

PBC Liberia Configuration Informal Meeting
Statement by Ambassador Staffan Tillander Chair on his first Mission to
Liberia from 14-18 May 2012

24 May 2012

In my briefing, I will first focus on my principal impressions, including progress on peacebuilding priorities, and then conclude with some thoughts on PBC's role. I will do this briefing in some detail, as this is my first opportunity to share my views on the way ahead. My speaking notes will be made available and the draft formal report should be circulated shortly.

I would like to welcome the participation of the Chair of the Sanctions Committee, represented by a colleague from the Pakistani Mission, in our meeting today; we had some very fruitful discussions prior to, during and after our respective trips. Later on, Ambassador Haroon will share some impressions from his trip.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Liberia for receiving me and thanks to Ambassador Kamara for facilitating this visit, and for sharing her views and advice before the trip.

Also thanks to UNMIL. I am very grateful to the DSRSG/ OiC, Mr. Moustapha Soumaré for his time and strong support during my visit. I also look forward to meeting the new SRSG on my next trip. Thanks also to the UNMIL officials and the UN Country Team, who accompanied me on my field trips and provided insightful briefings.

The support of PBSO was particularly valuable in preparing me for the trip as well as advice provided during my mission.

I follow in the footsteps of Prince Zeid. Reference to his former missions were made throughout my trip with much appreciation expressed about his efforts. He has clearly forged a path for PBC to engage in Liberia and I intend to build on his commitments and accomplishments, to the best of my ability.

Also, the Swedish Embassy and our Swedish presence in Liberia gave me and will continue to provide a strong base, support and connection to the realities and challenges on the ground.

My visit allowed me to better understand the reality on the ground, with a number of opportunities and challenges, and a growing number of partners and actors present. In my view, our efforts through the PBC should be viewed in this broader context in which the UN system as a whole, bilateral partners, and NGOs work with Liberia to support the consolidation of peace within the context of a

developing democracy, building of state institutions and capacities alongside the country's development. Here in New York, we as the PBC Liberia Configuration, must liaise very closely with this reality on the ground and with the UN presence in the country.

Throughout my trip, I sensed the Government's appreciation for the scale of work that remains for a responsible UNMIL transition. My main message is the need for the international presence that will remain indefinitely – the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, the World Bank, IMF, and bilateral partners – to adapt their support against the changing realities. The greatest change will be within the Government of Liberia, which will be the main actor to assume the responsibilities of UNMIL, first and foremost will be in the area of security management.

First turning to my principal impression and the status of progress in peacebuilding priorities:

It is evident that the country has made considerable progress. Close to nine years since the signing of the Peace Agreement and with the start of the President's second term, Liberia does appear to be at a new juncture in its peace process. The President described her second term as the time for "transformation", in contrast to the "stabilization", necessary during her first mandate. In this transformation, focus will be on undertaking radical reform over the next five years, most notably in the area of the justice system and in strengthening the security sector.

Some others commented that this was a critical window in terms of putting in place the mechanisms that will build a democratic society and permit inclusive democracy. Decentralization and empowering citizens will require substantive constitutional changes and some difficult deliberations under the ambit of national reconciliation.

Our role as a configuration, and mine as the Chair, should be focused on supporting Liberia to realize a successful transformation. The Configuration should maintain focus on the three peacebuilding priorities within the broader context of this new phase of peace in Liberia.

A few observations about progress on peacebuilding priorities.

On National reconciliation. My first meeting was with the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Blamo Nelson and the Minister of Finance and Planning, Mr. Amara Konneh. The bulk of this meeting was dedicated to discussing national reconciliation. Minister Nelson is a staunch defender of local governance and an engaged citizenry. He spoke enthusiastically of the need to effectively engage the general public in the development and implementation of a national reconciliation strategy. He informed that a draft of the Roadmap for National Reconciliation is about to be finalized.

We discussed the importance that the strategy becomes a starting point that is accepted by all, in particular opposition parties. An inclusive validation process is one way of ensuring this. All those, who should be part of the reconciliation process, should have sufficient time to be heard. On the basis of a common starting point, during the coming months and years, the reconciliation process will deal with short term as well as long term issues.

A national conference for finalizing the National Visioning exercise and into which the Roadmap efforts are being linked is currently planned for late July. I will follow closely the political validation of the Roadmap and I may also visit Liberia for this conference.

A visit and discussion with a local peace committee in Grand Cape Mount County shed some light on the possibilities, and, also the limitations of the “palava hut” mechanisms.

