



The New Agenda for Peace - Universality, Trust and Solidarity

GENEVA CONSULTATIONS

Ensuring the challenges of our time are addressed from a prevention perspective.

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SESSION OUTCOME NOTES : ‘Strengthening prevention through human rights’

Thursday 16th March - 16:00-17:30 - led by the Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva

Background

Following UNSG Boutros Boutros Ghali’s 1992 report ‘An Agenda for Peace’, peacebuilding was understood within the UN as a set of exclusively post-conflict activities.³ Prevention of destructive conflict—and with it the integration of human rights in conflict prevention—was not given sufficient emphasis within the UN system despite periodic calls for less reactive policies and actions, which are widely acknowledged as being more costly and less effective.

The sustaining peace agenda was a significant paradigm shift and a departure from the 1992 vision of peacebuilding within the UN shifting it to a holistic vision of peacebuilding that seeks to act throughout the peace-conflict continuum and prevent the ‘outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development’: aligning it with longstanding civil society theory and practice in which peacebuilding was *seldom narrowly confined to a post-conflict activity*. The universality expressed in the 2030 Agenda, where each and every State is responsible for sustainable development, was also echoed with the task of sustaining peace similarly defined as a relevant national concern for *all States*. Importantly, the Sustaining Peace agenda also echoed concerns about fragmentation in the UN system and the *lack of institutional collaboration* that hinders effective prevention of human rights violations and destructive conflict in a range of societies.

The UNSG’s reports in 2018, 2019 and 2020 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace – all contributed to the acknowledgement that human rights normative framework as a “critical foundation for peace”.¹ Particularly they recognized human rights violations as indicators of root causes of destructive conflict, on the basis of which preventive support through technical assistance and capacity building should be provided to Member States; affirming also the importance of civil society in peacebuilding. Importantly, greater use by Member States of, and strengthened UN system-wide support for, implementation of human rights recommendations in a collective effort to advance both the 2030 Agenda and conflict prevention was called for² - highlighting examples from a range of human rights projects supported by the PBF. Given the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the last report underlined the urgent need for multidimensional, coordinated and

¹ [A/72/707 - S/2018/43](#)

² [A/73/890 - S/2019/448](#)

conflict sensitive responses and whole-of-society approaches³. While not directly referencing sustaining peace, the UNSG's Call to Action for Human Rights, launched in February 2020, echoes in many ways the need for system-wide approaches to global challenges and the need to better integrate human rights in fulfilling the UN's mandate on prevention. In his call, the UNSG sets out overarching guiding principles and seven priority areas for action.⁴

In the year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 75th anniversary – and 30 years since the previous Agenda for Peace, the development of a *New Agenda for Peace* is another important moment in time to outline how human rights are indeed a 'critical foundation for peace' – and should be seen as problem-solving tools that safeguard lives and livelihoods and can prevent grievances from arising, including by comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and promoting participation.

Indeed, the *New Agenda for Peace* sets out to address, amongst several priority areas⁵, now to reshaping our responses to all forms of violence including consideration on how to more effectively address violence holistically as well as investing in prevention through commitments to provide the necessary resources for prevention, including at the national level; reduce excessive military budgets and ensure adequate social spending; tailor development assistance to address root causes of conflict and uphold human rights; and link disarmament to development opportunities.

Key takeaways

The grounding of the conversation we had yesterday was really in the recognition that while the 1992 'An Agenda for Peace' understood peacebuilding within the UN as a set of exclusively post-conflict activities³, this *New Agenda for Peace* needs to ensure that prevention of destructive conflict—and with it the integration of human rights in conflict prevention—is meaningfully included to ensure less reactive policies and actions. The prevention of the 'outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development' cannot happen without the meaningful integration of human rights approaches, normative standards and frameworks throughout the UN's analysis, policies, programs, and fund. As the SG himself acknowledged human rights as a normative framework is a "critical foundation for peace"⁶ and should be seen as problem-solving tools that safeguard lives and livelihoods and can prevent grievances and violent conflict from arising.

