

**Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding in the Central Africa region**

**9 June 2020**

**Chair's Summary**

1. On 9 June, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding in Central Africa region. The meeting, held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Mr. Marc-André Blanchard, Permanent Representative of Canada and Chair of the PBC, provided an opportunity for the PBC to discuss for the first time the implications of COVID-19 for peacebuilding and sustaining peace in Central Africa, with a focus on support to national and regional efforts to fill critical funding gaps that have emerged due to the pandemic, while sustaining peace gains. The Chair informed of the demise of President Nkurunziza of Burundi, of which news was announced during the meeting, conveying his condolences to the Burundian government and people, and requested for a minute of silence.
2. Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, François Louncény Fall, highlighted that the spread of the pandemic as well as some of the short-term prevention and mitigation measures are exacerbating long standing challenges in Central Africa, where countries are under enormous pressure to fight a battle on multiple fronts, including in the socioeconomic sectors, and to ensure peace and security. The medium and long-term economic impact in the region remains immeasurable, while illicit activities by criminal and armed groups have flourished, such as the intensification of Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon and Chad, as well as the Gulf of Guinea becoming the global epicentre of maritime piracy in recent years. Furthermore, three out of 11 countries, namely Angola, Cameroon and the Central African Republic will have organized elections by the end of 2020. In 2021, elections are scheduled in as many as six countries. In view of the required reallocation of resources to help address the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increased risk of a shortage of funds to organize elections. In this regard, SRSF Fall called on the PBC to continue its investments in good governance in Central Africa within the framework of the Africa Union's 2063 Agenda. He also pointed out that ECCAS member States' endeavour to combat the COVID-19 coincides with the ECCAS institutional reform aimed at restructuring the Regional Economic Community, within the framework of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture, to enable the countries in Central Africa to better address their challenges. He called on the PBC and other international partners to extend their support to this reform process. SRSF Fall informed that in April, the UN Office in West Africa, UNOWAS and regional partners had inaugurated the Regional Task Force for the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region. He underscored that the peak of the pandemic in Central Africa is 'yet to be on the horizon'. As countries in the subregion continue to fight on multiple fronts, showing solidarity at the continental and regional levels, stronger international support is awaited. He proposed that PBSO sign a MOU

with the future ECCAS Commission in order to enhance cooperation between the two entities in support of sustaining peace in Central Africa.

3. The Secretary-General of ECCAS, H.E. Mr. Ahmad Allam-Mi, highlighted the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Central Africa, especially in view of the fact that the ECCAS countries are highly dependent on exports of raw materials (oil, ores, timber and other agricultural raw materials), whose prices have fallen sharply since January, sometimes reaching a 60% drop for oil and 20% for mining resources. In addition, there has been a severe contraction in budgetary revenues, with a deficit in the overall budgetary balance of 4.33% of GDP in 2020, against 0.11% of GDP in 2019. He emphasized the potential impact of the pandemic on the political situation and stability in the region, and briefed on the ECCAS socio-economic response plan and preparations for the establishment of a regional mechanism of coordination and prevention of transmission of COVID-19 virus in border areas.. He called for a series of measures, including debt relief and cancellations to help the region cope with the crisis.
4. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, underscored that the pandemic is placing increased demands on Member States, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society and businesses, and requires timely, multi-dimensional and cross-pillar responses, in line with the integrated logic of the SDGs. He underscored that the meeting was an illustration of the Commission's unique role in support of regional peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts, and its use of flexible working methods to adapt its support to address the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. He also pointed out that the Central Africa region was a priority for the Peacebuilding Fund, which had leveraged its catalytic role by investing over \$112 million in the past two and a half years (21% of its budget). ASG Fernandez-Taranco informed that the focus of the PBF 2020-2024 investment plan was on cross border initiatives and regional programming in collaboration with UNOCA, ECCAS and the concerned UN Country Teams.
5. Member States from the region welcomed the convening for the first time of a PBC meeting on Central Africa and expressed appreciation for the Chair's leadership and the comprehensive presentations by the briefers, which allowed a rich discussion on the impact of COVID-19 as well as the resurgence of Ebola Outbreak in the region. They outlined their responses to the pandemic, as well as efforts to maintain peace and security, emphasizing the importance of mitigating different security risks, including increased attacks by violent extremist groups like Boko Haram. They informed of the worsening unemployment situation precipitated by the pandemic, which increases the risk of youth being recruited by Boko Haram and other extremist and armed groups. Concerns were also expressed about the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on women and girls as well as operational restrictions in the work of local civil society and peacebuilding organizations. They praised

the initiative of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, and some Member States also shared their related measures and efforts. They called for urgent support to help safeguard State capacities to fight disease outbreaks while at the same time delivering on peacebuilding priorities. They recognized the need for coordinated responses among the countries of the region and called for predictable financial support.

6. The PBC welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
  - The Commission expressed concern about the various interconnected challenges in the region and related humanitarian situation being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the conflict in North West and South West of Cameroon, the situation in the Central African Republic, violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin, and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. They also took note of many upcoming elections in the region and called for intensified coordination between partners and the region.
  - It commended all countries in the region for their swift response to the virus, stressing the importance of regional partnerships for the continuous pursuit of peacebuilding priorities and for building community resilience and enhancing financing for development. Member States welcomed the measures undertaken by UNOCA, ECCAS and the African Union to mobilize resources to help address the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, and took note of the suggestion by some for a joint African strategy in response to COVID. The Commission reiterated its commitment to continue to serve as a convening platform to encouraged further coordination and coherent support for national and regional peacebuilding efforts.
7. In his closing remarks, SRSG Fall reiterated the Secretary-General's Appeal for Global Ceasefire and assured that UNOCA will spare no efforts to support the region under the guidance of WHO regulations. He underscored the importance of a coherent regional response to the pandemic and called on stakeholders and partners to support the ECCAS regional response strategy in this regard.
8. In conclusion, the Chair recalled the electronic consultation on Financing and Partnerships for Peacebuilding and called for solidarity and for closing financial gaps that inhibit effective COVID-19 responses and long-term peacebuilding, including through debt relief and support to small and medium enterprises. He also called on all UN country teams in the region to break silos and join forces with the private sectors and NGOs to help the governments in the region to address youth employment and protect women and girls.