

## **Building Peace Regionally: What does the UN Peacebuilding Leadership look like at the Regional Level?**

Virtual Discussion | 13 December 2022

### *Summary Note*

The support and contribution of the UN to regional peacebuilding were analyzed in this roundtable through the experiences and from the perspective of different regional organizations. The discussion, held as part of a series of conversations<sup>1</sup> on the operationalisation of the Sustaining Peace Agenda, focused on progress achieved in implementing coherent approaches to peacebuilding and sustaining peace at the regional level, as envisioned in the 2019 UN Reforms (A/72/525). During the discussion, representatives of Member States, regional organizations, civil society, and the UN shared reflections and examples from their respective regions, as well as ideas for building partnerships and strengthening financing for action.

The roundtable discussion built on a previous session in the series that also explored regional peacebuilding. That roundtable, held on September 2019<sup>2</sup>, focused on strategic and operational partnerships between the UN, regional organizations, and civil society and the need to achieve greater coherence and complementarity at the regional level. A key message from that discussion was that while regional organizations play an important role in strengthening peacebuilding at the regional level, the aspirations of the UN Reforms and peacebuilding needs require, beyond partnerships, significant adjustment in strategic coordination and policy development.

The following key takeaways related to the UN peacebuilding actions at the regional level emerged during the most recent discussion:

### **The need for a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach to regional peacebuilding**

Sustaining peace efforts at the regional level are more effective and efficient if implemented through a holistic approach that helps overcome a “silos mentality” – where the different areas of intervention are considered separate rather than intersectional. Moreover, a holistic approach is necessary to enable truly multi-stakeholder operations. By

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<sup>1</sup> [The Sustaining Peace Roundtable Series](#) is organized by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), with the objective of examining strategies and pathways towards the operationalization of the dual resolutions (A/RES/75/201 and S/RES/2558) that concluded the 2020 peacebuilding architecture review.

<sup>2</sup> GPPAC, “Building Strategic Partnerships for Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level”, September 2019.  
[https://gppac.net/files/2021-01/sp\\_roundtable\\_series\\_regional\\_organizations\\_summary-final.pdf](https://gppac.net/files/2021-01/sp_roundtable_series_regional_organizations_summary-final.pdf)

identifying different but interconnected problems in a particular crisis, crisis management can effectively engage different actors with diverse capabilities and resources and encourage a coordinated response. As the Resolution on Financing for Peacebuilding (A/RES/76/305) outlines, “all relevant stakeholders in the field of financing for peacebuilding [are encouraged] to increase their strategic and operational collaboration at the regional and country levels, including in peacebuilding, development and humanitarian efforts [...]”<sup>3</sup>

Past experiences have demonstrated the importance of clear leadership within multi-stakeholder operations. The stabilization process in Iraq in 2015 is an example where ambiguous leadership proved lacking for the success of a complex operation. What is needed is clear and defined leadership that promotes the inclusion of different partners, improves the coordination between stakeholders, focuses on outcomes rather than outputs, and allows for the clear identification of funding and operational gaps.

### **Learning from successful experiences of collaboration between UN and regional organizations**

There are good examples of successful collaboration between the UN and regional organizations. In Latin America, for example, the Organization of American States (OAS) has collaborated with the UN in Colombia to support the Verification Mission of the Colombian Peace Agreement. The OAS-UN collaboration for the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), which was the first fully integrated mission between the UN and a regional organization, is another case.

Further, the collaboration between the UN and regional bodies in Asia – in a context of relative peace where non-traditional security issues and sustaining peace are key concepts – is very impactful. An example of this can be seen in the workshop<sup>4</sup> organized in December 2022 by the UN, through the DPPA, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with the objective of creating a regional framework for mainstreaming the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda at the regional and national levels. This example demonstrates the key role of the UN in creating a shared culture of peace and in promoting cross-cutting agendas, such as YPS and Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

The African Union and Regional Economic Commissions similarly work to engage with the UN on initiatives such as early warning and early response and on regional programs in areas where conflict has particular regional dynamics and implications, such as in the Sahel. As actors in different regions are working to build partnerships on peacebuilding, many regional organizations see an important role for the UN as a convenor well positioned to promote the exchange of lessons and good practices within and between regions. Globalization and modernization have created new and complex challenges, and the proliferation of non-traditional security issues calls for improved mechanisms to exchange perspectives and experiences on how to address these new challenges. Experiences of past partnerships and exchanges, including between regional bodies from the African and Latin American continents, exist.<sup>5</sup> However, over time, such exchanges have

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<sup>3</sup> Resolution on Financing for peacebuilding (A/RES/76/305), 8 September 2022. Paragraph 10.

<sup>4</sup> Media Release, “ASEAN-IPR-UN Workshop on advancing Youth, Peace and Security”, December 2022

<sup>5</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Enhancing cooperation between United Nations and regional human rights mechanisms](#), October 2022.

become more limited. The UN is strategically positioned to promote successful regional peacebuilding methodologies, to create space for information exchange, and to facilitate the development of more impactful joint initiatives.

### **Challenges and limitations of the UN at the regional level**

While many actors see a particularly important role for the UN as a regional and global convenor, there are two aspects that require further inquiry. First, there is competition between UN agencies, funds and programs at the global, regional and national level. Second, there remains a lack of clarity in the division of roles between the UN and other regional organizations. In some cases, the competition between the UN and relevant regional bodies has prevented or obstructed the success of peacebuilding initiatives. For example, the at times strained relationship between the Arab League and the UN has generated public concerns about the partners ability to respond to crises.

Both the competition and the lack of coordination represent challenges that affect impactful regional peacebuilding mechanisms - a process that requires stakeholders to come together around a shared narrative and analysis. A shared agenda and joint strategic priorities can only be agreed based on a shared analysis and common understanding of the crises.

### **Recommendations**

1. **The UN should consider where and how to balance its role as a convenor and advisor with that of being an implementer.** A coherent UN leadership can enhance the effectiveness of a multi-stakeholder approach. To accomplish this, it is necessary to address the internal problems of competition between agencies, clarify the roles of different agencies, funds and programs, and to promote an equilibrated relationship with regional bodies. Effective platforms are needed to coordinate multi-stakeholder mechanisms, promote the exchange of lessons learned and good practices between regions, and allow the transfer of responsibilities at the country level, which in turn can help clarify the division of roles between the UN and other stakeholders.
2. **Regional exchange and platforms for dialogue should be promoted by the UN Country and Regional Offices.** Spaces need to be used and created to promote the exchange of relevant experiences among and within regions, that can contribute to the discourse of preventive diplomacy. Concrete and open dialogue and exchange of lessons learned between and within regions should be encouraged. The UN, through its Country Offices structure and the successful experience of collaboration with different regional bodies, has a vital role to play in this regard.
3. **The UN and donors, through existing funding channels, should promote regional cooperation among states for the implementation of peacebuilding activities.** The Resolution on Financing for Peacebuilding (A/RES/76/305) explicitly calls for an increase in strategic and operational collaboration among peacebuilding financing partners at the regional and country levels with a view to promoting coordinated and context-specific approaches.