

## **“Who Makes Peace, Who Builds Peace?” National Ownership in Peacebuilding Processes**

*Workshop organised by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform as part of the  
International Security Forum 2009 in Geneva.*

### **Chair:**

**Thomas BIERSTEKER**, Curt Gasteyger Professor of International Security and Conflict Studies, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; and Adjunct Professor, Department of Political Science and the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Providence

### **Panelists:**

#### ***The Strategic Alternative: Backing a Decent Winner***

**Michael BARNETT**, Stassen Chair, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

#### ***A Reluctance to Commit: Does the International Community Have the Required Staying Power?***

**Alvaro DE SOTO**, Associate Fellow, GCSP

#### ***The Challenge of Building Broad National Ownership in Peacebuilding Processes***

**Scott WEBER**, Director-General, Interpeace, Geneva

### **I. Introduction:**

The objective of the panel “Who Makes Peace, Who Builds Peace?” was to consider the challenges that the international peacebuilding architecture faces in order to successfully establish the foundations of a lasting peace in post-conflict societies. In order to assess these challenges the panellists examined the interplay between the imposition of an externally-led peacebuilding model and the need for local ownership by addressing issues such as: identifying and supporting local peacebuilders, finding ways to deal with “spoilers”, taking into consideration local specificities, and developing nationally-owned and context-sensitive peacebuilding strategies.

### **II. Summary of the individual presentations**

Professor Biersteker opened the workshop session by providing brief introductions. Mr. Scott Weber presented the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and highlighted its significant contribution to peacebuilding practices.

**Professor Michael Barnett, Stassen Chair, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs,  
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis**

*The Strategic Alternative: Backing a Decent Winner*

Professor Barnett's presentation centered on providing an alternative model to Liberal Peacebuilding that tackles the critical issue of how to build stable states after war. He argued peacebuilding should not be about values (that barely work in Western societies), but about setting institutions that will allow for certain principles to develop. Instead of having the ultimate goal be the consolidation of a liberal state in post-conflict societies, the international community should aim at a *least bad state* that will commit to principles and processes. He suggested three key principles:

1. **constitutionalism:** the important role of a constitution to provide checks and balances within a state;
2. **deliberation:** the establishment of deliberative mechanisms which will assure that once ideas are made public there is more incentive to follow them through, and;
3. **representation:** a principle that ensures interests of the society are heard and realized.

Ultimately, he argued, the international community needs to be strategic: "less is more and less is better." International actors must be aware of the limits of liberal peacebuilding and be strategic about what in fact can be accomplished.

**Mr. Alvaro DE SOTO, Associate Fellow, GCSP**

*A Reluctance to Commit: Does the International Community Have the Required Staying Power?*

Ambassador de Soto acknowledged that national ownership is crucial, but insisted that external operations help ensure that channels and institutions for the solution of disputes are established so that future grievances can be addressed without resorting back to violence. Therefore, even though the international community needs the collaboration of locals in peacebuilding processes, it plays a crucial role in keeping these local actors honest. Ambassador de Soto remained doubtful, however, to what extent the international community has the patience of accompanying societies emerging from war: the "nascent architecture of peacebuilding" is left in wanting.

As a final remark, Ambassador de Soto addressed the issue of peacebuilding within the United Nations observing that since former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali's epiphany of describing peacebuilding in the *Agenda for Peace* (1992) as an "integrated approach to human security", very little had happened until 2005 when the World Summit took decisions for the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission. Despite some marginal improvement in issues of transparency between key actors (such as the Bretton Woods Institutions and the United Nations), the PBC has not been a successful step towards better dealing with peacebuilding operations. The creation of a separate body has in fact relieved the Security Council of the responsibility and the leadership it should have in ensuring the sustainability of a peace agreement. In conclusion, the international community is reluctant to commit wholeheartedly to the peacebuilding agenda.

**Mr. Scott WEBER, Director-General, Interpeace, Geneva**

*The Challenge of Building Broad National Ownership in Peacebuilding Processes*

Mr. Weber began by explaining that local ownership is one of the key peacebuilding principles that underpin the work of his institution, Interpeace. Peacebuilding is about

rebuilding relationships of trust within societies; it is not about how the international community can be more effective in a given country.

Issues about UN coordination are irrelevant and internal processes of change are what really matter. He agrees with Professor Barnett that the international community has to be strategic; it cannot impose democracy in a state where it does not grasp the depth of the conflict. Its only role is to help local actors sequence their peace processes. There are three imperative questions to be asked:

1. **how** do you get started? The first step is to do an actor (and conflict) mapping in order to be able to respond to the second question:
2. **who** needs to be involved in the process? Different groups in society have to be included: even spoilers need to be engaged and be given legitimacy and responsibility in the process.
3. **what** are key priorities for our society? Once the relevant actors are engaged they need to prioritize what should be implemented and in what order. Elections, which have been a priority for the international community, are usually a last priority for local actors.

As a final remark, Mr. Weber said that the international community needs to become invisible and leave credit and ownership for processes in local hands.

### **III. Summary of the discussion**

Once the floor was opened to debate the main questions were centred on what role the international community should play and how to better involve local actors. There was consensus amongst the panellists that the international community is an actor and does have an important role to play. Mr. Weber, for example, suggested that the regional effects of a conflict can most successfully be addressed by the international community (like in Afghanistan). In addition, the international community should act as an "encadreur" to help move internal processes forward and complement what already exists in the ground.

Ambassador de Soto insisted that the international community plays an important role and that the Security Council should be aware of the importance of a longer commitment. He stressed the key role of leadership to give a general sense of direction and how the choices of UN Special Representatives are crucial ones. However, there was heavy criticism from the audience on the fact that lead actors within the Peacebuilding Commission had no involvement on the countries that are in its agenda and that they are being strategic, but in regards to their own countries' agendas.

Professor Barnett commented on how in fact most international actors do not know what they are doing and that in reality context sensitivity does not exist. A better coordination of international actors is not enough when the machine overlooks internal processes. It is not just about rebuilding trust but about building societal contexts that might not have existed before.

On the issue of how to involve local actors Professor Barnett signalled that one of the main obstacles is the issue of accountability, which is directed towards donors and not towards locals. Ambassador de Soto said that if "spoilers" do not want to be involved then it is not worthwhile to attempt to engage them. Mr. Weber disagreed in saying that spoilers are different from freedom fighters and they do have cards to play that can be semi-constructive and necessary for peacebuilding processes.

### **IV. Conclusions**

The conclusions that can be drawn from the panel are that the international community has an essential role to play on peacebuilding operations but it should not

dominate the peacebuilding process: priority should be given to internal processes above all. International actors should be strategic and know how to prioritize issues and build trust among local stakeholders. In order to operationalise this, however, the role of leadership is crucial and has to be a combination of visionary approaches (being able to keep long term sustained international attention and engaging peacebuilders and spoilers in the process) and humble qualities (not letting egos get in the way of national ownership). Even though international actors are good at producing stable peace agreements there is still a lot to improve, especially within the UN, in what refers to the "nascent peacebuilding architecture".

**Rapporteur**

Andrea de Araujo Rivero, Project Assistant, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform