

On July 1, GCSP hosted the inaugural event for the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP), a public discussion entitled, "The Peacebuilding Commission Two Years Ahead: Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward." The talk was the first in a series organised by the GPP, a joint project of GCSP, the Quakers United Nations Office (QUNO) [<http://www.quno.org/>], and the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies [<http://www.iheid.ch/>]. The GPP aims to serve as a neutral forum for dialogue and exchange among the Geneva-based stakeholders involved in peacebuilding with a view to advance practical understanding of the key issues in peacebuilding.

To initiate the conversation, two panelists offered their insights on the United Nations' newly formed Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) [<http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>].

Professor Stephen John Stedman, who played a lead role in the UN high-level panel which first formulated proposals for the PBC's organisational structure, offered his perspectives both as an academic and as a practitioner. Mr. Ejeviome Eloho Otobo, Director of Strategic Planning and Deputy Head of Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) at the UN, reflected on his first-hand experience within the UN system. Stedman and Otobo both acknowledged that progress in the first two years at the PBC has been slow. However, both men also shared a sense of optimism, agreeing that the new Commission will continue to improve and expand its operations in the coming years. The current Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Switzerland, H.E. Nobuyasu Abe, chaired the discussion.

After some opening remarks from GCSP Director Amb. Dr. Fred Tanner and Dr. David Atwood, Director & Representative for Disarmament and Peace for the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Mr. Abe provided a brief background of the PBC. Following the bombing of UN offices in Baghdad in 2003, which claimed the life of Sergio Vieira de Mello and 17 other UN staff, then Secretary General Kofi Annan placed renewed emphasis on the issue of peacebuilding. Subsequently, Annan commissioned a report to explore the feasibility of establishing a new intergovernmental organisation (IGO) dedicated to helping countries recover from international and/or civil conflict. Prof. Stephen Stedman, currently Director of the Ford Dorsey Program in International Policy Studies at Stanford University became the head of the High-Level Panel on Threat, Security and Change which was convened to produce the report.

Professor Stedman began by noting that somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of peace agreements relapse into violence—with potentially disastrous consequences. As an example, Stedman remarked that it's often overlooked that the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 occurred *after* an agreement had been signed. There is thus clearly a need to conclude good agreements—that is, ones that last. Of course, this is easier said than done. In particular, Stedman suggested that peacebuilding efforts are commonly weakened by four factors: (1) inadequate strategy; (2) inadequate attention; (3) inadequate coordination;

and (4) inadequate resources. In the course of his remarks, he addressed each topic in turn, but focused most on the issue of strategy.

In broad terms, Stedman stressed that peacebuilding efforts needed to move beyond standard checklist approaches, which are task-oriented, to objective-oriented approaches that rely on an integrated strategy. To illustrate, he offered a generalised example. Peacebuilding typically requires that a large number of tasks be completed, ranging from the very difficult (disarmament) to the very mundane (the provision of identity cards). These are no doubt essential steps. But, according to Stedman, focusing on individual tasks may detract from the ongoing processes of mediation and negotiation, which arguably represent a more effective avenue for achieving long-term progress. Thus the objective for any peacebuilding organisation should be to first develop an integrated strategy—one that provides comprehensive and consistent support to all stakeholders.

This notion of an integrated strategy influenced Stedman's vision for the PBC. To integrate peacebuilding with the work of financing and development, his team's original proposal called for strong representation from international financial institutions (IFIs). To integrate on-the-ground knowledge, they stressed that those in the field should play a lead role in formulating the appropriate strategy. Subsequently, the field strategy would be approved by the relevant member states at the UN Secretariat. To provide flexibility and facilitate efficient decision-making, Stedman's team sought to limit the PBC to 20 members. And to integrate international stakeholders, they proposed that key donors, as well as main contributors of troops, be adequately represented. While some of these proposals were altered in the process of negotiations—the PBC currently has 31 representatives, for example—Stedman expressed pleasure that at least some of this organisational architecture has been retained.

Mr. Otobo followed up on Stedman's remarks, highlighting the PBC's inner workings and discussing areas for improvement. First off, he noted that a recent UN update report (PDF) [<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/>] confirms the Commission's early successes. Otobo then offered a rough metric by which to evaluate the PBC's first two years of operations. The metric took the form of four questions.

First, following the experience of the Commission's first two cases—Sierra Leone and Burundi—are additional member states showing interest in the PBC? Mr. Otobo offered a "categorical yes," pointing to new requests for referral from Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire. There is indeed demand for PBC assistance. Second, what has the process been like for Sierra Leone and Burundi? Highlighting the coordination between the PBC and the IMF, among other things, Mr. Otobo concluded that the experience has thus far been "positive, useful and valid." Third, is the PBC responding to the needs of post-conflict societies? Yes, said Mr. Otobo, citing evidence of successful financing. Specifically, the PBC provides three lending windows: (1) on-going funding for PBC countries; (2) provisional funding for countries at risk of lapsing into violence; and (3) an

emergency window, from which countries may request funds in order to respond to immediate risks. These funding options promise to provide responsive and flexible support, and—in Professor Stedman's terminology—represent an effective means of integrating finance, development and peacebuilding. Finally, and most importantly, is the work of the PBC influencing the attitudes, policies, and actions of UN member states? On this question, Mr. Otobo again answered in the affirmative. To demonstrate, he offered several examples in which members have increased funding, or extended new funding, to recipients of PBC support. He pointed specifically to Japan's recent decision to provide funds to Burundi, and to Sweden's and Norway's moves to increase aid to peacebuilding efforts. Development, Mr. Otobo concluded, is integral to sustainable peace.

Though the experience of the PBC has thus far been positive, Mr. Otobo did underscore some of the challenges that lie ahead. All of them were procedural or administrative in nature. Namely, in Mr. Otobo's estimation the Commission Country-Specific Meetings happen too frequently. Moreover, the approach should be revised so that an adequate period of time passes between the time when strategy planning is first initiated and the time when support is finally deployed (about nine months as initial practice tends to show).

A question and answer session followed Professor Stedman's and Mr. Otobo's addresses. The topics explored included: monitoring and accountability in PBC methodology; the need for leadership on the part of member states and the Secretary General; the extent to which PBC progress has been effected by regional collaboration, namely by the EU and the African Union; the appropriate role of business in peacebuilding activities; the widespread lack of explicit peacebuilding strategies within NGOs, IGOs, and governments; and, finally, the principled and practical reasons behind the decision to omit conflict prevention from the purview of the PBC. [A transcript from the Q&A will be made available in coming weeks.]

Professor Keith Krause, Director of the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding Keith Krauss at IHEID, offered his reflections to conclude the public discussion. He first asked, what makes societies peaceful? It's not necessarily the absence of conflict, Krause remarked, which is an inherent part to every society. Indeed, in many instances conflict may be seen as an ingredient necessary for progress. He further noted a general lack of emphasis on social norms—in his words, on "the social glue that keeps us all together." Professor Krause noted that throughout the afternoon, very little of the discussion centered on the object of peacebuilding—namely, people. In Krause's opinion, IGOs and state governments are necessary but insufficient instruments to effect lasting peace. Ultimately, peace is a function of whether people—that is, internal actors—resolve to settle past differences and move towards stability and development. From this perspective, the PBC, as an external actor, should aim to play a facilitative role in local and regional peacebuilding activities.