



QUNO

Quaker United Nations Office



The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC): Purpose, Work, and Opportunity

Meeting Note

Background

The International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), with support from the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), convened a half-day workshop on March 16, 2018, to contribute to advancements in, and the ongoing work of, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and its membership. The workshop, which included approximately forty participants, provided an off-the-record space for PBC members to continue to strengthen their understanding of peacebuilding, including best practices and lessons learned for policy development; identify strategies and opportunities to build upon progress made in the PBC; address new or ongoing challenges that impact the Commission's work; and reflect on and identify the capacities needed to strengthen the PBC. This meeting note provides a brief overview of the key issues that emerged from the discussion.

Key Emerging Themes

- 1. Peacebuilding must be informed by and maintain a focus on the field, measuring success by impact at the country or regional level. To support this goal, policymakers will benefit from a strengthened practical understanding of factors that foster peace and of how to translate this knowledge into policy and programming.**

Throughout the workshop, it was noted that peacebuilding, which is an inherently political process, must center on bolstering the structures, processes, and capacities for building and sustaining peace. However, a key challenge is the limited practical understanding of what programming and factors truly foster peace, and how to translate this into policy at different levels, including at the UN. Increasing this understanding, including by providing avenues for discussions on lessons learned, is critical for external actors and intergovernmental bodies, such as the PBC, as they carry out initiatives to support nationally driven processes for peace. Workshop participants noted that such external support must be contextualized, carried out in accordance with the principle of "do no harm," and centered on the needs of people. It is essential that local expertise is included in peacebuilding priority setting and that international actors do not externally impose processes on a country. This emphasis on people-centered impact should remain the primary driver of the PBC's work, as well as of broader UN peacebuilding activities and the work of the peacebuilding community as a whole.

- 2. Progress in the PBC, combined with increased attention on the Commission's work, has reaffirmed its relevance as the central UN body for peacebuilding and the potential of its unique convening power.**

Participants reflected on how the PBC has revitalized its role in recent years. This progress has reaffirmed the centrality and necessity of the PBC and renewed energy around it. This also places greater expectations on the PBC and its membership as it continues its work. Many of the strengths of the PBC rest with the diversity of its membership and its convening power, which, if further built upon, can enhance its role in advising other UN intergovernmental bodies.

During the workshop it was recalled that the PBC, through its unique membership drawing from the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Security Council, and the top troop-contributing and donor countries, should provide an avenue for better coordinating peacebuilding policy and practice across the UN system. To enhance the Commission's coordination role, participants called for more to be done to strengthen the work of its membership. Specifically, it was noted that Commission members should continue to enhance communication and coordination between their UN missions in New York and their capitals to ensure a whole-of-government approach to peacebuilding. This internal coordination is critical to increasing donor commitments and mobilizing nonfinancial resources. Additionally, further consideration should be given to how PBC members can better connect the PBC's work with the other UN bodies they represent, and vice versa, as their role is partly to support coordination and coherence across the UN system.

Efforts to improve coordination are amplified by the PBC's convening mandate, which enables it to provide a diverse and flexible platform to bring together governments, UN entities, and external actors on country-specific, regional, or thematic issues. This convening power, if capitalized on by the PBC's membership, can provide a direct entry point for the PBC to support inclusive peacebuilding and ensure its work is based on holistic understanding, analysis, and approaches. Participants expressed support for continuing to strengthen this role, including by finding more opportunities to meaningfully bring together different parts of the UN system, particularly those working at the country level. Additionally, it was recommended that the Commission, using its convening mandate, identify opportunities to foster stronger partnerships with civil society actors, particularly at the national or regional levels, so the PBC can continue to be informed by their practical and context-specific expertise. By increasing feedback loops with civil society actors, the PBC can better understand and assess if and how its work in New York impacts the reality on the ground.

3. The PBC's increasingly flexible working methods, particularly with regards to country situations, provide both opportunities and challenges for countries as they build peace.

