

**Peacebuilding Commission
Informal Country-Specific Meeting on Sierra Leone**

22 June 2012

Chair's Summary Note

1. The Peacebuilding Commission met on 22 June 2012 to discuss the state of play in the run-up to the elections to be held in November 2012 in Sierra Leone. The meeting was chaired by Ambassador Guillermo E. Rishchynski of Canada, in the presence of Dr. Christiana Thorpe, Head of the Sierra Leone National Electoral Commission (NEC). Joining from Freetown by video link were ERSG Toyberg-Frandzen, the Registrar of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the Inspector General of the Police, two representatives of national NGOs, and a representative of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Given the meeting's focus on elections, DPA's Electoral Assistance Division was also invited to participate.

2. **The Chair** noted that since his last visit to the field, much progress had been achieved, with the completion of the registration process thus reinforcing the commitment of society to holding elections. He recognized that the NEC has done an enormous amount of work, including in the areas of voters' education and outreach, and training on the rules and regulations of elections for all relevant partners. He also underlined the importance of holding elections in a calm and conducive environment, commending in this regard the signature by all parties and other actors involved in the process of the Declaration on the 2012 Elections. Finally he commended the All Political Parties Youth Association's advocacy for peaceful, free, and fair elections, and underlined the critical role of an independent, professional, and objective media.

3. In her briefing, **Dr. Thorpe** announced that after completing the matching process, voters' ID cards were now ready for distribution, which amounted to 2.6 million on the provisional list. From 30 June to 30 July, the provisional lists are going to be exhibited throughout the country for verification, and final registration. A final registration will take place after exhibition of the lists in July. Looking back, she recalled how her country had moved from needing the presence of peacekeepers to maintain peace in 2002, to providing their own troops to peacekeeping operations around the world. At present, the NEC was involved in preparing the roughly 9,000 staff needed for the exhibition and verification process, which would result in the appropriate corrections being made to the voters' list and its finalization by September 2012. She called on the international community to send in international observers whose presence during the elections would send a sign of confidence to the people of Sierra Leone. With respect to the electoral laws, Dr. Thorpe briefed on the efforts made towards harmonizing the various different documents into a single electoral code, a draft of which had been given Presidential assent in May 2012. Work was ongoing to abridge that new text with a view to disseminating it widely among the population. In terms

of challenges, Dr. Thorpe highlighted the lack of the needed vehicles to transport the electoral material to the 3,000 polling stations country-wide, as well as the concern for the overall general atmosphere come election day.

4. **ERSG Toyberg-Frandzen** welcomed the finalization of voter registration which had been recognized as a success by all stakeholders. The next steps would require much coordination of all stakeholders, as well as continued efforts to support and promote continued political dialogue among all stakeholders. The signature on 18 May of the Declaration by political parties, the NEC and NGOs was proof of their commitment to holding peaceful elections. ERSG Toyberg-Frandzen welcomed the recent release by the Government of the White Paper on the Shears-Moses Report, and encouraged the implementation of all the recommendations it contained. He called on the PBC to maintain its support to the ongoing process.

5. The **Registrar of Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC)** highlighted some of the aspects of the groundwork laid by PPRC to ensure the holding of peaceful elections, including the conduct of the interparty dialogue, the close cooperation with the women and youth associations of all political parties, and the organization of the consultative conference leading to the signature of the 2012 Declaration. He praised the political will exhibited by all stakeholders, political parties, national assembly, civil society, as well as the unwavering support of the international community.

6. The **Inspector General of the Police** briefed on the efforts of his organization to align its resources in support of the electoral process. These include the provision of security to elections personnel, assisting in the transportation of electoral material, building capacity, including logistic, to have the number of personnel needed come election day, and, with the support of UNIPSIL, the provision of training in techniques for non-lethal crowd management. He stressed that constant threat reviews were being conducted. Concerns were raised in terms of the need to enhanced collaboration with political parties, and the need for more responsible journalism and media coverage.

7. Additional presentations were made by the representatives of two NGO networks involved in observing preparations for the elections to ensure transparency and enhance the population's confidence in the electoral process, and in sensitization activities at community level. A representative of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of the role of NEC in creating a level playing field for all actors in the electoral process.

8. Interventions were made by the representatives of Sierra Leone, Ireland, Chile, Indonesia, South Africa, Nigeria, Pakistan, Australia, Japan and PBSO. All commended the remarkable efforts made by the National Electoral Commission towards ensuring the successful holding of free and fair elections.

9. It was noted however, that more details are needed on progress regarding the setting up of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, as well as on the appointment of the Chair of the PPRC, and of members of the National Human Rights Commission. Questions were also raised regarding recent reports of inaccuracies on the voters' lists and provocative

messaging coming from some media outlets. The need to ensure that legal frameworks are in place and have been disseminated was highlighted by one participant. Several interventions stressed the role of the youth and the need to encourage their active participation in the elections, and to provide appropriate electoral education, while also ensuring the proper measures are taken at local level to mitigate possible acts of violence or dispute after the elections.

10. In response to questions raised, **Dr. Thorpe** provided additional clarification on the process of verification of the voters' lists to ensure the full participation of all voters, on the role of the media, and on training provided by the PPRC to the political parties youth association. Another initiative is being rolled out to use young motorbike operators – so-called Okada Boys – to disseminate messages on the electoral process to their passengers. She also informed the members of the configuration that a Memorandum of Understanding had been signed with Paramount Chiefs and representatives of the Inter-Religious Council to pass messages through their communities. The **Inspector General of the Police** added that crowd control training was being rolled out for all police divisions, and that he hoped all 6,500 officers would be trained by the election.

11. In his final observations, the Chair thanked all for their participation and noted that the presentations made had raised the level of confidence of the PBC regarding the upcoming elections. He reiterated the commitment of the PBC, and the wider international community through UNIPSIL, to make all efforts to ensure the success of the elections. He commended the high level of scrutiny displayed by civil society representatives and encouraged all to provide observation for the electoral process. Finally, the Chair indicated that the UNDP basket fund for the elections is fully funded and noted that the PBC stands ready to deploy additional efforts in the future should the need arise.

12. The meeting was adjourned.
