

What is after the New Agenda for Peace? Assessing opportunities and next steps for the Peacebuilding Commission

In-Person Discussion | 30 August 2023

Summary Note

The 2020 peacebuilding architecture review (hereafter, the 2020 review) concluded on 21 December 2020 with the adoption of dual resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/75/201) and the Security Council (S/RES/2558). The resolutions call on Member States, the UN, and other stakeholders to “continue to take action to implement the resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to advance efforts to bring greater coherence to peacebuilding efforts” (S/RES/2558, OP1). In line with this call, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) are continuing a series of roundtable discussions to examine strategies and pathways towards the operationalization of the 2016 resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

This roundtable discussion focused on the recommendations in the New Agenda for Peace for the UN intergovernmental bodies, specifically the Peacebuilding Commission, and identifying avenues available and support needed to continue and to bolster global action for the promotion of sustaining peace and conflict prevention.

The following are key themes that were raised during the discussion:

- *The Peacebuilding Commission and diplomacy for peace.*

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has the potential to convene multistakeholder discussions on topics that are difficult to put on the agenda of the UN Security Council, including on conflict prevention and climate change. The New Agenda for Peace (NA4P) recognizes that the PBC is well positioned to bring attention to and to convene dialogue on the underlying drivers of conflict, providing countries with advice and political support, and offering comprehensive approaches to address issues at the intersection of peace and development—such as the link between climate and conflict. The PBC can also prioritise strengthening its advisory role to other intergovernmental bodies on issues on which PBC Member States (MS) agree and have shared values.

- *The role of the Peacebuilding Commission and the prevention agenda.*

The NA4P has a strong focus on prevention and recommends the development of national prevention strategies. Emphasising the universal responsibility and applicability of prevention, the policy brief aims to destigmatise the prevention agenda and strengthen its link to sustainable development. During the discussion, participants explored the idea of national prevention strategies being treated in a similar way to SDG national voluntary reviews.¹ In this line of thought, the PBC could play a constructive role in providing a platform for these voluntary reviews to be presented and to elicit support, sharing progress, lessons learned and experiences

¹ Read more about Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

that could be useful in other contexts. Participants recognised that there is an obvious link to the work of UN Country Teams in supporting prevention at the national level (not least in their work on Common Country Assessments (CCA) that inform the development of Coordination Frameworks) and thus the involvement of the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes in discussions on how to advance this idea would be useful. The suggestion was also made for future voluntary national reviews on prevention to include the identification of risk factors and a clear link to mechanisms for early response in the emergence of violent conflict. While the list of risk factors and relevant infrastructures to address risks must be adapted to any particular context and decided at the country level, the PBC could provide support in promoting early responses to risks.

- *Strengthening the role of the Peacebuilding Commission and the New Agenda for Peace.*

Some Member States expressed surprise or disappointment at the lack of reform proposals in the NA4P, particularly on the Security Council and peace operations, which are seeing push-back in many host countries. Others interpreted the SG's policy brief as providing an invitation to Member States for action with small "hooks" that offer possibility for innovation and new ideas. One of the principles underpinning the case for more collective security in the policy brief, the universality of prevention, is contested by some Member States. In recognising the universality of prevention, the NA4P calls upon all Member States to invest in national peacebuilding and prevention strategies and capacities. On this point participants raised the point that there are different understandings of the meaning of universality and on prevention as a goal for all Members States versus focusing prevention efforts on countries that are fragile and affected by conflict and violence. Nevertheless, the follow up on the NA4P and preparations for the Summit for the Future presents an opportunity to use informal spaces, such as the Roundtable Series, to convene MS for discussions on prevention and recommendations on this theme also in the final Report of the High-level Advisory Board on Multilateralism.

Participants further emphasised the need to continue efforts to destigmatise the work of the PBC by improving communication in a way that addresses the lack of awareness of the PBC mandate even among Member States. Notable examples include a recent PBC meeting held on Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Reconciliation in Norway, Canada, and Colombia which sought to highlight the importance of conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding². Cooperation with other UN bodies and regional organisations has also allowed the PBC to provide input to the work of other intergovernmental bodies. For example, through its informal coordinators, Egypt and Denmark, the PBC has strengthened its bridging role with the General Assembly and ECOSOC respectively. Another specific area for improvement is the assessment of the PBC's impact at the country level. The PBC Secretariat in DPPA/PBSO highlighted the development of the Impact Hub which will help in this regard. Stronger links with regional organisations and civil society organisations will further support monitoring on the ground and lead to more context-specific peacebuilding support.

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UN Nations Peacebuilding. (2023, June 19). *PBC Meeting on Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Reconciliation in Canada, Colombia and Norway*. Retrieved from United Nations Peacebuilding:
<https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/pbc-meeting-indigenous-peoples-peace-and-reconciliation-canada-colombia-and-norway>

Participants highlighted that the PBC is also quite successful in building consensus in country-specific meetings. However, Member States have found it difficult to formalise PBC positions on certain topics, and to get agreed language on those topics (e.g., human rights and climate security).

Based on the key takeaways from the discussion, the following suggestions for follow-up are offered:

- In the lead up to the 2025 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, Member States, in partnership with the UN and civil society, could consider concrete action on the ideas put forward in the New Agenda for Peace, such as those focused on nationally led prevention strategies or an increased role for the PBC.
- Member States could explore using the platform provided by the PBC to present national reviews on prevention strategies, sharing best practices, lessons learned, and examples of prevention initiatives that are deemed successful.
- Processes leading up to the Summit of the Future and the adoption of the Pact for the Future also presents the PBC with an opportunity to build consensus on its role and support capacities to strengthen its effectiveness and impact.
- A comprehensive review and assessment of the PBC working methods including good practices and lessons learned could support efforts to strengthen the work of the PBC. Member States should develop a systematic approach to assessing and analysing the PBC's work, including country-specific and thematic meetings. It could be useful to develop a monitoring mechanism for the work of the PBC to facilitate documentation of good practices and support further institutionalisation.
- The PBC should be bold and lead thematic discussions on cross-pillar issues in its convening role. This includes taking into account relevant recommendations made by the Human Rights Council.