While not explicit in the *New Agenda for Peace* – the [Our Common Agenda](#) does set out a firm human rights grounding, notably through language and recommendations relating to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies – and the *New Agenda for Peace* sets out to address, amongst several priority areas⁷.

- The significant challenge of integrating human rights and sustaining peace remains—and it is systemic in nature. While some point to the continuing tensions and divergent views among Member States and fragmentation across the UN's three pillars as the main barriers, others point to the continuing lack of awareness and understanding of their linkages and complementarities, and the continued misconception of human rights actions as encroachments into matters of national sovereignty. Prevention needs to include the prevention of *all* forms of violence not only

³ [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#)

⁴ [Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights \(un.org\)](#) ; (1) sustainable development; (2) times of crisis; (3) gender equality and equal rights for women; (4) public participation and civic space; (5) future generations, especially climate justice; (6) collective action; and (7) new human rights frontiers

⁵ Reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons); Strengthen international foresight; Reshape responses to all forms of violence; Invest in prevention and peacebuilding, including Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission; Support regional prevention; Put women and girls at the centre of security policy

⁶ [A/72/707 - S/2018/43](#)

⁷ **NA4P priority areas:** 1. Reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons); 2. Strengthen international foresight; 3. Reshape responses to all forms of violence, including consideration on how to more effectively address violence holistically; 4. Invest in prevention and peacebuilding, including Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission as well as investing in prevention through commitments to provide the necessary resources for prevention, including at the national level & reduce excessive military budgets and ensure adequate social spending; 5. Support regional prevention including by tailoring development assistance to address root causes of conflict and uphold human rights; 6. Put women and girls at the center of security policy.

the prevention of violence and armed conflict; as this is where human rights approaches and analysis, technical assistance, institutional strengthening can have a real positive impact on addressing grievances and preventing harm to people and communities. Broadening this lens can significantly contribute to universalizing where prevention happens, and to depoliticize it.

- Critically, there is a need to **redouble efforts to engage in preventive conflict work and prioritize the appropriate application of international humanitarian law, international refugee law and human rights law standards**, despite the political barriers and lack of political will to engage in this work. Notably, the United Nations must preserve the integrity of the application of international humanitarian law, international refugee law and human rights law, and not cede the ouster of these legal regimes by the invocation of counter-terrorism regulation. Furthermore, the immediate operationalization and consistent application of the United Nations human rights due diligence policy across all United Nations activities must be ensured⁸.
- Ensure that solidarity - which is taking central stage in the NAP - continues to be understood as fundamental value "by virtue of which global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes costs and burdens fairly, in accordance with basic principles of **equity and social justice**, and ensures that those who suffer or benefit the least receive help from those who benefit the most" (General Assembly, resolution 57/213).
- To adequately 'invest in prevention and peacebuilding', as called for by the New Agenda for Peace outline in the OCA, **adequate and sustained investment in human rights is critical**. Indeed, for the Human Rights Council and other relevant stakeholders and bodies to perform both their accountability and prevention roles they need to be put on a **more sustainable financial footing** (including through more flexibility for the United Nations to allocate funding, and to better link them with other processes to maximize their impact and assist States parties with compliance). Furthermore, **additional consideration should be given on the balance the funding deficits and needs** within the peace architecture of the United Nations and the fragility through which the peacebuilding architecture and human rights pillar rely on voluntary contributions, despite commitments on their centrality to United Nations reforms⁹.
- It was noted that developments at the HRC also offer **important opportunities to demonstrate how human rights interventions, tools and mechanisms ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of prevention and sustaining peace efforts**. Reflecting on its role and mandate, the HRC discussed for the first time the contribution of human rights to peacebuilding at its annual panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming in 2017. In 2018, the HRC adopted resolution 38/18, which elaborated on **the HRCs role and that of its mechanisms in preventing human rights violations and contributing to sustaining peace**. The report by the rapporteurs appointed pursuant to that resolution contains proposals to that end ([A/HRC/43/37](#)), including: the official sharing of HRC reports with the Security Council and/or the PBC through the Secretary-General; fostering the working relationship between the HRC, special procedures and the PBC; the development of a comprehensive framework linking peacebuilding activities to human rights prevention, also as guidance for the development of peacebuilding priority plans; and the inclusion of the recommendations of HRC mechanisms in conflict analyses and needs assessments for PBF-supported projects. The follow-up [HRC resolution 45/31](#) includes some of these proposals and calls for a strengthening of UN human rights early warning and action capacity, with the High Commissioner for Human Rights tasked with providing early warning briefings to the HRC. The resolution also calls for HRC reports to be systematically drawn to the attention of relevant UN bodies and invites the PBC Chair to brief the HRC annually on its work. Implementation of these

