

## Peacebuilding Commission

### Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

20 March 2024

#### Chair's Summary

On 20 March 2024, the Peacebuilding Commission held its inaugural meeting on Mauritania. The Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Mauritania, the World Bank Vice President for Western and Central Africa, civil society representatives, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support participated in the meeting. Member States commended Mauritania's efforts in addressing terrorism and violent extremism, advancing inclusive and sustainable development, enhancing social protection and basic service delivery, and promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities. They expressed concern over remaining peacebuilding challenges, including the complex regional security situation and the impact of climate change. They called for coordinated and continuous international support for Mauritania's peacebuilding efforts and encouraged its continued engagement with the Commission.

1. On 20 March 2024, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Sérgio França Danese, convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on Mauritania, to showcase the Government's efforts and good practices in peacebuilding and sustaining peace. This engagement also offered a platform to inform on the peacebuilding opportunities and challenges, as well as mobilize coordinated and coherent international support for the country's peacebuilding priorities.
2. In his opening remarks, the PBC Chair noted that despite the complexity of the security and environmental situation in the Sahel, Mauritania has pursued an ambitious and positive development and governance agendas, and invested in conflict prevention to counter the threats of violent extremism in and around its borders. He underscored that Mauritania's experience could inform other countries facing similar challenges.
3. **H.E. Mr. Abdel Salam Mohamed Saleh, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Mauritania**, briefed on the myriad of difficulties, including a continuous cycle of droughts resulting in the destruction of livestock and farms, large scale population movement, urbanization, compounding internal and external stressors, which might contribute to radicalism and terrorism. He noted that natural resources, effective policies and debt reduction had allowed the country to contain the impact of these issues. Furthermore, the Government has focused on the three pillars of the comprehensive policy, comprised of (i) Security and prevention of terrorism by ensuring adequate funding and resources for security forces, strengthening the legal framework to combat terrorism and organized crimes, awareness raising and dialogues with extremists through moderate Islamic leaders, which has led to a lower rate of recruitment of youth; (ii) Political space, with the Government's engagement with the opposition, including through the President's dialogues; and (iii) Social policy implementing the policy to ensure universal access to basic social services. The Government has prioritized social protection, and funds 90% of the relevant cost with its

national budget. The Minister underlined the concern over the gap between economic and demographic growth, noting the critical importance of developing human capital and the eradication of poverty. In respect to the environment, Mauritania has been working to utilize renewable energy and green economy. He highlighted the effort of Mauritania in receiving refugees, promoting social cohesion between refugees and host communities, and building resilience of the population. He acknowledged the bilateral and multilateral support for the country, particularly the PBF, commending the visit of the PBF partners to the country in 2023.

4. **Mr. Ousmane Diagana, Vice President for Western and Central Africa of the World Bank**, commended Mauritania's strong resilience capacities, highlighting its approach to addressing both security and development nexus. He expressed concern over Mauritania's vulnerability to deteriorating regional dynamics and domestic risks and pressures, stressing the need to promote resilience at state, institutional, and community-levels. He cited the conflict in Mali, the breakdown of transhumance chains in the region, which had led to an influx of refugees and livestock in the most eastern regions of the country, threatening the fragile equilibrium between farmers and herders in an area of scarce resources. He emphasized that the Bank will continue to support programmes in Mauritania that could address these factors and promote resilience in a flexible manner, introducing examples of the Bank's support, including the flagship Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project, with a focus on supporting social cohesion in areas of transhumance, agriculture and regional programmes, which aim to support community social cohesion and economic development along the Senegal River Valley, and complement other engagements in the Hodh El Chargui region, as well as increased support for refugees. He noted that the Bank has mobilized funding from the IDA20 Host Communities and Refugees Window to support health and social protection with a strong focus on economic inclusion. Emphasizing the need of a concerted effort from all partners, he noted that the Bank is working very closely with the United Nations in Mauritania to ensure complementarity of actions and better targeting of collective interventions. He called for increased effort to define jointly with the Government of Mauritania, how international partners could support Mauritania's peacebuilding and prevention priorities.
5. **Ms. Lila Pieters Yahia, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mauritania**, shared observations from her visit to Hodh El Chargui, where communities are extremely vulnerable and socially excluded, due to the remoteness of the area and poverty. She mentioned the contribution of the PBF (since 2018) to the home-grown prevention model, including through collective efforts among diverse communities for providing access to water, building on efforts for conflict prevention and resolution. Noting that Mauritania is amongst the Sahelian countries most affected by climate change, she identified the lack of access to water as a major source of conflict. She also noted that food insecurity remains a challenge for the country, despite the progress made through social protection and other various measures. She also underscored the importance to promote the meaningful participation of women and their empowerment, highlighting the role of local women's network in assisting marginalized women, including through assisting them to have access to land and credits. She commended Mauritania's effort to prevent violent extremism through religious dialogues, highlighting the importance of capacity building and empowering of young people. She further commended the Government's effort for peaceful coexistence between host communities and refugees. She called for sustained attention and increased support for Mauritania's efforts for the consolidation of the

national prevention model and the addressing of challenges posed by climate change and the influx of refugees. Ms. **Yahia** emphasized the importance to promote dialogue and the organization of free and transparent election in June 2024. She introduced the PBF's comparative advantage in consolidating the model developed by the government. She called for strengthened partnership with international financial institutions in support of strengthened prevention efforts while commending the Government in investing in prevention from their national budget. She noted that the new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, signed in January 2024, offers an opportunity for the United Nations to continue to promote greater inclusion of marginalized groups, and improvement of human capital development. She called for support for the Government's effort in strengthening the national architecture for peace in line with the Secretary General's policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace.

