

# Key messages from the Liberia consultation

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Monrovia, 31 March 2016

The three recent reports on UN peace and security on Peace Operations, the Peacebuilding Architecture and Security Council Resolution 1325 (women, peace and security), stress that disconnected, incoherent and uncoordinated efforts remain a foremost challenge for the UN System and the broader international community. The reports refer to this problem as “fragmentation”, and emphasize how fragmentation stands as a roadblock to more effective international support to fragile and conflict-affected countries. Most of the fragmentation issues highlighted in the reports are well known and have been discussed for a decade or longer. Yet, the challenges persist and continue to require dedicated action and attention from the highest political and bureaucratic levels to improve efforts to sustain peace in the countries we are mandated to serve.

To further inform the global discourse on needed reforms, the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) held a consultation in Monrovia, Liberia on 31 March. Hosted by the Government of Liberia and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and funded by the Danish Government, the consultation explored the consequences of fragmentation at the country level, where the assistance of the international community to efforts to sustain peace is put to the test. The consultation also sought to identify good practices for addressing the challenges of fragmentation with a view to feed these findings and insights into the upcoming High-Level Thematic Debate on Peace and Security in the General Assembly in May 2016.

While Liberia has certain specific and unique attributes and characteristics, many of the findings and insights discussed at the consultation have broader, if not global, applicability and relevance. The discussions and outcomes from the Liberia consultation are presented in this paper unfolding the following key messages:

- 1. With the coming drawdown of the peacekeeping mission and exit from the Security Council, combined with unaddressed conflict drivers, Liberia is at a critical point in time when peace must be consolidated. In similar situations elsewhere in the past, the political and funding architecture of the international community and the UN in particular has failed to adequately reflect the cyclical nature of conflict and sustain focus long enough and sufficiently enough to achieve a durable peace. To rule out any risk of relapse, now is the time to stick the course.**
- 2. Despite the development of a range of accountability frameworks, the international community and the government and people of Liberia never settled on one comprehensive, inclusive, transparent and binding compact based on mutual conditionality and buy-in across the board. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity (after the elections in the case of Liberia) to reinvigorate a New Deal-type process aimed at developing and implementing an inclusive accountability framework by engaging multiple stakeholders from different branches of the political system and parts of society, and to anchor it at the highest levels of government.**
- 3. National ownership is not restricted to nor is it equivalent to government ownership. Expecting a strong and unified position and leadership from the top is also in contradiction with the participatory, inclusive processes involving youth, the private sector, civil society, women, etc. that are needed. Further, national peacebuilding plans need to be regularly reviewed as part of an inclusive process and in dialogue with society at large as well as engagement with the international community.**
- 4. The lack of a binding compact and inadequate political accompaniment has left a number of critical drivers of conflict unaddressed or insufficiently addressed. Unresolved land issues, center-periphery grievances, lack of economic opportunity, incomplete reintegration of former combatants and an insufficient reconciliation process constitute the primary security concerns thirteen years after the end of the conflict.**
- 5. Further, the inability to mobilize voluntary resources to complement or continue activities implemented by the peacekeeping mission has been a particular challenge and one that continues to undermine the consolidation of peace. Assessed contributions provide funding to cover immediate security-related activities by the mission but there is a reliance on voluntary contributions for integrated, longer-term peacebuilding efforts (e.g. DDDR programming).**
- 6. The Ebola response in Liberia highlighted that coordination and coherence is more likely to happen in times of acute crisis. Lessons from humanitarian reform processes and the cluster system in particular could also inform the peace and security domain.**
- 7. Fragmentation at the UNHQ level (sometimes resulting in contradictory instructions and conflicting priorities) leads to fragmentation at the country level. Policies and frameworks for coherence and coordination at the country level are in fact in place but the challenge lies with implementation. There is a need for some level of structural harmonization within UN agencies, funds and programs. Member states serving on their boards have a critical role to play in this context as have the donors providing their resources.**

## Key questions, discussions and outcomes from the Liberia consultation

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### ***After 13 years of concerted efforts and substantial international support Liberia is at a critical point in time when peace must be sustainably consolidated***

- While Liberia has made great strides in building peace over the past 13 years, the lack of genuine reconciliation, an incomplete reintegration process, a considerable youth bulge, lack of economic opportunity, center-periphery grievances, unresolved land issues and disillusion with the political elites provide the potential for social-economic and political volatility. Elections and a possible referendum on constitutional reform in 2017 could heighten political tensions.
- In this context, resources and capacity to sustain Liberia's peace dividend are strained, as UNMIL prepares to draw down and government revenues contract due to a fall in global commodity prices. At the same time the country remains vulnerable to the negative social and economic fallout of the Ebola crisis. There is a crucial role for the PBC in assisting Liberia with resource mobilization from donors and domestic sources, and to bring sustained international attention to Liberia once it is no longer on the Security Council's agenda.
- These characteristics are not unlike past experiences of other post-conflict countries at the point of mission drawdown. The frequent relapse of comparable countries merits special attention to Liberia in the years to come.

