

**Statement by the Chair of the PBC Liberia Configuration,
Security Council briefing on 5 May 2015**

Mr. President,

If no new cases are reported, Liberia will be officially declared Ebola-free this Saturday, on May 9. But this is not the time to lower our guard. Focused efforts will still be needed to ensure that Liberia stays at zero, including by improving basic healthcare services in the rural communities. High level international attention must also be maintained to ensure that the broader recovery process can bring tangible change to the people of Liberia as quickly as possible.

Having been appointed Chair in early March, I travelled to Liberia from 5 to 7 April to get a first-hand impression of the situation on the ground. The purpose of this visit was to draw lessons from the crisis and to see how the PBC can best support peacebuilding priorities in the Ebola recovery and UNMIL transition processes. I have shared my report with you in advance, but let me take this opportunity to highlight three points.

Firstly, there is urgent need to improve the socio-economic situation in Liberia. This includes increasing access to primary education, deployment of social safety nets, and creating employment opportunities for youth. The conditions were dire already before the crisis – with sixty-four percent of the population living below the poverty line and only thirty-four percent of children attending primary school – and the situation have now further deteriorated. The crisis has increased the burden on households and destroyed the livelihoods of many; in particular women and youth engaged petty trade. Providing opportunities, especially for the youth and women, is a critical priority for ensuring future peace and stability. Swift recovery of the economy, including through resumption of cross-border trade, return of international flights, and economic stimulus, will

be key to these efforts.

Secondly, there is need to address state-society relations and trust in state institutions. A major part of this is to focus more on strengthening accountability, legitimacy and institutional capacity, including through empowering the various independent commissions. This also includes enhancing state presence and capacity to deliver basic services in the communities as part of the decentralisation process. As UNMIL draw-down and turn over security responsibility, targeted efforts must be made to strengthen the justice and security sectors, including the “software” of security to improve “civilian-security relations”. But state capacity is not enough to build trust. Continuing to deal with some of the outstanding grievances from the civil war, including through accelerating the implementation of the national reconciliation roadmap in an inclusive manner, is also critical. This will be important not least in the context of starting to prepare for peaceful and credible elections in 2017. In this regard, it is important to continue to empower women and to guarantee their full and equal participation in the electoral process, noting that the percentage of women in the Legislature decreased in the latest senatorial elections.

Thirdly, there is the need for a stronger regional perspective and approach. The Ebola crisis has clearly demonstrated that what happens in one country in the region has a direct impact on the others. The crisis has given new impetus to regional cooperation. The decision by the Mano River Union leaders to join efforts in a regional Ebola recovery plan should be welcomed and supported. Such regional cooperation, including at the highest level, will be important also for the future maintenance of regional peace and security. Relevant regional initiatives and organisations deserve greater attention and support, and we should more systematically consult and coordinate with these organisations as we frame our own engagement.

Mr. President,

The priority for the PBC is to safeguard that peacebuilding gains can be sustained and strengthened. Close coordination with the Security Council will be important in the coming months to help ensure a responsible and seamless transition of UNMIL, including by coordinating with relevant Ebola recovery efforts and by helping to mobilize support and resources for the Government transition plan.

The Ebola crisis exposed how volatile the situation in Liberia still is. But it also demonstrated the determination and resilience of the people of Liberia. The success we celebrate today is much thanks to Liberian political, religious and traditional leaders uniting in collective action. We should build on this experience and seize the opportunity for change as we take the next steps in support for a peaceful and prosperous Liberia.

I thank you.