6. **Mr. Mohamed Elmouloud Ag Ahmedou, President of the Fire Brigade**, noted that in the Niger basin and the southwest of Mauritania, a sustainable environment is a vital source for the livelihoods and provision of drinking water for livestock and agriculture. In terms of building trust between communities and refugees, the Fire Brigade has cooperated with refugees in combating bush fires. He explained that the elders created a group of volunteers dedicated to protecting the environment under the framework of SOS Désert, a Mauritanian Association and partner of UNHCR, with support of the local authorities. He emphasized that by putting out fires in the region, the group of refugees protected the wealth of the Hodh El Chargui region and created peaceful coexistence among communities. He noted that the group's effort led to a reduction in brushfires by 60% in 2023, compared to 2022.
7. **Ms. Boye Sall, young woman activist from Guidimakha**, briefed on her role as a member of a PBF project on the Promotion of Social Justice through Strengthening Access to Civil Status, Land Exploitation, and Conflict Prevention and Resolution for Women and Youth (Girls and Boys) in the Guidimakha Region. She noted that the PBF project provided a space for sharing experiences, conducting dialogues, bringing communities together, and raising awareness about women and girls' rights, including rights to education, employment and movement. She also noted that the PBF project allowed women to obtain access to lands and justice, including through advocacy campaigns and legal clinics. The PBF project has contributed to building the capacities and skills sets of women and girls.
8. **Ms. Mame Leye Traoré, Mourchidate**, noted that Mourchidates is an Islamic organization that utilize inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues to combat violent extremism, promote inclusion, tolerance and peace within communities and social cohesion. She explained that Mourchidates contribute to building bridges of understanding and solidarity, strengthening the social fabric, and identifying and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable individuals. Mourchidates also seek to prevent exclusion and marginalization, which could lead to radicalization, by offering emotional and moral support, and assisting with reintegration into society. Mourchidates strive to promote the collective respect for diversity and peaceful coexistence between different religions, communities and stakeholders.
9. **Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support**, recalled the PBF partners visit to Mauritania in October 2023, which highlighted challenges and opportunities. She noted that the status of the country as an "oasis of stability" in the Sahel,

which has benefited from investments in security, social protection for host and refugee communities, consensus-building efforts and the facilitation of dialogues. She emphasized that these efforts have contributed to building resilience in the country. The international community has an important role to assist Mauritania in consolidating institutions and processes for building and sustaining peace, addressing the compounding effects of climate change, broadening of inclusion and mitigating the impact of spillover risks from the region. She emphasized the importance of partnership to provide coherent and coordinated support to Mauritania's peacebuilding efforts. She looked forward to even greater synergies between the World Bank and the United Nations going forward as the Bank seeks to invest in a more upstream preventive approach in its support for Mauritania. Ms. Spehar further emphasized the importance of an increased focus on regional and cross-border prevention and peacebuilding efforts. She introduced the PBF support to Mauritania, which invested over \$29 million in 15 catalytic national and cross-border projects.

**10. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following remarks:**

- They commended Mauritania for sharing experiences, good practices and lessons learned from their national peacebuilding and development efforts.
- They commended Mauritania's efforts in addressing terrorism and violent extremism, advancing inclusive and sustainable development, and promoting social cohesion and building resilience through strengthened social protection and basic service delivery.
- They commended Mauritania's efforts to host refugees and promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities.
- They expressed concern over remaining challenges faced by Mauritania, including the challenging regional security situation and the impact of climate change on peacebuilding, including the limited access to water and food insecurity.
- They called for coordinated and continuous international support and increased funding for Mauritania's peacebuilding and development efforts and strengthened partnerships among international, regional, national and local actors, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Union and civil society organizations.
- They underscore the importance of capacity building for prevention and peacebuilding and empowerment of youth.
- They emphasized the critical importance to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation and empowerment of women in Mauritania and acknowledged the important roles played by women peacebuilders in the country such as Mourchidate.
- They called for free, fair and credible presidential election in June 2024.
- They commended the important role played by the PBF in support of Mauritania's peacebuilding efforts.
- They encouraged Mauritania to continue to engage with the Commission, utilizing it as a platform to further mobilize political, financial and technical support and share good practice and lessons learned.

***Chair's recommendations***

- Continue advocating for political, financial and technical support for Mauritania to advance its peacebuilding and development efforts and sustainable and inclusive development, including addressing violent extremism and terrorism, promoting social cohesion, and combating impacts of climate change.

- Call on the international community to advance coherent and coordinated support for Mauritania's national peacebuilding and development efforts.
- Advocate for international financial institutions to scale up their support for Mauritania.
- Encourage Mauritania to continue its engagement with the Commission to ensure that its peacebuilding and development efforts is provided with the necessary support.
- Encourage Mauritania to keep sharing its good practices and experiences with the PBC and the PBF, and with other countries engaged with them.
- Encourage countries with similar challenges as Mauritania to seek to better know Mauritania's experiences and approaches.