⁸ [A/77/345](#)

⁹ In 2022, the human rights pillar received just 3 per cent of the total United Nations regular budget. The Peacebuilding Fund is currently under consideration for regular budget and approved assessed contributions (2022). The Secretary-General's forthcoming consideration of the regular budget proposals of the Office of Counter-Terrorism should be tied to overall United Nations objectives, critically assessing the levels of regular budget funding towards peacebuilding, gender equality and human rights, as well as with measured analytics as to how the overall goals of the United Nations towards peace and human rights tied concretely to the observations and concerns raised during the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism on human rights due diligence, monitoring and evaluation and overall balance in the United Nations system.

provisions offers opportunities to enhance institutional collaboration and forge closer linkages between the human rights and peace and security pillars on prevention.¹⁰

- **Accountability is a critical element of peace and conflict prevention**, with impunity licensing further violations and abuses and the prospect of accountability acting as a deterrent. Efforts to strengthen the prevention capabilities of mechanisms and bodies such as the HRC should complement and not displace the critical accountability mandates of such mechanisms and bodies.
- There are further **opportunities to strengthen the integration of human rights in country-level programming** for the Agenda 2030, underpinned by robust analysis, a focus on leaving no one behind, and meaningful participation, and enhance joined-up support to Member States in implementing human rights commitments and obligations. To that effect, **Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs)** feature stronger multidimensional analyses of drivers of vulnerability and better highlight interlinkages of interventions by different pillars while the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Coordination at Headquarters supports the development of synergies in interventions.¹¹ These components are essential for prevention. And indeed, data indicate that 57 per cent of the UNSDCFs explicitly addressed peacebuilding and 90 per cent substantively addressed drivers of needs, risk, and vulnerability.¹² To make good of these opportunities, stepped-up engagement with country teams and peace operations, including through HRAs equipped to work on rights-based approaches, could ensure that relevant CCA processes, joint analysis and programming make better use of human rights information, patterns of their violation (in particular of [economic social and cultural rights](#)) and the recommendations of human rights mechanisms (also in line with the Call to Action). Attention should also be paid to the voluntary national reviews, which assess national progress in achievement of the SDGs, gaps and lessons learned for presentation to ECOSOC's high-level political forum on sustainable development; such reviews have seen limited integration of human rights information and data to date.
- **Intergovernmental exchange needs to happen between the New York and Geneva bodies**. For instance, **the HRC and PBC could create space for informal discussions**, one option could be to choose country situations or thematic issues of mutual concern or interest, and to invite representatives of the HRC to participate at the PBC and vice versa. If this approach appears unfeasible in the present political climate, identifying countries with positive experiences under the HRC's agenda item 10 to speak at the PBC could be a less ambitious initial step. This could be further facilitated by the consideration of expanding the role of the Commission to more geographical and substantive settings, as well as to addressing the cross-cutting issues of security, climate change, health, gender equality, development and *human rights* from a prevention perspective. The **PBC Chair should also brief the HRC** – as per the standing invitation issued by resolution HRC/45/31.
- **Civil society actors, including human rights defenders and local community peacebuilders**, often play key roles in prevention, early warning, mediation, and other peacebuilding activities in many contexts, particularly in conflict-affected societies and in situations of extreme fragility or transition. At the same time the restriction of civic space

