

## **PBC Ambassadorial meeting on Sri Lanka**

**17 April 2019**

### **Chairperson's summary of the discussion**

1. On 17 April 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Sri Lanka as an opportunity for the Government to present the country's progress in advancing peacebuilding and transitional justice through ongoing initiatives to strengthen democracy and good governance, promote reconciliation and foster development. The meeting, which was chaired by Commission Vice-chair H.E. Mr. Ion Jinga, was a follow-up to an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Sri Lanka convened in November 2017. Members were briefed by H.E. Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Finance of Sri Lanka, Mr. Mano Tittawella, Secretary General of Government Secretariat for Coordination of Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM), Mr. Saliya Pieris, Chairperson, Office of Missing Persons and Mrs Dhara Wijayatilaka, CEO/Secretary General, Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and Chairperson, Office of Reparations. ASG Oscar Fernandez-Taranco and Ms. Hanaa Singer, Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, also briefed the Commission.
2. H.E. Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Finance, Sri Lanka, provided an update on the country's progress on advancing peacebuilding and transitional justice, to include the Government's policy perspectives on these issues. The Minister highlighted the Government's recent co-sponsoring of Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 40/1, which rolls over HRC resolution 30/1 of 2015 and provides a two-year implementation timeline extension. The Minister referred to the peaceful resolution of the 52-day constitutional crisis in late 2018 as a litmus test for democracy in Sri Lanka, noting the positive role played by Sri Lankans themselves in protecting the country's democratic institutions. He expressed appreciation for the early support provided by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to the four pillars of Sri Lanka's Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP), i.e. transitional justice; reconciliation; good governance; and resettlement and durable solutions, including targeted support for initiatives to build trust and confidence at the national level in support of the resettlement of IDPs, country-wide consultations on transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms, and for the timely deployment of technical experts to advise the government on transitional justice issues. Acknowledging continuing challenges facing the country, the Minister highlighted reform success in policy, legal and economic areas, and expressed his conviction that sustained economic growth and development would depend on reconciliation, stability and peace. He appealed to the international community to provide more predictable financing, technical expertise, capacity building and the sharing of good practices on

reconciliation-related initiatives to help Sri Lanka consolidate gains in advance of elections in 2019 (presidential) and 2020 (parliamentary).

3. SCRM Secretary General Mr. Mano Tittawella described the complex, multi-layered institutional framework that underpins Sri Lanka's transitional justice and reconciliation processes. The Secretary General noted the Government's peacebuilding achievements, stressing the coordinating role of the SCRM, which reports directly to the Prime Minister, in ensuring coherence among all entities and stakeholders in the implementation of the country's peacebuilding agenda. The Government has committed to the establishment of four transitional justice mechanisms, including the Office on Missing Persons (OMP); Office of Reparations (OfR); Truth Seeking Commission; and accountability mechanisms. The OMP and OfR are now operational. To improve communication with the public on the reform agenda, the Government has launched a community awareness programme that included a series of media sensitization workshops aimed at countering misconceptions and misleading information, especially on transitional justice processes. The Secretary General noted that the Government has signed and ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (ICPPED), to enforce the criminalization of forced disappearances and reparations to victims' families, and introduced the Right to Information Act to foster a culture of transparency and accountability in public authorities. He also highlighted support provided to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and reduce ethno-religious tensions, the launch of a resettlement and land release programme for victims displaced by the conflict, with 89,263 acres of land (75% of total land occupation) released as of March 2019, and the construction of 150,857 houses in the Northern, Eastern and North Central Provinces as significant achievements. The Secretary General expressed appreciation for the consistent support provided by the UN Resident Coordinator Office and UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, and by bilateral partners to help Sri Lanka achieve its peacebuilding goals.
4. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, ASG for Peacebuilding Support, noted that the PBF has invested \$20.7 million in Sri Lanka since 2015. He highlighted the country's recent constitutional crisis as a pertinent example of institutional resilience necessary to sustain peace and encouraged the Government to continue to work through its institutions in support of a long-term political settlement. In commending the Government for its implementation of the inclusive and comprehensive PPP with its focus on women, youth and victims of conflict, he highlighted the Government's initiative to broaden partnerships for peacebuilding to include Sri Lanka's private sector. He also noted that Sri Lanka briefing serves as an example of the PBC serving as a platform for discussion of good practices. The ASG expressed hope that the new working methods of the PBC and the implementation of the

Secretary-General's reforms would help capture and disseminate more good practices and lessons learned to partners and countries on similar paths.

