

## **Summary report of the visit of H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog, Chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, to West Africa, 5 to 10 April 2015**

### *Program*

1. From 5 to 10 April the PBC Chair visited Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, engaging with a wide range of national and international actors. The program included separate meetings with the Presidents of the three countries and relevant ministers and other Government representatives, as well as with national civil society organizations, the UN family and the diplomatic communities. The Chair also met briefly with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union (MRU) and held meetings with the UN regional team and UNOWA SRSG Mohammed Ibn Chambas in Dakar.

### *Objectives and scope*

2. The week-long visit by the PBC Chair to West Africa had dual objectives. Building on PBC engagement on the Ebola crisis so far, the purpose of the visit to the three most affected countries on the PBC agenda was to assess the impact of the Ebola crisis on peacebuilding generally as well as to better understand possibilities for expanded support for the regional and national peacebuilding priorities. As Chair of the PBC Liberia configuration, the purpose was to assess how the PBC can best support the post-Ebola recovery process and prepare for the draw-down of UNMIL. The following is a summary of the key findings and conclusions related to the first objective (a separate report on Liberia will follow).

### *Ebola update*

3. The number of cases of Ebola reported during the week of the visit was the lowest recorded since May 2014. Liberia reported no new cases, and there were only a handful of new cases in Sierra Leone. The case incidence in Guinea also decreased significantly compared to previous weeks. A key element to success has been the difficult but necessary change of people's practices and understanding, particularly in the area of safe burials. There was confidence that the epidemic should soon be under control, although getting to zero will likely remain a challenge for the next few months. Focus will turn towards putting in place the necessary systems and capacity for staying at zero, including with a sub-regional approach of strengthening resilience and capacity to detect and avoid future outbreaks.

### *Crisis impact*

4. The crisis has diverted attention from other pressing priorities and in some areas even reversed progress. The socio-economic situation has been impacted significantly. Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea were already among the poorest in the world, and the crisis has stalled or even set back critical efforts aimed at poverty reduction and economic development. Economic growth, trade and investment, already affected by low global commodity prices, has slowed considerably. Livelihoods, in many areas of the society, have been undermined and many people have lost their employment. With low primary school attendance rates already before the crisis, the prolonged closing of schools has had a heavy impact on children. Women have been adversely affected particularly as primary care-givers during the epidemic and through the negative impact on their employment and

income generation possibilities.

5. According to national stakeholders, the crisis has in some areas impacted negatively on state-society relations. Past conflicts, inequality and weak governance in remote areas had led to low levels of trust in state institutions among local communities as well as high level of inter-communal tensions. While important progress in strengthening social cohesion and state capacity had been achieved in recent years, the Ebola crisis seems to have reversed and in some cases exacerbated these challenges. The lack of effective and accountable decentralization of state institutions and services, including the justice and security sectors, were often cited as factors that contributed to the lack of confidence and trust in state institutions.

#### *Out of crisis opportunities*

6. Despite the Ebola epidemic's negative impact, there are also seeds of opportunity to seize in the recovery period. The crisis has generated decisive leadership and resolve at the national and local levels. This national and local commitment and dedication should be the foundation for the recovery efforts. The crisis has also triggered renewed sub-regional cooperation with good and active relations among the governments, including at the highest level. The Chair's visit coincided with a regional ministerial meeting to prepare for a joint regional strategy in Monrovia hosted by the MRU and supported by the UN. International attention and interest in the region has also been raised, including with an increasing number of international partners. These trends need to be sustained and built upon in the next phase in order to bring the three countries back to the path of recovery and sustained peace and resilience.

#### *Peacebuilding priorities*

7. Building on existing national development plans, all three countries have now developed their respective national Ebola recovery plans. These plans will be presented at the World Bank/IMF spring meetings later this week in which the PBC will be present. At this meeting, there will also be a presentation of a joint MRU regional recovery strategy with focus on improved management of border areas and support for border communities, reflecting a common interest in the enhanced sub-regional cooperation. These plans are aimed at guiding international support for short to medium term recovery efforts, and assisting the countries to transition smoothly into the implementation of their established national development plans.

8. All three Heads of States and other stakeholders clearly stated that the fight against poverty and the promotion of economic growth is the number one priority. This is also a priority with relevance for peacebuilding. The restoration of livelihoods and the generation of employment opportunities, not least for youth, is a development imperative that will also be key to stem frustrations and maintain stability. Increasing access to quality education was also highlighted as a peacebuilding related priority, keeping youth active and being a critical pillar for the development and prosperity of future generations.

9. There is also a clear sense that a central peacebuilding priority is the improvement of state-society relations and the building of trust in state institutions. This priority is well

reflected in the three national Ebola recovery plans. It includes efforts such as building institutional capacity for better service delivery, including in the justice and security sectors, decentralizing state institutions and building local capacity, enhancing transparency and accountability, and improving political institutions for inclusive participation and dialogue, including at the local level. The need to address the human trauma caused by the crisis was also emphasized, including addressing the stigmatization and isolation of survivors.

#### *International support*

10. According to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Ebola, the international community has pledged over 5 billion USD for the emergency response. This is indeed impressive. National and international interlocutors in all the three countries however reflected on the fact that while it was clearly imperative to save lives as the crisis had hit, these resources would have been better spent on sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts which would have strengthened resilience and the institutions and the systems necessary to prevent such crisis. In other words, investing longer term in national institution-building is not only right thing, it is also makes sense economically.

11. The outstanding peacebuilding challenges which the Ebola crisis has revealed also provides an opportunity for the international community to reflect on lessons learned from many years of effort to support peace consolidation, with a view to do better moving forward. There is a clear need to promote more holistic and integrated approaches which overcome the barriers between inherited institutional silos. Given the close interdependence of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, it is also important to move beyond the standard country to country response, in order to support regional frameworks and capacity in some areas. The need for better coordination of international support was also highlighted by both national and international interlocutors. The guiding principle must always be to build national capacity and support national ownership.

#### *PBC role and next steps*

12. All three Governments affirmed to the Chair of their appreciation for the PBC and their recognition of its efforts in recent years. They also noted their appreciation of the PBF as a key strategic instrument with concrete and valuable impact. The PBC was recognized for having played an important early warning role at the beginning of the health crisis, and for having initiated the discussions in New York on the need to prepare for a comprehensive recovery initiative which include peacebuilding priorities. There is an expectation that the PBC continues to play an important role in ensuring that the international community stays engaged, focused and coordinated also in the recovery phase.

13. Lessons from the Ebola crisis response – including importance of national and local community leadership and ownership, the need for a regional approach, and the opportunity of maintaining broad international engagement – should be guiding for the PBC also in the Ebola recovery phase. National stakeholders requested that the PBC continue advocating for international attention in order to maintain the momentum and ensure that the international community stands by its commitments and pledges. The PBC should also have a role in supporting key peacebuilding priorities in national recovery

efforts. This will require collective efforts by all PBC members, promoting peacebuilding priorities in all relevant fora and working in the areas of their different comparative advantage. The PBC's unique constellation of members will be a major asset in providing this support.

14. Guided by the PBC Special Session on 14 April, the Chair will participate at the World Bank Spring meetings on the Ebola recovery. The PBC could also consider how best to support the planned UN high-level meeting on post Ebola recovery in July. While the respective configurations will be taking forward the country specific work, the PBC could continue examining how best to support regional approaches.

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