



OI Policy Compendium Note on the UN Peacebuilding Commission

Overview: Oxfam International's position on the Peacebuilding Commission

Oxfam International welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. There is a vital need for the UN, international financial institutions, and donor governments to be more proactive in supporting countries that are at risk of sliding into conflict, and to better sustain that support once peace agreements are made. The Commission has begun to make steps towards this.

Oxfam believes that the ongoing test of the Peacebuilding Commission's effectiveness will depend upon:

- The extent to which the Commission facilitates agreement by the UN with other non-UN players on effective strategies to consolidate peace and foster early recovery.
- The willingness of UN agencies, donor governments, and international financial institutions to adhere to and finance the strategies developed by the Peacebuilding Commission.
- The extent to which the Commission's strategy and actions respect the distinct role of humanitarian actors and humanitarian action in a post-conflict environment.
- The effectiveness of its engagement with civil society, both internationally and within the countries of focus.
- The extent to which it is able to expand its resources and capacity to take on new and more challenging countries.

1. Background

In December 2005, upon the recommendations of the Secretary-General and agreements made at the 2005 World Summit on UN reform, the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted joint resolutions establishing a new UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).¹ The PBC is designed to act as an intergovernmental advisory body to bring together all relevant actors (states; regional organisations; financial, troop, and civilian police contributors; UN representatives; and financial institutions) for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery.

The Peacebuilding Commission comprises:

1. An intergovernmental Organisational Committee composed of 31 member states selected as representatives of the UN's various stakeholders: the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), major UN peacekeeping troop-contributing countries, and major donors to the UN.²
2. A Peacebuilding Support Office in the UN Secretariat composed of 15 officials, and headed by an Assistant Secretary-General,³ to offer information and strategic and policy guidance to the Committee, and to support the process of planning at the country level.
3. A Peacebuilding Fund, initially of \$250 million, to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities when other funding may not yet be available.

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution ([A/RES/60/180](#)) and UN Security Council Resolution ([S/RES/1645\(2005\)](#)).

² As of 23 June 2008, the OC comprises: Angola, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Luxembourg, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America.

³ Currently Caroline McAskie of Canada.

Since it was established at the end of 2005, and after a slow start, the Commission's activities have increased. Provisional rules of procedure were approved in June 2006, and the Commission has started to work on its first countries of focus, with funds being distributed for various peacebuilding activities, from those aiming to strengthen the rule of law and encourage democratic governance, to projects that promote youth enterprises.⁴ The Commission played a positive role in encouraging the mobilisation of international resources in the case of Burundi, yet it is too early to judge whether the PBC will ensure predictable financing for recovery activities over multiple financial cycles.

The countries on the PBC's agenda now include the original two, Burundi and Sierra Leone, with the addition of Guinea-Bissau in late 2007 and the Central African Republic (CAR) in June 2008.⁵

2. Oxfam International's position on the Peacebuilding Commission

Oxfam International welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. There is a vital need for the UN, international financial institutions, and donor governments to be more proactive in supporting countries that are at risk of sliding into conflict, and to better sustain that support once peace agreements are made. We concur with the assessment made in the December 2004 report of then Secretary-General Kofi Annan's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change that if only two peace accords in Angola and Rwanda had been successfully implemented, the deaths of almost three million people could have been prevented.⁶ An effective Peacebuilding Commission could play a positive role in strengthening the international community's attempts to maintain peace and security, and reduce the need for reactive responses after violence has broken out.

Despite the Commission's founding resolution noting "the importance of participation of regional and local actors", and encouraging consultation "with civil society, non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations", progress in these areas has been mixed. The preconditions for the consultation of civil society organisations are unnecessarily restrictive, and although attempts to decentralise working methods away from New York (through the use of video conferencing and field visits) are welcomed, the potential contribution of local civil society is not yet being realised.

