

Strengthening the Peacebuilding Commission - Enhancing an Evidence-Based Approach in Partnership with Civil Society

A Discussion of the Operationalising Sustaining Peace Roundtable Series

1 July 2025

Summary Note

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2025 PBAR) presents an important opportunity to follow-up on the commitments made in [the Pact for the Future](#) to ‘strengthen the Peacebuilding Commission ...to bring a more strategic approach and greater coherence and impact to national and international peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts’. This includes efforts to ‘strengthen the advisory, bridging and convening role of the Commission’, and for it to ‘consult with civil society, nongovernmental organizations, including women’s organizations and the private sector’ (Action 44).

Recent research by [the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs](#) and the [New York University Center on International Cooperation](#) provide arguments that applying evidenced-based approaches guided by the latest research and diverse knowledge available about specific contexts, and peacebuilding practices in general would make the work of the Peacebuilding Commission (the Commission hereafter) more relevant and impactful and suggest ways of doing so. In follow up discussions, Member States have acknowledged that ‘civil society brings valuable, country-level perspectives and can contribute to more inclusive and holistic discussions within the Commission’. Other stakeholders such as academic institutions, think tanks and national and local experts also [provide](#) expertise on ‘both country-specific contexts and/or good practices.’

This roundtable discussion served as an opportunity to outline ways to strengthen the evidence-based approach of the Commission by engaging with stakeholders such as academia, think tanks, local peacebuilders, and other national and local experts. It also explored concrete modalities for bringing together the Commission with diverse experts and knowledge holders in a regular and coordinated manner. Participants recognized that as the Commission is a political body, with its members being diplomats with diverse backgrounds who can benefit from input from technical experts (e.g. from capital, academia and civil society) to strengthen the Commission’s impact.

The following key points emerged from the discussion:

The Commission’s work would benefit from improving its access to quality information and analysis on the contexts under its consideration. This could be accomplished by 1) diversifying the expertise available to the Commission during and ahead of its meetings and as a contribution to its advisory opinions, and by 2) both enhancing the modalities for accessing expertise and external analysis and improving the alignment in timing of when this expertise is accessed.

Diversifying expertise could include increased opportunities for civil society, UN field presences, think tanks and various other stakeholders to share input with the Commission. Some examples were shared in the discussion, including PBSO’s recent submission from the Peacebuilding

Contact Group on MINUSCA, which is considered to be a good practice (noting that this submission did not include civil society perspectives). Member States welcomed similar contributions by civil society. Where possible, such efforts should be consolidated.

Furthermore, the CSO-UN Dialogue is an effective platform that serves three main purposes: 1) to provide a pool of briefers that could be considered by the Commission for input into its discussions, 2) to enrich advice provided by the Commission through field-level experiences, and 3) to ensure a more structured conversation between CSOs and the Commission - in the future intended to be made more two-way. By focusing on engaging CSO networks in the discussions of the Commission allows for more diversity of expertise and experiences. Participants suggested that the CSO-UN Dialogue could be further enhanced by having more focus on a specific context of relevance to the Commission, while also ensuring that the Dialogue convened on a more frequent basis, rather than being held as an annual event.

In complement to the CSO-UN Dialogue, a Peacebuilding Week could be another opportunity to engage in a more structured way with the research community. The Commission also could consider building on its engagement in other processes, including the increased number of briefings by the Commission's Chair to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and opportunities that emerge as part of the ongoing review of peace operations, including upcoming events scheduled in New York (5-7 November 2025). On this note, participants in the discussion highlighted that the Commission could and should also provide advice to other intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly. Finally, there are opportunities to bring expertise of local peacebuilders into the work of the Peacebuilding Impact Hub, including in the collection of quality impact stories at the field level.

The Operationalising Sustaining Peace roundtable series serves as another platform for Member States to strengthen the evidence base on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Complementing other initiatives, the series can strengthen the impact of the Commission's work by sharing independent and diverse research and knowledge with Member States of the Commission on a regular basis throughout the year. While currently limited through financial constraints, the roundtable series can make quality analysis available to Member States in a timely manner, supporting Member States to be prepared for the Commission's meetings on thematic issues and specific countries/regions. The roundtable series also provides Member States of the Commission at the expert level with an informal and off-the-record space to facilitate consensus-building.

Even though it is not possible to ensure a fully predictable schedule for the Commission while also maintaining flexibility and responsiveness to countries requesting support, there are still opportunities. For example, the mandate renewal calendar within the UN Security Council is known almost a year in advance. This provides sufficient time to align the Commission's work, with advice developed 6-8 months in advance, with civil society and think tank expertise enriching the discussions and the outcomes.

The Commission's Member States need to specify what expertise and knowledge are needed to improve the work of the Commission. Different stakeholders bring different value to the work of the Commission. For example, local peacebuilders can convey the key concerns

within communities and share compelling stories of peacebuilding impact. Think tanks and academia can provide analysis on the trajectory of peacebuilding action throughout the years in a specific context, as well as the latest research findings on certain relevant themes (e.g. national prevention strategies). NGOs working with the Commission are able to articulate how the perspectives of others can be framed in a way that is more relevant for the work of the Commission. UN field-level presences can provide an overview of peacebuilding processes taking place at different levels. To ensure strategic and tailored support to the Commission and to know how best to draw on the value of each of the above-mentioned actors, it is important that Member States articulate what expertise and knowledge they need and at what point it is most useful.

