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Quaker United Nations Office

Keeping a Peacebuilding Focus: Intervention during the UN Peacebuilding Commission Annual Session on “Regional approaches to peacebuilding: The Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and the Mano River Union”, 4th December 2019, UNHQ, New York

QUNO remarks (as delivered)

My thanks to the organizers and to our speakers today. My name is Andrew Tomlinson, and I am the Director of the Quaker UN Office, where we work on peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict.

I believe I am right in remembering that a few years ago it was the Peacebuilding Commission that was the first UN body to take the important step of addressing the Ebola crisis in West Africa on a regional basis, rather than piecemeal, country by country. It is heartening to see this continuing regional engagement, and to have the PBC again leading the way. As we think about the Mano River Union, we see a group of countries that are each unique, and which are also closely linked to one another economically and socially. The resilience of the people of the region in the face of a wide range of challenges has been remarkable.

Nevertheless, despite the regional nature of the issues, it seems that the UN is still struggling to move on from an approach that is fragmented, organized country by country and using different tools. As a result of this fragmentation, the UN engagement has varied greatly, sometimes driven not so much by the individual needs of the country as by the vagaries of the particular UN model that is being applied—here a peacekeeping deployment, there a country team, here a PBC accompaniment, there not – and these differences in the mode of UN engagement can have an enormous impact on the host countries. While there have been important attempts to address this – and we have heard many examples today - further work needs to be done to avoid the negative impact of transitions of the UN presence, as we have seen so recently with the transition in Liberia, where despite the efforts of the government and people, and by the PBC configuration and others, we are seeing increasing challenges – some of which seem to be due as much to the changes accompanying the shift in the format of the UN presence as to any endogenous developments.

In these two days we have seen important efforts to bring together perspectives from across silos, reaching out to bring together expertise from the development, humanitarian and security sectors. The PBC has a unique mandate in this regard. Nevertheless, *let us not forget that the PBC also has a core competency, a central mission – which is peacebuilding.* As we seek to bring together a holistic lens and strategy to the task of accompanying people along their journey to sustainable peace, let us not lose track of the tools at the heart of these efforts – of a focus on strengthening the relationships between people, their communities and their governments, on the core actions of trauma healing, reconciliation and trust building, and of fostering true social, political and economic inclusion, including that of women and young people.

In the preamble to the 2030 Agenda, all the world's governments made a commitment to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and this commitment remains the principal yardstick for our efforts. In the midst of all the complex crises that beset us, despite changing global power dynamics, we must remain focused on this long term, primary task – so that at the end of the day we can look ourselves in the mirror and say, yes, we together were able to increase peace, justice and inclusion in our communities, in our countries and around the world.

Andrew Tomlinson
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