

26 September 2017

Ambassadorial-level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission

Liberia Configuration, 13 September 2017

Chair's Summary

Background

On 13 September 2017, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Liberia Configuration held an Ambassadorial-level meeting under the chairmanship of Ambassador Olof Skoog of Sweden to discuss the preparations for the upcoming elections, the current status of the implementation of the Peacebuilding Plan and the drawdown of UNMIL. Senior officials attended, including the DSRSG Waldemar Vrey, the Liberian Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Henrique F. Tokpa, the National Elections Commission (NEC) Executive Director, Lamin Lighe, the Chair of the Elections Coordination Committee (ECC), Mr. Oscar Bloh and Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

Introductory Remarks

1. In his introductory remarks, Ambassador Olof Skoog, welcomed all participants. He noted that the legislative and presidential election are less than one month away and this meeting provides an opportunity to hear directly from national authorities on how preparations are unfolding. Second, he noted that the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan was the first ever mandated by the Security Council and the PBC is one of the bodies mandated to monitor its implementation. In this context, he looked forward to hearing from the government regarding the status of implementation during phase 1. Finally, he stated that the UN presence in Liberia is in transition. For the past couple of months, both the PBC and the Security Council have actively discussed the UNMIL drawdown, as well as the capacity and resources of the UNCT who will remain. At previous occasions, the need for a robust continued UN engagement, empowered by predictable resources, and the need for continued peacebuilding, was made clear. He asked members and representatives of UNMIL to reflect on where we stand in terms of addressing the upcoming “cliff” in financing and expertise beyond March 2018.

Preparations for Upcoming Elections

2. The National Elections Commission (NEC) Executive Director, Lamin Lighe, informed that the voter registration had been completed. The NEC was in the process

of copying the information on to CDs in order to give a copy to the political parties. In addition, he informed they were well into the process of hiring the necessary poll workers and training of all officials who would be involved in the electoral process. The procurement process for electoral materials was also on track.

3. However, he noted that several challenges still remained. The first was logistics. In view of the bad conditions of the roads due to the fact that the elections will take place during the six month rainy season, there would be a need for transportation by air. The NEC has presented to UNMIL what the foreseeable needs will be and were awaiting a response on the support the Mission would be able to provide. In the meantime, four commercial vendors were identified and a request would be made to the government for financing to cover any aspects of air transportation which UNMIL was not able to provide. Regarding appeals to the Supreme Court, only one case remained pending. It would be very important that the legal recourse continued to be effective and transparent. Security coordination would also be a key issue. He described the Joint Task Force which had been set up pooling all resources of the Liberian Security Institutions. He thanked Japan for the contribution of \$1.1 million for DAS and resources for election security.
4. DSRSG Vrey added that international observer missions had already started arriving and installing themselves including EU, AU, Carter Centre and National Democratic Institute (NDI). He also congratulated the National Security Institutions for their work in the ongoing electoral campaign process which has had no incidence of violence so far.
5. The Chair of the Elections Coordination Committee (ECC), Mr. Oscar Bloh, noted that there was substantial experience in Liberia related to the electoral process, especially in the 2014 elections. CSOs have already been involved in observing the voter and candidate registration process and the electoral campaign thus far. The ECC expects to field 2000 observers and cover about 50% of the polling stations. He noted the importance of having a high degree of transparency during the tallying of the votes and the transmission of results to central organs. He stressed the importance of allowing the NEC to announce the results of the vote. He raised the issue that certain complaints made to the NEC were solved by mediation and were not taken through legal procedure. He thinks there is a need to better define what issues can be solved through mediation and those which must be solved through legal mechanisms. He believes that in this regard, there are lessons to be learned from Kenya.
6. ASG Fernandez-Taranco informed the meeting that the PBF had provided financing for programmes on youth and women through a project focused on building trust with the security services. He underlined the importance of the presence of electoral observers and the efforts to create an enabling environment for the electoral process. He congratulated the SRSG for his good office efforts and for his role in developing the code of conduct for the candidates.

