-19. In this context, he was encouraged by the publication of the final draft constitution which marked an important step in the right direction. He suggested that deciding on the timelines towards the referendum on the constitution and the 2021 elections was a priority. He also highlighted the importance of electoral reforms prior to the elections for enabling a conducive environment for the elections. He noted that more efforts were needed to advance the SSR process, and expressed his hope that the recommendations of the SSR Technical Assessment Mission could be adjusted to the current circumstances and implemented in the coming months. The SRSG stressed the importance of continuing efforts for strengthening political party dialogue and consensus building in the current situation, building on the Collaborative Leadership and Dialogue series and Inter Party Committee. He emphasized that The Gambia was at a critical juncture and underscored that the support of the PBC would continue to be vital in ensuring that peacebuilding gains were sustained.
6. Ms. Seraphine Wakana, UN Resident Coordinator, highlighted that multilateral and bilateral partners, civil society and the private sector had all risen to the occasion to support the Government in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that the preventive measures

taken to curb the spread had given rise to significant socio-economic issues, especially those impacting the livelihood of the 48% of the population living in poverty. The UN's crisis management team had been working in tandem with the National Health Emergency Committee to respond to the pandemic. She explained that the UN had set up a UN COVID-19 response structure, which covered support in the areas of health, social services, socio-economic response and recovery, and risk communication and community engagement. This included supporting the Government in reprioritizing the National Development Plan in light of COVID-19. She noted the 16 million USD that had so far been approved from the PBF to support the country in key peacebuilding areas, and highlighted the flexibility of the PBF in reprogramming some of these projects to address COVID-19 related issues. In conclusion, she reiterated the UN Country Team's commitment to continue supporting the Government's COVID-19 national response in a coherent and collaborative manner that strengthened the health and socio-economic nexus for sustainable peace and development.

7. Ms. Oumie Sise, Manager of Discovery Tours and member of the Board of the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reiterated that the pandemic had shed light on existing vulnerabilities of the economy. She noted that two critical sectors, agriculture and tourism, had been severely hit, with some businesses experiencing zero income since mid-March. She pointed to the need for stronger representation in the policy-setting arenas for matters directly affecting women and youth, underscoring that their involvement was key to achieving long-term development. She highlighted limited access to financing instruments and lack of capital as key factors for slowing down growth of women and youth owned businesses. In addition, bureaucratic roadblocks hindered women from transitioning from the informal sector to the formal sector. She stressed that the promotion of businesses, with special focus on empowering women and youth in this area, was key for strengthening the economy and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. She concluded by emphasizing that stable economic activity and a conducive business environment were also important building blocks for political stability.
8. H.E. Mr. Lang Yabou, Permanent Representative of The Gambia, expressed his appreciation for the PBC's recommitment to peacebuilding and sustaining peace in The Gambia by convening this meeting. In this regard, he underscored that it was imperative to understand the interlinkages between peacebuilding and development to consolidate peace gains, which had been highlighted by the previous speakers. He stressed the importance of reenergizing peacebuilding efforts in the current situation and directing initiatives towards the challenges highlighted during the meeting, in close cooperation with partners. In conclusion, he reiterated his hope that the meeting would help close identified gaps and prevent the COVID-19 pandemic from reversing hard-won peacebuilding gains in The Gambia.

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

- They commended the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while noting with concern the consequences of the pandemic on key reforms and peacebuilding processes.
- They welcomed efforts by the Government, with support from the international community, to continue addressing the country's peacebuilding priorities. They urged all stakeholders not to lose sight of The Gambia's peacebuilding agenda, particularly in the area of SSR.
- They recognized the pivotal role of women and youth in promoting economic development and addressing challenges emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, they committed to work with The Gambia to further engage women and youth in peacebuilding and socio-economic recovery.
- They welcomed the adjustments made by the UN and other partners to integrate the challenges of COVID-19 in their assistance to The Gambia. They further highlighted the important role of International Financial Institutions, sub-regional and regional organizations and the private sector in socio-economic recovery.
- They acknowledged the support provided by the PBF in key peacebuilding areas and welcomed the reprogramming of some PBF projects to address issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- They expressed their readiness to help mobilize international support for The Gambia's immediate response and efforts towards ensuring post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and sustained attention on the country's peacebuilding priorities.

10. In his closing remarks, the Chair thanked the Government for its continuous engagement with the PBC and reiterated the commitment of the PBC to continue accompanying The Gambia on its path towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace.