

Visit of the Chair of the PBC Liberia Configuration and the

progress. The departure of the mission, UNIL, in 2018 has left a certain vacuum in key peacebuilding areas such as financing and security for elections as well as a culture of dependency on the UN and the international community more broadly in sustaining peace and delivering public services. The socio-economic impact of the recent global COVID-19 pandemic and the secondary effects of the ongoing conflict in Liberia are still being felt and will continue to affect the progress and exacerbate the country's fragility risks.

UNIL enjoys excellent relations with the Liberian Government, which facilitates greatly UN support and the UN's engagement. There is an opportunity for further

10. Outstanding challenges mentioned by women we met include a) how to sustain the progress achieved, including helping other communities achieve economic empowerment as a tool to support their peacebuilding role and to elevate their status in their communities, c) how to fight violence against women, including domestic, sexual violence, female genital mutilation and political violence, and d) how to strengthen women's political participation, including achieving the 35 percent quota of women's representation in political life and institutions. These two latter challenges were discussed in-depth with, inter alia, the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Gender. Aspects discussed included how to dedicate enough resources to support women's political engagement, how to build an enabling environment for women in rural areas to engage in politics, how to remove the stigma and prejudice affecting women's political participation, address the violence that specifically targets women during the electoral period, online abuse and harassment on social media and addressing sexual and gender-based violence targeting women. The President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Gender are passionate champions of gender issues. We congratulated the President for his role as self-proclaimed Feminist-in-Chief. We strongly believe that addressing these issues of gender equality will contribute towards a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable society. We also noted the encouraging trends and efforts within political parties to ensure increased women representation in parties' leadership and broader participation in elections.

11. In our conversation with interlocutors, we were reminded that reconciliation efforts need to be adapted to the specific needs and context of Liberia. International practice includes a range of different options from truth-telling to institutional reform to accountability, amnesty and memorialization. It is important to close the violent chapter of Liberia's history. In the Government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development for 2018-2022; (PAP5), reconciliation is recognized as central to improve civic trust, co-existence and overall social cohesion, including through the implementation of the Strategic Roadmap for Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. Most County Reconciliation Plans pursue similar objectives, including restoration of trust, land reform and resolution of land related conflicts.

12. The Peace Clubs mechanism has proven to be a worthy agent of change and a major actor in the promotion of social cohesion at the community level. We welcomed the Government's decision of 2017 by which Peace Clubs are registered as a Community Based Organization and are firmly embedded in the Liberian peacebuilding infrastructure. As such, we expressed the hope that the Peace Clubs' sustainability could be ensured over time with basic contributions to their functioning through the national budget.

13. We were reminded that it is imperative to reduce the potential for a resurgence of violence and to sustain the trust between the population and the government. In this regard, we encouraged the Government to step up efforts to tackle issues related to corruption and social inequalities, a main obstacle to social cohesion. Addressing the land issues, including using local mediators, was mentioned as part of the prevention strategy.

1;. The presidential and legislative elections scheduled to be held in 2023; represent an important milestone and an opportunity to consolidate democracy and the peace that Liberia still then have enjoyed for 22 years. The electoral process, however, also brings with it a risk of being a source of political polarization and for heightening social tensions. In our discussions with the main stakeholders involved with the elections, we detected an increasing polarization in the political landscape, with entrenched positions on key issues pertaining to the preparation and holding of the elections of 2023; including voter registration, the capacity and independence of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and state capacity to maintain law and order. While some foresee the risk of violence around the electoral period, all reiterated their commitment to ensure that the country does not return to violence.

10. Overall, we saw the urgency of addressing the deepening polarization and mistrust surrounding the electoral process through greater transparency, communication and dialogue with the latter, in particular, among political parties and between the political parties and the NEC. A shared understanding and consensus on how to move forward with electoral preparations will be critical in order to instill confidence in and build the credibility of the process. This should include addressing issues such as, inter alia, the voter registration process, biometric identification and security to help address the key vulnerabilities related to the electoral process.

11. Reports about possible misuse of youth for partisan politics are worrying as this has the potential to escalate into violence. In meetings with government representatives, political party representatives, the NEC and the international community, all stakeholders and particularly political parties and their supporters were urged to exercise patience, remain calm, and address any outstanding grievances through established legal framework(s) in a peaceful and transparent manner. All parties were urged to reject the use of violence

1D. Youth represent approximately 60% of Liberia's population, and capturing the opportunities offered by youth remains fundamental to development and peacebuilding in Liberia. Despite significant progress, youth in Liberia continue to be impacted by root causes of the conflict, including socio-economic inequalities and marginalization, high levels of unemployment, and limited access to education.

