

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration

12 November 2020

Chair's Summary

1. On 12 November 2020, 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 for the Government of Liberia and international partners to update on priorities for continued support to building and sustaining peace in Liberia, with a focus on Liberia's senatorial elections, referendum (on three issues requiring constitutional reform) and two representative by-elections, scheduled for 8 December 2020, and the related issue of women's participation and empowerment in Liberia.
2. In her opening remarks, the Chair recalled the meeting of the configuration in April focused on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 in the country, and her subsequent virtual visit to Liberia, meeting with the Government and civil society, as well as meetings with the IMF and the World Bank, focused on their assistance during the pandemic. The Chair noted that one of the key messages coming out of her discussion with civil society organizations in June, was their ask for the international community to keep attention on upcoming elections, ensuring they are conducted in a free, fair and transparent manner. The Chair stressed that the elections and their outcome would pose a significant test to democracy, peacebuilding and sustaining peace in Liberia over the coming months; and also noted the significance for Liberia of the situation related to elections in the subregion. She highlighted Liberia's strong history of women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding and the importance of efforts to ensure women's full, effective and meaningful participation in these elections. She also noted with concern, reports of increased sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia during the months of lockdown due to COVID-19 and commended the government's response, including by declaring rape a national emergency and allocating resources to the implementation of a National Roadmap on Rape and SGBV produced by an Inter-Ministerial Taskforce. Finally, she highlighted the important role played by civil society during an election period.
3. H.E. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia underscored the timeliness of the meeting and the Government's commitment to the holding of free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections, critical to peace and development in Liberia, citing in particular efforts to ensure the participation of women, youth and other marginalized groups, and to address violence against women. He further noted the allocation of approximately US\$ 6 million to the elections. The Minister updated the Commission on Liberia's national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the support of the international community, including its economic recovery plan. The Minister highlighted tensions in the subregion, and emerging humanitarian needs due to an influx of refugees, predominantly from Côte d'Ivoire. He also

noted the Government's continued work to address corruption and rape as a national emergency. The work of the Peacebuilding Fund in support of national peacebuilding priorities was also welcomed.

4. Mrs. Davidetta Browne Lansanah, Chairperson of the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia underscored the importance of free, fair, credible and violence-free elections to peace and stability in Liberia and the continued work of the NEC to engage all stakeholders, including civil society organizations, women and persons with disability, youth groups, faith based organizations, local nongovernmental organizations, community based organizations, the media and political parties. The Chairperson updated on efforts to ensure the integrity of the voter roll, including through the support of UNDP and ECOWAS; stronger collaboration between the NEC and the Liberian National Police; strengthening of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms; and work with the Women's Situation Room (WSR) Liberia branch, a conflict management mechanism, to receive and report information related to violence against women. The Chairperson also noted efforts at legislative reform to ensure no less than 30 percent of candidates on political party lists of each gender. An outstanding challenge, noted by the Chairperson, is the delayed receipt of funding from the Government by the Commission (with US\$6 million of a total budget of US\$13.5 million received). In this regard, the Chairperson called for international support.
5. On behalf of the United Nations, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and Mr. Kingsley Opuku Amaning, the United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC) in Liberia a.i. briefed the Commission. The SRSG highlighted the context of five Presidential elections in the West African sub-region; a number of which have shown how underlying grievances can easily translate into political violence and updated on efforts with partners including Governments, political parties, civil society, ECOWAS, AU and other regional organizations, to contribute to credible, transparent, inclusive elections in the interest of regional stability and peace. Both the SRSG and RC updated that work in Liberia has included technical support teams from ECOWAS and UNDP assisting the NEC in their efforts to improve and update the voter roll (with nearly 300,000 new voters registered, of which 40 percent are female), and commended the NEC for its hard work; noting also the current budget shortfall. ECOWAS, the RC and UNOWAS continue to provide timely and effective political facilitation to mitigate possible areas of tension between political stakeholders, including coordinating closely with the Mano River Union. The ongoing work of financial institutions including the World Bank, IMF and African Development Bank in accompanying the Government of Liberia in sustaining peace and development was also commended.
6. Both the SRSG and RC noted the continuing challenges of political representation by women; with 20 of the 118 senatorial candidates being women, and the only female senator's seat up

for re-election, with the consequent risk of having an all-male senate following the elections. The expected Equal Representation and Participation Act, which establishes a quota for women in Parliament, was highlighted as a measure that would increase participation of women in politics. The Government's efforts to address the rate of sexual and gender-based violence were also welcomed. Liberia was the only country in the region where a National Taskforce against the COVID-19 pandemic included civil society and women's organizations. Liberia's National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security 2019-2023, developed with the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, is the overarching national document guiding the country's implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and stresses the need for gender-sensitive approaches to peace and stability. Although the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes in Liberia has gained momentum over the last ten years, many challenges in particular in the area of implementation and allocation of resources, remain. Finally, insecurity in the sub-region and an influx of refugees, Liberia's continued economic crisis, and the exacerbation of existing inequalities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were noted as potential causes of unrest, and the importance of the political and financial support of the international community to accompany Liberia reaffirmed, including through the valuable work of the Peacebuilding Commission, and the Peacebuilding Fund. The RC stressed the imperative of adequate, predictable and sustainable financing for peacebuilding; particularly in transition settings such as Liberia.

