**Peacebuilding Commission**

**Ambassadorial Meeting on The Gambia**

**15 May 2019**

**Chair’s Summary**

1. On 15 May 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on The Gambia, under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Guillermo Fernández de Soto, Chair of the PBC. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for the Government of The Gambia to update the Commission on ongoing peacebuilding processes, in particular the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Constitutional Review Commission.

2. In his opening remarks, the PBC Chair recalled the Peacebuilding Commission’s engagement with The Gambia since 2017, in its efforts to raise awareness for the peacebuilding priorities of The Gambia and foster coherence and collaboration in support of The Gambia. The Chair referred to The Gambia as one of the best examples of PBC’s engagement and a demonstration of the importance of building on national ownership. He expressed expectation that the meeting would allow the Commission to renew political commitment in support of the pressing needs of the country. He also underlined the financing and technical support provided by the Peacebuilding Fund in the areas of transitional justice and security sector reform.

3. The Attorney General and Minister of Justice of The Gambia, H.E. Mr. Abubacarr M. Tambadou, provided a comprehensive overview of the political situation and wider political reform processes since the change in the government two years ago. He explained the careful planning that went into ensuring the inclusive and participatory nature of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), to include representation of the country’s five major ethnic groups as well as women and youth groups, which contributed to inspire confidence and credibility in the institution. The Minister highlighted that the Gambian diaspora continues to be the focus of efforts to reinforce inclusion and participation, noting that the Constitutional Review Committee started the first phase of drafting a new constitution based on public consultations with Gambians at home and abroad. He provided updates on the National Human Rights Commission which was established in consultation with OHCHR and reviewed by civil society organizations. The Minister informed that there has been significant progress in freedom of expression and a reduction in reports of arbitrary arrests, emphasizing the view that encouragement of divergent views will contribute to sustaining peace. He advised that Gambian local and international consultations have been held to contribute to the review of the criminal legislative framework, electoral laws, and the 1954 Prisons Act, and that more efforts are being made to build public confidence in the criminal justice system. The Minister also informed the Commission that The Gambia has ratified a number of treaties and conventions in the last two years, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, and the African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance (ACDEG). In addition, the government is finalizing new anti-corruption legislation. The Minister highlighted the challenges faced by the TRRC in dealing with both victims and perpetrators, particularly those who are in active service in the armed forces and the paramilitary force. The pace of security sector reform has been slow but, as the newly appointed Chair of the Steering Committee on SSR, the Minister hopes to make significant inroads with the international community’s support.

4. The Chair of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, Mr. Lamin Sise, briefed on the TRRC, which ended its fourth session on 25 April 2019. He informed that over the past four months, the TRRC conducted site visits in support of the investigation of alleged crimes committed on 11 November 1994, with the team of investigators continuing their search for the remains of victims. Members of all fourteen families of the victims were invited to share their stories and were offered counselling and related services, for which the TRRC reimbursed travel costs. Mr. Sise noted that perpetrators have voluntarily come forward and testified about their participation in crimes and human rights violations. As part of the Never Again campaign, robust outreach activities are being conducted throughout the country to foster national conversation, including by the Youth and Children’s Network Unit. The Reconciliation, Women’s Affairs and Communications Units have conducted at least five town hall meetings and four women’s listening circles, and at least three outreach activities have been dedicated to an Alternative AIDS Treatment program.

5. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, briefing via video-link, described his recent visit to The Gambia and said that he was encouraged by the pace of reforms. He noted that the National Human Rights Commission presented a country report on the human rights situation for the first time in twenty-five years to the African Commission for Human Rights. He lauded The Gambia’s National Constitutional Drafting Commission for conducting its work in a participative and professional manner. He noted the appointment of Minister Tambadou as Chair of the Steering Committee on security sector reform as a positive step forward. Mr. Chambas highlighted the $7 million Peacebuilding Fund portfolio, devoted to three priority areas: land disputes, reintegration of returnees and the participation of women and youth in decision making and peacebuilding. He informed the Commission of the visit of the Vice-President and IMF Deputy Managing Director Mr. Tao Zheng to The Gambia and urged that more grants be given to The Gambia for debt relief and to support restructuring the economy.

6. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, noted that the engagement with The Gambia remains a priority for the Peacebuilding Support Office and highlighted the importance of the PBC as a platform for dialogue and sharing good practices, including on transitional justice. Underscoring that half of the total portfolio of PBF funding is focused on transitional justice, with a significant amount focused on women empowerment, he raised the possibility of additional funding in support of electoral reform. Mr. Fernandez-Taranco reiterated the PBF engagement with the government with a view to enhancing social cohesion. He stressed the testimonies of women as fundamental to the integrity of the transitional justice process and noted that testimonies of young people had prompted members of the Gambian diaspora to contribute to the Victim’s Fund to address reparation needs. Finally, he noted that PBSO was organizing an expert-level visit of PBF donors to The Gambia at the end of May 2019 to see first-hand the impact of PBF-funded projects.

7. Member States congratulated the Gambian authorities for the implementation of reforms in the justice and security sectors and made the following observations:

* Welcomed The Gambia’s progress in peacebuilding processes.
* Recognized The Gambia as a model case and success story for collective preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.
* Welcomed initiatives to broaden the base of engagement in society and promote social cohesion through the establishment of a national dialogue process.
* Commended the TRRC for bringing perpetrators forward in larger numbers voluntarily and lauded the efforts of the Ministry of Justice to strengthen rule of law and promote diversity.
* Welcomed the promotion and participation of women in all areas of life and in the justice system, as seen in the number of women judges and commissioners in the TRRC. The participation of women as witnesses, senior officials and decision makers in the judiciary sector was hailed as unleashing the true potential of women in all aspects of peacebuilding.
* Acknowledged the PBF’s early investment and PBC’s regular engagement with The Gambia in support of the transition process. Member States reaffirmed their commitment and welcomed a focus on root causes of conflict in the PBF projects under preparation.
* Welcomed the multi-stakeholder approach centered around national ownership, encouraging the UN system and regional organizations such as AU, ECOWAS, and development partners to continue to support The Gambia.
* Recommended the PBC’s sustained international attention on The Gambia in support of efforts to prevent the recurrence of violence.
* Suggested stronger engagement with IFIs in future meetings. Urged members of the international community to continue to provide support for The Gambia in this critical moment in its history and appealed for stronger support for development initiatives and social justice, good governance, sustainable development and the empowerment of youth.
* Noted existing challenges at the regional level and urged the Gambian government to continue to implement its security sector reform program.

8. In conclusion, H.E. Mr. Tambadou noted that while all areas under discussion were equally important, security sector reform stood as a priority to build a modern democratic state responsive to socio-political realities. The continued support of ECOMIG and ECOWAS was seen as critical. To the question of reintegration of returnees and migrants, the Minister reaffirmed the Government’s interest to welcome people back to The Gambia, with the cooperation of the European Union and regional partners to engage returnees in productive and meaningful activities. The Minister thanked PBSO for its assistance and hoped for continued support to set the country on a democratic foundation, with respect for rule of law and human rights. Finally, the PBC Chair thanked H.E. Mr. Tambadou and Mr. Sise for their briefings and honest assessments and renewed the Peacebuilding Commission’s commitment to provide support in accordance with the principle of national ownership.