

# CIVIL SOCIETY – UN PREVENTION PLATFORM

## The Impact of Prevention at the Field Level: Can the New Agenda for Peace Turbo Charge Prevention at the UN?

Hybrid Discussion | 14 September 2022

### *Summary Note*

#### **Introduction**

The Secretary-General's 2021 'Our Common Agenda' report puts forward a vision that promotes the shared goals of the United Nations (UN) and its Member States for the next 25 years. 'Our Common Agenda' is designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral arrangements in order to make a tangible difference in people's lives. Of twelve major sections in the report, the third section outlines the *New Agenda for Peace* (NA4P) with six proposed focus areas for promoting peace and preventing conflict: reducing strategic risks, strengthening international foresight, reshaping responses to all forms of violence, investing in prevention, supporting regional prevention and centering women and girls in security. The NA4P follows up on former Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace,' which was published in 1992. 'Our Common Agenda' acknowledges that global conflicts, risks and priorities have drastically changed in the last thirty years, so NA4P aims to shift alongside the 21st century world that the UN is now operating within.

The recent conversation organized by the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform provided a space for prevention experts from various sectors and institutions to reflect on the scope of the NA4P and exchange practical ideas for ensuring that this Agenda provides for inclusive, cross-sectional and impactful prevention action at the regional, national and local levels.

The key themes and next steps that emerged during this discussion include:

- **The New Agenda for Peace should provide space and opportunity to destigmatise prevention in multilateral policy and practice.**

As a part of the NA4P, the UN can provide space for destigmatising prevention. Prevention remains a sensitive topic within the multilateral system as actors continue to show reluctance around financial and resource investment in a concept they struggle to clearly define. Also, concerns persist around the UN's ability to influence political will and build national prevention capacity without Member States full support. However, the UN can promote the benefits of conflict prevention, thereby slowly increasing political will and destigmatising this topic to its Member States.

Further, utilizing a holistic approach to prevention would help the UN destigmatise it. Among others, the UN's development and peacebuilding efforts both contribute to conflict prevention. On the former, more developed countries engage in less violent conflicts. Subsequently, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals play an important role in prevention. Goal 16 specifically focuses on promoting peaceful, inclusive and just societies and institutions, but all of the goals assist conflict prevention at a base level. On the latter, countries with peacebuilding measures in place have more infrastructure to rely on if conflict breaks out.

At the same time, peacebuilding and development should not be conflated with a broader scope of prevention efforts. The NA4P should outline a comprehensive prevention framework that the UN and Member States can explore and integrate into the outcome of the Summit of the Future, incorporating the role peacebuilding and development efforts can play in advancing prevention. A

defined conflict prevention framework would bring prevention to the forefront of multilateral, regional and national action.

- **The New Agenda for Peace should provide space for building prevention capacities at all levels.**

The NA4P acknowledges the importance of supporting regional prevention efforts, but the UN can take this a step further by focusing on increasing prevention capacities at regional, national and local levels.

At the regional level, a strong NA4P would unite actors around a common prevention goal. The NA4P already presents an incentive to create regional prevention strategies that could help further destigmatise prevention. These new efforts can build on existing good practices of regional prevention action and increased commitments by regional organizations and regional economic commissions (RECs) as well as integrate new threats to regions, including climate change. However, it is important to note that when Member States are a part of several regional organizations, their capacities can be stretched too thin. Some ways of alleviating regional prevention efforts are integrating the lessons learned from current work of regional organizations, as well as better coordination among diverse regional arrangements.

At the national level, a strong NA4P would present national governments with the opportunity to develop a coherent vision for conflict prevention, with the support of the UN. National actors have an appetite for conflict prevention, so a strong NA4P could provide guidance and link them with existing tools and resources. Inclusive national political leadership has a deep knowledge of the local context and potential challenges, but the UN has technical expertise in mitigating the root causes of conflict. By combining these capacities, national actors will be best positioned to operationalise conflict prevention. National prevention action can then increase global political will to pursue prevention.

Local actors play a critical role in impactful prevention action. For example, local monitors effectively provide critical contextual data for early warning systems, providing a strong ground for prevention and de-escalation responsive to the needs in specific localities. Where these efforts are neglected and root conflicts are left unaddressed, conflicts escalate. Resources then go towards mitigating violent conflicts, which is much more costly, less effective, and often practically impossible. Current situations where crises and conflicts have re-occurred illustrate that local input should be central in conflict prevention. Investing in grassroots peacebuilding would empower local capacities, which is a key aspect for successful conflict prevention.

- **The New Agenda for Peace should internalize an inclusive approach in its process and outcome.**

The process of developing NA4P, as well as its outcome, should integrate inclusive ownership and be grounded in and reflective of the experiences of local communities. Diversity and inclusion, including the experiences of women and youth, are also central aspects to meeting communities needs in the NA4P and ensuring informed and well-rounded conflict prevention strategies. History shows that homegrown and local conflict prevention solutions are more well rounded and long lasting than general solutions developed at the highest levels. When meaningfully involved, local peacebuilders develop a strong sense of ownership and therefore can sustain their commitment and progress in the long-term.

- **The New Agenda for Peace should make a case for investing in prevention, including financial and non-financial contributions.**

Following up on the *Pathways for Peace* report, the NA4P should further provide concrete avenues and incentives for the donor community and national governments to use avenues available to them to financially support conflict prevention. While the donor community can re-envision their priorities to invest towards prevention; national governments can use their own budget allocations to prioritize prevention. This will save money in the long run by preventing and mitigating violent conflicts. However, investing in prevention is not just a financial commitment. Committing to prevention also includes improving political commitment at all levels, growing technical expertise in practical prevention action, and spending time increasing capacities and research.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations have been identified as targets for strengthening the focus on prevention in the NA4P:

- The UN should provide space for showcasing the benefits of conflict prevention. This action will trickle down to regional, national and local action and **destigmatise prevention** both in policy and practice.
- The NA4P should outline **a global framework for conflict prevention** that can be used to build regional, national and local prevention capacities, as well as ensuring coordination among them.
- The NA4P process should include **diverse actors working at different levels**. A diverse group of voices should be at the forefront of conflict prevention, including local peacebuilders, women and youth.
- The multilateral system must **support more investment in prevention**. Investment comes in many forms, including—but not limited to—finances, technical expertise and research work. If taken seriously, these investments in prevention will pay off.