1B. We received accounts of issues particularly concerning developments reflecting the fragility of young people, a widespread use of drugs and youth militancy that is being instrumentalized for partisan politics. Youth militancy mobilized by the political parties, potentially leading to physical violence, poses a major risk to peaceful elections. The Women's Civil Society representatives lamented the impact that drug and substance abuse are having on youth, and they indicated that they are committed to help young people overcome this drug epidemic. The Minister of Gender called for resources dedicated to helping to remove young people from the street, helping with the rehabilitation of those already involved with drug abuse, and bringing them back to school or social development programmes. With regard to the risk of youth involvement in political violence, we were encouraged to hear about increasing opportunities to engage in dialogue and to use the spaces offered by youth communities to protect them and help them engage in more constructive approaches, including youth positive participation in political life during and beyond the election period.

1+. Addressing unemployment and social, economic and regional disparities, while promoting intra and inter-group harmony and empowerment of women and youth, including young women and men in rural parts of the country, remain essential in addressing the root causes of fragility and violence and promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in Liberia.

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- .. We discussed the situation of the rule of law, justice and security sector as they pertain to peacebuilding and to the elections of - - ; in particular.

-1. It is to be recalled that Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued its final report on 15 December 2014. The report argued that in order to dismantle impunity and set Liberia on the path of healing and reconciliation, a mix of criminal accountability, national healing through a truth-telling process, reparations, memorialization and institutional reform to promote good governance and human rights was urgently needed. The TRC process has been subject to political tensions and has polarized Liberians, particularly with regard to the accountability aspects. So far, the country has not prosecuted war criminals from its 14-year conflict, which left around 250,000 people dead. During our meetings, we reiterated the long-standing position of the United Nations regarding the need to fight impunity and bring justice to victims.

--. We received updates on some of the LaS reforms under way, including efforts to enforce the law on sexual and gender-based violence and exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. We discussed specific measures being put in place to protect women against (political) violence in the context of the --; elections. The security and law enforcement institutions reassured us that these institutions will play their role in contributing to peaceful and fair elections, noting also that the political parties had a big r

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L. 4 e \$ere informed that, based on this assessment, Liberia no longer fell in the category of fragile countries of the 4 orld ?an( 2 roup ( 4 ? 2' and the International 6 onetary 9und (1 6 9'. 4 e ac(no\$ledged the significant macroeconomic progress achie"ed by Liberia, \$hile also underlining the importance of the country continuing to benefit from critical resources usually allocated to fragile and conflict\*affected countries, gi"en current circumstances. It \$as confirmed to us that much of the progress Liberia had made after the





- @.. Further opportunities for P?9 support to peacebuilding initiatives in cross-border areas and communities will be explored, including with the relevant Resident Coordinators on possible new initiatives in "vulnerable areas of Côte d'Ivoire" Mali, Côte d'Ivoire" (in a 9aso, Côte d'Ivoire" Liberia, engaging 8 4 A# and supporting its role in cross-border programming and collaborating with the 6 !% #ecretariat and the Af5 ?. Regarding the 6 !% and Af5 ?, P?#8 will follow up with those and other relevant institutions to finalize the Fragility and Resilience Assessment of the 6 ano !"er, distil recommendations and identify possible follow-up, particularly cross-border initiatives.
- @1. P?#8 will see( enhanced collaboration with the Af5 ?, which could include sharing analysis, exchanging on both institutions' programmatic approach to peacebuilding and resilience, on implementation strategies and on collaboration with 2 8s and C#8s, identifying possible cooperation on regional initiatives and helping to bring the %&C> closer to the Af5 ? in areas of resilience, peacebuilding and peace dividends, and community-based projects. P?#8 will also further help to socialize the Af5 ? Fragility #trategy within the %&.
- @-. On the policy and partnership fronts, P?#8 will further endeavour to update (no\$ ledge and analysis of economic dynamics and the interaction of those dynamics with peacebuilding and resilience, and the lin(s bet\$een macro-economic reforms and community resilience, to better inform policy dialogue with the 2o"ernment and I9Is and to inform appropriate program inter"entions.