

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration

17 June 2021

Chair's Summary

1. On 17 June 2021, H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations and Chair of the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting focused on efforts aimed at strengthening social cohesion in Liberia.
2. In her opening remarks, the Chair acknowledged that in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development for 2018-2023 (PAPD), the Government of Liberia put emphasis not only on what is known as negative peace – the absence of violence – but also on positive peace, expressed through social cohesion. She recognized that social cohesion was a broad term that could be regarded as the bonds that keep societies integrated through inclusion, equality and trust between citizens and in state authorities. The Chair recalled that the PAPD recognized that the attainment of a cohesive society would be fundamental for sustaining peace in Liberia and that national peacebuilding priorities therefore included social cohesion objectives to create a sense of shared values and civic responsibility, mitigate conflict, reduce income inequalities and improve access to basic services and upward social mobility. The Chair noted that partnerships would be key in this endeavor and informed the Commission of her recent bilateral consultations with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, in which the International Financial Institutions had highlighted their contributions towards social cohesion and advancing peacebuilding in Liberia, including support for governance reforms, access to basic social services across the country and addressing marginalization and exclusion.
3. H.E. Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Sr., Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, thanked the Commission for convening a meeting on strengthening social cohesion and integration, which the Government of Liberia recognized as fundamental factors for sustaining peace. With the support of the PBC and other partners, the Government had made significant strides towards social cohesion through a number of laws, policy frameworks and decisive and proactive action to address drivers of conflict and inequalities. He confirmed the Government's commitment to tackle corruption and highlighted several legal instruments that had recently been presented to the legislature to improve Liberia's anti-corruption legal framework. He further highlighted the 15 Counties Consolidated Peace and Reconciliation Plan for 2020-2025, which was based on local consultations facilitated with support from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to reflect the views of the people of Liberia, and updated the Commission on the National Reconciliation Conference held in December 2020 in Gbarnga. The Minister stressed the importance of addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and reiterated that the Government had

developed an Anti-SGBV Roadmap and allocated an initial amount of USD 2 million for its implementation; declared rape a national emergency; appointed a special prosecutor for rape; set up a National Sex Offender Registry; and established a National Security Taskforce on SGBV. He recognized that Liberia's youthful population, which made up nearly 63% of the total population, could be a positive force for development and peacebuilding, if empowered. In cooperation with partners, the Government had created opportunities for youth recovery and empowerment through conflict prevention and leadership programs, county and district peacebuilder and mediator initiatives and the Technical, Vocational, Education and Training Program. He stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated Liberia's peacebuilding challenges and urged the Commission to continue mobilizing support for addressing the drivers of instability and strengthen social cohesion in Liberia, with particular emphasis on community-based engagement, empowering women and youth and ensuring free, fair and peaceful 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections.

4. H.E. Mr. Varney A. Sirleaf, Minister of Internal Affairs of Liberia, expressed appreciation for the continued support from the PBC to ensure sustained, coordinated and focused international support to address Liberia's peacebuilding challenges, as well as for exploring opportunities for strengthening partnerships in support of Liberia and championing a strong regional approach. He recalled that the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) had provided critical support of nearly USD 27 million during the period 2017-2020 for key national peacebuilding priorities, which had contributed towards filling significant gaps following the withdrawal of UNMIL. He noted that Liberia had faced a number of peacebuilding challenges over several decades that continued to serve as root causes of conflict and instability, including over-centralization of governance, youth unemployment, mismanagement of natural resources, socio-economic inequalities and marginalization, especially affecting women and girls. The Minister stressed the need for continued support for peacebuilding initiatives focused on women's empowerment, youth engagement, socioeconomic development, prevention and peaceful management of land-related conflicts, rule of law, transitional justice and human rights. He particularly highlighted the importance of community-based engagement focused on elements of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations related to promoting social cohesion, in the context of the Strategic Roadmap for Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and the 15 Counties Consolidated Peace and Reconciliation Plan. He also highlighted the need to institutionalize social cohesion objectives across the whole of government, including through the formulation of a national policy on reconciliation, strengthening the capacity of Liberia's Peacebuilding Office and establishing a Peacebuilding Office Youth Desk. The Minister underscored that support for the operationalization of the Local Government Act would be key for decentralization. In this regard, he informed the Commission that the Government was in the process of establishing a revenue sharing mechanism under the decentralized government structure that would ensure that a portion of state revenue would remain in the county where it was raised. He further highlighted the

establishment of peace committees in all 15 counties as a successful community-based approach that had a track record of resolving conflicts and reducing tensions at the local level. In conclusion, he encouraged the PBC to continue rallying international support for Liberia's peacebuilding priorities, including by fostering south-south cooperation as well as regional approaches through the Mano River Union.

