

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission Sierra Leone Configuration

Wednesday, 23 May 2018

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 23 May 2018, H.E. Mr. Marc-André Blanchard, Chair of the Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an ambassadorial level meeting to receive an update from Hon. Alie Kabba, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone, and Mr. Sunil Saigal, United Nations Resident Coordinator, on the peacebuilding priorities of the new Sierra Leone government, and discuss the ways in which the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) can support these.

Mr. Tom Ven, Europe Union Ambassador in Sierra Leone (via VTC), Ambassador Adikalie Foday Sumah, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone, and Mr. Marc-André Franche from the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) also briefed the configuration.

Meeting Summary:

1. **In his welcoming remarks, the Chair** congratulated Minister Kabba for his appointment and through him, President Julius Maada Bio on his election and inauguration. He commended the government, opposition and the people of Sierra Leone for the successful presidential, parliamentary and local council elections and the peaceful transfer of power, especially given how close the results were. He commended the UN for its role in providing support during some of the critical moments in the electoral process. He particularly recognized the role that Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) has played in managing some of the tensions during the election and post-election period, in close cooperation and coordination with partners in the region, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). He also commended the very positive role played by Sierra Leonean civil society through the election period. The Chair emphasized that the meeting provided the first opportunity to hear from the new government about their priorities for Sierra Leone, and how the PBC and PBF could help support these.
2. In his address, **Hon. Alie Kabba, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation** expressed his appreciation to the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration and the Chair for the support provided before and during the election period. He described the electoral process as peaceful, and underscored that with cooperation from the officials of the former administration, Sierra Leone succeeded to have a smooth handover of power, with the new President sworn in immediately after the results were announced on 4 April,

and the formal inauguration ceremony taking place on 12 May. The President had already addressed the Parliament and a new Government was already at work for the benefit of the country with a new Chief Minister to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the Government's strategic priorities.

3. Mr. Kabba outlined the strategic priorities of the new government: social cohesion, education, an improved health sector (starting from primary health) and skills training and economic growth (with a focus on agriculture, marine resources, and tourism, improving the fiscal situation, and private sector development). Fiscal discipline would be emphasized, with a significant rationalization of all tax exceptions and duty waivers that, he mentioned, had caused the loss of billions in state revenues and deprived key development sectors, such as education and health. An Integrated National Financing Framework for the SDGs would also be formulated to slowly reduce dependence on foreign support.
4. Elaborating on the areas in which the PBC could support the new government, Minister Kabba emphasized support to social cohesion, national reconciliation efforts to bridge regional and ethnic divides, supporting youth empowerment, leveraging the convening and advocacy role of the PBC to bring international and donor attention on the priorities of Sierra Leone. He also called for the PBF to continue acting as a catalyst for programs structured around the new government priorities.
5. In his briefing, **Mr. Sunil Saigal, UN Resident Coordinator** underscored that both the PBC and the PBF had been instrumental in the lead-up to the elections; the PBC had provided important accompaniment to the country at a critical time including through the visit of the Chair to Freetown, and the PBF projects on conflict prevention and mitigation and women's political participation had provided key support. Now that the elections were over and a peaceful transition had taken place, it was time to work under the new modalities. The government is working to prepare a new national development plan, which would focus on the priority areas of education and the diversification of the economy. The UN country team (UNCT) was currently articulating how it could best support the new government in implementing its priorities, with the planning process for the UN Development Assistance Framework aligned with the government's planning processes. Different parts of the UNCT were already working with line ministries. A cabinet retreat was being organized for the month of June, supported by the UN and Dfid, to solidify the priorities of the government and to start a systematic implementation of the government plan. With regard to the prioritization of the economy and development planning, the government was in touch with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for budgetary support, and a new IMF mission was being prepared for June 2018.
6. **Mr. Marc Andre Franche, Chief of the Financing for Peacebuilding Branch on behalf of PBSO** congratulated the President, Minister Kabba and the people of Sierra Leone on a successful electoral process, and applauded the sense of responsibility and patriotism demonstrated throughout the process. SRSG Chambas and ECOWAS had played a commendable role, exemplifying how the UN can come together with coherent strategies on prevention. The PBC Sierra Leone Configuration and its Chair had played a

critical accompaniment and advocacy role during the electoral process. He reaffirmed the PBF's support to the new government's priorities, and reported that the PBF had approved last year a \$3 million project to support conflict prevention efforts in the lead-up to the elections, focusing on peace advocacy, election security, and early warning and response.

7. Touching upon how the PBC can support Sierra Leone in the post-electoral period, Mr. Franche highlighted three potential areas of involvement:
 - Ensuring that various stakeholders active in Sierra Leone, including international financial institutions and particularly the IMF, conduct their activities in a conflict-sensitive manner, relying on an analysis of risks and opportunities in the present context.
 - Focusing on ways to ensure secure and equitable access to land ownership and control over natural resources, including through lending support to efforts for the reform of the land tenure system.
 - Supporting national reconciliation efforts, including through supporting efforts to address ethnic-regional tensions, with a particular focus on youth.
8. **Ambassador Sumah** thanked the Peacebuilding Commission for its support to Sierra Leone, and underscored that the Commission could now build on the priorities of the new government articulated by Minister Kabba.
9. Following the statements, **members of the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration** took the floor with a discussion based on the briefings they had just received and suggestions based on their own country experiences; so as to connect with Sierra Leone's current national priorities. They:
 - Congratulated the new government for a smooth transition of power and called for continued and coordinated PBC and PBF support to the priorities of the Sierra Leone government in the post-electoral period;
 - In the context of national reconciliation, highlighted the importance of adopting and implementing inclusive policies that would also address horizontal inequalities, emphasized the need for supporting the smooth functioning of parliamentary processes, given the new political realities;
 - Expressed their support for the government's development priorities, with a particular emphasis on social cohesion, the role of the youth, education (including civic education) and national reconciliation, and underscored that these areas should be in the PBC's focus in the period ahead, while gender issues should also continue being addressed;
 - Underlined that conflict sensitive approaches should be embedded in the work of Sierra Leone's international partners, and the PBC could play a vital role in

ensuring this particularly through engaging with partners such as the World Bank and the IMF;

- Underscored that the Sierra Leone example demonstrated the value of partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations, and the critical role the UN regional offices played in conflict prevention;
- Commended the government's focus on fiscal discipline and the prioritization of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

10. In response, **Minister Kabba** commended the emphasis on the land tenure issue, particularly as diversifying the economy and focusing on agriculture was one of the priorities of the government. On national reconciliation, he agreed that inclusive approaches, instead of “zero sum games”, would be needed to ensure a harmonious political environment in the future. He confirmed that official trips had been made around the country to engage different political factions and different party corners. He underscored that Sierra Leone was a collective project, and all sides should be given the space to contribute to it.

11. **The Chair** thanked the members for their support and suggestions. He added that while the conversation had been forward-looking, it would be useful to have the opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned from the recent elections and the role that the UN and regional organizations can play. Sierra Leone is just the latest in a series of positive examples in West Africa, and that it was suggested to the PBC Chair and PBSO to capture the good practice around elections. The Chair mentioned that he saw his role as PBC Chair as one of advocacy for Sierra Leone in the UN system. He shared that a visit was being planned to take place later in the year. Members of the configuration would be updated as the working plans evolved.