

Check against delivery

Statement to the Security Council by H.E. Ms. Louise Blais

Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission,

on Pandemics and the Challenges of Sustaining Peace

12 August 2020

Madame President,

Excellencies,

- I would like to congratulate Indonesia on its presidency of the Security Council this month and for organizing this timely high-level debate.
- In my capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, I wish to express my appreciation for the constructive Informal Interactive Dialogue between the Council and the PBC organised by Germany and co-hosted by Indonesia, Niger and the United Kingdom on 22 July and the enhanced collaboration between the two bodies, notably to help address the present public health emergency and contribute to durable peace and sustainable development.
- I will be updating the Council today on the PBC's continuing efforts to support national and regional stakeholders in addressing peacebuilding challenges exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic in conflict-affected contexts, and observations from the work we have done to date.
- As noted in resolution 2532 (2020), this is a critical time for countries affected by conflict. Hard-won peacebuilding gains are at risk as the impact of the pandemic in several cases has destroyed livelihoods, threatened social cohesion, strained the capacity of governance institutions, and contributed to risks of increased instability. The crisis may potentially exacerbate underlying tensions and inequalities, while compounding already dire humanitarian situations in affected countries. Overall, this pandemic risks setting these countries even further behind in attaining the SDGs.
- The PBC has been extraordinarily active over the last several months, convening virtual ambassadorial-level meetings and adjusting its work plan to focus explicitly on the impact of COVID-19 on the abilities of governments and their partners to deliver on emergency and national peacebuilding priorities. The PBC was among the first UN bodies to rapidly shift to using virtual platforms in response to the pandemic, and within a few weeks of the UN's closure we were able to convene an ambassadorial-level VTC meeting focusing on how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in peacebuilding contexts.
- At its thematic meetings on the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding, and the socio-economic impact of the crisis, the Commission echoed the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and urgent action within the framework of his plan and report entitled «Shared Responsibilities, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19» to fight the pandemic and deliver on national priorities. The PBC has been advocating for strengthened partnerships in support of coherent, conflict-sensitive and inclusive responses that recognize the importance of leaving no one behind and ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected and empowered. In this connection, it is particularly important to ensure that the impact of the pandemic does not reverse progress in achieving gender equality, and women's empowerment, as well as the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

- Additionally, since April, the PBC convened a series of consultations to hear directly from countries and regions how they are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic - including in Central Africa region, West Africa and the Sahel, the African Great Lakes, and the Pacific Islands.
- Allow me to share some observations on the basis of these discussions:
 - First: conflict-affected countries are in crisis, as the challenges they face in delivering on their national peacebuilding priorities have been exacerbated and multiplied by COVID-19. Most of the countries and regions where the PBC has engaged are already confronted with escalating humanitarian crises, high levels of displacement, food shortages, and collapsing economies. It is urgent that we act to save lives and prevent the reversal of peacebuilding gains.
 - Second: this crisis cuts across the UN's traditional siloes and requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral, global response. This is also true for conflict-affected countries, where governance capacities and institutions are weak, societies are deeply divided. Recognizing that an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, security and development actors, within and outside of the United Nations system, consistent with their respective mandates, and the Charter, is critical to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and essential for improving respect for human rights, gender equality, empowering women and youth, strengthening the rule of law, eradicating poverty, building institutions, and advancing economic development in conflict-affected countries, it is important to continue cross-pillar support to UN peacebuilding activities in the field, while acknowledging that each pillar has its intrinsic value and specific mandate. In countries where the PBC has engaged, the impact of the crisis has been most severe on the poorest and most vulnerable. If national responses are perceived to be slow, inadequate, ineffective, or unfairly distributed, existing tensions could be further exacerbated. It is important that government responses to the pandemic and international assistance in this regard do not replicate or exacerbate existing inequalities or social division. This means strengthening the UN's socio-economic response as well as better understanding and addressing possible root causes of conflict. Attention is also needed to mid- to long-term efforts to strengthen inclusive and accountable national institutions.
 - Third: The socio-economic impact of the pandemic has been severe. Even after decades of international peacebuilding support, many countries are only one or two shocks away from falling into deep crisis. Several countries where the PBC is engaged are at risk of seeing double digit contractions in economic growth, and there is no social safety net or economic stimulus package that can make up for the destruction of livelihoods of entire communities. Small and medium enterprises, which employ 90% of the workforce in Africa, are suffering severe consequences and are often overlooked in recovery plans. This requires us to pay attention to livelihoods, incomes, and inclusive economic development. The PBC will consider, where relevant, socio-economic risks in its future advice to the Security Council.

- Fourth: The news is not all bad. In every country and region where the PBC is engaged, we have heard remarkable stories that testify to the resilience of communities, the role of civil society, and the innovation of the private sector. The various consultations have served as a valuable platform for exchange of lessons learned, good practices and innovations among the countries to build back better, including lessons from the successful fight against Ebola in West Africa. We must continue to support, learn from and replicate these success `stories.
- Finally: it is important to respond to this crisis through strengthened partnerships and financing. There is great concern that the coming years will see a global recession and reduction of official development aid flows. Consequently, resources could be shifted away from longer-term investments in building the institutions that help sustain peace to short-term humanitarian and emergency response. Countries affected by conflict are already the furthest behind in attaining the SDGs, and this pandemic risks setting them back even further. They need predictable, sustainable, coordinated financial and technical support.
- During these consultations the PBC has highlighted the urgent need to support countries to safeguard their capacities to fight the pandemic while continuing to accompany them in advancement of their medium- and long-term national peacebuilding priorities. The Commission underscored support for coherent and coordinated approach among all relevant actors, within and outside of the United Nations system, consistent with their respective mandates, and the Charter. The PBC also called for predictable, sustainable and coordinated financial support, and in this respect welcomed PBF's quick positioning to help address the peacebuilding and sustaining peace dimensions of its work in the context of the pandemic.
- The constructive nature of these discussions, based on the principles of national ownership and partnership, have encouraged new countries and regions to seek consultations with the PBC, leading to the PBC's first regional discussions on Central Africa and the Pacific Islands, with the consent of all countries concerned. The consultations have also encouraged governments to take into account the needs of all concerned segments of society when designing their COVID-19 responses and implementing nationally-owned peacebuilding priorities
- Madame President, these meetings have demonstrated the value of the PBC as a flexible, demand-driven platform that allows for collaboration across the different pillars of the UN system and among such diverse actors as the World Bank and other financial institutions, local civil society organizations, the private sector, and regional organizations to ensure multi-pronged and coordinated political and financial support to countries in addressing risks of conflict and delivering on national priorities. In this connection, the PBSO initiative to fast-track support for joint UN-World Bank data and risk assessment and analysis has been welcomed.
- At a time when the impact of the multifaceted crises posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict-affected countries is significant and the work of the UN, including in peacebuilding and sustaining peace, has become more challenging, the PBC's response to

COVID-19 has demonstrated the value of the convening platform that it offers to foster unity and solidarity among Member States, the UN system and relevant actors to stay the course in their support to peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.

- I thank the Members of the Security Council for their continuous support to the work of the Commission.