The advisory role of the Commission may be advanced through alternative mechanisms for the UNSC to access information. The persistent concern about the quality and timing of the advice provided by the Commission to UN bodies such as the UNSC, signals a need for alternative mechanisms for making information available to the UNSC. Regular joint PBC-UNSC expert meetings with academics, researchers, CSOs, amongst other matter experts could be one opportunity to share information and expertise with diverse UN Security Council Member States. The outcome of these meetings could be used to negotiate the written advice sent to the UNSC and ensure all expertise is shared with UNSC members. This would overcome a key challenge of the Commission: it being a political body, representing diverse views and operating through consensus, as Member States would hear all the expertise, even if it does not make it into the written advice. In organising these discussions, it is critical that alternative platforms do not become a space only for like-minded Member States to engage, but rather allow for diverse participation.

Modalities similar to Arria Formula Meetings of the UNSC could also be considered. In this light, Member States could organise a coordinated series of side events respecting the format of the Commission, with each new meeting organised by a different member of the Commission. This would ensure burden-sharing and inclusion of diverse priorities. These meetings could help Member States build expertise and collectively contribute to decision-making. More intentional use of Informal Interactive Dialogues (IIDs) should also be considered.

The roles and functions of the Commission's Vice-Chairs should be clearly articulated and operationalised. How to encourage all Member States of the Commission to fully engage and invest in the work of the Commission has been a long-standing point of discussion. The idea of increasing the number of Vice-Chairs from two to four was adopted during the Croatian Chairmanship (2023) to improve burden-sharing and to alleviate the Chair from having to bear sole responsibility for the Commission's functioning. However, the roles of the Vice-Chairs have not been determined or operationalised to date. One of the Vice-Chairs could, for example, take responsibility for the engagement of diverse actors in the work of the Commission. A good practice in this regard is considered to have been tested during the Egyptian Chairmanship (2021), where the Chair encouraged Member States to take the lead on specific issues. In response, South Africa took the lead on advancing discussions on innovative financing, and Japan on the engagement of IFIs. This practice seems to have stalled. Sharing responsibilities among the Commission's membership can contribute to organizing more activities to support an evidence-based approach to the Commission's work.

The Commission would benefit from its Member States developing a shared vision of what ‘strengthening the Commission’ entails. The challenge in articulating needs in part stems from Member States having a different understanding and perspectives on where the Commission adds the most value (e.g., as a forum to exchange good practices, as a knowledge hub, as a political body focusing on its original mandate, etc.). While some Member States are interested in more direct engagement in specific contexts, others envision increased use of Commission’s convening capacity and bolstering its knowledge management function. Further discussions on how to obtain a balance are needed.

In summary, Member States of the Commission could consider the following recommendations to enhance an evidence-based approach to the Commission’s work:

- **Specify what expertise and knowledge are needed to enhance the work of the Commission.** To ensure that input to the Commission is strategic and tailored, diverse Member States need to be more explicit about the type of expertise they need to increase the value and impact of the Commission’s work.
- **Support mechanisms to make diverse expertise available to the Commission during and ahead of its meetings and as a contribution to its advisory opinions.** This includes the encouragement of submissions by the Peacebuilding Contact Group and diverse think tanks and technical experts and giving these submissions adequate consideration in its deliberations. Beyond written submissions, the evidence base could be made available through expert meetings of the Commission or the Operationalising Sustaining Peace roundtable series. The proposed annual Peacebuilding Week and the CSO-UN Dialogue could further deepen the discussions with the diversity of expertise and strategic focus of such dialogues. While the Commission’s meetings often happen on short notice, relevant peacebuilding stakeholders interested in engaging with the Commission should consider the mandate renewal calendar within the UN Security Council.
- **Consider alternative mechanisms for sharing advice with UNSC Member States.** Regular joint PBC-UNSC expert meetings with academics, researchers, CSOs, and other technical experts could be one opportunity to share information and expertise with diverse UN Security Council Member States. In organising these discussions, it is critical that alternative platforms do not become a space for only like-minded Member States to engage but rather allow for diverse participation and respectful exchange of different perspectives and experiences. Modalities similar to Arria Formula Meetings of the UNSC could be considered. In this light, Member States could organise a coordinated series of side events respecting the format of the Commission, with each new meeting organised by a different member of the Commission. More intentional use of Informal Interactive Dialogues (IIDs) should also be considered.
- **Advance the process of defining the roles and functions of the Commission’s Vice-Chairs.** One of the Vice-Chairs could, for example, take responsibility for the engagement of diverse actors in the work of the Commission.

- **Develop a shared vision of what ‘strengthening the Commission’ entails.** While some Member States are interested in more direct engagement in specific contexts, others envision increased use of the Commission’s convening capacity and bolstering its knowledge management function. The Operationalising Sustaining Peace roundtable series and/or a dedicated workshop on this topic could be an avenue to have this discussion off-the-record and with the focus on supporting consensus-building.