



INTERNATIONAL
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Strengthening the UN Peacebuilding Commission

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On February 27, 2013, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), in collaboration with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, convened a roundtable workshop to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in supporting postconflict countries. The meeting brought together PBC member states, UN experts, and representatives from civil society and academia with an interest in the commission's work.

This meeting note summarizes the ideas and suggestions that arose during these discussions. It was drafted by Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, a visiting fellow at IPI, and Camilla Campisi, a UN representative at QUNO. The note reflects the *rappor-teurs'* interpretation of the meeting and not necessarily the views of all other participants. IPI owes a debt of gratitude to its many generous donors whose support made this publication possible.

Executive Summary

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) needs to demonstrate accelerated progress, cohesion in New York and around the world, and concrete added value in the field before its second comprehensive five-year review in 2015. These ideas and recommendations emerged from a workshop for new and current PBC member states held at the International Peace Institute (IPI) on February 27, 2013. Organized by the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and IPI in collaboration with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the event brought together PBC member states, UN experts, and representatives from civil society and academia with a particular interest in the commission's work.

Approximately fifty participants discussed challenges and opportunities for the PBC in accompanying countries through transition and peacebuilding processes after conflict, yielding the following key insights.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

Speak with One Voice

More cohesion at UN headquarters and in capitals is needed to ensure that PBC members can build trust between national governments and UN actors. Fragmentation of messages and actions interferes with the consistent approach required when accompanying countries through political transitions and periods of peacebuilding after conflict. One necessary step toward achieving greater cohesion is a clearer, more adept management of the relationship between the PBC configuration and the UN mission in the field. The PBC could also enhance cohesion among key security and development actors across the UN system by delivering a consistent message with a unified voice on the peacebuilding priorities of each country on its agenda.

Engage with Civil Society

The PBC plays the difficult role of a “critical friend,” building a shared understanding of a government's peacebuilding priorities in situations where governments are rebuilding their legitimacy. To maximize its impact in building sustainable peace, the PBC should balance its state-centric approach with increased engagement with citizens, civil society organizations, and other actors on the ground. This is a challenge for a New York-based body, and participants called for further exploration of how to best support the citizens of a country throughout postconflict transitions. Engaging on this level ensures processes—from politics to trauma healing—will be inclusive of

previously excluded voices, like those of women and minorities.

Facilitate Inclusive Reconciliation

Engaging across multiple levels is also critical for reconciliation, a highly complex and context-specific process that can transform relations and institutions in postconflict societies. All but one country on the PBC's agenda is currently undergoing a reconciliation process, with many more informal activities occurring at the community level. In listening to local voices and civil society driven processes, PBC members can better understand the history of violence and its impact. This is a necessary step toward facilitating an environment conducive to inclusive reconciliation.

Demonstrate Added Value

Finally, PBC members have a responsibility to deliver results. Participants identified three broad ways to demonstrate added value in countries on their agenda. Members can mobilize resources to fill funding gaps, share their experiences of peacebuilding in their own countries, and increase political will through enhanced coordination. These methods underscore the importance of cohesion in the field and at UN headquarters, including in the Security Council.

Background: A Critical Moment for the PBC

This year marks the seventh session of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, a critical midpoint between its five- and ten-year reviews. In theory, the PBC's accumulated experience in fragile and conflict-affected states could make it a core reference point for UN action. Country-specific configurations (CSCs) in New York bring together representatives from an individual country on the PBC's agenda with those contributing troops or financial resources, senior UN leaders and partners in the field, and other countries in the region engaged in postconflict work. CSCs can offer important lessons learned for the debate on post-2015 development goals and the special challenges in conflict-affected states. The PBC is uniquely placed to focus international attention on fragile states and mobilize resources. However, there is a widespread impression that member states could

more fully carry out the responsibilities of commission membership.

To that end, the PBC's newly elected chair, Croatia, seeks to further improve working methods and deepen the commission's engagement with key operational partners. The 2013 agenda calls for an evaluation of PBC members' roles and their existing relationships with other principal UN organs. The chair also aims to improve resource mobilization by PBC members, who can advocate for donor funds and engage with the private sector and support revenue management in countries on the agenda. Members can avoid duplicating their efforts, review existing mechanisms and structures, endeavor to maximize their limited capacity, and build on experience gained from the PBC's day-to-day work and impact on the ground. Finally, the chair hopes for serious progress in the development of indicators to measure success. By mid-2013, revised PBC working methods will be published to help accomplish these goals.

Participants at the workshop considered the upcoming agenda of the PBC and revisited the broader role of PBC membership. Participants called for each member of the PBC to ask how their influence, expertise, and resources could be brought to bear in the work of the commission to enhance cohesion and to make important connections between local, national, and international peacebuilding processes.

Political Accompaniment

The PBC is most effective when it supports senior UN leaders in the field, fosters trust with national governments, and builds consensus on a country's peacebuilding agenda among actors on the ground and in New York. This role of supporting countries through political transitions and periods of peacebuilding after conflict is known as "political accompaniment." In this respect, the PBC can use its New York location as an asset by conveying messages from the field, bringing them to the attention of central UN actors, and mobilizing resources accordingly. Though its field engagement is limited by its New York base, the PBC is also well placed to build a bridge between the government and UN country teams and mobilize resources to further their work. Peacebuilding involves intensely political processes of conflict transforma-

tion, with local communities and the state coming together to reconcile their expectations for the future. Member states need to balance advocating for the government with acting as a “critical friend” that reports progress and problems in a given country situation. To that end, the PBC could increase civil society engagement and explore how to “accompany” the citizens of a country, not just its government.

CSC member states and their representatives across UN forums—in the General Assembly, the Security Council, and economic bodies—can add value by maintaining a consistent message on the peacebuilding agenda of a country and serving as a unified voice for that agenda. When the PBC was founded in 2005, the UN lacked a forum to bring together security and development actors for cohesive engagement. The PBC was intended to address poor coordination within the UN, evidenced by short-term attention to conflict states, lack of timely financing, and difficulty holding actors accountable to commitments. However, reaching a level of coherence between actors in the areas of governance, development, security sector, and finances has so far proved challenging for the PBC. The commission adds the most value when it maintains its focus on broader policy issues, as demonstrated by lessons from countries like Burundi.

Burundi was one of the first countries on the PBC’s agenda, where it operated alongside the UN Peacebuilding Fund and projects it funded. In its early years, the CSC did not mobilize any additional funds, which led the government to doubt its added value, viewing the PBC as merely another supervisory body. By the elections in 2010, the PBC was formally recognized as one of the key stakeholders for a short time. However, within the country, some perceived the PBC as absent during the elections and related violence, further undermining perceptions of its value in Burundi. During this difficult early engagement, the CSC might have partnered more closely with the special representative of the UN Secretary-General and adapted as the situation in the country evolved. In general, without a solid working relationship between the CSC and UN presence on the ground, fragmentation can occur and threaten effective engagement and cohesive messaging. A successful donor conference in Geneva in October 2012

created a new sense of purpose for the PBC in Burundi, and the CSC now has the opportunity to continue to build cohesion and trust with the government.

Increasingly, actors from Burundi and elsewhere ask the PBC to consider non-donor countries as chairs of CSCs. Some meeting participants expressed the view that the Global South could play a greater role in UN peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, regional support is crucial to long-term peace and stability in fragile states. Postconflict processes are most sustainable when they are nationally owned, regionally anchored, and internationally supported—principles that can inform the work of the PBC.

Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

All but one of the countries on the PBC’s agenda is undergoing a national reconciliation process in addition to informal, local peacebuilding activities. Reconciliation is essential to transforming societies and moving from fragility to peace. Reconciliation is driven by national and local actors, and therefore raises particularly difficult challenges for the New York-based PBC. Still, the commission can play a role in supporting and facilitating an environment that fosters reconciliation.

To promote reconciliation, the PBC can support the creation of mechanisms that promote a “culture of peace” and cultivate the most basic interactions in society—inviting citizens and neighbors to return and work together again. CSCs can play an accompanying role, by working with different actors to ensure their voices are heard and encouraging strong leadership by national institutions and government. In the case of Burundi, one local perspective is that “the seeds of tomorrow’s wars grow in the soil of today’s healing and reconciliation,” meaning that the community must heal itself holistically in order to foster a lasting culture of peace. Again, civil society engagement is important for effective reconciliation, and the CSC can advocate for an inclusive process that honors the voices of victims, women, and minorities. The PBC can work to ensure that a public dialogue takes place with the entire societal spectrum present. Member states can also mobilize international

support for critical reconciliation work.

CSCs can encourage the government, when building a national reconciliation process, to take into account already existing success stories recorded by local communities. In Burundi, a national truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) is being established, while activities at the local level are already promoting reconciliation. Socioeconomic activities at the community level that foster inclusion and social cohesion can be valuable for setting the stage for broader efforts like the TRC. Local trauma-healing activities have also been successful in the reintegration of ex-combatants and returnees into the community.

