Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) - UN PBSO Civil Society Consultation for the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

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On January 28, the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), in partnership with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), held a civil society consultation as part of the 2020 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review in Washington, DC. A wide range of AfP U.S.-based and international members participated, from global development and humanitarian actors to grassroots local peacebuilding organizations. Participants reflected on the role of the UN in various contexts, key success, and the ongoing gaps and challenges of implementing the United Nations’ concept of “sustaining peace.”

Overview on Evolution of Violent Conflict and UN Peacebuilding

Henk-Jan Brinkman, PBSO Chief of Peacebuilding Strategy and Partnerships Branch, traced the trajectory of UN peacebuilding against the backdrop of the post-Cold War evolution of armed conflict. A decline in traditional intrastate wars since 1991 meant fewer conflicts that the United Nations was best placed to resolve — those between governments and a rebel group, resolved by a peace agreement, and requiring a peacekeeping force to support implementation. Today’s armed conflicts are far different, with multiple actors, many non-state and driven by divergent, often unclear factors. In Syria, for example, over 1,000 armed groups are parties to the conflict. Today’s violent conflicts are much more complex and protracted, for which traditional UN tools such as peacekeeping, mediation, and the Secretary-General’s good offices are much less useful, as seen in the last 10 to 15 years.

The UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) were established in 2005 – the same year the Human Rights Council was also created – as these new conflicts were emerging. The peacebuilding architecture was created in recognition of the UN’s “gaping hole” in dealing with civil conflicts and preventing them from relapsing. PBSO’s mission includes supporting the PBC and managing the PBF, which allocated $192 million in 2019 and is growing each year. The Secretary-General has sought $500 million per year for the PBF in 2018.

Two UN resolutions adopted at the end of 2005 called for reviewing the UN Peacebuilding architecture every five years. The 2010 review was not comprehensive, but the 2015 review was much better and created an advisory group of experts and issued a report that offered a new concept, “sustaining peace.” While initially skeptical, Henk-Jan became convinced of its utility and its shift toward a positive concept.

Previously at the UN, peacebuilding was associated with countries on the UN Security Council agenda – nations experiencing violent conflict or coming out of violent conflict. In contrast,
sustaining peace is a positive concept that encompasses all countries. This shift is similar to the idea of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being universal and not just for the Global South. The concept of sustaining peace has made it easier to talk to governments by making them less defensive and was an important change in the UN peacebuilding approach.

The goal is to move the UN system from a crisis response to a conflict prevention approach that includes peacebuilding. The concept of sustaining peace as highlighted in the resolutions (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 (2016)) is a goal and process that aims to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. This concept is an important step forward because it acknowledges that conflicts are not linear. Sustaining peace is being developed at a time when global conflict dynamics are also changing. There have been four ground-breaking changes in the twin sustaining peace resolutions. Member States recognize that peacebuilding needs to happen before, during, and after violent conflict. Previously, the UN approach was post-conflict only, which made progress all the more difficult. Agendas in the UNGA and SC are changing to move past an outmoded division between pre- and post-conflict approaches. Henk-Jan cited the example of Burkina Faso, which had significant conflict indicators throughout the past year. Conflict prevention programs were needed earlier. In these contexts, failure to fund prevention work early may result in the United Nations having to spend billions of dollars on peacekeeping operations like in the Central Africa Republic.

Second, there is greater UN emphasis on the comprehensive nature of violent conflict and the multiplicity of factors driving it — from politics to resource competition, exclusion, unemployment, and corruption. This makes peacebuilding the responsibility of the entire UN system and demands involvement from diverse actors in human rights, humanitarianism, and, most of all, development, calling for comprehensive approaches as also reflected in the SDGs. The UN, like all big organizations, needs to break silos; it could draw inspiration here from Apple, which succeeded by forcing engineers and designers to work together from the beginning of product development. Like Apple, UN agencies must work together from the beginning of an issue, and the Secretary-General is actively pushing for more integration. The UN needs to work on prevention earlier and underscores the need for functional early warning analysis within the UN system.

The third shift in the UN peacebuilding approach is a focus on national ownership and civil society, the private sector, and all segments of the population together — in other words, leaving no one behind. Exclusion is the most critical factor in why peace agreements fail. On the flip side, including women and civil society in peace processes reduces the risk of relapse and brings together coalitions for change. Therefore, a critical component of national ownership and partnership under the sustaining peace resolutions is strengthening and broadening partnerships with civil society organizations. The Secretary-General's reports have recognized that civil society often plays a vital role in mitigating violent conflict, preventing escalation, and facilitating the necessary conditions for building and sustaining peace. The Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) led an unique, inclusive and consultative process of a joint UN-CSO Working Group that developed the UN system-wide Community-Engagement Guidelines on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Organizations that participated in this process included the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP), UN Women, GPPAC, International Peace Institute (IPI) and Quakers UN Office (QUNO). Peace Direct developed and coordinated the online consultation for the United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines.

The fourth and final shift is with respect to partnerships with other stakeholders — not a new concept but one growing in importance. The Sustaining Peace resolutions recognized partners that need specific attention, including regional and sub-regional organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS that can put pressure on the Member States. Other key actors include financial institutions like the World Bank, which has become an essential partner in sustaining peace. The new World Bank Fragility, Conflict and Violence strategy calls for a pivot to prevention and significant partnerships with civil society and youth.

2020 Review and Next Steps

The 2016 twin UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (A/RES/70/26 and S/RES/2282) called for a comprehensive review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture in 2020, informed by a new SG report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. This report will be forward-looking and emphasize the impact of the UN system's support to peacebuilding at the field level while reflecting on the Secretary-General's reforms (please see the 2018 and 2019 Reports of the Secretary-General).

The 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review will occur on three tracks. The first, the PBC, is open to all 193 UN Member States. Some issues to be reviewed have already been identified, including the transition from peacekeeping to a development setting; women, peace, and security; financing; and partnerships. The second track is an Eminent Persons Group that will participate in the consultations and will provide their findings in a letter to the Security Council and the General Assembly. Track three involves consultations with civil society, think tanks and Member States around the world, which have already been held in December 2019 with the Africa Union in Egypt, and now the United States, with the Washington, DC event at AfP.

Further consultations will be held in South Africa, hosted by Accord, Colombia, hosted by GPPAC, and Kenya, hosted by the Life and Peace Institute, among others. These tracks are considered an informal process and will feed into the formal Member State discussions on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review. The report will also include thematic papers from within the United Nations. PBSO has encouraged civil society to send documents directly to them, especially those on working with civil society.

Upon completion of the informal phase, the formal phase of the review will start. The President of the General Assembly will appoint two facilitators to develop an outcome resolution. The terms of reference will focus on implementation and aspire for a short resolution that focuses on gaps and challenges. The Member States will need to step up with financing and coherence, as these issues are not all due to problems with the UN system; the Member States also need to live up to their commitments.
A key addition to this process is the Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, which will be released in July 2020, focusing on the implementation of the sustaining peace agenda. One key area that must be addressed to ensure the success of this agenda is financing and countries need to step up and fully fund this agenda and address earmarks in the UN system that makes agencies compete for pots of money.

Guiding questions for the discussion with Civil Society included:

- What are the various roles civil society organizations play in peacebuilding and sustaining peace? What examples are there, demonstrating the impact of taking a holistic approach to peace?
- What are some good practices and lessons learned from building partnerships between UN and civil society organizations for peacebuilding and sustaining peace?
- How can the UN strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations? How can the UN build broader partnerships with non-traditional civil society actors? What are the main challenges, and how can they be addressed?

Global Partnership for the Prevention and Partnership of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Life and Peace Institute (LPI), and AfP opened the discussion by addressing a few critical overall technical and process themes.

Marina Kumskova, from GPPAC, opened the discussion by focusing on the need to ensure local leadership and develop better evidence for peacebuilding programs. She stressed, however, a key piece of the sustaining peace agenda required integration of all sectors working in conflict affected regions and contributing to the peacebuilding sector, especially the humanitarian sector. She also stressed the need to ensure youth are at the center of this agenda. Her main concern is that this agenda is not just a bureaucratic process, but it has a real, meaningful impact on how the United Nations works on peacebuilding. She also focused on the need for regional platforms so local civil society can participate in these discussions. One of her key points was the need to map local actors and ensure they are partners in this process and post 2020.

Her specific examples:

Coordinating joint analysis and peacebuilding strategies among major stakeholders: Lessons from West Africa

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been particularly successful in developing and operationalizing mechanisms for conflict prevention and sustaining peace using reliable information from the ground. GPPAC’s member, West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), has a strategic partnership with ECOWAS in the implementation of a regional early warning and response system referred to as ECOWARN. This partnership allows ECOWAS to access verified indicators and information collected and analyzed purposefully by WANEP. Such an engagement offers local peacebuilders the opportunity to contribute to Track I, to respond to conflicts, and to also inform policy debates and development through analytical, information collation, and networking role of WANEP. This information analysis and reaction system has
helped prevent electoral violence in the Gambia and constructively resolve electoral disputes in Côte d'Ivoire. The project enables ECOWAS and WANEP to gain access to real-time community-based conflict information, which previously went uncollected and unreported but is essential to operationalize sustaining peace in the region. GPPAC’s members have stated if data on early signs of violence is not utilized, then there is no point in collecting it.

