

5-year Review of Peacebuilding Commission

Geneva Peacebuilding Platform Consultative Workshop

April 2010

Introduction

On 12 April 2010, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform organised a consultation in the framework of the official Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) review, with the participation of two review co-facilitators – H.E. Ms Anne Anderson, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in New York and H.E. Mr Baso Sangqu, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN in New York¹.

This consultation aimed to enable the Geneva peacebuilding community to share its views on the past performance of the Commission and discuss the challenges the PBC review ought to address. The consultation brought together a wide range of experienced practitioners from the peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian communities. Throughout the consultation, the participants assessed the impact and potential of the PBC in relation to its role within the UN system and beyond, the linkages this organ generates across communities, the strategies it helps shape in-country, and, last but not least, its effectiveness in leveraging capacity and commitment.

The first segment of the discussion framed the debate, giving the co-facilitators the opportunity to present the issues that have emerged so far in their consultations and to get feedback from the audience on both the review process and its substance. The second segment considered in more depth a specific aspect of the PBC mandate, namely that of building knowledge for more effective peacebuilding policy and practice. The discussions were held under the Chatham House Rule.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission: Novel Character, High Expectations

In order to frame the discussion, the reviewers recalled the rationale for the creation of the PBC and the aims of the review. The PBC was created in 2005, out of the recognition of the need for a “dedicated institutional mechanism to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict towards recovery, reintegration and reconstruction and to assist them in laying the

¹ The third co-facilitator, H.E. Mr Heller-Rouassant, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN in New York, was unable to attend the consultation and was represented by H.E. Mr Hernández Basave, Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN in Geneva.

foundation for sustainable development".² The creation of the PBC was initially met with enthusiasm and high expectations for its potential contribution to peacebuilding, but its image has deteriorated over time for a variety of reasons.

The PBC review process

The (UNSCR/GA) founding resolutions that established the Commission included provisions for a review after 5 years. Led by the three facilitators—Ireland, Mexico and South Africa—appointed by the President of the General Assembly in December last year, the PBC review process consisted so far of a first open meeting with the PBC member-states and a broad series of informal consultations with a wide range of international and external stakeholders in New York and Washington. Following the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform consultative workshop, the review process will take the facilitators to Brussels, Addis Ababa, Burundi, and South Africa. A second open meeting among the PBC member states, during which the preliminary outcomes of the consultations will be discussed, will be held in New York in May 2010.

So far, there has been a genuine interest in the exercise of the PBC and no deep fractures in the membership, as opposed to what occurred in the reviews in other intergovernmental bodies (e.g. the Human Rights Council). There is a broad recognition that the expectations for the PBC have been over-ambitious and that, while an assessment of the Commission's performance must take into account its short period of activity, the review needs to thoroughly re-examine the PBC's potential and map realistic ways to deliver on it.

The issues discussed in the consultations so far have been condensed into an "emerging issues" paper presenting six emerging clusters: I) materializing a more strategic space for the PBC within the wider UN architecture, II) designing a smoother transition between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, III) mobilizing sufficient resources that give adequate weight to developmental challenges and account for both delivery and spending, IV) ensuring a more substantial connection to national and field-based actors, V) developing regional approaches that reflect the complexity of conflict situations, and VI) scaling up the PBC mandate and ambition to achieve a more strategic impact.

The participants to the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform consultation had not been provided with the "emerging issues" paper in advance. Despite this, a wide range of inputs was made at the consultation, which fit properly within the review's six clusters. The co-facilitators, who said they'd come to Geneva in a "listening mode", encouraged the participants to share their experience and recommendations. The main substantive points raised and discussed during the consultation are summarized below.

Defining Peacebuilding

One of the key challenges to the PBC lies in the very definition of what constitutes peacebuilding. Peacebuilding efforts are often restricted by the timing of other events, most notably the formalized signing of a peace agreement in the wake of the deployment of peacekeepers. Although they focus on a series of compartmentalized activities that seek to address a list of urgent needs facing the country recovering from war, they do not always grasp the full dynamics and drivers of conflict. This approach has resulted in an institutional concentration on the 'what' and the 'when' definition of peacebuilding, which is dictated by a

² UN General Assembly, "2005 World Summit Outcome," A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005 (New York: UN General Assembly), para 97.

narrow decision making process. With regard to these issues, participants highlighted the following key points:

