

Prevention and sustaining peace: human rights in action

Organized by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) and Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva (QUNO) in cooperation with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

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The centrality of human rights in the UN's work to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of crisis and conflict has been increasingly acknowledged in recent years. This is key to anticipate or respond to contemporary challenges and multi-dimensional risks arising inter alia from climate change, asymmetric conflicts and States' responses to migration or civil society protests.

Building on the recognition of these intrinsic linkages, enshrined in the 2016 resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly on sustaining peace ([S/RES/2282](#) and [A/RES/70/262](#)) and at the center of the UN Secretary-General's prevention agenda, a rich body of experience is developing – through partnerships across the UN system and with Member States, national institutions and civil society - demonstrating the value of human rights analysis, approaches and mechanisms in the identification of root causes and drivers for violence and conflict, and the development of effective and sustainable solutions to address them. The 2020 Review of the peacebuilding architecture presents an important opportunity to build on these gains and to reinforce engagement, coherence and collaboration across the UN's three pillars to sustain peace.

A process of reflection on the role of the human rights mechanisms in prevention is also underway. Human Rights Council (HRC) [resolution 38/18](#) recognizes its crucial role in the prevention of human rights violations and the identification of protection gaps which, if addressed, could help build more resilient societies and sustain development and peace. The ensuing report ([A/HRC/43/37](#)) contains proposals for the operationalization of the HRC's prevention mandate and greater coherence across the UN system for preventing human rights violations. On this basis and as follow-up, HRC [resolution 45/31](#) calls for a strengthening of UN human rights early warning and action capacity and formalizes institutional collaboration among UN bodies and closer linkages between the human rights and peace and security pillars on prevention. In addition, HRC [resolution 42/6](#) on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights mandates a study due next year on the contribution of the HRC's special procedures in assisting States and other stakeholders in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses.

As the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights makes clear, the international human rights framework is part of the international community's collective toolbox and should be fully utilized for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities,² with particularly devastating impact on developing, fragile and conflict-affected countries, underscores the urgent need for multidimensional, UN system-wide and three-pillar approaches and responses.³

Yet, despite these developments, policymakers and practitioners frequently still operate in silos and there is continued fragmentation in the UN system which impedes effective joint action and engagement on prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Exacerbating this, funding remains bifurcated, undermining cooperative and integrated programming approaches between human rights, justice and peacebuilding programming.

¹ [UN Secretary-General, The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights \(2020\)](#).

² [SG Policy Brief on COVID-19 and Human Rights \(2020\)](#).

³ [2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace \(A/74/796 – S/2020/773\)](#)