Burundi and Sierra Leone, the first two countries on the PBC's agenda, are struggling to put their legacies of violent conflict behind them. Although both countries are worthy of the Commission's attention, they have not tested the full scope of work envisaged in the PBC's founding resolutions.

Guinea-Bissau and CAR obviously present new challenges to the PBC. However, fragile as all these states may be, none have experienced recent violent conflict at a level that can be said to truly test the PBC's ability to coordinate successful 'early recovery' activities, particularly in terms of securing/providing funding in critical post-conflict periods. Questions must also be raised about whether the operational arm of the PBC, the Peacebuilding Support Office, has the resources and capacity to properly address the problems of all four countries, let alone others.

Oxfam believes that the Peacebuilding Commission's effectiveness will need to be judged according to:

1. The extent to which the PBC facilitates agreement by the UN with other non-UN players on effective strategies that include a sequenced plan for actions to consolidate peace and foster early recovery.
2. The willingness of UN agencies, donor governments, and international financial institutions to adhere to and finance the strategies developed by the Peacebuilding Commission.
3. The extent to which the Commission's strategy and actions respect the distinct role of humanitarian actors and humanitarian action in a post-conflict environment, ensuring that humanitarian action focused on preserving life and meeting the immediate needs of the

⁴ For more information on the distribution of funds, please see: www.unpbf.org/

⁵ The Peacebuilding Fund supports countries before the PBC, but funding can also be made available to countries in similar circumstances by the Secretary-General or for individual projects funded under the PBF 'Emergency Window'.

⁶ United Nations High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (2004) 'A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility' New York: UN Department of Public Information

population for food, nutrition, shelter, and basic health services remains distinct from the inherently political strategy of consolidating and building peace.⁷

4. The effectiveness of its engagement with civil society. The procedural rules of the Commission should enhance the ability of civil society organisations and local stakeholders to input into the peacebuilding process.
5. The continued funding of the Peacebuilding Fund to at least \$250m; with all money allocated to the Fund being new money, and with the expectation that any increase in spending on management and overheads is commensurate with increased activities of the PBC on the ground. Additionally, there should be an increase in the resources that donor governments are willing to commit to peacebuilding activities in general; currently there is a major dearth of readily available funding for such action.
6. How the PBC fulfils its mandate in Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, two countries with very different but equally challenging social, political, and economic realities.
7. Whether the Commission continues to increase its capacity and is able to increase its impact on the ground in the current countries on the agenda, *and* adequately address additional countries as and when necessary.

For further background on the Peacebuilding Committee see:

Security Council Report, (2006) 'Peacebuilding Commission' 23 June 2006, available at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.1810109/k.D54B/Special_Research_ReportBRPeacebuilding_CommissionBR23_June_2006.htm (accessed June 2008)

Security Council Report, (2008) 'Peacebuilding Commission' 5 October 2007, available at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.3471567/k.864B/Special_Research_Report_No_2brPeacebuilding_Commissionbr5_October_2007.htm (accessed June 2008)

The Reform the UN website page on the Peacebuilding Commission, available at: <http://www.reformtheun.org/index.php> (accessed June 2008)

⁷ For more information see the OI Policy Compendium Note on [United Nations Integrated Missions and Humanitarian Assistance](#).

ANNEXE

Oxfam International has the following detailed proposals for how the Peacebuilding Commission should engage with civil society:⁸

➤ The rationale for interaction with civil society

Oxfam believes that civil society has a pivotal role to play in building peace. Central to successful peacebuilding is local ownership of the peacebuilding process and engagement in the development and implementation of strategies for rebuilding. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are uniquely equipped to mobilise individuals in peacebuilding activities and may be some of the few remnants of social networks in post-conflict situations. CSOs can be important resources for local knowledge and expertise in various sectors related to rebuilding societies after conflict and should be utilised early on in the peacebuilding process in the development of a strategic plan. Additionally, CSOs may be able to provide a valuable link between the PBC and local populations both in identifying local priorities in peacebuilding and transmitting information about the co-ordinated peacebuilding strategy. Finally, civil- society organisations are often engaged in providing goods and services as part of humanitarian relief and co-ordinating other essential activities, including justice mechanisms.

➤ The principles that should guide interaction with civil society

Any arrangements for consultation with civil society could be governed by principles of accountability, inclusiveness, and flexibility.

- **Accountability** includes development of mechanisms for transparency, participation, evaluation, information sharing, and complaints and redress based on the need for those most affected by policies to be involved in the decision-making process.
- **Inclusiveness** means engagement with diverse CSOs across sectors and regions. It is particularly essential to secure local support for the peacebuilding process.
- **Flexibility** will be essential at all levels and stages of activity, both as the PBC evolves and in response to fluctuating circumstances in the country concerned.

➤ The processes of interaction with civil society

(i) Early engagement with civil society in the country concerned

As part of the process of national ownership, engaging with civil society in the countries concerned at an *early* stage of the PBC's work will be critical. Such early and effective engagement could foster local buy-in for the peacebuilding strategy, build confidence in the new PBC by demonstrating its commitment to addressing local realities, pave the way for better governance by connecting local and national governments with civil society, and capitalise on existing peacebuilding efforts.

(ii) Country-specific focus

The Organizational Committee of the PBC should call on the country-specific meetings of the PBC to consult with representatives of local civil society. One mechanism for interaction with local civil society that should be supported by the PBC Organizational Committee is an *in-country civil society forum* supported from the Peacebuilding Fund to be held soon after a country is selected for the PBC.

- The forum could provide the PBC with a review of existing peacebuilding activities with a particular focus on those that are conducted by civil society.
- The forum could produce recommendations for the country-specific meeting of the PBC or potentially an annex for the strategy document of the PBC.

⁸ This is an extract from policy proposals developed by the World Federalist Movement in consultation with Save the Children, World Vision, International Crisis Group, International Center for Transitional Justice, Quaker UN Office, and Refugees International.

- Such a forum should be organised by civil society with a clear agenda and preparation that includes ensuring access to the forum for diverse CSOs, including women's organisations.
- The forum should be part of a self-organised and sustained process within civil society to feed into the country's peacebuilding strategy.
- The PBC should ensure that local civil society has access to documents and reports of the PBC and the Peacebuilding Support Office in local languages.

The Organizational Committee of the PBC should invite representatives of local civil society to participate as unofficial members in the country-specific meetings of the PBC. Representatives could be designated through a locally based process.

(iii) Regular consultations with NGOs at UN Headquarters

The PBC could develop formal and informal mechanisms for consultation with relevant international NGOs and representatives from civil society from the countries under consideration by the PBC.

- NGOs could *observe and monitor meetings* of the Peacebuilding Commission based in principle on the arrangements set forth in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31. Relevant arrangements include:
 - Access to the provisional agenda of meetings of the PBC;
 - Right to attend public meetings;
 - Right to submit written statements relevant to the work of the Commission.

Consideration could be given to local NGOs from countries concerned that do not have ECOSOC Consultative Status.

- The PBC could *host an annual dialogue* with NGOs and the PBC Organizational Committee. A regular consultation would allow for the necessary arrangements to be made to bring relevant actors from around the world to New York and for NGOs to self-organise and prepare contributions in advance of the set meeting.
 - The dialogue could be most effective if it were to coincide with a scheduled meeting of the PBC.
 - The dialogue could be organised into working groups that could address progress in each of the countries concerned and two to three thematic issues related to peacebuilding relevant to the PBC.
 - A possible output from the dialogue could be recommendations for the annual report of the PBC to the General Assembly.

(iv) Consultative review process in 2011

The PBC five-year review, mandated by its establishing resolutions, should include a consultative process to review CSO engagement mechanisms at UN headquarters and in the countries concerned.