- It was suggested that successful peacebuilding is far better described as a process defined by the 'how' and the 'who'. The international community has accumulated much knowledge on specific peacebuilding sector activities (e.g., Security and Public order; Justice and Reconciliation, Governance and Participation, Social and Economic Well-being). However, given that each context in which these activities are implemented is different, programming should be perceived as experimental and must be carefully designed and adapted across time, taking into consideration existing capacities and looking for long-term sustainability. With this in mind a strong recommendation to the PBC review was to facilitate over-arching strategies that concentrate on the 'how' of peacebuilding. Focusing on 'how' peacebuilding is conducted can help to assess whether a certain approach reduces tensions and solves some problems, or actually exacerbates tensions and reproduces the problem, sometimes even creating new ones.
- Of equal importance to the 'how' of peacebuilding is the 'who', defined by the actors involved in the process and the evolving dynamics between them. Currently the decision making structure of the PBC follows a narrow vertical chain from the UN country teams to the Commission in New York, in which a point of weakness at any level can affect the work of the entire architecture. Furthermore, in such an architecture, national ownership is dictated by Track 1 leadership, whose priorities may not match those of the wider population. Consequently, peripheral issues are often prioritized at the expense of the core conflict legacies, such as inter-ethnic reconciliation or problems related to complex state formation processes. In the absence of a serious conflict analysis informed by broad social representation, decisions are made before a consensus on priorities has been reached. As such, it was strongly suggested that the PBC shall seek not only to improve but also to set standards for the quality of participation in the strategic planning and monitoring of peacebuilding. This essentially means to ensure multi-stakeholder consultations at the field level that would seek to include a broad range of actors from different sectors and different levels. Only through such an approach can the PBC hope to formulate a common vision that induces national as well as societal ownership.

Role of the PBC

The review co-facilitators underlined the nature of the PBC as an advisory body to national governments, UN entities and UN structures, intended to facilitate interactions between actors and to provide solid suggestions to ensure an integrated peacebuilding strategy.

Promoting visionary strategies

With regard to the need for integrated strategies, participants considered it important to emphasise the following:

- A peacebuilding strategy is not equivalent to a recovery strategy, even in the event it is designed with a conflict-sensitive perspective.
- There is an important distinction to be made between *vision* and *plan*. The PBC is in a position to help nations develop a vision, but it is much less equipped in terms of planning mechanisms.

- The PBC should support a national vision, not an imported one. Too often, “national documents” are a mere reflection of UN or donors' expectations and not ones that represent the broader perspective of all citizens of the country.
- The PBC has a specific role in supporting multi-stakeholder processes aimed at identifying what peacebuilding means in a specific context, and within each activity undertaken in a given context.
- The ultimate goal of peacebuilding strategies should be to strengthen institutional and elites' capacities to manage peace processes by interacting with civil society. It starts with promoting a locally-driven, process-oriented, multi-stakeholder approach to develop the strategies themselves.
- Peacebuilding strategies need to be monitored and periodically revised. As the Burundi case shows, it is very difficult for ambassadors in New York to develop a coherent strategy that can keep up with the changes in the country. Therefore, strategies must be developed inside the country and be monitored by the people on the ground that are aware of events on a daily basis and are able to design and update strategies according that correspond to the evolving context.

Integration

Reflecting on the specific aspect of the PBC mandate related to integration and coherence, participants expressed the following opinions:

- Integration is not a panacea – integrating the entire UN system under the representative of the Secretary-General makes it a much more complex organ that may make programming more difficult than if it were carried out separately by each UN entity.
- In many ways, the UN system brings together unique units whose work is efficient, but that does not necessarily amount to consistent success over time. In Sierra Leone, the International Labour Organisation has launched youth employment programs, but in order for these efforts to reach a critical mass they need to be integrated within the wider peacebuilding processes. This type of common strategy can only emerge if UN bodies undergo an internal review and assess what the means to achieve such coherence are.
- The challenge for the PBC is therefore to avoid recreating bureaucracy (for example through in-country Peacebuilding Support Office Units) and, instead, to build more effective processes of convergence.
- When addressing coordination and integration issues, the international community needs to be mindful that this has little relevance to local actors. Peacebuilding is fundamentally about building relations of trust among internal actors, and therefore coordination between agencies is only relevant to the extent it helps enhance this trust.
- The PBC should consider the possibility of including outside actors within the various objectives it has set for itself. Currently, the PBC is a UN-centred body that leaves out much of the civil society organisations, while those are much better connected to the field and oftentimes have been working in the country throughout the duration of the conflict.