5. Ms. Hanaa Singer, the UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, described the pivotal role of the PPP in fostering and strengthening peacebuilding partnerships in Sri Lanka. While the PPP serves as the guiding framework of UN engagement in Sri Lanka, which was especially critical for providing support to transitional justice process and mechanisms at the national and local level, the RC noted the need for further external technical support to strengthen the capacities of key transitional justice and reconciliation institutions. She introduced the Joint Programme for Peace (JPP), developed in collaboration with development partners in Sri Lanka, as a framework for Member States looking to support peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka. The RC expressed appreciation to Australia, the UK and the US for their support in this regard.
6. OMP Chairperson Mr. Saliya Pieris noted that the OMP, established in February 2018, was the first transitional justice mechanism established by the Government, with a core mandate to trace and protect the rights and interests of the missing and their families. Since its establishment, the OMP set up its head office in Colombo to recruit 250 initial staff; commemorate the Day of Missing Persons/Disappeared; launch the awareness campaign 'Vital Pain Never Disappears' to highlight the suffering and pain of families of the disappeared; and establish a permanent database. He noted, however, that the OMP faces challenges in addressing skepticism and mistrust by families of the missing towards the Government, the lack of understanding of the deep trauma experienced by families of the disappeared, the existing economic gap between the North and the South and lack of capacity building opportunities within the OMP.
7. Mrs. Dhara Wijayatilaka spoke in her dual capacity as Chairperson of the OfR and as CEO/Secretary-General of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Mrs. Wijayatilaka informed the PBC that the first task of the OfR was to formulate a government policy on reparations linked to the country's transitional justice mechanisms. She stated that the Government's commitment to reparations acknowledges the legal obligation of the State to repair the consequences of violations it either directly committed or failed to prevent. At the same time, she noted that reparations, even with their financial, material and symbolic benefits, could not replace justice. She described the private sector's commitment to partner with the government in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, guided by the principle that peacebuilding is not the responsibility of the government alone, and highlighted as an example engagement by the Chamber of Commerce with business leaders at the district level in support of local

dialogue and conflict prevention activities. Mrs Wijayatilaka commended the UN Resident Coordinator and DPPA's assistance to build mediation techniques and skills for business leaders in support of conflict prevention in four potential hot spots. She noted that the private sector in Sri Lanka continues to call for clear and consistent Government policies on peace and reconciliation to enable the sector to broaden its work in peacebuilding.

8. Member States welcomed the briefing and made the following observations:
  - Highlighted the PBC meeting as timely and comprehensive, and commended the constructive role the PBC can play in support of Sri Lanka's national peacebuilding efforts.
  - Noted that Sri Lanka serves as a successful partnership model between the UN and Member States to advance peacebuilding and national ownership, including through the catalytic support provided by both the PBC and the PBF.
  - Congratulated Sri Lanka for overcoming the 2018 constitutional crisis in a peaceful manner that demonstrated the resilience of its institutions.
  - Welcomed the Government's continued commitment to peacebuilding and sustaining peace as demonstrated by its co-sponsoring of HRC resolution 40/1 in March 2019.
  - Commended Sri Lanka's continued commitment and engagement to transitional justice and reconciliation, including through the operationalization of the OMP and OfR, and demonstrating commitment to move ahead to establish the Truth Seeking Commission and judicial accountability mechanisms.
  - Underscored the importance of national ownership and the 'whole of society' approach of the Government's peacebuilding agenda that integrates all segments of Sri Lanka society. Member States noted that national ownership of the peacebuilding agenda is strengthened by the Government's allocation of national budget resources for identified peacebuilding and reconciliation priorities.
  - Welcomed with encouragement the Government's engagement of the national private sector in peacebuilding and reconciliations efforts in the country and considers it a good practice.
  - Noted the importance of the PBF and other investments in Sri Lanka's peacebuilding efforts in helping to strengthen institutions that played essential roles in resolving the country's constitutional crisis. Some delegations welcomed the extension of the Sri Lanka PPP to align it to the government planning cycle but requested clarity on the complementarity between the PPP, the newly launched JPP and the UNDAF.

9. In concluding remarks, H.E. Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN, expressed appreciation to the PBC for convening the meeting and offering the opportunity to update Member States on the progress, lessons learned and existing challenges of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in Sri Lanka. The Permanent Representative referred to the PBC briefing as continuation of the Sri Lankan Government's commitment to fully engage with stakeholders and the international community in efforts to build lasting peace in the country. While challenges remain, they could not hinder the country's advancing progress towards peace. This was clearly demonstrated by the restoration of rule of law, democracy and good governance through independent and resilient national institutions. The Vice Chair thanked the Sri Lanka delegation for the insightful briefings to the PBC and encouraged the Sri Lankan people to continue working towards securing political stability and longer-term peace. He reiterated the PBC's commitment to continue providing the Government of Sri Lanka with a platform to present its peacebuilding priorities and to share good practices, both in peer-to-peer interactions and by raising awareness and support.