**Monitoring cross-cutting developments relevant to sustaining peace at the regional level: Lessons Learned from the Asia-Pacific**

Engagements between a network of local women peacebuilders in the Pacific and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) led to the adoption by Pacific Forum Leaders of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). This action plan on WPS was the first regional plan designed to support and guide Member States to localize the WPS agenda into national policies and actions. The formulation of the RAP influenced the adoption of the regional Human Security Framework, a Conflict Prevention Framework, and the Security Sector Governance Framework. Through regional security consultative processes, local peacebuilders lobbied actively for the broadening of the definition of security to include human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, and regional cooperation. This expanded notion of peace and security is a welcome development and an opportunity to enhance a peace-development-humanitarian nexus in the region in line with the 2018 Boe Declaration.

At the global level, GPPAC welcomes increased recognition of local ownership. The draft Community-Engagement Guidelines which are expected to lead the UN agencies in their efforts of cooperating with local civil society and community stakeholders in peacebuilding. The UN engagement with these stakeholders should include capacity building of analysis, planning, programming and monitoring, and evaluation. These guidelines were developed with an expressed commitment to ensuring civil society ownership through a unique format and in an inclusive and consultative process. GPPAC sees a significant role for the UN to provide a new avenue for engagement with local civil society and GPPAC will advise civil society to use this opportunity to engage with the UN.

In all these contexts, the UN support is critical in capacity building of stakeholders and operational support for peacebuilding. Local networks, regional organizations, and UN Member States all play vital and varied roles at the regional level. A crucial next step should be mapping existing actors and their mandates. Based on this assessment, the UN can then provide the support needed to ensure regional operational partnerships to address the broader scope of issues relevant to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. These assessments must be done in an inclusive and participatory manner that reflects the experience and expertise of people in the region, including the Member States, regional organizations, and civil society.

**Lesley Connolly, from Life and Peace Institute (LPI),** focused her comments on what makes a good partnership. She explained that LPI has been working in the Horn of Africa for the past 35 years, with country programs now in the DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan. The partnership-centered approach LPI takes is one of mutual respect and meaningful participation. LPI adheres to an accompaniment model, which means that the Institute and partners analyze,
design, mobilize resources, and reflect on implementation together. In several programs and projects, LPI also closely accompanies partners’ change work on the ground – as opposed to the more common sub-granting implementation and financing to partners. These partnerships are based on adaptation to the environment and continually evolve, ensuring an open and transparent discussion of issues and the need to consider local perspectives in all aspects of partnerships.

As the international community, Lesley cautioned that we need to better reflect on what is working on the ground and build on that rather than come in with the mindset of “fixing it all.” By doing this, we can see what capacities need to be strengthened and change the starting point of engagement, under which the international community needs to allow local actors to set the terms and lead. Peacebuilding does not only happen when international actors are present. Therefore, moving into the next decade of peacebuilding, we must internalize this as a field and start programming with this mentality in mind.

**Liz Hume, from AfP,** highlighted the need to integrate other development sectors into conflict prevention beyond just doing no harm and develop better evidence to prove peacebuilding programs reduce and prevent violent conflict. These are critical issues that the Global Fragility Act, recently signed into law, and the World Bank’s first Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence also address. All bilateral and multilateral donors are struggling with the issues raised, but the peacebuilding community is at a tipping point. The issues raised are critical to ensure that this architecture and other bilateral and multilateral strategies are successfully implemented.

The ensuing participant discussion focused on the need for taking a long view and ensuring programs are much longer in duration. **Civil society representatives overwhelmingly stated that the UN funding and procurement mechanisms are complicated for local organizations and non-traditional partners to access.** They discussed flexible smaller funding mechanisms that accepted some risk. AfP members also advised looking beyond traditionally defined peacebuilding organizations to engage local actors, including faith groups, with considerable reach and longevity who do not look like or operate like typical implementing NGOs.

Participants also focused their comments on the need **for more inclusion of youth and women.** One participant with significant field experience in the Middle East urged taking cultural nuances into account and cautioned against viewing women or local communities as monolithic or taking a “tokenized” approach to gender. Another participant wanted to highlight the fact that youth are becoming more disillusioned and distrustful of governments and multilateral institutions; if PBSO fails to address this issue in the review process, it will look like the United Nations is just rearranging the bureaucracy.

Another key issue raised focused on **the need for governments to be held accountable,** and the significant impact the United Nations could have in this area. Henk-Jan discussed the importance of grievance mechanisms in governments for people to address societal problems. He said that
research finds that these systems can have a significant positive impact on attitudes and perceptions of the effectiveness and legitimacy of a government. Such systems are even more important than service delivery. However, others raised the issue that only systemic and structural change will address the reforms needed to change society.

In closing, AfP President and CEO Uzra Zeya thanked Henk-Jan and participants for their insights. She affirmed AfP’s readiness to support the UN review process and highlighted the power of networks like AfP, GPPAC, Pax Christi, and others present in helping inform an ambitious peacebuilding reform agenda for the next decade.