Integrating peacekeeping and peacebuilding

Peacebuilding has increasingly been defined as the integration of the military and civilian activities in post-conflict and fragile situations. Although the PBC was created specifically to address the gap between the end of violence - often ensured by peacekeepers - and the follow-up efforts to help the local population recover from war, attempts to homogenize peacebuilding through integration continue to face resistance from traditional mandate-oriented approaches and the PBC still has to find its way to promote peacebuilding strategies across sequenced activities, and amidst peacekeeping operations.

Arguing along this line, participants highlighted the limits of sequential thinking about peacekeeping and peacebuilding:

- Some participants argued that there are a few situations where there is no 'peacekeeping' mission.
- Furthermore, the common assumption that peacekeeping induces peacebuilding needs to be revisited. A participant clearly stated: "*you need to build first in order to keep*".
- In the minds of the affected population, peacebuilding starts from day one of a post-conflict setting, and does not start according to documents and timeframes of the New York-formulated integrated strategies. As such, peacebuilding should take place as early as possible, even prior to or in the midst of peacekeeping deployments.
- Although peacekeeping operations have been made increasingly comprehensive, they have simultaneously become overloaded with ambitious objectives. Mandates include promoting stabilization, the rule of law, and kick-starting institutional development within a limited period of time and with a high staff turnover. This accounts for poor results in terms of national ownership and long-term sustainability.

Political accompaniment

Providing "high level accompaniment" to peacebuilding processes in specific countries was discussed as an important part of the PBC's facilitative role. The Commission could leverage its authority to help identify gaps through consultations at the national and the local level, and strengthen mechanisms for mediation, dialogue and lasting consensus. To be meaningful, such accompaniment would enable sensitive issues to be raised and discussed, and criticism on the political course of a peacebuilding process to be expressed. Nevertheless, such a role for the PBC raises significant questions:

- First among them is the question of the compatibility of "diplomacy and peacebuilding". UN partnership is often confined to national governments who have to sign off on the peacebuilding strategies adopted. This structural problem has repercussions in terms of ownership issues, as governments do at times perceive civil society as the opposition. Furthermore the focus on ensuring a close relationship with national governments is likely to preclude the PBC from addressing sensitive issues and expressing criticism.
- Another question is how to increase the political leverage of the PBC. It was felt that the PBC could derive greater political authority from the Organisational Committee, provided the latter be made more relevant and effective.
- Participants wondered whether a "contact group" could help the PBC increase its political clout in specific countries. The composition of this group remained, however, an open question. Some participants felt that a group made up of countries with geopolitical or major economic/aid interests in the country concerned was needed to

have some sort of weight over the political process. Others, on the opposite, were of the opinion that a set of countries with little political and economic interest in the focus country would be more capable of critically and neutrally reviewing the peacebuilding approaches implemented in that country.

- Some participants highlighted that the PBC had fared well in fulfilling a spotlight function, by bringing to the fore issues which would not otherwise be prioritized under the conventional approach, such as natural resources management, Diaspora engagement, or reparations-related issues. In DRC, for example, the PBC helped link natural resources and peacebuilding activities as part of a joint vision, making the necessary administrative connections (i.e. consultations, joint missions, etc), mobilizing technical expertise, and marshalling funds.
- A specific role for the PBC in terms of political accompaniment was identified in terms of regional approaches to peacebuilding. International organisations are facing limits when addressing issues that have transnational implications, such as the nexus between displaced populations and armed groups.
- Participants also wondered whether the PBC could increase its political advocacy role beyond a narrow set of focus countries, and deal with critical political dilemmas as they emerge in conflict-affected countries.

Improving the PBC visibility and image

There was a general agreement that the improvement of the PBC's political leverage and impact on the ground required addressing the image of this new institution in a serious way. Specifically, participants highlighted the following:

- While the PBC has indeed grabbed more attention from international headquarters and the donor community, its efforts in terms of strategic guidance have been hardly visible on the ground.
- In the PBC focus countries, most of the key societal actors beyond the capital-based ones are not even aware of its existence, which raises doubt as to the PBC's capacity to foster nationally-owned strategies.
- Some participants also expressed concern that the PBC was seen as little more than another source of funding, with little strategic credibility even among national actors.

Accountability

Concerns were expressed during the consultation regarding the current mechanisms to ensure mutual accountability.

- Participants expressed regrets with the fact that the international community continues to be mostly upwardly accountable, and not directly accountable to beneficiaries.
- Furthermore, there is a common assumption that all post-conflict activities are presumed to be peacebuilding activities, without any verification as to whether they are in fact having a positive or substantive impact on the actual 'causes of peace' in the country.

