

Transitions, Inclusion and Opportunities in the new UN Peacebuilding Landscape

QUNO remarks during the Peacebuilding Commission Annual Session 2016, “Transitions as a challenge to consolidating peace and security: The role of the PBC in diplomacy and political accompaniment”, 23 June 2016

QUNO had the opportunity to make brief comments from the floor in both of the two interactive working sessions.

Interactive working session 1: Countries undergoing transitions: key challenges

Dear Friends, I would like to offer three reflections in response to the concept note for today’s meeting and the remarks made by our speakers this morning.

Transitions: The real transitions are the ones that happen not in New York but in countries, transitions in national circumstances, in political accommodations and in the political economy – that is, changes in the lives of real people affected by violent conflict. These transitions are complex, often slow moving, and heterogeneous. They don’t fit into a simplistic generic conflict cycle framing – each situation is unique, with local drivers and dynamics. That is where we start. The other sorts of transitions that have been discussed today are those in the forms of UN engagement, but these are largely artifacts of the clumsy and discontinuous nature of the tools that the UN has at its disposal. The challenge should be how we can better design sustainable UN accompaniment of long term country and regional transitions to peaceful, just and inclusive societies, rather than the other way around.

Cooperation and coordination: All actions by the UN community, even those at times of crisis, even those in response to threats to peace and security, need to be connected to a long term strategy to accompany and support the development of peaceful societies. There always must be a longer term vision – and the 2030 Agenda provides not a bad starting point. Developing and conflict-affected countries are currently faced with, at worst, an uncoordinated collection of different plans and strategies, shortly to be joined by 2030 Agenda implementation plans, including those for Goal 16. We need to find better ways of coordinating the actions of all actors around a common vision – and this is surely a role for the PBC if it should choose to accept it.

Inclusion: The three peace reports all found that local actors are best placed to help the UN identify the root causes of conflicts and develop responses that best serve the needs of all segments of the population. National ownership has rightly been emphasized, and the sustaining peace definition usefully broadens the understanding of national ownership as something that must be inclusive of all segments of society. For long term peace to be achieved, multiple viewpoints must be taken into account. In the short term, a number of steps can be taken which could have impact:

- Improve access for civil society to the PBC in New York and in country
- Support and expand existing mechanisms for community engagement, such as the work of civil affairs in DPKO and of the Peace and Development Advisors of the joint program.

- Enhance in-country access for civil society to UN missions and strategic discussions: civil society space is shrinking in countries all around the world, and the UN needs to proactively model pluralistic modes of engagement with the whole of society

Interactive working session 2: What role for the PBC in accompanying countries undergoing different types of transitions

I have some additional thoughts to offer as regards the opportunities that now lie before the Peacebuilding Commission:

PBC role: the opportunity now before us is for the PBC to become the place where longer term national and regional strategies for sustainable peace are articulated, refined and supported. The Security Council is the crisis manager and lead on Peace and Security; ECOSOC is the lead on sustainable development and economic, social and development issues more broadly, along with the General Assembly. And the PBC can become a forum where the 3 pillars of the UN can be brought together and where longer term strategies are pursued.

Picking up on some of the examples cited here today, the PBC can help make the connections between how the international community can accompany elite level political work on the one hand, and how UN agencies can support basic service delivery, which now under the 2030 agenda includes freedom from violence and access to justice, on the other.

A new opportunity: To do this, though, the PBC has to move out of the straight jacket of just being a place to discuss 5 or 6 countries. If it is to live up to its role under the new resolutions, it needs to be able to take a broader and more flexible approach. We should not forget that the Commission has a number of really important comparative advantages compared to other actors. For example, it has a political legitimacy and a political mandate – as a state body it can speak on a peer to peer basis with governments – that’s something the IFI’s don’t have, however important they may be on economic issues. The PBC also works *in partnership* with societies in transition, rather than making decision about them without their involvement – they are in the room and part of the discussion. And the Commission now has a strong mandate that makes sense, built around sustaining peace, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuity, a mandate that is framed in terms of partnership with all relevant actors, including civil society. It is a rare event that a major UN member state body has the opportunity to reinvent itself, and we must make the most of this opportunity

Building trust: And finally, I wanted to support the comments we heard from the chair and others this morning, that the heart of sustainable peace is restoring trust, and building stronger relationships between individuals, their communities and their governments. The UN system has a fragmented approach to reconciliation as a long term exercise, and perhaps this is something that the PBC can take up in its second decade.

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June 2016