Implementation of Peacebuilding Plan

7. The Liberian Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Henrique F. Tokpa, started by acknowledging the importance of the Peacebuilding Plan as a road map for the consolidating peace in Liberia. He underlined the fact that this was a joint process bringing together the Government of Liberia, multilateral partners, the United Nations and all political parties. He noted it is now 6 months into the process of implementation of phase one. He stressed the importance of Security Council encouragement. However, he warned that securing the necessary finance for the implementation continued to be challenging. The Government of Liberia had provided some of the allocations and he expected the disbursement to be accelerated. He highlighted the importance of establishing a UN Human Rights office in Liberia, and noted the PBF commitment to support this effort.
8. ASG Fernandez-Taranco emphasised that for Liberia to be successful in its peacebuilding efforts, as it was in peacekeeping, it is necessary that the peacebuilding plan be effectively implemented. While he understood the difficulties of pushing for reform during an electoral period, he stressed that addressing root causes of the conflict, such as corruption, decentralisation and land rights, would be a key factor in successful peacebuilding. Progress in these reforms would also have an impact on the ability for Liberia to mobilise the international community's support for phase two of the Peacebuilding Plan.

UNMIL drawdown

9. DSRSG Vrey informed that UNMIL had been working on the drawdown process since January and that they were in the process of finalising a narrative and a matrix covering the process. Key priorities for UNMIL are: support the government transition; to establish a OHCHR office in Liberia; support to gender and youth. In this context, they are in the process of determining which activities will be handed to the UNCT, to the government or bilateral partners and which would be liquidated. He noted ECOWAS would be receiving the UNMIL radio which would become part of the regional radio network transmitting in three languages. The Government has put in place a Transition Commission and has developed a bill for the transfer of state assets which is now before legislature. Finally he noted they will be developing a final report on UMIL that will cover the entire period in which the Mission was present in Liberia.
10. ASG Fernandez-Taranco reminded all of the UNCT mapping exercise presented by DSRSG Yacoub El Hillo at the previous PBC meeting. This mapping exercise identified key gaps in both expertise and financing necessary to enable the UN system to support the efforts for the implementation of the Peacebuilding Plan. With UNMIL's departure in March of 2018, there was an urgent need to secure predictable sources of financing to cover approximately \$130 million needed for the next year . He noted that the creation of an MPTF, which was already in advanced stages, could provide the needed unified and coherent mechanism to fill the gaps identified in the mapping exercise. The PBF has indicated its willingness to kick start this process with \$10 million, but this would only be effective if it leveraged financing from the

international community. While the PBC had done a good job in exposing the imminent resource and finance cliff after UNMIL departs, the clock is now ticking to secure the needed resources to avoid this cliff.

Discussion

11. Member States welcomed the positive developments related to the organisation of the upcoming elections, especially the code of conduct, the successful voter and candidate registration and the efforts to ensure security. Several members underlined the importance of the observers, both national and international. While many noted the progress made in terms of ending the cycle of violence and rebuilding after the Ebola crisis, they cautioned that much work remained. Several noted the importance of making further progress in the needed reforms to address the root causes of violence. They welcomed the fact that the National Legislature had announced an extension of their session in the hope that this will allow for further reform legislation to be approved. It was noted that to sustain the gains made to date, it is crucial that there be positive impacts on the daily lives of all Liberians, that they are able to benefit from peace dividends. There was broad agreement on the importance of cross border cooperation and engaging with regional actors such as the AU, ECOWAS and MRU.
12. Member states made it clear that Liberia is a test case on how the UN transitions when peacekeeping missions drawdown. There was broad agreement among member states that in view of the upcoming elections and the transfer of power to a new government in early 2018, Liberia must continue to receive political accompaniment and good offices. Members expressed interest in exploring all options to achieve this. It was suggested that lessons could be learned from the gradual drawn down of the UN presence in Sierra Leone, a process in which the PBC had an active participation.
13. They also noted it would be a test case on how the UN supports the implementation of a peacebuilding plan, the first to be mandated by the Security Council. They stressed the fact that the PBC had an important role to play in this process and that Liberia could be a model for other countries undergoing similar transitions. Progress on the implementation of the peacebuilding plan was welcome, and the need for the PBC to monitor in a meaningful way was underlined. Several members raised concern about the resource and financing gaps and welcomed the establishment of the MPTF. Some Member States noted the need to prioritise goals to ensure they were realistic and inclusive. It was suggested that the PBC organise a meeting after the GA focused specifically on the issue of securing the needed financing.

Conclusion

14. The Chair thanked the meeting for its active participation and interest. The need to monitor the implementation of the peacebuilding plan, the need to provide political accompaniment and the urgency of securing resources to avoid the resource and financial “cliff” after the departure of UNMIL are all challenges that will require innovative and proactive support from the PBC.