

## **Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission**

### **Ambassadorial-level meeting on peaceful and inclusive elections in Liberia**

**25 April 2023**

#### **Chair's summary**

##### **Executive Summary**

On 25 April 2023, the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on ensuring peaceful and inclusive elections in Liberia. Elections-related progress made since the last meeting of the Liberia Configuration on 14 November 2022 was highlighted, including the completion of the National Housing and Population Census, the procurement of a biometric voter registration system, the completion of the first phase of the voter registration, the establishment of a Youth Task Force Against Election Violence and signing of the revised Farmington River Declaration. Liberian Government representatives outlined measures to address political tensions and to prevent electoral violence, including early warning and response mechanisms. The meeting had a particular focus on promoting the inclusion of women and youth in the electoral process, noting that women and youth remain severely underrepresented in politics, and that youth make up the majority of the voting populace. The PBC encouraged the endorsement of the 30 percent gender quota for political party leadership and party candidate lists, underscored the need to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and to fully implement the Violence against Women in Elections and Politics (VAWIE/P) Protocol. The PBC also highlighted the need to ensure constructive inclusion of youth in electoral processes and decision-making at all levels. The government's responsibility to provide timely and adequate funding for the National Elections Commission (NEC) was underlined.

1. On 25 April 2023, H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations (UN) and Chair of the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on peaceful and inclusive elections in Liberia, focusing on women's and youth political participation and the prevention of electoral violence. The meeting provided an update on the preparations for the legislative and presidential elections, which will be conducted on 10 October 2023, as well as identified remaining challenges and opportunities to support the efforts of the national authorities.
2. In her opening remarks, the Chair outlined election-related progress made since the last meeting of the Liberia Configuration on 14 November 2022. Achievements included the completion of the National Housing and Population Census, the procurement of a biometric voter registration system, the completion of the first phase of the voter registration, and the establishment of a Youth Task Force Against Election Violence. She underlined the signing of the revised Farmington River Declaration as an important accomplishment and reiterated its implementation as critical. She outlined remaining risk factors, such as pre-electoral and post-electoral violence, including targeted violence against women candidates and voters, and

electoral administration issues due to funding delays. She noted that the Elections Law amendment, including its provisions on a 30 percent gender quota for senior political party leadership and candidate listings in elections, is unlikely to be enacted prior to the elections. She welcomed initiatives taken by some parties to uphold a 30 per cent gender quota on a voluntary basis and encouraged other parties to follow suit.

3. On behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, **the Acting Foreign Minister, H.E. Ms. Thelma E. Duncan** thanked the UN and the Liberia Configuration of the PBC for the continued support for the country's peacebuilding efforts. She emphasized the Government's commitment to ensuring an enabling environment for peaceful, free, fair, transparent, and inclusive elections with the full participation of all Liberians. She noted the successful conduct of the National Census and the ongoing biometric voter registration. She underlined the signing of the Farmington River Declaration as one of the efforts to ensuring a peaceful environment for the conduct of the elections, addressing all forms of violence, particularly against women in elections and politics, and facilitating women's equal electoral and political participation. She acknowledged the Peacebuilding Fund's (PBF) continued support aimed at promoting an inclusive and peaceful electoral environment and process. She called upon the international community to provide financial, capacity-building, technical and logistical support for the upcoming elections.
4. On behalf of the Minister of Internal Affairs, H.E Mr. Varney Sirleaf, the **Executive Director of Liberia's Peacebuilding Office, Mr. Edward K. Mulbah**, highlighted the need to address the root causes of conflict to consolidate peace. He outlined measures to address the increased political tensions and to prevent electoral violence, including a robust early warning and response system funded by the PBF, which detects, collects, and reports triggers of electoral violence across the country and which is linked to a National Situation Room. Further, 450 conflict early warning monitors have been deployed, who collect and report incidences of potential threats to peace and security before, during and after the 2023 elections. He outlined efforts to increase women's electoral participation and to avoid their marginalization and intimidation, including through instructing local chiefs, elders, and traditional leaders. He informed of the collaboration between the Peacebuilding Office and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), supporting dialogue with youth groups to advance their political participation and positive contribution to the peaceful outcomes of the 2023 elections.
5. **The Chairperson of the National Elections Commission (NEC), Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansana**, informed of the completion of the first phase of the biometric voter registration process, which resulted in the registration of 1.4 million Liberians. She informed of the technical challenges and the pockets of violence during the first phase of the voter registration, as well as the national authorities' response addressing the occurred challenges. In this regard, she reiterated the importance of adequate technical support and close collaboration with all agencies responsible for early warning to ensure a non-violent electoral process. Further, she acknowledged the NEC's continued work with partners to ensuring the 30 percent gender quota for political party leadership and candidate lists. She called for continued support to the NEC,

