

Report of the Visit of the Peacebuilding Commission to Sierra Leone

15 to 20 February 2013

Executive Summary

1. A delegation of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) visited Sierra Leone from 15 to 20 February 2013. It met with President Koroma, Government officials, other national actors and international partners (see Annex B for the composition of the delegation and Annex C for the programme of the visit). The delegation also undertook a field visit to Makeni.
2. Sierra Leone has made significant progress consolidating peace and is poised to embark on a period of sustained economic development. In this respect, the successful conduct of Presidential, Parliamentary, and local elections in November 2012 signaled that Sierra Leone has crossed an important threshold.
3. Nonetheless, both short and long-term challenges remain. In the near term, the results of the election reinforced the perception that Sierra Leone is politically divided along geographic lines. The “winner-take-all” nature of the political system is also widely perceived to be exacerbating political tensions. The delegation noted consensus on the need for reform as well as general support for President Koroma’s announced intention to conduct a constitutional review to address these issues. In addition to enhancing the inclusiveness of Sierra Leone’s democratic processes, several interlocutors stressed that the review would present an important opportunity to advance progress on human rights and gender equality by modernizing a range of outdated provisions.
4. In the longer term, Sierra Leone will continue to grapple with challenges associated with youth unemployment, the effective management of national resources, and the threat posed by transnational organized crime. Of these issues, youth unemployment remains the major concern and greatest threat. Interlocutors repeatedly stressed the need to build Sierra Leone’s human capital by training youth in the skills needed to take advantage of growing economic opportunities. The delegation also noted that public expectations will need to be carefully managed in light of surging investment in the extractive and agriculture sectors. While Sierra Leone is the most advanced of the members of the West Africa Coast Initiative, it will require sustained international support and remains vulnerable to the threat of transnational organized crime. The reconfiguration of the International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) to an International Security Assistance Team (ISAT) may present an opportunity for the international community to continue supporting key national institutions in the sector.
5. Over the past fifteen years the United Nations has played a critical role in keeping and consolidating peace in Sierra Leone. This contribution is widely recognized by Sierra Leoneans and the UN is a highly valued partner for all national stakeholders. It was emphasized by many stakeholders including political parties that UNIPSIL still has an

important role to play on several residual issues, particularly with respect to facilitating political dialogue and providing assistance for the constitutional review. The Government of Sierra Leone clearly expressed its preference for a well managed and gradual UNIPSIL drawdown with a timeline determined by the political situation in the country. A “structured transition” of UNIPSIL with an effective communication strategy appears essential for the UN not to “walk away in the wrong way”. This will entail a careful assessment of how UNIPSIL’s present functions can be absorbed by national institutions, members of the UN Country Team, and other international partners. The Security Council may wish to consider these calls from national stakeholders for continued and targeted political support when debating the renewal of UNIPSIL’s mandate for the year ahead.

6. It is clear that the PBC could potentially play an important role during the final phases of UNIPSIL’s transition. It is not currently clear that the UN Country Team and other international partners will be able to assume all aspects of UNIPSIL’s mandate that require continuing attention within existing resources. The Peacebuilding Commission may be called upon to advocate for additional support and could work closely with relevant UN entities to ensure that processes are in place for a smooth transfer of responsibilities. It is particularly important that this process is seen as a transformation of the United Nations presence in Sierra Leone and not as reduction in international assistance.

7. Strengthening collaboration within the Mano River Union (MRU) is becoming an increasing priority for the leaders of Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Existing cross border peacebuilding initiatives spearheaded by the MRU Secretariat should be assessed and scaled up. The PBC could provide a useful forum for the MRU to disseminate its activities and relevant country configurations may want to consider options for collectively deepening practical cooperation with the institution.

8. For the first time, a PBC delegation embarked in a joint visit to two agenda countries. The PBC delegation was able to appreciate the regional interconnectedness and commonality of both the challenges and opportunities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In light of repeated calls for the PBC to increasingly adopt a regional approach, the delegation recommends that such joint visits be more systematically considered as a useful and cost-effective modality for engaging countries in the same region.

