

Peacebuilding Commission
Informal meeting of the Liberian Country Specific Configuration
8 December 2010

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 8 December 2010, the Chairperson of the Country Configuration for Liberia, H.R.H. Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, convened the third informal meeting of the Configuration. The Chairperson presided over the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was a briefing on the Chairperson's mission to Liberia in preparation for an Informal Interactive Dialogue with the Security Council and to consider a work plan for the Liberia Configuration.

Briefing on the PBC Chairperson's Mission to Liberia (7 – 15 November 2010);

The Chairperson provided an overview of the mission explaining how he had met with a diverse group of people and a significant cross-section of Liberian society including: senior government officials, national civil society, rural communities, international community and UN. He also had the opportunity to travel to rural and urban parts of the country visiting three (3) counties: Bong, Lofa and Montserrado. He expressed his appreciation for the support of the Government of Liberia, UNMIL, PBSO, DPKO and the UN Country Team for the success of the mission.

The Chairperson proceeded with a few principal impressions. He commented that he was very impressed with the quality of public officials he met as well as the UN leadership. From discussions with key stakeholders on the ground he is solidly convinced that the PBC is focused on the key risks and challenges to peace in Liberia: rule of law, security sector reform and national reconciliation.

He then highlighted a few points per each priority. In the area of rule of law, some significant efforts are under-way to strengthen the system, however; compared to the scale of the challenges these are only a beginning. This was exemplified by the Magistrates Sitting Programme, which was established to decrease the enormous backlog of pre-trial cases in Monrovia. This Programme includes thirteen lawyers and, in fact out of the some three hundred Magistrate Judges in the country, they are the judges with a law degree. This educational gap points to the larger need for building capacity, which will be essential to reform the justice system to respond to the current demands placed on it. More specifically, a core impediment in the system is the limited jurisdiction of the Magistrate Court, which can only be expanded in a manner that is in line with the capacity of its Judges. This expansion is seen as a basic necessity to better balance the processing of cases through the three tier court system, which presently is overwhelmed at the second level where the vast majority of cases are processed.

On security sector reform, the Chairperson commented on the strides being made by Liberian National Police (LNP). The number of trained personnel is steadily increasing. Quality training is on-going via the National Police Training Academy. Nonetheless, the basic working tools such as uniforms and communication equipment are direly needed. On the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), the Chairperson reported that, despite considerable efforts by the international community, the Minister of Defense and his Chief of Staff were doubtful that the army would be fully operational by 2012 as foreseen in a

number of Secretary-General reports on Liberia. He put this forward as an issue for further attention by the Configuration.

Turning to national reconciliation, the Chairperson emphasized the importance of memory and the need to go beyond the traditional approach of building physical infrastructure and capacity building as a means to reconcile war-torn communities. He commended the Land Commission's efforts that have the potential to significantly decrease conflict triggers. Even so, he stressed that this does not diminish the necessity of Liberians reckoning with their past, in particular what many Liberians pointed to as a critical root cause – “the original sin” that dates back to the founding of the country and the resulting divide between the settler and indigenous populations. On this matter, while noting that the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission falls well within the scope of Liberia's sovereign decision-making process, he commented on the ability of the PBC to serve as an advisor in sharing lessons from other countries. The Chairperson further proposed support for a National Archive, where the memory of the country could be stored following a reckoning process that would allow the population to look at the more painful episodes of their history.

The Chairperson further reported on the ground breaking ceremony that was held for the construction site of the first Hub. The Hub is an organic concept based within the LNP Strategic Plan and appears to be fully supported by the key senior government officials – Inspector General of LNP, Chief Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Acting Minister of Justice – who all accompanied the mission on the trip to Lofa and Bong Counties. The main challenge will be implementing the project in a sustainable manner which will enable the government to assume full cost for the Hubs. The Chairperson, as well as the ASG for Peacebuilding Support who accompanied his mission, both conveyed this message to all concerned officials including the President.

Subsequently, two (2) Member States took the floor. Specific interest was expressed in how the Hub Project will be implemented particularly as it pertains to deployment of personnel and larger coordination of security sector reform within the Government and the international community. Questions were further posed on how the PBC can concretely work on the ground with the Government of Liberia and UNMIL as well as what would be expected of members in terms of fundraising. Support was also raised for working with the Liberian Government on resource mobilization and for the Liberia Configuration to set precedent in being an advisory body to the Security Council.

The Chair responded urging members to be flexible with regards to the finalization of the Hub. He further noted that draft rolling targets were drawn up and asked interested members to join a small working group to help finalize these in consultation with the field. These rolling targets would be the basis for the first review of the Statement of Mutual Commitment. The SRSG, who joined the meeting by VTC, also reported that UNMIL and the Government were working to set up a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that would closely follow the construction and deployment of staff to the Hubs. The Joint Steering Committee, which is responsible for approving the ToRs for the TAG, is currently being reviewed to be more policy focused and strategic in its works.

The Director and Deputy Head of PBSO briefly summarized main points from the ASG for Peacebuilding Support's mission. The ASG, like the Chairperson, is focusing on promoting the sustainability of the Hub(s) and has been in contact with the World Bank on the matter. He further

commented on the importance of building government capacity, for which infrastructure is a basic component.

Adoption of Work Plan for the Liberia Configuration;

The Chairperson proceeded to the next agenda item referring members to the draft work plan that had been shared. He clarified that this is a living document that would be amended as necessary. In fact, with reference to an informal, informal discussion on reconciliation, he stated that he wanted to defer to the Government of Liberia before proceeding on this activity. Members expressed no objections to the work plan and it was adopted.

Other Matters;

The Chairperson informed members of his intention to send out an invitation for a Steering Group of the Liberia Configuration with whom he would meet more frequently to help guide the work of the PBC on Liberia. He explained that he wanted to keep this to a small workable group who would commit to beginning active members including participating in missions to Liberia.