With this committee, we also had an interesting discussion about the gender aspects of conflict resolution. While three (3) out of the Committee’s nine (9) members are women by design, only one female member was present. I believe we all realize that there is still some ways to go on the issue of gender and women’s empowerment. PBC should examine how we could contribute. As noted by the Minister of Gender, we need to look at women not only as vulnerable individuals but also as Agents for Change. The peace committees seem to be one good place to start, but there may be others as well. In this regard, I hope to meet with Ms. Leymah Gbowee in a future trip; unfortunately, she was out of the country during this trip.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the Independent Human Rights Commission. Although still with very limited resources, they are interested in implementing the “palava hut” mechanisms and have also have initiated some work on this and are also following up on claims of rights violations.

I was also briefed on the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism for land disputes and am impressed by how it builds on traditional and other practices. This project shows the potential to structurally address the ever-present land disputes throughout the country rather than creating solutions on an ad hoc basis. I hope to visit the Land Coordination Center in Lofa County during my next trip.

Repeatedly, I heard about the importance of empowering the youth. The Government has some ambitious plans, including budget allocations, for the next three years in engaging young people in employment and empowerment programs. The PBF funded pilot National Youth Service Programme being implemented by UNICEF can be used as a basis for a broader effort. We need to work with UNICEF to ensure that the PBF funds will be catalytic in taking this programme forward. Importantly, this project also sets out to target 500 “at risk youth”

Now to the *Justice and Security issues.*

A fascinating seminar style meeting with the Chief Justice and 4 of the Associate Justices gave an in-depth view into the problems and challenges as well as solutions to the problems. They explained the need for a comprehensive review of the laws. We spoke in some depth on some core issues that require Constitutional Reform such as the number of courts per county and the need for an appellate court. Justices also spoke of the need to improve infrastructure, strengthen prosecution and align deployment of judges with the size of dockets. It is evident that when the President speaks of the need for “radical reform” of the justice system, she is accurately describing the scale of reform that is needed.

The President highlighted the Police as one of the Government’s priority issues. This is also a key issue in the UNMIL transition. The President expressed the Government’s preference to have a lead country responsible for police training to ensure coherence. The Minister of Defense, Mr. Brownie Samukai, elaborated on this in our meeting as we discussed the transition in more detail.

Clearly, with a great number of programmes and bilateral support as well as that of UNMIL/ UNPOL, a more coherent approach would be an advantage. Some of that has been achieved through an improved donor coordination in Liberia. But additional steps are necessary. Coherent and coordinated measures to support police training will be key to ensure an increasing presence, quantitatively, as well as, qualitatively, throughout the country, as foreseen through the Hub project. Here, in New York and in Monrovia, we will consult with partners and the Government on how to take this suggestion forward. I will soon hold a Steering Group meeting to discuss this further.

Clearly, the Hubs can be critical to UNMIL’s transition. I visited the 1st Hub in Gbarnga. It is an impressive project and is already starting activities, with a presence of police and immigration officers. The Minister of Finance assured us that the running costs will be in the budget for 2012/13.

While progress is being made, work remains. It will still be some months before it can be considered fully operational. The Court, for example, will be in place and operating only in the fall.

To succeed, the daily management of the Hub must immediately be strengthened. Close interaction with the local population and staff in place must be ensured on a daily basis. Deficiencies in basic provisions, such as water supply, has already had an immediate and negative impact on the functioning of the Hub.

This is a pilot, and we have an opportunity to learn from mistakes and improve practices as we start preparing for the 2nd and 3rd hubs. The Monitoring and Evaluation function must quickly be staffed and start operating.

I spoke with partners about PBC's interest to be present for an opening. I also suggested for an opening ceremony to be more than a ribbon cutting event. I think it would be important for the local community to see the buildings of the Hub, fully occupied with clear signs of activity. I will remain in contact with counterparts on this and keep the configuration informed. A broad representation of the PBC at such an opening would send a strong signal of our support as a configuration.

While in Gbarnga, I also had the opportunity to visit the county prison. This visit gave a visible and loud illustration to the problem of high pre-trial detention with estimates of 80 percent of the prison population being pre-trial detainees. This figure is coming down and a number of measures are being taken by the Government.

The President raised this issue herself in our conversation. The Jury Bill, which will address some of the fundamental weaknesses of the justice system, has recently been resubmitted by the President to the Legislature. Officials were optimistic that the Bill would be passed during the 53rd Session of the Legislature. This Bill along with some of the measures mentioned by the Justices will be essential to building an equitable justice system for all Liberians.

In terms of security actors, progress has been made in reforming security forces, but the process is far from complete. This was evident in my meeting with security officials posted at the Bo-Waterside border crossing with Sierra Leone. While there were few officials with limited resources and mobility, they represented several different agencies. The National Security Reform and Intelligence Act has been passed, but the implementation will be even more challenging. Amongst other tasks, the dismantling of Ministry of National Security and the National Bureau of Investigation will be important. The mandate for the Drug Enforcement Agency needs to be revised along with the Drug Law. The drafting of a Police Act is also a priority task. This field visit also impressed upon me the need to ensure that security actors are properly equipped with vehicles and communication equipment.