Report of the Visit

1. The Liberia and Sierra Leone configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission undertook a joint delegation visit to their respective agenda countries in February 2013. The Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration, Ambassador Guillermo Rishchynksi, led the Sierra Leone portion of the trip from 15 to 20 February 2013. The delegation was composed of representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, Kuwait, Japan, Sierra Leone, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (see Annex B for a full list of participants and Annex C for the programme of the visit).
2. The Chair would like to express his gratitude to the Government of Sierra Leone for the warm welcome received by the delegation. He would also like to thank ERSG Toyberg-Frandzen and UNIPSIL staff for their tremendous efforts organizing and facilitating the visit. Ambassador Staffan Tillander, the Chair of the Liberia configuration, and the Peacebuilding Support Office served as invaluable, engaging, and constructive partners in designing and conducting the first joint visit by the Peacebuilding Commission.
3. The delegation met with the President and other Government officials, the leadership of Parliament, representatives of political parties, heads of independent commissions, civil society, the diplomatic community, the UN Country Team, and Sierra Leone's development partners. The delegation also undertook a visit to Makeni, the provincial capital of the Northern Region, to assess views from a range of national stakeholders and visit two peacebuilding projects.

Political Situation

4. The overarching tone of the visit was positive. All interlocutors acknowledged the tremendous strides Sierra Leone has made since the end of its civil war. The successful conduct of the 2012 elections demonstrated the progress made towards consolidating peace, managing political tensions, and building capacity in core national institutions. Widely considered an important threshold for peace consolidation, the elections have led to a shift in emphasis towards economic and social development. In this context, the Government of Sierra Leone is in the process of articulating its Agenda for Prosperity, the country's next Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and framework for national action over the next five years until 2018.
5. At the same time, all national stakeholders acknowledged that some peacebuilding challenges lie ahead. Youth unemployment remains a latent and long-term threat. Investment in the natural resource sector is bringing both opportunities and risks. Transnational crime networks in the sub-region also represent a source of potential instability. These issues will need to be addressed or managed even as Sierra Leone moves towards a more traditional development footing.

Constitutional Review

6. The peaceful elections of November 17 2012 signaled an important step toward peace consolidation. Nevertheless, several interlocutors described the elections as short on policy issues and the voting pattern consolidated party affiliation along regional divide. This fact, coupled with the refusal of the main opposition party, the SLPP, to accept the results and the inability of 8 out of 10 registered parties to win seats in Parliament suggests that a more inclusive political system may be needed.

7. The President and the country appear ready to embark on a constitutional review process that will help to address this matter. The review is expected to last approximately two to two and a half years and will be led by Sierra Leone. The Government has shared with the PBC a preliminary road map of the process. An 11-person strong Constitutional Review Committee with representation from the UN will be established. The Commission will take into account the recommendations put forward in 2008 by a Constitutional Review Commission established in 2007. The Committee would then engage in countrywide consultations and prepare a report to be shared with Government. The consultative phase would culminate in a national conference to take place at the end of 2013. Based on this process, the Government would then establish a Drafting Team to produce the revised Constitution for submission to Government and Parliament. Sierra Leoneans will subsequently approve the final text through a national referendum. During various meetings the PBC underscored the importance of ensuring that the constitutional review process is inclusive, consultative, and reflective of the views of all Sierra Leoneans.

8. Given the fact that the constitutional review process will be highly political, all relevant stakeholders expressed the need for UNIPSIL to facilitate the process based on its unique position as a trusted, neutral arbiter. The UN family would also be expected to provide technical assistance. UNDP has accumulated experience in this area and has confirmed its readiness to assist.