### ***Inclusive and comprehensive "compacts" between society-at-large and international partners must guide transitions from war to sustainable peace***

- Compacts are about solidifying partnership where each party has the right to make demands and to expect mutual accountability. Mutual conditionality is thus to be expected and both parties must strive for transparency, inclusion and dialogue. There is a need to redefine the nature of this partnership and to depart from the traditional donor-recipient relationship.
- The private sector, civil society organizations, the broader political system and youth need to be more actively involved in discussions on sustaining peace following a common vision. A comprehensive compact can clarify the processes that will be used for ensuring inclusivity and identify the role the international community, including the PBC, can play in facilitating that engagement.
- Youth in particular should be considered a key stakeholder in Liberia's peace process and have a central role not only in the design of strategies but also in their implementation. In the current context the engagement of youth is a matter of conflict prevention.
- In Liberia, the New Deal got off to a challenging start in part because of the misconception that it had to come as a full package with a pre-determined set of requirements that were perceived as a duplication of efforts and thus considered a burden. However, all stakeholders agree on the validity of the New Deal's underlying principles and that the process used to define peacebuilding priorities is essential to achieve integration and sustainability.
- The process of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides an opportunity to reinvigorate a New Deal-type process aimed at developing and implementing an inclusive accountability framework, engaging multiple stakeholders

from different branches of the political system and parts of society, and to anchor it at the highest levels of government. During the critical transition when UNMIL hands responsibilities and functions it has held for the past 13 years to the GoL it will be essential to have open and transparent communication about the process and timing that reaches beyond Monrovia.

***The notion of national ownership should not stand in the way of ongoing, honest and accountable dialogue between government, society-at-large and international partners***

- National ownership is not restricted to nor is it equivalent to government ownership. The executive branch does not constitute the full political system and the political system cannot warrant genuine national ownership. Expecting a strong and unified position and leadership from the top is also in contradiction with the participatory, inclusive processes that are needed. Competition between line ministries and some level of incoherence on the side of government is a natural phenomenon in any country. However, these challenges are especially serious in countries with a recent history of violent conflict where the sources of funding tend to be fragmented and incoherent.
- While reconciliation at the community level has seen positive development in Liberia, comprehensive and concerted national efforts remain inadequate. The international community has showed deference to national ownership in defining and leading the reconciliation process but the government has not ensured adequate progress at the national level. Land reform and ownership as well as the risk of elites dominating the political space are other areas where honest and accountable dialogue is needed. Unaddressed grievances are likely to come to the fore in the upcoming referendum and election period if left unaddressed. The international community including the PBC has a responsibility to work with the government to ensure that adequate steps are being taken to address the remaining legacies of the conflict and other latent conflict drivers.
- National peacebuilding plans need to be regularly reviewed as part of an inclusive process and in dialogue with civil society and the international community. This could create a needed space for more regular dialogue. Religious and traditional leaders have a potential to contribute positively to peace consolidation and should be part of the national dialogue.

***Integration and coherence is possible but typically only happens when the sense of urgency is strong enough and mostly in spite of institutional incentives rather than because of them***

- There is an opportunity to learn from Liberia's Ebola response about how integration works well in situations of crisis (e.g. the Presidential Council that was set up for Ebola response with active participation of civil society, the military, the donor community etc.). Lessons from humanitarian reform processes and the cluster system in particular could also inform the peace and security sector. In Liberia the Peacebuilding Fund architecture is an example of a useful forum for dialogue.
- Fragmentation at the UNHQ level (sometimes resulting in contradictory instructions and conflicting priorities) leads to fragmentation at the country level. Policies and frameworks for coherence and coordination at the country level are in fact in place but the challenge lies with implementation. There is a need for some level of structural harmonization within UN agencies, funds and programs. Member states serving on their boards have a critical role to play in this context as have the donors providing their resources.

- In mission settings, there is increased risk of fragmentation but also potential for enhanced integration if managed correctly. Calling for integration can be misleading as in some cases diversity is a positive attribute. Integration is not the same as coordination or coherence. At a minimum what should be expected, if not demanded, is coherence.
- Integrated regional peacebuilding interventions and the engagement of regional actors are critical and need to be strengthened. A recent example is an initiative to bring traditional leaders from Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire together for dialogue during a time of tensions in the border region. To do so there is a need for more flexibility in financing and the management of mission assets to support these efforts.
- The way the personnel, procurement, and management systems of the broader UN System are designed and regulated continue to hamper coordination and effective responses.

***Financial and strategic disconnects in the early aftermath of conflict creates a negative legacy that undermine sustainable peace a decade later***

- Missions need to think about an exit strategy and apply longer-term thinking from the outset with realistic criteria for success but also flexibility for change based on the changing context. Assessed contributions provide funding to cover immediate security-related activities by the mission but there is a reliance on voluntary contributions for integrated, longer-term peacebuilding efforts (e.g. DDR programming). The UN Country Team is not able to pick up the work without additional resources. This lack of support undermines peace consolidation and leaves a lasting impact.

In Liberia a critical example of the above can be seen in the unfinished reintegration and rehabilitation of individuals and groups engaged in armed conflict during the war. Thirteen years down these groups are considered a potential security risk particularly in the context of elections.

- There is often a disconnect between what donors say in the boards of agencies, funds and programs and the reality of their behavior on the ground. In Liberia, this was exemplified by the reluctance of donors to contribute to the One Fund. The possibility of mission funds (from assessed contributions) going to pooled funding mechanisms for programmatic activities at the country level should be further explored.
- The PBF is expected to be catalytic but in the case of Liberia there has been a challenge in generating additional funds to support medium to long-term peacebuilding efforts. Most donors tend to prefer bilateral engagement and funding arrangements, which exacerbates fragmentation. There is a need for greater information sharing on what peacebuilding funds are being spent on to ensure greater transparency and accountability.
- Missions need to be better at drawing on the capacity and expertise of country teams from the onset of mission planning but there are structural hurdles to doing so (personnel systems, reporting lines, IT systems, financing).