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REFERENCE:

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Excellency,

I am writing to you to follow up on my letter addressed to former Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1521, H.E. Masood Khan, dated 26 December 2013 regarding the recommendations contained in the final report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia dated 25 November 2013.

As I had stated in my previous letter, I visited Liberia from 2 to 7 February, and would like to share with you the situation I have observed in the area of land tenure and rights and its links to natural resources management.

The Government of Liberia has taken a series of measures to help resolve land disputes and improve the related aspect of natural resources management. The Land Rights Policy has also been approved, and related legislation is currently being prepared in the Legislature. This new policy recognises community title and also provides an opportunity for a more transparent and consensual land use decision-making.

Five Land Coordination Centres (LCCs) in Lofa, Bong, Margibi, Nimba and Maryland counties have been established and are facilitating the development of a land dispute resolution network system. During my visit, I met with the LCC team in Kakata City of Margibi County and was briefed on its outreach activities and mediation support work for settlement of land disputes involving chiefs, women, youth and religious leaders.

His Royal Highness
Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Husseini
Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom
of Jordan to the United Nations
Chairman
Security Council Committee
Established pursuant to resolution 1521 (2003)

Some of their challenges conveyed to me included the division of deeds, establishing ownership of land among community group leaders, and the determination of ownership for lands vacated during the war.

As the Chair had rightly pointed out in his letter of 12 December 2013, the Government of Liberia should continue to address the grievances of local communities affected by the allocation of customary land for use by international agricultural companies. Concessions still trigger disputes in some communities.

During my visit, I met with community groups residing in a concession area in Grand Cape Mount County and was briefed on their challenges regarding lack of medical and education services, lack of training for the youth and lack of access to farmland in the area of their villages. I also met with the management team of Sime Darby Oil Palm and Rubber in Grand Cape Mount County and was informed of some of the challenges they faced including managing expectations of communities, balancing environmental concerns with development, legal rights and ownership, and managing costs and requirements. Sime Darby's management highlighted the employment and labour opportunities which their operations offered and its contribution to reduced migration of Liberia's labour force from rural communities.

I was also briefed by the Deputy Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy on the Ministry's efforts to coordinate the work of national agencies on environmental issues, regulate land use and ensure respect for the new land policy. The Ministry has also been holding regular consultative meetings on the Kimberley Process recommendations with stakeholders.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is also taking steps to further understand the nature and source of disputes in concession management and citizens' engagement to improve current practices. I should add that UNDP, the World Bank and the Peacebuilding Commission have been supporting this process and will continue to do so. The World Bank and UNDP, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, have initiated a study on disputes in concessions management and the quality of citizen engagement as a first step towards preventing the escalation of land and natural resource management conflicts. The study is expected to be completed by April 2014.

As you are aware, land tenure and land rights have been cross-cutting issues linked to two priority areas – “Strengthening of Rule of Law” and “Supporting National Reconciliation” – under the Statement of Mutual Commitments between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia. During my visit, I have referred to the recommendations listed in the Chairman's letter of 12 December 2013 in my discussions with key interlocutors including the President, the Minister of Interior, and the Deputy Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy.

Let me assure you that the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission is committed to ensuring coordinated action for peacebuilding activities including those which address issues which could possibly trigger conflict. While government-led action is crucial for long-term peace and stability of the country, the wide range of international partners supporting capacity and institution building should be well coordinated to ensure that all aspects of land issues and natural resources are taken into account.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Staffan Tillander

Chair

Peacebuilding Commission

Liberia Configuration