During the workshop, it was noted that the unique role of the PBC is critical, as the Security Council does not have the capacity to discuss all issues facing the international system and can only focus on key threats to international peace and security. Building on the work carried out by recent PBC chairs, the Commission has become increasingly flexible in its approach to country situations, providing a platform for countries beyond those mandated in Country-specific Configurations (CSCs) to receive support. This flexibility continued under the chairmanship of the Republic of Korea during the Commission's eleventh session, when the Commission provided an avenue for a range of non-CSC countries, such as Colombia, the Gambia, the Solomon Island, and Sri Lanka, to come before the PBC upon their request. Additionally, the PBC remained flexible with regards to its regional approach, focusing on the Sahel and West Africa. The PBC should continue to work to provide a home for preventive, peace-focused engagement with countries based on their national priorities and informed by thorough, inclusive, and context-specific analysis.

The implementation of the PBC's flexible working methods, however, has introduced new challenges for the Commission as it strives to provide the much-needed UN platform for countries seeking a forum to raise and receive support for their peacebuilding needs and priorities. Such challenges raised during the workshop include the issue of working methods and how to ensure sustained approaches to these countries. Without a CSC chair, there are no specific member states mandated to uphold the interests of these countries. Yet for the PBC to be an entity relevant to all countries, consideration needs to be given to how to engage with non-CSC countries using more flexible approaches that meet these countries' needs and do not turn into one-off engagements.

4. Recognition of the peace and development nexus needs to result in greater coherence and coordination of peacebuilding policy across the UN system, which can in part be supported by work carried out by the PBC.

A reoccurring theme raised during the workshop was the link between peacebuilding and development. Participants called for moving from rhetorical recognition of this link (e.g., “there can be no peace without development and no development without peace”) to a greater practical understanding of how development and peacebuilding programming may already align in some country situations and what more is needed to make approaches to peace holistic. The Peacebuilding Commission can provide a space for such practical discussion because of its convening and bridging roles. The Commission can provide a forum to bring development and peace and security actors together across the UN, both in New York and at the country or regional level, to have strategic discussions on country or regional situations. This brings an opportunity for the PBC to creatively explore how, as a body in New York, it can further support and accompany countries as they work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through economic and institution-building initiatives. Furthermore, through its advising functions, the PBC can strategically use the outputs from its meetings to support work carried out by ECOSOC. This could provide a key opportunity for the PBC’s membership drawn from ECOSOC to support cross-body coordination and impact.

5. Sustained financing for short and long-term programming is critical in assisting states to build peace, and more initiative should be taken to explore innovative financing and partnership opportunities.

Resource mobilization, both financial and non-monetary, was repeatedly raised as critical to programming for peace. Without sustained financing, including for long-term initiatives that seek to effect multi-generational change, peacebuilding programming will not be successfully implemented in countries that come before the PBC, and states will risk not being able to build their resilience. Participants called for consideration of how the PBC can bring greater attention to the financial capacities needed for peacebuilding programming. This could include strengthening partnership with and increasing the convening of relevant actors, such as the private sector and international financial institutions. By holding strategically focused and timed discussions, the PBC can support the building of relationships between the UN, governments, the private sector, and international financial institutions. This can contribute toward more sustainable resource allocation for peacebuilding and better coordination between UN headquarters and field missions, particularly with country teams and during times of transition.

Going Forward

IPI and QUNO look forward to a continued partnership that will allow our organizations to provide further support to the PBC and its membership by holding a series of strategic and output-driven discussions exploring the above-mentioned topics, among others. Our organizations will continue to work with the UN and member states to develop and provide a forum for frank discussion on issues related to the PBC’s work, with a focus on innovative thinking, idea sharing, and peer-to-peer learning.

About Our Organizations

International Peace Institute (IPI)

IPI is an independent, international not-for-profit think tank dedicated to managing risk and building resilience to promote peace, security, and sustainable development. To achieve its purpose, IPI employs a mix of policy research, strategic analysis, publishing, and convening.

Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)

Since 1947, QUNO has worked with diplomats, UN officials and civil society to support a UN that prioritizes peace and prevents war. QUNO uses Quaker House and its convening power to facilitate off-the-record meetings and bring perspectives from outside the UN system in order to promote peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict at a policy level in New York.