

Ambassadorial-level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission

Liberia Configuration, 21 November 2017

Chair's Summary

Background

On 21 November 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 and the drawdown of UNMIL. Senior officials attended, including SRSG Farid Zarif, DSRSG/PCS Yacoub El Hillo, DSRSG Waldemar Vrey, Deputy Minister for Budget and Development Planning, Hon. Tanneh G. Brunson, Acting Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Varney A. Sirleaf, the National Elections Commission (NEC) Chairman Cllr. Jerome Korkoyah, Acting Deputy Chief Observer, EU Observer Mission Colm Hahy, ECOWAS, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Liberia, Mr Israel Choko Davies, Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco and Executive Director, Multi Partnership Trust Fund, Ms. Jennifer Topping.

Introductory Remarks Preparations for Upcoming Elections

1. The Chair opened the meeting by congratulating the government and the people of Liberia for the peaceful and constructive electoral campaign process and the first round of voting. He noted that this was an accomplishment to be proud of and on which the country must now build. He underlined the role of SRSG Zarif who carried out extensive good office efforts, including support for the development of a code of conduct among candidates and regular meetings among the parties and electoral authorities. In his view, it is significant that when issues arose related to the first round of polling, these were channeled through established legal mechanisms, following well designed procedures both in the NEC and the Supreme Court.
2. SRSG Zarif reminded participants that this is a defining moment in the history of Liberia and it is putting to test the legal and constitutional frameworks of the country. He noted that up to this point, all complaints regarding the first round of the elections were dealt with through due process. However, the prolonged legal process to address complaints is also leading to some confusion and tension, especially in view of the need for the postponement of the second round of voting. In responding to questions, SRSG Zarif noted that the Mission's focus had been on good offices. The key messages had been the need to abide by the rule of law, avoid violence, enhance quality of engagement and discourse, remove public slander and focus on issues. He believes these efforts payed off and that the political leaders had done an excellent job in

controlling expectations and emotions of their followers There were 600 campaign events and only 12 incidents. He underlined the fact that he had worked closely with ECOWAS and the AU, especially in situations where there was a need to mediate differences among key actors.

3. The Chairman of the NEC outlined the various steps in the process to address the complaints related to the first round of voting. He noted that the NEC had disposed of the main complaint due to lack of sufficient evidence. He noted that following this, there would most probably be an appeal to the Board of Commissioners and then the Supreme Court. The NEC would only be able to resume electoral preparations after a decision was made by the Supreme Court. The elections must be held within 8 days after a decision of the Court.
4. The representative of ECOWAS noted that the elections were well run but there were irregularities that need to be addressed. He announced that they would be sending electoral experts to Monrovia who would arrive the following Monday. The main objective must be to address complaints but keep the inauguration of new Government as scheduled on 22 January.
5. The representative of the EU noted that if the NEC and Supreme Court adjudicate within the time limits, the second round of elections could even take place before the end of the year. However, further complications could arise if there are further complaints following the second round He informed that there is a limit of 58 days to resolve overall disputes.

Drawdown of UNMIL

6. As an introduction to the next agenda item, the Chair noted that for the past months, both the PBC and the Security Council had been actively discussing the UNMIL drawdown, as well as the capacity and resources of the UNCT who will remain. The Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission must help the UN system to identify how to responsibly manage this transition, and how to ensure predictable financing for peacebuilding in Liberia during the critical transition phase. He reminded participants that this was the first time that the Security Council requested a Peacebuilding Plan (resolution 2333), and the PBC has been explicitly asked to support the implementation alongside other partners. With UNMIL's departure in March of 2018, there is an urgent need to secure predictable sources of financing. The creation of a Multi Partnership Trust Fund (MPTF) is aimed at providing the mechanism to secure the needed funding.
7. Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco noted that the current process around the contested election result of 10 October voting underscores the critical importance of carefully navigating the transition process. He noted that at previous meetings, the PBC had discussed the mapping exercise carried out by the UNCT to identify gaps in resources and expertise. Through this exercise the risk of a "resource cliff" was identified in advance of the departure of UNMIL, and the Chair of the PBC has called the attention of the Security Council to this issue. He went on to explain that the Liberia Transition Multi Partnership Trust Fund is a pooled fund to collectively

mobilize the \$130 million, needed for the UNCT to support the implementation of the Liberia peacebuilding plan in an integrated manner. He congratulated the UN leadership in Liberia for their efforts to establish this fund in advance of the departure of UNMIL and noted that the PBSO greatly supports this initiative

8. Regarding the PBF, he informed that the PBF was in the process of approving more than US\$ 8 million in support of urgent priorities formulated in the Peacebuilding Plan. These include:
 - A project to enhance national capacity to promote, protect and monitor human rights and to enable continued UN human right presence after UNMIL drawdown
 - A project to expand platforms for the non-judicial mitigation of land concession disputes, in close partnership with- and with financial contribution of the private sector
 - A project to reduce pre-trial detention and roll out community policing with a special emphasis on addressing justice and security needs of women and girls at the community level.