5. Mr. Niels Scott, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Liberia, emphasized that improving social cohesion in Liberia would require a long-term vision and commitment as well as the participation of all stakeholders in society. Several national strategies had been adopted to advance the implementation of the TRC recommendations, including the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, which laid out a blueprint for national reconciliation. Nonetheless, a robust government-led process was needed to guide the development of a more integrated and effective reconciliation strategic framework that could guide implementation and coordination, delineate accountabilities, identify budget costs and ensure monitoring and tracking of results. He underscored that this comprehensive government-led process also had the potential to establish a broader peacebuilding momentum and thereby avoid a project-by-project approach to peacebuilding, which was unlikely to result in sustainable peace. He stressed the critical role of the PBF in helping to build the foundations for peacebuilding in Liberia with demonstrated impact in key peacebuilding areas, including community-based reconciliation through the Palava Hut process, and highlighted new PBF projects underway aimed at strengthening peace dividends through local socioeconomic empowerment and promoting women's political participation. The Resident Coordinator commended the Government's efforts for decentralization and the passage of the Local Government Act under Minister Sirleaf's leadership, while noting that more work was needed to ensure adequate and equal service delivery throughout the country. He stressed that continued efforts aimed at women's economic and political empowerment and programmes for advancing young people's political, civil and economic participation would be central for strengthening social cohesion. He underlined that dedicated national efforts and a strong regional approach, including by tapping into south-south cooperation, was needed to tackle the root causes of conflict in Liberia and, in the long-term, build a unified national identity that embraces the narratives, symbols and aspirations of all ethnic communities.
6. The Resident Coordinator was joined by the UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Stephen Rodrigues, who reiterated that national strategy documents laid out clear and comprehensive priorities for achieving a cohesive Liberian society, and while important progress had been made, it was imperative to systematically monitor the implementation of these priorities and ensure their adequate and sustainable funding, including through the national budget.
7. Counsellor Dr. Yvette Chesson-Wureh, Angie Brooks International Centre, emphasized the critical role of civil society in promoting civic engagement and local ownership in Liberia,

which would be key in the lead-up to the 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections. She underscored that the upcoming elections in 2023 could be a potential cause for conflict and stressed in this context the need to budget for civic education. She highlighted the Talking Bus Project that, with support from the PBF, brought a range of people on board a bus to engage in dialogues on issues affecting their communities, which were broadcast and translated to engage the broader community populations. She informed the Commission of the Women Situation Rooms, supported by the PBF and replicated in other countries, which had engaged civil society and various stakeholders to promote peace before, during and after elections. Recalling the marginalization of women candidates in the Senatorial midterm elections in December 2020, she underlined the need to promote women's political participation and noted with concern that the backlash risked deterring future generations from entering politics. In this regard, she stressed the urgency in adopting the proposed 30 per cent gender quota. She further underlined the importance of mentorship programs for women and youth, including for encouraging political participation. Youth empowerment programs focused on disadvantaged young people, including those affected by drug addiction, would also be central for sustaining peace in Liberia. She highlighted the ongoing youth caravan as a peer-to-peer initiative that would engage young people across the country in dialogues on peacebuilding and mobilization in anticipation of the 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections. She further stressed that access to land continued to be a key driver of instability that needed to be adequately addressed. In conclusion, she recognized the progress made on strengthening social cohesion in Liberia and urged for continued and enhanced efforts by the Government, with support from international partners, to address remaining peacebuilding challenges, while emphasizing the importance of engaging civil society actors in these efforts.

8. Member States and other partners welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- They commended the Government's commitment to strengthening social cohesion, which was recognized as essential for building and sustaining peace in Liberia, and noted that there was a common understanding among national stakeholders and partners on the remaining challenges. They underscored that political will would continue to be central for making progress on national peacebuilding priorities and underlined the vital role of civil society in promoting social cohesion, integration and national reconciliation.
- Recognizing the tremendous potential in Liberia's youthful population, they underscored the importance of promoting youth empowerment programs and employment opportunities for youth, including in key sectors such as agriculture, to enable young people to act as agents of peacebuilding and contribute towards social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

- In light of the 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections, they underlined the importance of promoting women’s political participation and welcomed the Government’s efforts to address the underrepresentation of women in politics, including through the proposed 30 per cent gender quota. They also underscored the need to support the full implementation of the Anti-SGBV Roadmap.
 - They stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships in support of Liberia’s peacebuilding priorities and welcomed in this regard the Chair’s consultations with International Financial Institutions. In addition, they expressed strong support for further exploring a regional approach to peacebuilding and development and for advancing south-south cooperation.
 - They highlighted the need for strategic follow-up of the implementation of national peacebuilding plans, including the Strategic Roadmap for Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and the 15 Counties Consolidated Peace and Reconciliation Plan, and encouraged the Government to make use of the PBC platform in this regard.
9. In her closing remarks, Ms. Vivian Gartayn Lombeh, Minister-Counsellor at the Mission of Liberia to the United Nations, echoed the progress made on building social cohesion in Liberia and the remaining challenges highlighted by previous speakers. She stressed the need to continue to work together to transform the expressed political will, commitments and intentions of support into concrete actions. She particularly underscored the importance of promoting youth empowerment, which was expected to yield significant results in terms of peacebuilding and development.
10. The Chair thanked the briefers and commended the ongoing efforts to promote social cohesion and national reconciliation in Liberia. She noted that Liberia had been highlighted as a beacon of hope for other countries, while acknowledging that more work was needed. She reiterated the need for continued efforts to address marginalization, tackle the rural-urban divide, mitigate land rights issues, empower youth and advance national reconciliation, especially noting the central role of civil society in strengthening social cohesion and sustaining peace in Liberia. The Chair ensured that the Commission would continue to support the promotion of women’s equal political participation, including through following up on progress regarding the proposed 30 per cent gender quota. The Chair commended the Government for its demonstrated commitment to peacebuilding and underlined that the PBC would continue to serve as a platform for strategic follow-up, strengthening partnerships and rallying coherent international support for national peacebuilding priorities.