

CIVIL SOCIETY – UN PREVENTION PLATFORM

Advancing UN Prevention Efforts Across Sectors and Institutions: Collective Pathways for Effective Prevention

Summary Note¹

On 12 May 2021, the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform convened an informal virtual dialogue on ‘Advancing UN Prevention Efforts Across Sectors and Institutions,’ with participation from a diverse range of representatives of the United Nations (UN), Member States, and civil society. The dialogue built upon a series of reflective discussions entitled ‘UN Prevention Across Sectors and Institutions: Pathways for Effective Prevention,’ organised by the Platform in 2020, and provided an opportunity to engage in a forward-looking discussion to advance prevention in light of current and upcoming UN processes such as the UN75 process, the Common Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and the 2022 high-level meeting on financing for peacebuilding.

Various UN initiatives and reforms aim to improve prevention capacities at all levels. This includes the UNDP-DPPA Joint Program on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention and Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs), among others. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sustaining Peace agenda also have at its core a variety of goals on prevention, such as improving gender equality, ensuring accountable and inclusive institutions, and reducing inequalities. The implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda (including as a cornerstone of the “Silencing the Guns” initiative) and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (including through support of women mediators’ networks, such as FemWise-Africa) have also proven to serve important goals of prevention.

However, attempts to advance prevention continue to be hampered by a number of challenges. Trends of growing nationalist and populist rhetoric have increased the difficulty of advancing multilateral approaches for preventive action. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the root causes of conflict and led to many governments looking inwards. There simply remains a lack of political will for more anticipatory and proactive approaches to addressing conflict. Moreover, some have argued that other integrated agendas that contribute to prevention, such as SDGs and Sustaining Peace, have hindered explicit funding and resources for preventive action. Additionally, despite the meaningful inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups being both “the right thing to do” and the most effective way of preventing conflict, it has proven difficult to ensure that such efforts go beyond one-off consultations.

These opportunities and challenges impact the trajectory of violent conflict in each region of the world. Meaningful change requires the continued exchange of perspectives between UN actors, Member States and civil society to make certain that the implementation of the prevention agenda matches the rhetoric of inclusion of all stakeholders and to capitalise on local knowledge.

¹ The points made in this summary should not be attributed to any one speaker or participant.

With this in mind, the discussion highlighted the following key points:

Prevention initiatives require greater coherence overall and increased coordination with local civil society.

In recognition of the need for meaningful inclusion to effectively prevent conflict, the UN field presences, regional organisations, national governments, local civil society, and youth and women’s networks need to work together to improve information and resource sharing, as well as joint action. In this, the roles of the UN Country Teams, Resident Coordinators, and Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) become critical in mapping relevant stakeholders, coordinating analysis and supporting joint preventive programming. Improving joint programming will ensure that UN agencies are not competing with one another for funding and are instead working together in a coordinated manner. In addition, bridging the rural - urban, and generational divides is an often-overlooked opportunity for greater coherence and inclusion of actors. The current Common Agenda process is a good practice as it includes dedicated tracks for local civil society, young leaders, Member States, the UN and other thematic experts who can contribute their perspectives for a joint outcome.

Political support for conflict prevention needs to be encouraged. There is a need to overcome the lack of political will for prevention at the multilateral and country levels. At the national level, PDAs support national implementation of prevention action across different UN Agendas. Building political will at the national level is central and ensuring comprehensive and tailored guidance for PDAs that takes into account concerns regarding interventionist perceptions is needed.

Prevention initiatives require adequate and flexible funding. The donor community should consider middle-income countries in funding opportunities. Further, while increased investment in the Peacebuilding Fund is encouraged, there needs to be a whole-of-system approach that connects financing for prevention to financing for development and peacebuilding. Through June 2023, the Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) envelope for the most vulnerable countries, is being rolled out under the World Bank’s IDA-19, with the potential to make serious inroads, if used strategically. However, beyond innovative approaches to increasing the availability of funds for prevention, the quality of investments needs to be considered so that it does not entrench securitised approaches, which tends to aggravate tensions. Instead, investments should be rooted in working with partners on the ground to support their needs and priorities and fostering partnerships. The 2022 high level meeting for financing can be used to leverage and bring together all opportunities across the system.

Harnessing the benefits of innovation and data is essential to moving from reactive toward more proactive and anticipatory approaches. New information, communication technologies and data are key to supporting all relevant stakeholders in effectively preventing violence and conflict. In particular, evidence-based analysis and impact assessments grounded in local knowledge and expertise, should be further supported. Data collection at the field level is essential to monitor new conflict escalation dynamics more effectively.

The Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform aims to support the UN’s prevention agenda through strengthening coordination and information sharing between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the UN at all levels, through close collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). The Platform seeks to identify concrete, practical steps to enhance the UN and CSOs’ collective capacity to carry out preventive work, through sharing examples of best practices, identifying areas of potential collaboration and supporting UN efforts to bridge early warning and early action. The group considers prevention broadly as encompassing inclusive activities aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting societies in preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict, at both structural and operational levels. The Platform believes that the UN’s work on prevention would benefit from a systematic engagement with civil society and that the inclusion of diverse civil society expertise is crucial to achieving sustainable peace and development. The Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform is co-facilitated by the Quaker United Nations Office and The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict in conjunction with the UN - Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and a coordinating group of the following organizations: African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, Center on International Cooperation New York University, Conciliation Resources, International Crisis Group, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Social Science Research Council and The Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. The Platform also relies on an extensive network of global expert CSOs.