9. The Acting Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Varney A. Sirleaf reassured members that despite the ongoing electoral process, the Peacebuilding Plan was being implemented. Systems had been put in place to monitor assets and all government Ministries were instructed to prepare term end notes for their successors. He acknowledged that the passage of needed reforms remained an issue, including the need for the new legal frameworks for land reform, decentralisation and other conflict prevention measures important to all citizens to address root causes of conflict. He underlined that political reconciliation must be a priority. He urged donors to support the MPTF which could support institutional change to cement the gains of the past 15 years. Deputy Minister for Budget and Development Planning, Tanneh G. Brunson noted that provisions had been made in the budget for the second round of elections, but that the current postponement was putting a stress on government finances. She went on to note that the Peacebuilding Plan provided a framework for the new government based on SDGs. She stressed the need for the international community to continue to support Liberia after the elections and the departure of UNMIL.

10. DSRSG Yacoub El Hillo described the MPTF as an essential element in the effort to mitigate the financial unpredictability that would ensue with the departure of UNMIL. He went on to outline the various steps which were being taken in the UN transition process.:
 - The UNDP had undertaken a review process of its presence in Liberia and identified areas where they would deploy extra capacity.
 - OHCHR would ensure the UN engagement post UNMIL, with special focus on reconciliation and root causes of the war.
 - The Office of the Resident Coordinator would be reinforced to continue political accompaniment and good office efforts.

- The UNCT would move into a One UN House which would allow for savings of up to US\$ 1 million per year.
 - Cooperation with the World bank has been strengthened.
11. He informed members of the plans to hold a “Liberia Moment” meeting in Monrovia in the second half of March next year which would allow the new government an opportunity to present to the international community its vision of phase II of the Peacebuilding Plan, would mark the official launch of the MPTF and of a Statement of Mutual Accountability. This would provide a platform to fill the gap left by the end of the Security Council mandate for Liberia and to bid farewell to the UNMIL leadership.
 12. Jennifer Topping underlined the risks posed in times of transition which usually lead to stop/start peace investments and resource cliffs. She explained that the MPTF mechanism was designed to mitigate this risk. She noted that in UN operations there were frequent problems of fragmentation since the financial support tended to be highly earmarked. This reduces the ability to provide surge capacity and a flexible coherent response to priorities on the ground. The MPTF could enhance UN system wide coordination and avoid competition among Agencies over limited funding. She emphasised the high premium of transparency, and public access to data in real time which reinforces the confidence of the contributors. The MPTF also allows for pooling of risk and prioritisation is facilitated. Over time, the fund can be broadened to support the Agenda 2030 as has been the case in Colombia and Somalia. Noting that timing was critical, she hoped the mechanism would be up and running before the end of the year. She noted that Liberia needed a broader coalition of contributors which should go beyond those that have a presence on the ground.

Discussion

13. Participants congratulated the government and the people of Liberia for the peaceful first round of voting. But they also noted that most international observers have stated that the elections were adequate and that the complaints of irregularity must be dealt with swiftly and not jeopardise the electoral calendar.
14. Several members expressed support for MPTF as a key mechanism to avoid the “Resource Cliff”. The fact that both UNMIL and PBC had actively worked to get this mechanism set up in advance of the departure of UNMIL was appreciated. The need for new donors was stressed and it was also suggested that a positive action would be for MPTF to pre-qualify national entities for implementation. There was broad agreement that traditional mechanisms are limited and that new financial mechanisms such as innovative financing, south /south and triangular cooperation can play a role. It was suggested that the PBC should identify specific gaps/needs and the best mechanisms to address them.
15. The role of the PBF in kick starting funding for the UN transition was appreciated. But it was also noted that while the PBF can provide first capitalisation and leverage other partners, it has limited funding and is not designed to provide the long-term needs for UNCT programmes.

16. Participants stressed that what is necessary is to provide conditions for sequencing sources of resources over time. It was noted that as confidence and stability increase, this will change the financial landscape with increasing participation of national resources and the private sector. The need for finding the best balance for each context, and for using pooled funding mechanisms and blended financing, was underlined. It was also suggested that residual funding at the end of PKOs, could be transferred to MPTFs.
17. Several interventions proposed that PBC develop a lessons learned exercise on the transition in Liberia. How can PBF projects best help achieve transformation? How can PBC statements of mutual commitment contribute to transitions?

Conclusion

18. The Chair thanked all for their active participation and the rich and substantive input. He noted that strong messages had been given: A swift and effective handling of the electoral complaints that have been brought before the NEC and the Supreme Court is necessary to ensure a timely transition to the new government and to reinforce the democratic system of Liberia. Key structural reforms, as set out in phase I of the Peacebuilding Plan, which will help address some of the root causes of conflict in Liberia are still necessary. In this context, it is clear that the transition continues to require donor attention to ensure that the weight of fragility does not derail the process of post war recovery and reform. The international community and the United Nations must be ready to continue supporting Liberia once UNMIL has departed. He underlined the support given by participants for the initiative of an MPTF. He emphasized that the Liberia Trust fund, with predictable funding from international partners and the catalytic support of the PBF, has the potential of becoming an effective mechanism to allow the continued UN support for the implementation of the peacebuilding plan and a smooth transition process.
19. He stressed that the Peacebuilding Commission stands ready to continue its political accompaniment; ensuring international attention after the Peacekeepers leave and undertake continued advocacy on the importance of pursuing reforms that are central for sustaining peace in Liberia. He informed that he stands ready to conduct a visit to Monrovia next year to consult and agree with national partners on the PBC engagement going forward in this very important year of dual transitions.