



Building Strategic Partnerships for Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level

Meeting Note from the UNGA74 Expert Discussion

Introduction

On September 24, 2019, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the International Peace Institute (IPI), held the fifth meeting in a series of roundtable discussion to examine the operationalization of Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. The meeting focused on strategies to operationalize the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions at the regional level and the roles of regional actors, including regional intergovernmental organizations, in implementing them.

Roundtable participants reflected on positive examples as well as key challenges in establishing strategic and operational partnerships between the United Nations (UN), regional organizations and civil society, and possible ways forward to address these challenges.

The roundtable provided space to reflect on the themes raised during the 19-20 September 2019 Conference organized by GPPAC, together with the Organization of American States (OAS), Community of Democracies (CoD) and International IDEA in Washington D.C., where participants explored avenues for mobilizing and enhancing the capacities of regional organizations to support peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The roundtable was an opportunity to bring the main conclusions of the Conference to the ongoing policy and reform discussions at the UN with the aim to generate ideas for how the 2020 Review of the UN peacebuilding architecture can serve to strengthen partnerships and dialogue between UN entities and regional organizations.

The following note is a short summary of the discussion and the key recommendations.

Operationalization of Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level

The role of regional organizations was strongly highlighted in the 2016 parallel Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions (A/RES/72/276 and S/RES/2282 (2016)) and the 2018 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (S/2018/43). The recent Interim Report of the UN Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/73/890-S/2019/448) also notes that “strategic



partnerships with regional and sub-regional partners on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace remain a priority for the UN” ahead of the 2020 Review of the UN peacebuilding architecture.

As part of its ongoing reform processes, the UN aims to strengthen regional infrastructure, capacities and coordination on peacebuilding. One element of this effort is the operationalization of the single regional structure designed to support a more holistic approach to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. This includes strengthening regional responsibilities of Assistant Secretaries-General and the integration of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the former Department of Political Affairs (DPA) into the new Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).

The Interim Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace unambiguously highlights the need to improve operational partnerships with regional actors outside of the UN system and “further explore ways to partner with international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank and the African Development Bank, as well as civil society organizations.” However, the role and strategic engagement of DPPA and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), among others, with regional institutions and actors in relation to the newly reformed UN structures and policies remains an area that calls for greater attention and clarity.

During the roundtable participants explored the role of the UN, regional organizations and civil society in regional Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace efforts, identified good practices and highlighted challenges that the 2020 Review of the UN peacebuilding architecture can address for stronger operationalization of Sustaining Peace at the regional level:

The United Nations’ role and capacities to Sustain Peace at the Regional Level

The UN is taking a number of steps to support regional peacebuilding both politically and operationally. In addition to the steps outlined above, participants highlighted newly developed regional conflict prevention strategies (such as those for the Sahel and the Horn of Africa) and the appointment of regional Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) as part of the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme. The PBC also has increased its engagement with the AU Peace and Security Council through annual interactive dialogues. PBSO has signed memoranda of understanding with the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as supported regional and national efforts to coordinate and support peacebuilding in Burkina Faso, Burundi and the Central African Republic.

Challenges remain when it comes to navigating various streams of peacebuilding work at the regional level to ensure that they complement each other. Participants at the

roundtable felt this area was difficult to address and often neglected due to differing mandates and interests of various actors working at regional levels.

The UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention:

The deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (PDA) to support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams continues to be one of the most visible aspects of the Joint UN Development Programme (UNDP) - UN DPPA Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. PDAs have supported local actors implementing policies and initiatives to prevent violent extremism in Bangladesh, Tajikistan, and Tunisia; and designed cross-border peacebuilding initiatives in the South Caucasus and the Great Lakes Region. PDAs also increasingly work with regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the Pacific Islands Forum and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

One way to address such challenges would be for the UN to have regular engagement with regional organizations and civil society to assess and take stock of regional peacebuilding progress and processes. Doing so would promote better coordination of existing work across different levels.

Regional Organizations' roles and capacity to Sustain Peace at the Regional Level

Because of their geographic proximity, mandate and deep understanding of the political dynamics in their regions, regional organizations are ideally placed to address some of the main root causes of conflict and other threats to security (e.g., climate change and multi-dimensional threats) before they develop into violence. They can provide localized support from a regional perspective to prevent escalation of national and regional crises and identify capacities needed on the ground and actors best placed to deliver on them.

ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and Plans of Action:

ECOWAS' Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) includes an Enabling Mechanism, which is at the heart of reinforcing cooperation among ECOWAS Member States and ensuring the coordination of the efforts to implement the ECPF Plans of Action. Such a mechanism contributes to a measurable improvement of peace, security and stability in the region.

This work, however, is not without challenges. Political realities and mandate limitations may prevent regional organizations from effectively responding to crises. For ASEAN, the reality of geopolitics has made it difficult for the organization to engage constructively in the crisis in Myanmar. Similarly, the lack of a conflict prevention mandate in the OAS has limited its ability to actively respond to the situations in Venezuela or Nicaragua, for example.

Organization of American States Judicial Facilitators Programme:

The OAS Facilitators’ Program began in 2007 and incorporates seven countries in the region, including: Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá, and Paraguay. The main objective of the program is to reinforce access to justice for citizens who live in rural, isolated areas, establishing a service with national coverage, administered by the corresponding Judiciary. The service has resulted in thousands of mediations, negotiations, and advice, which has contributed to a significant reduction in conflict and crime. Added to this, the program contributes to spreading legal literacy among the population it reaches.

Participants brought up some positive ways through which such challenges can be addressed. Regional organizations have been finding creative ways to engage in peacebuilding within the scope of their mandates, including by building the capacity of relevant actors to address root causes and facilitating civil society engagement. In the OAS, such creativity is exemplified by initiatives to strengthen democracy, human security, and the rule of law. In this context, the Sustaining Peace resolutions, which emphasize that “development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing” can serve as a useful policy framework for regional organizations.

Participants highlighted that effective regional peacebuilding requires regional organizations to prioritize capacity building with Member States and civil society on coordinating joint analysis and to monitor developments on the ground, as well as map and mobilize actors best positioned to respond to identified peace and security challenges.

Civil Society’s roles and capacity to Sustain Peace at the Regional Level

Participants generally agreed that civil society is a well-suited partner to inform peacebuilding processes at the regional level given their expertise and access to valuable data, as well as a set of skills and expertise to inform peacebuilding efforts. For example, the partnership between ECOWAS and the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has proven to be mutually beneficial. Through an early-warning system, WANEP provides ECOWAS with data and analyses on conflict indicators and risks on a weekly and monthly basis. Having collected data on the linkages between violence and elections, WANEP has implemented a program to monitor the election-related conflict. This has helped to put in place mechanisms to reduce and prevent election-related violence. ECOWAS, in its role, monitors data and mobilizes political will to address challenges at national and regional levels.

However, such a partnership is an exception rather than a norm. In many countries, civic space is increasingly being restricted and opportunities for civil society to engage

are limited. Given their position vis-à-vis their member governments, regional organizations are crucial for the protection of the civic space and for guaranteeing that local analysis is taken into consideration across all efforts to advance Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

FemWise and The Africa Peace and Security Architecture:

The African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government established the Network of African Women Mediators, known as FemWise-Africa, to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation. FemWise-Africa's location within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is intended to place it in a strategic position for policy formulation and advocacy, and to narrow the implementation gap in commitments for women's inclusion in peacemaking in Africa.

Participants reasserted that local ownership is key for effective Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace and should be based on strong operational partnerships between national governments and civil society. Regional organizations are well positioned to support the establishment of such partnerships and for enabling collaboration. Some of the lessons learned can be gained from the Sustainable Development Regional Forums, as well as partnerships established with civil society at the regional level for humanitarian assistance.

Conclusion:

Ahead of the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, the roundtable highlighted the need to operationalize regional arrangements designed to support a more holistic approach to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, and to systematize cooperation and coordination among the UN, civil society and regional organizations. The 2020 Review should also serve to more clearly identify the gaps that hinder such coordination and enable processes for overcoming challenges.

Critical actions needed to operationalize regional arrangements include:

- 1) Commitment to achieving **greater coherence and complementarity** at the regional level:
 - a. Regional organizations should continue to develop and strengthen monitoring capacity within their own structures and the infrastructure needed to mobilize timely response from relevant partners to early-warning signs of potential violence.
 - b. Regional organizations should also enable civil society to freely and securely conduct peacebuilding work, collect data and meaningfully inform peacebuilding work across different levels.

- c. The role of the UN regional peacebuilding entities, including regional peacebuilding offices, should be focused on providing political and operational support for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace at the regional level, including engaging with regional organizations and on cross-border issues.
- 2) Member States' **commitment to advancing the implementation of Sustaining Peace**:
 - a. Regional organizations should encourage and support their Member States in operationalizing the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions by integrating it into their policies and priorities. This could involve sharing good practices and building their capacities for operationalization.
- 3) **Adequate and sustainable funding** of regional peacebuilding efforts:
 - a. Donors and international financial institutions should increase their commitments to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace as part of their funding priorities across different thematic areas and engage with regional organizations to promote peacebuilding at the regional level.
- 4) Ensuring **the 2020 Review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture** serves to strengthen the development of a regional peacebuilding architecture:
 - a. The UN should consider a more systematic engagement with regional organizations and civil society to assess and take stock of regional peacebuilding progress and processes, while enabling better adjustment of the processes in line with existing gaps.
 - b. Regional organizations should prioritize capacity building with Member States and civil society on coordinating joint analysis and monitor the developments on the ground as well as map and mobilize actors best positioned to respond to identified peace and security challenges.