Youth Employment and Empowerment

9. The singular issue that continues to preoccupy Government officials and other national actors alike is the high level of unemployment among the youth. This is a problem common to the countries in the region. Of the 40 million people living in the Mano River Union, 17 million are unemployed. Addressing youth unemployment underpins most objectives that will feature in the Agenda for Prosperity. The Government has also further refined its architecture in this area with the creation of a separate Ministry for Youth Affairs to advocate within Government for youth issues and to provide policy guidance to the National Youth Commission. In turn, the Commission has been tasked with undertaking concrete activities on youth employment and coordinating the efforts of international partners. However, a fully-fledged youth employment strategy is not yet operational. Creating jobs and equipping Sierra Leoneans with the required

skills will take time and resources from Government, the private sector, and development partners.

Natural Resources and Land Management

10. Until job-rich economic growth takes hold, managing expectations with respect to the extraction of iron-ore and discovery of offshore oil will prove a challenge. The very visible signs of private investment have raised public hopes of securing immediate benefits. In this respect, full adherence with International Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative would provide a signal of confidence. A number of development partners including the World Bank, the IMF and DFID are providing considerable support in the area of natural resources management.

11. The issue of land ownership is closely interconnected with natural resources management, especially given the coexistence of a dual land tenure system whereby land can be purchased in the Western area but not in other provinces. Lack of clarity on who owns the land is often at the center of conflicts between local communities and multinational corporations. Compared to previous PBC visits, the delegation heard more frequent and more strident warning about the potential for tension. At the same time, recent examples of fruitful collaboration between the extractive companies and the local communities show mutually beneficial arrangements can be established. This is particularly true where investors are prepared to support targeted job training efforts.

Democratic Institutions

12. Democratic institutions are in place and some have achieved both national and international recognition, notably the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The delegation was impressed with the briefing provided by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Sierra Leone is steadily improving its ranking in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. At the same time, the number of cases pursued by the ACC has increased over time and the Commission has been able to prosecute influential individuals. The mandate given to the ACC by law is sufficiently broad for it to pursue corruption effectively (Anti-Corruption Act of 2008) and the Commission enjoys the support of the President. However, the weaknesses in the judiciary have either undercut indictments or resulted in lenient punishments.

13. The NHRC has gained international standing and no longer depends entirely on international assistance. The NHRC has also established regional offices and is planning to extend its outreach to the district level. Recognizing the challenges posed by increasing private sector investment, the Commission is building capacity in the area of business and human rights. The Commission also noted that the constitutional review would provide an important opportunity to eliminate discriminatory clauses contained in the constitution.

14. Younger institutions, such as the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC), are progressively shaping their role and displaying their added value. However, there is a need to strengthen the regulatory frameworks defining their roles and responsibilities. National interlocutors, starting with the President, have called for the international community to assist in strengthening the capacity of the PPRC and the IMC. With regard to the IMC, the passage of the freedom of information act coupled with equipping the Commission with a stronger mandate would help manage Sierra Leone's media landscape. The print media, in particular, are often accused of inaccurate, unprofessional, and sometimes irresponsible reporting.

Security Sector

15. Interlocutors praised the Sierra Leone Police for its role during the elections, but also noted an enduring need to ensure its accountability and enhance its professionalism. The PBC was provided some assurances that an independent complaints mechanism would be put in place in keeping with the findings of the Shears-Moses report. The NHRC will be part of this mechanism, although it will need to maintain some independence in order to ensure it can still be able to address grievances that cannot be fully solved by this independent mechanism. The PBC was further informed that the lack of private sector security companies has led to the Sierra Leone Police being hired to provide security in the extractive sector. In some areas this has raised questions within the public about the Sierra Leone Police's loyalties. In this regard, the level of trust between the Sierra Leone Police and the population remains a key concern.

16. Ensuring continued support to the broader security sector is central to UNIPSIL's transition. UNDP has shown willingness to provide support in this area, but would need to build the required capacity. DFID has historically supported SSR in post-conflict Sierra Leone and is now ready to convert its support to the army to a broader engagement with the security sector as a whole. Accordingly, the International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) would be reconfigured into an International Security Advisory Team (ISAT) with a smaller number of advisors and a multilateral composition. DFID appears willing to absorb some of UNIPSIL's tasks after the mission leaves.