particularly to its gender, civic and voter education and political party programs. She highlighted the importance of youth inclusion and stressed the need to ensuring their peaceful engagement instead of being politicians' militants. She underlined the Government's responsibility to provide timely funding for the NEC for effective electoral preparations and operations, informing that the NEC has so far received USD 27.5 million. The remaining USD 25.5 million is yet to be transmitted to the NEC.

6. **The United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC) in Liberia, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni**, noted that full public confidence will require measures to address challenges in the electoral process, mitigate the risks of electoral violence, and encourage the full participation of all voters. Recognizing the NEC's efforts, she highlighted the need for timely funding to strengthen the prospects for credible outcomes. She commended the political parties' commitment to non-violent elections through the signing of the Farmington River Declaration and underscored the need for its full implementation. She called for increased efforts to strengthen women's representation in the electoral process and politics. In this regard, she emphasized the importance of the 30 percent gender quota to promote gender parity in the elections, as well as long-term commitment and mechanisms to ensure women's full participation and to address prejudice, discrimination, and violence against women. She noted the significant underrepresentation of young people in politics and public life at all levels as a remaining challenge and emphasized the access to decision-making opportunities and productive employment as essential to sustaining peace, stability, and social cohesion. Lastly, she underscored the UN's continued support with international partners to the electoral process.
7. **The Executive Director of the Community Healthcare Initiative, Ms. Naomi Tulay-Solanke**, underlined the challenges women are facing to enter politics, including household and family responsibilities, lack of resources and networks, as well as patriarchal political structures and violence against women. Underscoring the need to address these barriers, she recognized the importance of the PBF's support for women's political participation and empowerment, including eliminating violence against women. She highlighted women's contribution to peace, stability, and prosperity. She underscored the issue of the decrease of elected women in the legislature since 2005 and called upon the NEC and political parties to enforce the 30 percent gender quota and ensure gender equality in elections. She urged all development partners to support national civil society organizations and independent bodies to monitor independently during the electoral process. Lastly, she encouraged young Liberians to peacefully participate in the electoral process rather than be used as tools for electoral violence and called upon civil society organizations to continue to raise awareness on rights and inclusive participation in electoral processes.
8. **The Head of Secretariat of the Federation of Liberian Youth, Mr. Ernest Duku Jallah**, highlighted the obstacles hindering youth political participation, including limited access to education and job opportunities. He noted that the exclusion of youth in politics has pushed them to seek alternative avenues for participation. Recognizing the energy, creativity, and vision that youth possess to drive positive change, he called for treating young people as

responsible partners in the democratic process. He stressed the need for resources and support to youth to actively participate in decision-making processes, hold leaders accountable, and contribute to the country's development. Therefore, he recommended the creation and support of platforms for young people to participate in civic engagement and called upon political parties to create a quota system to ensure youth in their leadership and candidate lists. He urged the Government and other stakeholders to invest in youth development programs and emphasized the need for inclusive governance and decision-making processes that involve young people at all levels. He encouraged cooperation between the Government, international organizations, and the civil society to ensure opportunities for youth to engage effectively in the political process.

