

Peacebuilding Commission Informal Meeting on Sri Lanka

20 November 2017

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

On 20 November 2017, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting to discuss the peacebuilding experiences of Sri Lanka, upon the request of the Sri Lankan Government.

H.E. Mr. Indrajith Coomaraswamy, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mano Tittawella, Secretary General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM) attended the meeting and explained to the Commission the peacebuilding priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka. Mr. Jehan Perera of the Sri Lanka National Peace Council also delivered remarks.

From the United Nations, Mr. Miroslav Jenca, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, and Ms. Una McCauley, UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka addressed the meeting.

The meeting focused on Sri Lanka's comprehensive efforts towards sustainable peace and prosperity, in particular the efforts of the Government to promote socio-economic development, reconciliation and transitional justice. The meeting provided an important opportunity for the PBC to discuss ways in which the UN system could continue to support the Government in the future. Speakers also underlined the need for an inclusive and people-centered peace, highlighting the positive role of women, youth and civil society can play in Sri Lanka's peacebuilding process. The role of the Peacebuilding Fund in supporting the peacebuilding priorities of Sri Lanka was a particular focus.

1. The Chair opened the meeting emphasizing that the meeting had been convened at the request of the national authorities to discuss the peacebuilding priorities of Sri Lanka and ways in which the international community, including the United Nations, could support these priorities. The meeting testified to the convening power of the PBC and its ability to serve as a platform for countries that are interested in engaging with a broad range of stakeholders on their efforts to sustain peace, including learning previous good practices and lessons learned. He added that the PBC was looking forward to hearing the unique experiences of Sri Lanka in the areas of reconciliation, constitutional reform, good governance, human rights, and the participation of women, among others.
2. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, explained that the engagement of the UN with Sri Lanka would be critical for securing sustainable peace and development in the country. After explaining the history of the conflict, he underscored that the elections in 2015 sent a strong message by the people of

Sri Lanka against ethnic and religious divisions, extremism and impunity. Despite a myriad of challenges, the country was on a steady course towards democracy, rule of law, good governance, reconciliation and sustainable peace. He went on to commend the contributions of the Peacebuilding Fund in providing the resources to S

accountability in a comprehensive manner. He stressed the importance of constitutional reform to move towards a political settlement and ensure a sustainable end to violent conflicts, noting the recent debate in the Constitutional Assembly on this issue. Recent high-level visits from the UN to the country, deployment of a Reconciliation and Development Adviser, and PBF's support to reconciliation were indicators of the commitment of the UN to Sri Lanka.

6. Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, stressed that transitional justice is an essential element of the UN's peacebuilding work in Sri Lanka, and in the absence of a peace agreement, HRC resolution 30/1 established the framework by which the government, victims and civil society can address the root causes of the past conflict. He noted that the implementation of commitments was taking longer than originally envisaged, but there had been recent positive moves, such as steps taken towards the operationalization of the OMP. Democratic space had opened up and the human rights situation had improved. However, the long-awaited review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in line with international human rights standards, and the incorporation into national law of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance, the demilitarization of the North and East and the resolution of land disputes remained outstanding. With support from the PBF from April 2016, OHCHR was supporting the Government of Sri Lanka in designing transitional justice mechanisms, including the National Consultations on the Reconciliation Mechanisms. OHCHR would continue supporting the government in establishing the truth and reconciliation commission, and the prompt operationalization of the OMP.
7. Ms. Una McCauley, UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, pointed out that Sri Lanka was one of the best examples where the UN was able to speak in one voice. From the beginning of the transition process, the UN had played an important convening role, moving from coordinated UN action to coordinating the efforts of all donors and partners around the priorities of the government through the Peacebuilding Priority Plan. With the support of donors and funding from the PBF, the UN Country Team had been able to engage in confidence building and resettlement, and provide discreet technical assistance to the government.
8. Mr. Jehan Perera from the Sri Lanka National Peace Council voiced his gratitude for the international support in finding solutions to intractable issues in Sri Lanka. He pointed out that Sri Lanka has a diverse civil society fabric. He noted recent progress in achieving freedom from fear, ending impunity and human rights violations, and the expansion of space where the civil society could operate. Sri Lanka still has many problems which could only be addressed through inclusive approaches. Civil society with national and international support could play an important role in overcoming these problems.
9. Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, ASG for Peacebuilding Support, highlighted Sri Lanka's unique experiences on reconciliation, peacebuilding and economic development, and noted the centrality of implementing the HRC resolution 30/1 to its efforts to guarantee non-recurrence of past human rights violations and to put the country on the path to sustainable peace and development. He explained how the Peacebuilding Fund was

supporting Sri Lanka to build lasting peace, particularly by helping the government to coordinate and mobilize donor support around the PPP, support an inclusive Peacebuilding Board for strategic guidance, enable national consultations on transitional justice, support ONUR, enable land release and IDPs resettlement, encourage greater participation of women and youth in reconciliation and help foster greater UN coherence. He further encouraged countries like Sri Lanka and Colombia to share their unique lessons and experiences on reconciliation, accountability and development, and urged greater engagement of the IFIs on the development dimension of building peace.

10. In their statements, PBC members gave the following messages:

- The Sri Lanka case provided many valuable lessons on peace and development, including the importance of PBF engagement in a middle-income country, simultaneous efforts to address peace and development matters by aligning economic and fiscal fundamentals in support of long-term peace, and strong government ownership of various processes, including the comprehensive PPP.