Now turning to PBC engagement

The issue of national ownership was foremost during my trip. Government officials spoke clearly and forcibly on leading national processes. This signals of how Liberia is at a new juncture in the peacebuilding process. I agree with them. It is time for them to lead the process. At the same time, we need to be attentive to and supportive of the enormity of such a task. We need to support the Government, including provisions of advice, even sharing those difficult messages. This requires us to be sensitive to the local conditions as well as being clear in terms of accountability, transparency and results.

In relation to on-going budget preparations, the Government is already demonstrating its adherence to these principles. Representatives of partner

countries present in Liberia spoke with admiration of the transparency efforts of the Government, which had recently provided a detailed briefing on the draft budget.

At the same time, all partners must intensify their efforts towards coordination and alignment with Government programmes. Part of this will also entail increasing current support to the government to build its own structures for handling the flows of funds.

I have had the opportunity to begin discussing the New Deal with Liberian Government Officials as well as with representatives of the partners, the US and Sweden, in piloting the New Deal. We share a common assessment that this is an opportunity for the international community as well as for Liberia. Of particular value is the fact that Liberia, as one of the G7+ countries, has been at the forefront in promoting this deal and defining its principles, norms and goals.

As the discussions on the New Deal continue to evolve, the PBC should explore ways to support these efforts and make sure that our efforts are as closely aligned as possible. The links and overlap with the SMC are very obvious and indeed helpful in this context.

On the SMC, I have become quite persuaded about the utility of this instrument. It holds parties accountable to their commitments. In relation to the upcoming second review, Minister Konneh informed of his plans to brief the Configuration on the Government's achievements as carried out last year. It will be exemplary for the Government to continue to report in such a matter. As the second review of the SMC is in August, I propose that we continue deliberations within the Steering Group in the coming months on linkages between the PBC and the New Deal

Specific to PBC commitments, as the Steering Group has already begun working on the issue of resource mobilization, I look forward to examine the draft resource mobilization strategy and to continue discussions on the topic in this forum. We need to work with the Government of Liberia to mobilize support from a broader group of partners in the months and years to come. This is an urgent task, in particular, given UNMIL's transition. We should not underestimate the challenges in terms of rapidly building national capacities in different areas. We should also not underestimate the opportunities in terms of economic and social development as well as private sector investments in consolidating peace, stability and democracy in Liberia.

The justice and security component of the Liberia Peacebuilding Programme and the respective PBF funds are, and should be seen as integrated parts of the broader Joint Programme on Justice and Security. In relation to **resource mobilization**, there is presently a gap of close to \$15 Million for justice and security projects within the Joint Programme Work Plan for 2012. An assessment of the Justice and Security Trust Fund is currently taking place by a joint mission of

Norwegian and Swedish experts with consultants. Their report should be useful in helping to determine the best mechanism also for PBC in terms of fundraising. My first instinct is to encourage funds to be contributed to the Trust Fund in response to the gaps outlined in the Joint Programme Work Plan for 2012, as a means to contribute towards coherence of efforts.

The Liberian Government also informed that they have set aside \$ 5 Million for a Trust Fund for national reconciliation. Similar efforts, in terms of resource mobilization for national reconciliation, could be made in support of this Fund for national reconciliation.

As to ***coherence of efforts***, in view of UNMIL's transition, UN "Delivering as One" will be crucial in the coming years. The UN Country Team is stepping up up its efforts to focus its activities on key interventions, as appropriate, and work in an integrated manner. It is recognized by all that there must be a clear link and a seamless transition between UNMIL and the UN Country Team. UNDP, assured me that they are in the process of strengthening their capacity to deal with rule of law issues. This is a very welcome development. The PBC should also adopt the message that while UNMIL may be going through a process of reconfiguration, the international community, including the UN, the World Bank and bilateral partners will continue to support Liberia.

Lastly, I am very focused on the need to continue to build the linkages between New York and Monrovia that the former Chair initiated. A number of stakeholders expressed an interest in using different means to this end, including through visits to Liberia, meetings with officials here in New York, thematic discussions via VTCs, as per past practices. I also mentioned this proposal in the Joint Steering Committee meeting in which I participated. My counterparts in the Swedish Embassy are also open to examining with members of the PBC in Liberia, the advantages of such meetings. In addition to these efforts, I do plan to regularly travel to Liberia and would like to invite colleagues in New York to accompany me.

With this, I thank you for your attention.

I would again like to welcome the Chair of the Sanctions Committee, in our meeting, and I would now like to offer the floor to our colleague from the Pakistani Mission to share some impressions from their trip.