¹⁰ In addition, HRC resolution 42/6 on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights mandates a study ([A/HRC/48/21](#)) on the contribution of the special procedures in assisting States and other stakeholders in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses. HRC resolution 42/17 on human rights and transitional justice mandates an OHCHR report ([A/HRC/48/36](#)) on how addressing gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law through transitional justice measures can contribute to sustaining peace and the realisation of SDG 16 on inclusive and peaceful societies. Also of note, HRC resolution 45/28 on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 urges Member States and the UN system to ensure women's participation in all levels of decision-making and implementation of conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, post-conflict reconstruction, peacekeeping, peace-making and peacebuilding. The resolution also calls for the inclusion, by the High Commissioner, of relevant information in country-specific work and thematic reports, and for consultations to be held with women human rights defenders, women's organizations and women peacebuilders. See ensuing [OHCHR report](#) on mainstreaming this issue in the work of the HRC and its mechanisms.

¹¹ [E/2020/54](#): Paragraph 52.

¹² [A/74/976](#) - [S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 17.

and attacks on civil society are important signs of democratic backsliding and critical early warning signs of potential social unrest or conflict. The Secretary General should consider invoking article 99 of the UN Charter to refer situations to the Security Council where human rights defenders and civil society actors are subject to widespread and systematic threats, attacks and restrictions, as these may be early warning signs of more widespread violations and conflict. Undoubtedly also, the engagement of local civil society and community actors is a critical component of sustaining peace, the success of which depends on broad societal commitment and national ownership. The recognized role of civil society and the urgent need to do more to protect civic space and participation is a priority area in the Call to Action under which a [systemwide guidance note](#) on protecting and promoting civic space was launched in September 2020. **The UN could do more to establish consistent, sustained, and transparent modalities to ensure civil society inclusion in long-term sustained policy development relating to sustaining peace**, while similarly supporting Member States and regional organisations to do so. Further stakeholders groups such as trade unions and representatives of the private sector should also be considered. For instance, PBSO and other UN entities could continue the model of joint civil society-UN working groups at Headquarters, as used in developing the [Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#) (CEG) and the guidance note on civic space, to follow, monitor and report on progress made on sustaining peace approaches and implementation of connected recommendations.

- **Informed public participation in decision making processes** – built upon the right to access to information; to participate in decision making; to access to justice, to freedom of assembly and of association - are key to facilitating greater consensus in the decision-making process, mitigating the potential for conflict and increasing the likelihood of finding effective, long-lasting solutions. This is being eroded in part by “an ever-deeper [crisis of trust](#) fomented by a loss of shared truth and understanding” (OCA, p.22).

In the Global North this can grow out of *too much* information while in many developing and fragile contexts, confusion more often grows out of an information vacuum or rather a reliable information vacuum – where **public interest media** take centre stage. There is therefore a need for greater collaboration between UN bodies such as OHCHR – including the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression – UNESCO, UNDPDPO and the Peacebuilding fund- to foster media development efforts in fragile contexts; but also better multi-stakeholder collaboration with the civil society and the private sector. It is also critical to give some flesh to the positive obligations of States to protect and promote the right to information, including in its horizontal effects vis-à-vis non-state actors, in particular the Big tech companies such as Google and Meta whose actions or lack of action have immense effect on the realization of the right to information and human rights in general (see e.g. this recent [report](#) on Digital spaces and peace processes). There is also a critical need for sustained financing for independent public interest media as they face an existential threat due to the capture of digital advertising revenues by those tech giants that jeopardize the business models and viability of public interest media. The “New Deal for Journalism” report produced in 2021 by a panel of experts in journalism viability also recommended “for rights-respecting governments globally to commit 0.1% of GDP over the next ten years, to ensure journalism’s survival and transition in the digital era.”