- Members of the international community frequently take responsibility for service delivery as part of peacebuilding activities. This comes at the expense of capacity building within the national government and host communities.
- There is a need for greater transparency both in the amount and focus of support by donors. By developing indicators and monitoring the way peacebuilding activities are carried out, the PBC will be in a strong position to assess the efficacy of peacebuilding projects and identify those which make a genuine impact.

Consolidating Knowledge on Peacebuilding

There is a great deal of academic and practical knowledge that could help prevent the recurring missteps that the Peacebuilding Commission is supposed to address, but the knowledge is not properly absorbed nor easily employed by the UN system and the broader international community.

Some participants emphasized that the PBC could play a specific role in this, given that:

- To learn beyond their specific sectors of activity (humanitarian intervention, employment, migration...), organisations need to proactively develop procedures and incentive mechanisms that shift organisational routines, systems, or hiring practices to support the intended peacebuilding outcomes.
- Effective peacebuilding requires learning how to adapt to a specific context; it requires moving away from standard programmatic procedures and questioning how these practices do or do not fit with the context-specific dynamic.
- Apart from the PBC, there is no other body in the UN that focuses solely on peacebuilding and that could therefore be able to advocate for improved peacebuilding practice across the organisation.

Bearing these realities in mind, there are several initiatives the PBC could implement in order to consolidate peacebuilding knowledge and improve practice:

- Monitoring best practices with a focus on the peacebuilding process rather than its programmes. The PBC could serve as an accountability body, commissioning reports and ensuring that information on peacebuilding effectiveness is transparent and made available online. A stoplight system could be set up and discussed at each meeting of the PBC.
- The UN member states on the PBC also serve on the governing boards of many of the UN entities engaged in peacebuilding, and therefore have the opportunity to influence organisational incentives for the application of peacebuilding.
- Establishing and working with knowledge platforms and networks of research organisations to evaluate peacebuilding effectiveness, and to encourage formative evaluations that help improve ongoing practice.
- Working with Non-Governmental Organisations to implement a participatory multi-stakeholder consultation that would support the adaptation of programmatic lessons learned to each particular context.

Conclusion

The consultation facilitated by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform underlined the importance of approaching peacebuilding as a process in terms of *how* activities are conducted and *who* participates in them. Although sectoral best practices have emerged, individual activities need to be made context-specific to the realities on the ground. What remains constant is the necessity for an inclusive participatory processes that utilizes local capacity. Through such practices, peacebuilders are most likely to obtain the societal commitment to truly strengthen the capacity of local populations to resolve conflicts through non-violent methods. With this in mind, it was recommended that the PBC shall step beyond being a facilitator and take on a guardianship role mainly through advocating for the fundamental importance of concentrating on the 'how' and 'who' of peacebuilding; ensuring the utilization of these processes at all levels of peacebuilding through cross-organisational convergence; and formulating indicators of best practice to verify the efficacy of peacebuilding efforts and keep members of the international community accountable for their actions. Committed to these principles, the Geneva Peacebuilding Community of stakeholders expressed its willingness to continue exploring the concrete steps that need to be undertaken to progress in this direction.



Participants

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2010 Review of the Peacebuilding Commission Geneva Peacebuilding Platform Consultative Workshop

**Monday 12 April 2010
14:15-17:30**

Venue:
Geneva Centre for Security Policy

14h15 **Opening**, Dr David Atwood, Director, Peace and Disarmament Representative
Quaker UN Office

14h20 **Session 1: The PBC review - framing the debate**

Chair: Dr Caty Clement, Head of the Conflict and Peacebuilding Programme of the
Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Speakers: H.E. Ms Anne Anderson, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in New
York

H.E. Mr Baso Sangqu, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN in New
York

H.E. Mr Arturo Hernández Basave, Deputy Permanent Representative of México to
the UN in Geneva

15h45 **Coffee Break**

16h00 **Session 2: Building knowledge on peacebuilding**

Chair: Dr David Atwood, Director, Peace and Disarmament Representative Quaker UN
Office

Speakers: Mr Scott Weber, Director-General, Interpeace

Ms Susanna Campbell, Research Fellow, Centre on Conflict, Development and
Peacebuilding

17h15 **Closing remarks**

H.E. Ms Anne Anderson, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in New
York

H.E. Mr Baso Sangqu, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN in New
York

Dr David Atwood, Director, Peace and Disarmament Representative Quaker UN
Office