In the case of Liberia, reconciliation is high on the agenda of both the Security Council and the Liberian government. The PBC supported the creation of a reconciliation roadmap for the country, an important part of moving the process forward. Even though a wide range of government and civil society actors are involved, local buy-in from the population remains uncertain, and it has been difficult to make progress on justice issues relating to reconciliation. Sequencing is important for local and national actors who seek to confront the past through community-based truth telling, manage the present by amending history books, and forge the future by refining laws and reforming services. Reconciliation needs to be addressed both in the postconflict period and over the long term. The PBC can help to create a space for dialogue and discussion of lessons learned, including how to better plan, coordinate, and implement reconciliation in Liberia throughout these crucial steps and phases.

In taking on a role in reconciliation, the PBC can draw more systematically from past processes and successes. Local practitioners on the ground offer valuable lessons, and platforms for horizontal learning could be established between PBC countries. Institutional transformation can help (re)build the relationship between citizens and the state. Similarly, if it is inclusive, constitution making can be a valuable opportunity to consider reconciliation. Peacebuilding programs supported by the international community should advance reconciliation and healing to reduce the risk of a relapse into violence.

Defining the Role of PBC Membership

Some participants opined that the record of the PBC to date falls short of expectations, particularly the expectations of the countries on its agenda. When considering their role going forward, member states need to acknowledge the commission's limitations. The PBC cannot set its own agenda and does not have operational power; it has a small secretariat (the PBSO) and a fund that shares its ideals but is not within its control. One suggestion was that the PBC might increase its value by examining its agenda and questioning which countries should be on it. This may raise tough issues like how a country can move to a new stage or even "graduate" from the PBC's agenda, as well as how to approach countries that remain entrenched in conflict despite extensive UN efforts.

Another point of discussion was whether the assets of PBC members are being fully utilized, and a number of ideas arose in this respect. Some PBC members have themselves emerged from conflict, and comparative learning could be useful in this respect. PBC members could also emphasize coordination, both within their missions and with their capitals, to leverage power in different forums. Member states could bring more political weight through greater involvement of their capitals and their permanent representatives. Similarly, member states need to consider what their delegations can do beyond participating in meetings and how to effectively transmit information from PBC meetings to their capitals and decision makers. Capitals could benefit from training, not just ad hoc collaboration, on what is involved in PBC membership.

The role of PBC membership extends to joining and chairing CSCs. When briefing the Security Council, ideally a CSC chair speaks on behalf of the entire PBC configuration, not simply his or her own country. Chairs face numerous capacity challenges, including prioritizing time for PBC engagement. If a chair can mobilize other members of the configuration to be more involved, this could lead to greater capacity for the CSC and the chair. To date, too much has been left to the

chairs of CSCs. Still, CSCs have increased their skill in aligning and supporting national peacebuilding priorities; their next challenge is bringing governments on board with this approach.

To do so, PBC members could increase cohesion through enhanced coordination and demonstrate added value by increasing political will and mobilizing resources. Members could participate in donor conferences, investigate and apply their own expertise, and use existing influence within the international community to encourage sustained attention. In incorporating local and civil society perspectives, PBC members could also innovate on issues such as cross-border peacebuilding, regional approaches, and addressing the continuum and resurgence of conflict in countries on the PBC's agenda. In addition, PBC members, particularly CSCs, could bring all stakeholders together to help create a platform that bridges divides in societies recovering from conflict.

Conclusion: Increasing the PBC's Cohesion and Impact

The next two years mark a critical turning point for the PBC. The urgency and centrality of peacebuilding is clear, but unless the commission's pace of progress accelerates, the second comprehensive review of the PBC in 2015 will be even more critical than the first. The PBC can aim higher and assess where it can affect positive outcomes. A clear determination of best practices and effective methods could help the commission move forward.

The PBC needs an overarching focus on increasing cohesion in New York and around the world. It could become an engine that enlarges the toolkit of the UN and pushes for more resources for peacebuilding and sustainable conflict prevention. In doing so, the PBC needs to regularly demonstrate concrete added value in agenda countries. Peacebuilding is not done in New York, and the PBC must bring in other actors and deliver results in the field. PBC members can add value by mobilizing resources to fill funding gaps, fostering expertise, raising political will, and engaging civil society. This can only happen if the commission and its member states strive for increased coherence in their activities in New York, in member state capitals, and on the ground in countries on the PBC's agenda.

The **INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE (IPI)** is an independent, international not-for-profit think tank with a staff representing more than twenty nationalities, with offices in New York, facing United Nations headquarters, and in Vienna. IPI is dedicated to promoting the prevention and settlement of conflicts between and within states by strengthening international peace and security institutions. To achieve its purpose, IPI employs a mix of policy research, convening, publishing, and outreach.



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