It is worth noting that the consultations also wished to make clear that the New Agenda for Peace process – and stakeholder engagement should have done more to ensure informed public participation in the process; not least considering the aforementioned Guidelines and guidance note as blueprints.

- **The United Nations must actively work to prevent counter-terrorism from “eating up” and ultimately weakening peace operations¹³**, and given the forthcoming global review of the Peacebuilding Fund in 2024, the Secretary-General and relevant entities should **integrate robust analysis and findings related to the increasing range of preventing and countering violent extremism programming labeled under the heading of peacebuilding** (including the findings and recommendations from civil society and other local stakeholders from around the world).

¹³ [A/77/345](#)

- The Swiss Appeal of 13th June 2016¹⁴ to put Human Rights at the Heart of Conflict Prevention: "Security and human rights make a perfect match" was considered an interesting model to continue putting political and financial will into ensuring human rights are taken up more seriously in peace and security, which led amongst other initiatives to the establishment the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucuses in both New York and Geneva.

These inputs are representative of the following stakeholders present: QUNO¹⁵, International Service for Human Rights, Geneva Academy, ICJ, ICRC, ILO¹⁶, OHCHR, UNU, Justice Rapid Response, Universal Rights Group, Interpeace, Protection Approaches, UNITA, FIDH, UNIGE, Alliance internationale pour la protection du patrimoine dans les zones en conflit, Fondation Hironnelle, UNHCR.

Guiding Questions for the Consultation on ‘Strengthening prevention through human rights’ – 16th March

Building on the aforementioned developments, and the opportunities the New Agenda for Peace as part of the implementation of Our Common Agenda - the consultation session on the 16th March on ‘Strengthening prevention through Human Rights’ hopes to focus on the following (non-exhaustive) guiding questions:

- How can we ensure and strengthen leveraging human rights as a basis for conflict prevention through national institutions and capacities? How can human rights analysis and tools help focus on factors that can give rise to or exacerbate grievances? How can human rights contribute to anticipating, preventing and preparing for major risks to come?
- How can we ensure that a New Agenda for Peace also takes forward the implementation of the Call to Action for Human Rights?
- How can we effectively invest in prevention by better investing adequately, predictably and sustainably in the Human Rights Pillar? How can ensuring human rights mechanisms are on a more sustainable financial footing contribute to prevention, foresight and reshaping responses to violence?
- How can the three pillars of the UN system better cooperate, notably through its intergovernmental bodies, to ensure cross-cutting issues of security, climate change, health, development, gender equality and human rights are addressed from a prevention perspective? In particular, how could the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) better work together in the name of prevention?
- How can the New Agenda for Peace help enhance previous commitments in making human rights recommendations and analysis a reference point in the design and delivery of United Nations fund and programs, development assistance and crisis prevention initiatives?
- How can Member States better be held accountable in their efforts to prevent violence based on the rule of law?
- How could building on efforts made - including those since the Sustaining Peace Agenda and UNSGs development and management reforms - help make prevention a political priority?
- How do we ensure that victims and survivors of human rights violations can have meaningful participation and agency in shaping the New Agenda for Peace including from an accountability as well as prevention perspective.

¹⁴ [Switzerland launches the appeal of June 13th to put Human Rights at the Heart of Conflict Prevention: "Security and human rights make a perfect match" \(admin.ch\)](#)

¹⁵ For more on QUNO Geneva’s work on sustaining peace see: [Sustaining Peace: How can human rights help?](#); [Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Sustaining Peace: An introduction](#); [Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace Project Report: Exploring the Universal Periodic Review](#)

¹⁶ For more on ILO’s work on sustaining peace see: [Sustaining Peace through Employment and Decent Work \(ILO/DPPA\)](#); [ILO’s Recommendation 205 \(normative\) on "Employment and decent work for peace and decent work"](#)