17. The PBC delegation also visited Pademba Road Prison. Sierra Leone does not currently have any political prisoners and has a very low level of mistreatment by prison officials. The real challenge is finding adequate resources to meet minimum standards. The PBC appreciated the access that it was granted to the prison and took note that while attempts are made to ease the conditions of the prisoners, insufficient public funds and scarce donor interest make it virtually impossible to guarantee a dignified and healthy environment for detainees. Delays and structural weaknesses within the judicial system have also led to apprehended individuals remaining in detention for much longer than the periods provided for in the law.

Political Parties and Parliament

18. The meeting with political parties gathered nine of the ten registered parties even though only two, the APC and the SLPP, won seats in Parliament. All parties welcomed the decision of the President to move ahead with the constitutional review and shared the view that the current system requires moderating reforms. It will be critical to capitalize on this convergence and engage the political parties fully in the political process in a constructive manner. The political parties expressed a clear desire for UNIPSIL to play this role and cautioned strongly against an abrupt withdrawal of the mission. Beyond the domain of political competition, political parties cited the need to build Sierra Leone's human capital, address youth unemployment, and manage investment in natural resources as key challenges.

19. The PBC also held a productive discussion with the leadership of Parliament, including the Speaker and Deputy-Speaker of the House, Majority and Minority Leaders, Deputy-Leaders, and the Majority Whip. The last elections produced a sizeable turnover. Nearly 70% of the Members of the new Parliament are serving their first term, which creates a need for enhanced capacity building.

20. Parliamentarians agreed on the need for national dialogue. The issue of voting on party lines, with the North and West supporting the ruling APC party and the South and East the main opposition SLPP party, featured prominently in the discussion and there was general agreement that getting to a 'mosaic' representation would require looking into the electoral system. Several spoke to the need to move away from the "winner-take-all," possibly by including some elements of proportional representation. Parliamentarians also felt that they should be more integral part of the national decision-making process, which they believe bypasses them in favour of the central Government and local authorities.

21. Unfortunately, only 15 of 112 elected seats went to women in the last election, one less than during the previous Parliament. In a wide range of meetings, including with Parliamentarians and civil society, women voiced their disappointment at the failure of political parties to field women candidates despite the formal adoption of gender policies that stipulate otherwise. This contrasts with the high voter turnout amongst women, with women accounting for 53% of the votes. Likewise, the gender bill including a provision for a 30% quota for women in all elected and appointed positions was not passed by Parliament before the election. The constitution itself also contains provisions that discriminate against women. Yet there are opportunities for improvement ahead. The two main political parties, the APC and SLPP, are about to hold their conventions at which women could and should be elected to leadership positions. The new Parliament should now be able to debate and pass the gender bill, and the review of the Constitution would present an important opportunity to remove all discriminatory clauses.

Regional Dimension

22. The PBC delegation concluded that a regional approach to peacebuilding is warranted in support of the efforts of the Mano River Union and ECOWAS. Bringing a PBC delegation to both Liberia and Sierra Leone allowed for a better understanding of common challenges and opportunities. The delegation benefited from a detailed briefing by the Mano River Union Secretariat on the work it has conducted in remote border areas. The MRU has helped officials on both sides of the border meet more regularly to cooperate on issues of common concern. This has helped rationalize procedures for border crossings and increased cooperation in areas such as the movement of stolen vehicles. Like the PBC, the Secretariat offers advocacy and advice while leaving implementation of activities to the relevant operational organizations. A meeting in New York with the Secretary-General of the MRU and all West African configurations of the PBC could help deepen the existing relationship and identify more concrete opportunities for providing additional support.

Field Visit to Makeni

23. On February 16, the delegation travelled to Makeni, where it met with the Resident Minister for the North and representatives of the political parties. The delegation also visited a youth employment business skills training center and an employment focused road-building project. Informally considered “the fastest growing city in Sierra Leone,” Makeni is the site of much of the recent investment in the agriculture and extractive sectors. All stakeholders stressed both the benefits and the risks associated with this growth. Rising employment opportunities have brought Sierra Leoneans from all corners of the country to Makeni and efforts are underway to provide adequate training to meet market needs. At the same time, the Resident Minister for the North noted that public expectations are very high and some conflict between the communities and the companies has already occurred. All interlocutors stressed the critical need to build human capital if the population as a whole is to fully benefit from the new investment.