7. Mr. Oscar Bloh, Chairperson of the Elections Coordinating Committee, a non-partisan network of civil society organizations monitoring elections in Liberia, briefed the Commission on outstanding peacebuilding challenges in Liberia, including inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and continued lack of trust in state institutions. With regards to the upcoming elections, the Chairperson noted concerns regarding electoral security and limited police presence across the country, the role of the judiciary, the need for a transparent and inclusive process of cleaning the voter roll in order to instil confidence, concerns regarding women's political representation and the prospect of an all-male senate, and recommended sufficient resources for election management be made available by Government in advance.
8. Member States, and other partners, welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They reaffirmed the importance of the elections as a critical test for Liberia's democracy and encouraged the Government of Liberia's commitment and efforts to ensuring credible, fair and transparent elections, with the constructive engagement of all Liberians. The support of the United Nations, ECOWAS and other international partners was welcomed; and concern expressed at the NEC's funding shortfall. The role of civil society in supporting successful elections, including through monitoring, was also noted.

- The marginalization of women in political leadership positions, as well as concerning rates of violence against women in the context of the elections and sexual and gender-based violence, were emphasized as points of particular concern, and inclusion of women and youth identified as critical to building lasting peace and stability in Liberia.
 - The indispensable role of the Peacebuilding Commission – and the dedication and contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission’s Liberia configuration – was emphasised, as a platform for driving coherence and coordination, and to mobilise international support to nationally owned and led peacebuilding initiatives, in the context of the elections and the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - They reiterated their support for the Government of Liberia and its people and voiced support for Liberia’s continued efforts to achieve sustainable development through the implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, address root causes of conflict, make progress on outstanding peacebuilding priorities and consolidate peacebuilding gains, including investment in building responsive and effective national institutions and enhancing capacity building, governance reform, work on social cohesion and gender equality, including efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence, reconciliation and transitional justice. It was noted that continued work to address socio-economic challenges, including through the support of the World Bank, was important. The valuable contribution of the Peacebuilding Fund to peacebuilding in Liberia was welcomed, and interest expressed in continuous learning and development of good practice through the work of the Fund.
 - Cross-border challenges, including the increase in refugees, and concerns about regional stability were also highlighted, including the supportive role of UNOWAS and ECOWAS and collaboration with the Mano River Union. There was a suggestion that the scaling up of cross-border projects should be explored, including through partnering with international financial institutions.
9. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support welcomed the opportunity for the Commission to again be an international solidarity platform for Liberia with a timely discussion in support of credible and transparent elections, women’s inclusive participation and the women, peace and security agenda; which also advanced recommendations of the Peacebuilding Commission’s review of its gender strategy this year. The ASG stressed the Peacebuilding Fund’s longstanding support for Liberia, approving \$25 million over the last three years, including investments in reconciliation, youth and women empowerment, peaceful resolution of land conflicts, cross-border cooperation, efforts to strengthen the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and the development of the second phase of the Liberia National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. The ASG

agreed with the value of sharing lessons learned from the Fund. Looking forward, he said the Fund is exploring how it could support continued dialogue and reconciliation efforts and is in the final stages of considering two peacebuilding proposals from civil society organizations, submitted under the annual competitive gender and youth promotion initiative.

10. In his closing remarks, H.E. Mr. Israel Davies, Chargé d’Affaires, Mission of Liberia to the United Nations, reaffirmed the importance of peaceful elections and the strengthening of democracy in Liberia, and expressed gratitude to the international community, the United Nations, working closely together with ECOWAS, the Peacebuilding Commission and the particular commitment of Ambassador Eneström, and the Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Fund.

11. The Chair thanked the briefers and took note of the many updates on the work being carried out in order to create a conducive environment for the elections, and the challenges ahead. She emphasized the importance of the election to the continued path of the country to sustained peace, and the need for all to work toward ensuring the elections are conducted in an orderly, inclusive and transparent manner. The Chair highlighted the need to continue to support the civil society led observer networks and allow them to participate in strengthening the democracy and to this end, The Embassy of Sweden in Monrovia is supporting the Peacebuilding Office (PBO), situated within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other partners in the Situation Room on COVID-19 related issues and the upcoming election. She also noted that efforts to ensure that women can actively participate in the election need to continue, and urged the Government to continue its work in addressing alarming reports of sexual and gender-based violence. The Chair thanked all and adjourned the meeting.