

Chair's Summary
PBC Sierra Leone Configuration Informal Expert-Level Meeting

16 May 2018 (10:00am – 11.30am)

Introduction by the Chair:

1. **On 16 May 2018, the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration met at expert-level** to receive an update on the developments in the country following the election of a new President and establishment of a Government and to discuss Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund support to Sierra Leone during the electoral process and the aftermath.

Briefing by Director for International Cooperation and Legal Affairs at the Sierra Leone Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation:

2. **The Director for International Cooperation and Legal Affairs at the Sierra Leone Ministry of Foreign Affairs** gave an update regarding the electoral process and developments in the aftermath. He told the configuration that the electoral process was largely peaceful, from which the Sierra Leone People's Party's (SLPP) emerged as the ruling party. After a mostly smooth transition period, with full cooperation from the officials of the former administration, the inauguration ceremony for the new President Maada Bio had taken place on 12 May. On 25 May the President addressed the Parliament.

3. The Director explained that there was now a new cabinet in place, with a new Chief Minister to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the Government's strategic priorities. The Government's priorities would be social cohesion, education 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 had caused the loss of billions in state revenues and deprived key development sectors such as education and healthcare. An Integrated National Financing Framework for the SDGs would also be formulated.

4. The Director elaborated on the areas in which the PBC and PBF could support the new government, focusing on support to national reconciliation efforts to bridge regional and ethnic divides, security sector reform, leveraging the convening and advocacy role of the PBC to bring international and donor attention on the priorities of Sierra Leone, and through the PBF, acting as a catalyst for programs structured around the new government priorities.

Remarks by the UN Country Team:

5. **The Peace and Development Adviser in Freetown** explained that the election and post-election period were largely peaceful, but unprecedented levels of violence had been observed at district level. Particularly during the second round, the political climate had deteriorated, with strong ethno-regional rhetoric from different political stakeholders. While the transition period was managed in a peaceful manner, the situation on the ground remained fragile. Despite tensions, there were positive signs: the new composition of the Parliament (where the former ruling party APC won most seats and two new parties entered the Parliament) reflected the desire to move beyond traditional ethnic/regional divides and two-party divisions, and a new

phenomenon emerged with urban elites and the youth becoming increasingly involved in policy issues beyond support for the two traditional parties. It was now critically important to build confidence between various groups and ensure national unity. The government acknowledged this, and had requested UNDP to develop a program on social cohesion, through the current PBF project on conflict prevention. There was a strong civil society in Sierra Leone, which worked together with the UN to contribute to peaceful elections; it would be essential to continue engaging civil society.

6. An initial crisis in the first session of the Parliament, where High Court-issued injunctions on 15 APC parliamentarians had led to protests by all elected APC parliamentarians and the intervention of the riot police, and had delayed the swearing in of all members of the Parliament, been successfully averted with the support of SRSB Chambas and ECOWAS. As a result of the mediation efforts, all 68 APC MPs were sworn in. The Government cabinet was formed, and the President had already issued several Presidential orders, including the decision to consolidate all government revenues in a single account, resulting in the payment of government salaries for the first time without using external funds. A new development plan was under preparation, which would focus on the priority areas of education and the diversification of the economy.

7. **The UNICEF representative** spoke about their concerns on issues such as the involvement of children in often tense political rallies, the increased vulnerabilities of children and youth during the electoral process due to the closure of schools, and a spike in female genital mutilation often paid by politicians to gain support. The new government had made children and youth issues one of their priorities. There was a strong focus on education, with support to free education and 20% of the national budget dedicated to educational programs. Linked to the focus on strengthening social cohesion, a national youth service program would be established, to increase awareness among youth in districts other than their own. UNICEF would work on civic education and peacebuilding efforts, including through aiding community level efforts, in support of the national government

8. **The UNDP representative** briefed the configuration on the PBF-supported conflict prevention project during the elections, with a focus on peace campaigns and education and training to the Police. The project had supported the establishment of a group of national and international eminent persons, such as the former president of Ghana, to facilitate the signing of a Peace Pledge by political parties, helped establish district monitoring committees to ensure party compliance with the code of conduct, supported electoral justice mechanisms (setting up electoral courts, identifying and training judges, preparing compendium of electoral laws), and provided training programs in elections and human rights to security personnel and other stakeholders. The project was due to end at the end of 2018; the next steps for the Fund could involve tackling post-electoral tensions by supporting a social cohesion proposal drafted in collaboration with civil society organization following a specific request from the Vice President.

Other remarks:

9. Member state representatives who took the floor:

- Lauded the successful electoral process and the peaceful transition of power, despite minor setbacks, and declared their support to the priorities of the new government;

- Stressed the importance of regional efforts in conflict prevention, lauded the key role of SRSB Chamras and ECOWAS in managing the tensions during and after the elections, and argued the need to develop projects at a regional level to support peace efforts; (Sierra Leone representatives explained that regional discussions on key priorities had already commenced, with the President visiting Ghana and several regional actors joining the President's inauguration ceremony. The ECOWAS summit would be an opportunity to discuss concrete steps.)
- Emphasized that the involvement of the youth and the civil society, and supporting community-level engagement would be critical in the period ahead, and positive examples such as women's situation rooms needed to be further utilized as best practices;
- Pledged their support to Sierra Leone in this critical phase, and underscored that the future workplan of the configuration should reflect government priorities.

10. The Canadian representative congratulated the government and people of Sierra Leone for the successful elections, and commended the leaders of both parties for the restraint they demonstrated. She commended regional mediation efforts, and the important support role of the UN and ECOWAS. She noted that it was the first time in decades that none of the four countries of the Mano River Union hosted peacekeeping missions; this new situation could lead to new regional opportunities which could be supported by the PBC and PBF. She closed the meeting by stating that the configuration would also focus on capturing and sharing the lessons learned on successful conflict prevention efforts during electoral and post-electoral periods, and look into ways to support the youth, peace and security agenda with a focus on Sierra Leone.