24. Local representatives of the political parties expressed views similar to those aired in Freetown. Most praised the recent elections, although the Sierra Leone People’s Party highlighted its continued concern with specific aspects of the electoral process, as outlined in its case before the Supreme Court.

Transition

25. National actors and international partners alike stressed the importance of UNIPSIL’s role as a political convener and trusted arbiter. While all recognized that the time to transition from a special political mission to a more traditional UN Country Team presence is fast approaching, many interlocutors stressed the importance of UNIPSIL’s role addressing residual political issues in the year ahead. Of these, the need for UN

engagement on the constitutional review and in the security sector was cited most frequently. Likewise, all national and international stakeholders emphasized the need to avoid an abrupt departure by conducting an orderly transition that is communicated clearly to all Sierra Leoneans. The pace of this transition should be guided by developments on the ground. While many of UNIPSIL's functions can and should transfer to the UN Country Team in the coming months, it will be important to assess progress on the constitutional review process over the coming year.

26. In addition, it is clear that some challenges to peace consolidation will remain present in the longer-term. As one observer noted, Sierra Leone still stands “on a pivot between stability and instability”. For this reason, several of the PBC's interlocutors noted that the post-UNIPSIL UN presence would need a “politically savvy” Resident Coordinator with support from a team with sufficient political and human rights expertise. Likewise, several meetings indicated a general consensus that Sierra Leone has benefited from having key peacebuilding issues considered in an international forum and questioned whether the PBC might continue to serve this awareness raising and attention-generating function after the Security Council withdraws UNIPSIL.

27. These observations point towards the need for development partners to remain engaged. Sierra Leone already stands as an excellent example of best practices in aid coordination. The strategic coherence of the current international assistance should be retained through close alignment with the Sierra Leone's forthcoming PRSP, the Agenda for Prosperity. This is especially true as a number of interlocutors noted that the policies and investments that Sierra Leone enacts over the next few years will fundamentally shape the future of the country. In this respect, the PBC was particularly encouraged by the decision of some development partners to increase their assistance to Sierra Leone.

Next Steps

28. The PBC is entering a new phase in its engagement with Sierra Leone in three related respects. First, much depends on the Security Council's decision-making with respect to UNIPSIL's transition. The PBC could potentially play a useful role in this process. Working in close cooperation with the Government of Sierra Leone, UNIPSIL, the UN Country Team, and international partners, the PBC can work to identify any gaps that may emerge from UNIPSIL's drawdown. Where functions currently performed by UNIPSIL must be continued and cannot be immediately absorbed by other actors, the PBC could serve as an advocate for marshaling necessary resources. The Chair proposes to begin consideration of this issue once the Security Council adopts UNIPSIL's new mandate in March 2013. In this respect, the exact activities to be undertaken will depend on the further development of transition planning on the basis of a clearer timeline and set of mandated activities.

29. Second, the PBC has defined its engagement in Sierra Leone according to the priorities established in the Agenda for Chang (2007-2012). Once this strategy is replaced by the Agenda for Prosperity the configuration will need to consider how to adjust its

own work to remain aligned with Government of Sierra Leone's vision for peacebuilding and economic development.

30. Third, the UN transition process and national shift towards the Agenda for Prosperity highlight the broader need to begin considering the nature and duration of the PBC's engagement in Sierra Leone. Over the course of the next year there is a clear role for the PBC in supporting the UN's transition process, the elaboration of the constitutional review, progress on outstanding risks to peace consolidation, and the articulation of the Agenda for Prosperity. As the time for a Resident-Coordinator led UN presence approaches, however, the PBC will need to consider altering its own engagement and beginning to define an exit strategy. The priorities of the Government of Sierra Leone, the pace of progress in the field, and an assessment of the PBC's expected added value should drive the timing and speed of this process.