**9. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:**

- The Commission commended Liberia on the remarkable progress the country has achieved in the last two decades and underlined the 2023 elections representing a crucial milestone to consolidate democracy, peace, and stability. They underscored the importance of ensuring peaceful, free, fair, transparent, credible, and inclusive elections, while acknowledging the full ownership and efforts of the Liberian authorities.
- They commended the signature of the Farmington River Declaration and underscored the importance of fully implementing the agreement. They noted that inclusive dialogue between and among electoral stakeholders, adherence to a joint code of conduct and declaration of non-violence, would be key to ensuring peaceful and inclusive elections.
- They stressed the importance of efforts to mitigate and address political tensions, hate speech, disinformation, misinformation and to prevent electoral violence. In this regard, they underlined early warning mechanisms as crucial. They underscored the need to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and to fully implement the Violence against Women in Elections and Politics (VAWIE/P) Protocol.
- They noted the need to tackle the root causes of conflicts and to enhance social cohesion and in this regard underscored the importance of strengthening socio-economic opportunities, service delivery, food security, rule of law, and good governance. They also stressed the importance of respect for human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of the media during and after the elections.
- They underscored the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in electoral processes, politics, and peacebuilding. They encouraged the endorsement of the 30 percent gender quota for political party leadership and party candidate listings. While recognizing that the new Elections Law might not be passed prior to the elections in October 2023, they encouraged political parties to apply voluntary adherence to the 30 percent gender quota.
- They highlighted the need to ensure constructive inclusion of youth in electoral processes and decision-making at all levels. They noted the importance of increased involvement of youth in social, economic, and political spheres of the society, including access to employment.
- They encouraged the Government to provide the required resources to the NEC for the electoral process. They also encouraged strengthened financial, logistical, and technical support by the international partners. Further, they emphasized the importance of

collaboration and partnerships with the IFIs and regional financial institutions. They noted the PBF's crucial support to peacebuilding and elections and acknowledged the PBF as an important catalyst in fostering effective international cooperation. In this regard, they stressed the need to ensuring predictable and flexible financing through the PBF.

10. In her concluding remarks, **the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar**, commended Liberia's remarkable progress on the electoral process, while noting the need to address remaining risks. She underscored PBSO's continued support, including through the PBF support to holding peaceful and inclusive elections. Recognizing the ongoing efforts, she urged strengthening early warning mechanisms, and the full operationalization of the VAWIE/P Protocol. She stressed the imperative of strengthening women's political participation and encouraged voluntary adherence to the gender quota as well as addressing the barriers for women's inclusion more broadly. She also underscored the importance of youth participation in politics and decision-making. Importantly, she emphasized the need to address the funding gap for the elections, reiterating the Government's responsibility in that regard, while exploring if the international community could assist. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of advancing the country's medium- and long-term peacebuilding priorities, including socio-economic opportunities, basic services, and good governance.
11. The Chair thanked the briefers. She concluded by underscoring the upcoming elections as a crucial milestone in consolidating Liberia's democracy. She emphasized inclusive dialogue between political parties as well as their adherence to the Farmington River Declaration as key to ensuring peaceful and transparent elections. She stressed the need to ensure women's political participation and welcomed the continued efforts to implement the gender quota even though the Elections Law was not promulgated. Further, she emphasized the need to ensure meaningful inclusion of youth by turning their energy and creativity into political engagement. She underlined the need to address the funding gap for the elections, being a key Government commitment, and noted that the Commission will monitor the issue closely. She concluded by reaffirming the Commission's commitment to support Liberia in its efforts to sustain peace.

**Chair's recommendations/Action Points:**

- Encourage and monitor the full and timely implementation of the Farmington River Declaration.
- Encourage the promulgation of the new Elections Law, including the section on a 30 percent gender quota for political party leadership and party candidate lists (Section 4.5). Continue advocating political parties to apply voluntary adherence to the 30 percent gender quota in the 2023 elections.
- Continue advocating for the inclusion and full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and youth in politics, decision-making, and peacebuilding before, during, and after the presidential and legislative elections in 2023.
- Encourage and monitor the full operationalization of Violence against Women in Elections and Politics (VAWIE/P) Protocol.
- Continue advocating and monitor the timely and adequate support to the NEC to implement its mandate and operations.