

Peacebuilding Commission

Special meeting

26 January 2015

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 26 January, the Peacebuilding Commission convened a special meeting. The meeting was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Brazil, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and addressed the following agenda items: (1) Briefing by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization on Food security and peacebuilding; (2) Briefing by UNDP on the plans for taking forward the Ebola-related recovery initiatives; (3) Other matters.

Briefing by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization on Food security and peacebuilding

1. The Chair opened the meeting welcoming Mr. José Graziano da Silva, Director General of FAO, and thanking FAO for the important support it is providing to the countries on the agenda of the PBC. The Chair noted that today's discussion represents an important opportunity to address the relations between food security and peacebuilding in post-conflict settings and to identify practical recommendations to increase food security and build sustainable peace.
2. Mr. Graziano da Silva informed Member States that FAO recognizes food security as an essential foundation of peace, security and development. The link between food security and peacebuilding is a two-way relationship and food security can be an important tool for conflict prevention and mitigation, as well as to ensure sustainable development. In this regard, Mr. Graziano da Silva recalled that one of FAO's key strategic approaches is to ensure the complementarity between humanitarian and development interventions. On the humanitarian side, FAO is working with IFAD and WFP on a common strategy which includes relief, recovery and resilience. At the same time, the Organization is undertaking programmes to reduce hunger, which is a root cause of conflicts.
3. Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed that good governance, agriculture, poverty and violence are all interrelated and that establishing partnership among local and global actors is a crucial step to overcome these interconnected challenges. He added that both political commitment and technical understanding are also required.

4. Member States welcomed the presentation by Mr. Graziano da Silva and raised a number of questions on the importance of strengthening the role of the international community in reinforcing the links between food security and peacebuilding.

Briefing by UNDP on the plans for taking forward the Ebola-related recovery initiatives

5. The Chair provided a brief background on the PBC's efforts to address EVD. He recalled that, on 25 November 2014, following-up on the numerous PBC meetings dedicated to the fight against the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), he addressed a letter to the Secretary-General requesting that the United Nations undertake an assessment of the Ebola epidemic's impact on post-conflict peacebuilding efforts in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In his letter, the Chair stressed the importance that the PBC attached to the epidemic's impact in the areas of security, local governance, political institutions, social cohesion and economic recovery. He also recalled that the Secretary-General, in his response to the PBC dated 17 December 2014, informed that UNDP would lead the UN's initiatives on Ebola-related recovery. The Chair invited UNDP to brief on the on the plans for taking forward the Ebola-related recovery initiatives.

6. Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye (Regional Director, UNDP Africa Bureau) expressed his appreciation for the work done by the PBC since the EVD outbreak. He informed that the quadripartite partnership led by UNDP, which includes the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the EU, working closely with the AU, ECOWAS and the Mano River Union, is receiving overwhelming support from Member States. He noted that, while it is too early to say that the epidemic is ending, it is vital to lay the ground for effective and sustained recovery. In order to assess the impact of the epidemic, the Ebola Recovery Assessment (ERA) initiative has been structured around four main pillars: a) peacebuilding, governance and social cohesion; b) socio-economic revitalization; c) health, water and sanitation; and d) basic services and infrastructure. He highlighted that the first pillar is composed by a Peacebuilding, Governance and Social Cohesion Thematic Working Group, co-led by UNDP and EU and benefiting from critical support from PBSO. The findings of the Working Group should be completed in four to five weeks, but initial findings point to the following issues:

Situation pre-Ebola

State of the post-conflict peacebuilding and related governance institutions:

- Despite significant support and progress achieved, systems and societies in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone were characterized by a high degree of fragility which accelerated the spread of the EVD;
- Over-centralization of decision-making of day-to-day core governance functions and service delivery in urban areas led to weak and incoherent coordination of service delivery;
- The economies of the three affected countries were over-dependent on the extractive sector, with its limited employment opportunities. That led to a growing number of youth unemployment;

- A politics of weak inclusion and the perception of regional preferences, which strained social cohesion, were seen as a primary driver of fragility of governments and states;
- At sub-regional level, the Mano River countries is characterized by porous borders and trans-national and ethnic affinity which remain a major security challenge.

Impact of EVD crisis on peacebuilding and social cohesion

The epidemic affected the three economies which decreased by 3-4% in real terms and may take 5 to 10 years to return to the pre-Ebola levels. The EVD eroded governance, peace and security gains in a number of ways:

- There has been a rise in violence directly related to the outbreak and resistance of the population to State-led initiatives and political resentment has hardened in all three countries, fuelled by unfounded rumours, which has contributed to increased risks of tensions around upcoming elections;
- Social cohesion has been further eroded and the mistrust in the state has increased. However, there has also been a positive dimension linked to spontaneous community response actions;
- Violence has increased and school closures have led to an increase in crime;
- The space for political dialogue is shrinking and that might impact upcoming political elections in the countries.

7. Mr. Magdy Martinez-Soliman (Director, UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support) focused his briefing on the emerging recovering strategies for peacebuilding and social cohesion. He noted that, after consulting with governments and numerous partners, the international recovery partnership identified the following recovery strategies that have emerged from initial consultations with governments and developing partners:

- Focus on systems rather than sectors: it is crucial to pay special attention to equitable access to basic service delivery, which would also strengthen the trust in governments;
- Decentralization and strengthening of local governance should be prioritized: a strong local government system, which keeps interaction with the central government as well as with local communities, is an important element for accelerating the recovery from the EVD crisis;
- Governments and partners must pay attention to trauma healing and psycho-social support;
- Establish comprehensive early warning and surveillance systems which bring together conflict, health and natural hazards early warning systems;

- Revitalize local economies for jobs and livelihoods: the three countries should establish social protection systems;
- National recovery strategies should explore opportunities to interact at regional and sub-regional level.

11. Member States welcomed the briefing by UNDP and the Ebola Recovery Assessment it is leading. Delegations focused their interventions on the following issues:

- Peacebuilding must be integrated in all the themes and issues relevant to the ERA, which can provide the basis for the PBC to further access full impact of EVD on the longer term and exchange views on potentially modifying peacebuilding priorities at the country level;
- While the focus should be on addressing immediate peacebuilding needs of the affected countries, including the challenges related to public health, security and governance, the international community must focus its attention on the medium- to long-term peacebuilding priorities, including national reconciliation and youth employment;
- National ownership is the key to successfully addressing the recovery phase, while capacity building and the strengthening of national institutions must be at the centre of recovery efforts;
- Particular attention should be given to women, who have been affected by the EVD more than men, particularly those in rural areas;
- The PBC can play an important role as a platform for coordination and it should further engage with regional and sub-regional actors, such as the Mano River Union;
- It will be important for UNDP to develop a solid communication strategy to inform Member States on the activities of the Ebola Recovery Assessment and the differences from UNMEER-led processes;
- PBSO mentioned that the ERA report would provide insight for the need to assess and/or allocate existing or additional funding.
