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PLATFORM

Geneva Peace Week 2021 Thematic Track Report

Moving beyond securitization: What risks (and new horizons) for Peacebuilding

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Geneva Peace Week 2021 (GPW21) took place from 1-5 November 2021, featuring Online Workshops and a Digital Series that focused on four main thematic tracks. This report will summarize the key emerging insights from the 9 workshops and 10 digital series offerings within the thematic track, ***“Moving beyond securitization: what risks (and new horizons) for peacebuilding”***.

An increasingly worrying trend among approaches to today’s challenges is the means by which perceived threats are framed through ‘hard security’ narratives and policies that have led to violations of human rights, and undermine or threaten the safety and solutions of communities themselves. This thematic track shone a light on this issue, providing a timely exchange on the impacts to peace, human rights, civil society, drug policies, the environment and climate change. This track grew from the continued work from colleagues and partners who sought to integrate a human rights-based dialogue at the GPW21. This note summarizes the most important insights and points of discussion from GPW21.

Change in perspective is needed - seeing those affected as being ‘at threat not as threats’. Responses to perceived threats have increasingly marginalized and violated the human rights of those communities themselves who are at threat. In the session on *Turning the authoritarian tide: strategies for transforming securitization*, panelists highlighted the impact of post-9/11 wars counter-terrorism policy, rising authoritarianism and the threats to civil society. Participants discussed how securitized approaches to countering or preventing so-called terrorism exacerbate conflicts and are enabled and justified by the global multilateral counter-terrorism framework that legitimizes governments to exclude human rights. In the context of the Philippines, discussions on how the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) framework is misused to crack down on opposition and dissent has led to criteria to assess individuals' political, religious and general information that has marginalized civil society and seriously violated human rights. Similarly, the session on *Drugs and (dis)order – how do we build peace in drug affected borderlands?* challenged the top down approaches to drugs and conflict through narrow law and order security lenses to highlight how these reinforce marginalization and ignore the threats to the communities in borderlands themselves while viewing them as threats. Across many sessions, both within this track and others during Geneva Peace Week, was the growing recognition of the role of securitization in climate change and the treatment of migrants, and deterioration of media freedom.

Among these sessions within the securitization track, there was notable interest in challenging current frameworks, increasing monitoring of human rights and putting people who are most *at risk* at the centre to address the root causes of the challenges that these communities face.

From actors to acts themselves. Shifting beyond securitization and addressing impacts to human rights requires a serious discussion about whether current frameworks are working to address insecurity and poor governance. Across numerous sessions, including *Shifting the Paradigm: Power and Responsibility* and *Rethinking Peace*, an open conversation about how power should be shifted, enabled participants to critically examine the acts of these policies and ask ‘who is the change for? Are we doing this with integrity and inclusion?’. A session on Liberia’s slums highlighted how inclusion of local youth can challenge securitization and allow communities to lead their own change. Further, in the workshop, *Addressing the legal and political barriers to peacebuilding engagement with proscribed groups*, panelists and participants discussed the need for policy and strategy to be centred on people and on peace to determine decisions on proscription, recognizing that proscription and donor aversion has damaging effects to peace. Across many workshops, commentary from a range of practitioners focused on challenging the elite strategy of Western government interests in security and stability for a few to address the wellbeing and human security of all.

Human rights approaches to ensure a just and peaceful response. An emerging theme among all sessions was the recognition of how securitization seriously violates human rights. Mandate holders in *Turning the tide on authoritarianism* called attention to the lack of monitoring and impact assessment of human rights in the current prevention and countering of violent extremism framework. Other speakers highlighted the importance of accountability and questioned whether we are genuinely looking at peace when addressing security challenges. Numerous workshops highlighted the importance of the 2016 Sustaining Peace Resolution (2282) in addressing the interlinkages between peace and security, and human rights. Across each of these sessions, many participants argued that human rights must be at the centre of approaches to ensure a just approach in the shift beyond securitization. In addition, there was notable interest in the need to challenge the military-industrial complex, the arms industry and ensure that governments work with local actors to create sustainable peace processes.

More engagement with the language of securitization is needed. Despite a rich discussion on the challenges and impacts of securitization, an important insight that



emerged in many sessions was what we mean by ‘securitization’, and the difference between security in general, the scope of actors within the security space and how securitization has emerged as a problematic trend, and how it operates. A deeper discussion emerged between participants on the role of security forces and what is needed when addressing security issues. In this context, there is a great need to unpack academic terminologies and increase awareness of securitization to ensure language is not misunderstood, co-opted or undermined when addressing security challenges and human rights violations.

Inclusion and bridging siloes. A final and underlying theme across the sessions was the role of inclusion, both within international, national, and local peacebuilding actors and mechanisms but also between peacebuilding, human rights and humanitarian sectors. When we seek to build peace and address security challenges, the need for genuine inclusion of communities themselves, their rights and agency must be amplified. This is not a new idea, but one which the message now must be adopted in practical policies and frameworks to move beyond securitisation. Similarly, recognising the interlinkages between human rights and peace actors is vital to strengthen and uphold prevention and sustainable peace. There was remarkable discussion on how to do this, from increasing cooperation between UN actors in Geneva and New York, to fostering new frameworks for participation and bottom-up approaches.