

Peacebuilding Commission

Statement by the Chair of the Country Specific Configuration on Sierra Leone

H.E. Ambassador John McNee

22 March 2010

Thank you Mr. President,

It is a great pleasure to participate in the Security Council's consultations in my capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission's Sierra Leone configuration. I appear before you having just returned from visiting Sierra Leone with a delegation from the Peacebuilding Commission. I was fortunate to be joined by the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations from Austria, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Korea, Liberia, and Peru. The size and stature of this delegation amply demonstrate the international community's commitment to Sierra Leone.

As I indicated in my last briefing, the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission has aligned its engagement with the peacebuilding priorities outlined in Sierra Leone's *Agenda for Change*, namely good governance, youth unemployment, and drug trafficking. The recent visit provided an opportunity to take stock of progress and consider the Commission's future contribution in each of these areas. The delegation's discussions with President Koroma, relevant Government officials, the major political parties, civil society, donors, and the diplomatic corps underlined the progress made in recent years, highlighted outstanding challenges, and provided insight into current political dynamics.

Mr. President,

The political situation in Sierra Leone remains calm. Important steps have been taken to follow-up on the Joint Communiqué signed by the major political parties in March 2009. The Independent Review Panel into the causes of the political violence has started work. With support from UNIPSIL and UNDP, the Political Parties Registration Commission

has also engaged with the main political parties to foster constructive dialogue and mitigate the possibility of further political instability. Campaigns to promote tolerance outside Freetown and with the youth wings of the political parties have usefully targeted potential sources of political violence.

Notwithstanding this progress, efforts to promote inclusive multi-party democracy will only become more important. The Peacebuilding Commission delegation met with all three political parties. These discussions revealed significant divisions. Mutual trust and inter-party dialogue remains limited. The trend towards growing regional polarization and increasing politicization of Paramount Chieftaincy elections is also cause for concern. Likewise, isolated incidents of political violence, most recently in the Tongo Fields, illustrate the potential for further instability. As the 2012 elections approach and political stakes rise, the incentives to depart from peaceful and inclusive politics will rise. All actors must continue to follow-up on the Joint Communiqué and work towards a more tolerant democratic politics.

Mr. President,

Further progress on peacebuilding will help buttress these political efforts. With respect to good governance, Sierra Leone should be commended for its efforts to combat corruption. The suspension and removal of Ministers, including as recently as last week, demonstrates that no official is above the law. The Anti-Corruption Commission also continues to use its independence and authority to prosecute graft, improve public systems, and conduct outreach. Sierra Leone's rise in the Transparency International index is a concrete sign of this success. Nonetheless, corruption remains a serious problem throughout Sierra Leonean society, not in the least due to its inhibiting effects on foreign direct investment.

Sierra Leone has also pursued other important aspects of improved governance. A concerted program of decentralization is bringing public services to districts outside Freetown, improving the integration of rural areas in national development, and

enhancing accountability. Critical work is also underway to improve the capacity of the Sierra Leone Police, particularly with respect to public disturbances. The importance of a capable, trusted, and adequately resourced police force ahead of the 2012 elections should not be underestimated.

Mr. President,

The Peacebuilding Commission has identified youth unemployment as an issue requiring special attention. One third of Sierra Leone's population is between 15 and 35 years of age. Many idle youth are concentrated in urban areas, unable to find jobs and frustrated by social marginalization. This represents a latent risk of political instability. Both the Government and its international partners are moving to address this challenge. The Parliament of Sierra Leone passed the National Youth Commission Act in December 2009 and the Government is in the process of establishing the Commission as a focal point for youth policy. A sector working group involving key Government departments and international partners is also working to better target employment creation. Following constructive discussions during the delegation visit the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission will meet on March 26th to identify outstanding needs and consider how it can best support this welcome and growing momentum.

Mr. President,

Drug trafficking is a third area of concern for peacebuilding. Sierra Leone has developed an integrated approach that is a model for the region and is a key participant in the West Africa Coast Initiative, as demonstrated by the Ministerial-level Conference held in Freetown in February 2010. The meeting reiterated regional commitment to combating drug trafficking and considered the operationalization of the Transnational Crime Units in each of the West Africa Coast Initiative pilot countries. These efforts are to be commended, but more support is needed to ensure that the region as a whole has the

necessary capacity and resources to confront the considerable threat posed by organized crime.

Mr. President,

Sierra Leone is a multilateral success story. Sierra Leoneans have made remarkable progress on all fronts. A major peacekeeping operation has transitioned into the current integrated peacebuilding office. The remaining peacebuilding priorities represent the final obstacles before the country proceeds to long-term development. It would be a mistake to underestimate them. Sierra Leone requires continued attention and assistance, particularly in the period leading into the 2012 elections.

The Consultative Group Meeting held last November provided a welcome opportunity for international partners to reiterate their support. Nonetheless, more is needed, especially with respect to specific gaps. For example, in-kind contributions of patrol vessels or police vehicles would enhance Sierra Leone's ability to monitor its maritime borders and peacefully manage internal tensions. Perhaps most importantly, financial contributions to the UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund in support of the *Agenda for Change* and *United Nations Joint Vision for Sierra Leone* would enable critical progress on peacebuilding.

This funding would also directly reinforce the excellent and innovative work carried out by ERSG Schulenburg, UNIPSIL, and the entire United Nations Family. The integrated approach adopted by the United Nations in Sierra Leone deserves the international community's strongest support. It is a successful model of how national and international actors, including the Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission, can work together to build sustainable peace after even the most terrible conflict. National and international actors must ensure that this remains the case. It would be a great shame if complacency at these later stages of peace consolidation undermined all that has gone before. For this reason the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission remains

steadfastly committed to supporting Sierra Leone as it reaches towards long-term sustainable development.