



Dag Hammarskjöld
Foundation

Informal retreat of the members of the Peacebuilding Commission

The Peacebuilding Commission in a new era for peace

Organised by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the UN Department of Political and
Peacebuilding Affairs
29-30 June 2023
Greentree Estate, Manhasset, NY

Summary note

On 29-30 June 2023, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) co-organized an informal retreat of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) at Greentree Estate, Manhasset, New York. The retreat convened Ambassadors from the Peacebuilding Commission's membership, the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and senior officials of the United Nations.

The retreat provided an opportunity to explore ways in which the Peacebuilding Commission can contribute to a more effective multilateralism and to a new era for peace, building on the momentum created by the development of a New Agenda for Peace by the Secretary-General in recognition of the need to revitalize the collective security system and multilateral action for peace. In addition, the retreat offered an informal space for Member States to take stock of the progress made over the past few years and to assess areas where the work of the Commission can be further strengthened, with specific focus on its working methods and ways to ensure follow-up and impact.

The retreat opened with a reception and a working dinner during which the PBC Chair, H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović (Croatia), shared reflections on recent developments within the PBC and ideas for how to take forward efforts needed to further realize the Commission's full potential. This was followed by a contextual framing by the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, who spoke of the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future as defining moments during which Member States need to demonstrate their recommitment to multilateralism. During this time of multidimensional crises and decline in trust in the multilateral system, it is imperative to acknowledge the reasons for slow progress towards the SDGs, and in that regard, to accelerate transformative solutions including revised economic thinking, new methodologies for measuring progress, and updated institutional capacities and policies that constructively embrace the seismic technological changes that have and will continue to take place globally.

The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, provided an overview of the forthcoming policy brief on the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace that will make the case for more effective collective security, underpinned by the principles of trust, solidarity, and universality. Some of the key features of the New Agenda for Peace will be underscoring the imperative to eradicate all forms of violence and a recognition of the universality of prevention and thus a call for Member

States to invest in national peacebuilding and prevention strategies and capacities. The New Agenda for Peace is also anticipated to identify a potential elevated role for the PBC, drawing on its strong focus on national ownership and on its mandate, to serve as a platform for engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders including IFIs, regional bodies and civil society.

In response to the presentations, participants shared reflections on the themes raised. These included support for the recognition of the universality of prevention, with an appeal for countries to show solidarity rather than being driven solely by national interests; a call to view the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda as providing a blueprint for prevention strategies; a reminder that the PBC does and can provide critical support to countries in peacekeeping transition settings such as Mali and DRC; and a recognition of the PBC playing a key role in bridging the three pillars of the UN and thus in contributing to greater coherence in the UN's peacebuilding work.

The second day of the retreat was structured around a welcome and framing by the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Peacebuilding Support, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, followed by three sessions, covering the following topics: 1) The universality of peacebuilding and sustaining peace: developing good practices; 2) Working methods for improved impact; and 3) Building stronger synergies between the PBC and the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Welcome and Framing

ASG Spehar opened the second day of the retreat with an overview of advances that have been made by the PBC in demonstrating and strengthening its role. The Commission has in recent years expanded its geographic scope, providing support to more countries, including through multi-country engagements, and has considered a broad range of peacebuilding questions, including most recently on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and transitional justice. In these meetings, the Commission has demonstrated its value in promoting peer-to-peer learning in the spirit of South-South and triangular cooperation as well as underscoring the universality of peacebuilding and prevention by exploring cases from diverse contexts and in different regions including the Global North. ASG Spehar highlighted the increased number of instances in which the PBC has provided advice to the Security Council while acknowledging that there was still insufficient information about how the Commission's advice is utilized in the work of the Council. She urged Member States in the PBC who are also members of the Council to make an effort to improve communication in this regard. Finally, ASG Spehar underscored the potential role that could be played by the PBC in providing a forum for "unpacking" the 2022 General Assembly resolution 75/201 on financing for peacebuilding and identifying strategies for advancing its implementation.

Below is a summary highlighting key points derived from these discussions, which were conducted under Chatham House rule.

Session 1: The universality of peacebuilding and sustaining peace: developing good practice

In starting the first session, participants acknowledged how the PBC has gradually strengthened its role and provided a space for an increasing number of countries across different regions who approached the Commission to share their peacebuilding experiences and challenges.

In this regard, participants had an opportunity to hear about the support that The Gambia has received from the PBC in recent years, including during the political impasse that followed the national election in 2016, and the impact that this support, which continues at present, has had on the country. There is a strong sense nationally that it is thanks to the international community – including the PBC, PBF and ECOWAS in particular – that The Gambia was able to avoid widespread violence and take steps towards sustainable peace. The Gambia has been keen to use the PBC platform to share its experience, including its ongoing

transitional justice process. “The empathy (of the international community) was so palpable” participants heard. Thanks in part to the support provided by the PBC and PBF, The Gambia was listed as the third most peaceful country in Sub-Saharan Africa on the Global Peace Index¹ in 2022.

The case of The Gambia was recognised in the session as providing a good example of successful prevention, wherein global actors worked in close **partnership with regional and sub-regional organisations** in support of and in coordination with national and local stakeholders. Participants recognised that the PBC serves as a unique platform to facilitate such partnership and urged the Commission to continue to pursue stronger engagement and interaction with **International Financial Institutions** (IFIs), in particular the World Bank. A specific idea of establishing a “**Sustaining Peace network**” was proposed for the PBC to more systematically cooperate with regional actors.

During the session, participants highlighted that different Member States may have slightly different understandings of what **universality of peacebuilding and prevention** means and that it was important that this be clarified. The moderator and several speakers recalled USG DiCarlo’s remarks, during which she outlined the notion of prevention as a universal goal that all Member States should engage in and that must be understood as a responsibility of each country, not just those most affected by conflict and violence. There was also the recognition of the universality of peacebuilding and sustaining peace being embedded in the 2016 twin resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (A/RES/60/180-S/RES/1645(2016)) and in Goal 16 of the SDGs. In terms of the work of the PBC, which supports the universality of peacebuilding and sustaining peace, participants recalled the fundamental principle of national ownership underpinning all of the Commission’s engagements and thus concluded that universality should be understood in the context of strengthening the PBC’s toolbox and appeal to a broader spectrum of countries. The idea was raised of introducing a voluntary “**sustaining peace review**” in which countries could share their national peacebuilding strategies, with the PBC serving as a platform for presentation and discussion of such reviews to better enable the Commission to mobilise political and financial resources towards these strategies.

Session 2: Working methods for improved impact

In the second session, participants highlighted that the PBC has been regularly reviewing its working methods and rules of procedure with a view to remaining flexible and fit for purpose, as prescribed in the 2016 twin resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In accordance with the PBC’s founding resolutions (A/RES/60/180-S/RES/1645(2005)), the PBC has developed its own rules of procedure and working methods and has the flexibility to update them as needed. In the context of the forthcoming New Agenda for Peace, and echoing some of the recommendations made by the High-Level Advisory Board on Multilateralism, it is timely to explore what would need to be adjusted within the working methods and support capacities to allow for the Commission to strengthen its effectiveness and impact as an intergovernmental advisory body.

A few key areas came into focus during the interactive discussion. The first was in relation to the **consensus-based decision making** currently in practice at the PBC, that participants recognized as having benefits as well as shortcomings. Participants mostly agreed that formal written statements or submissions to other intergovernmental bodies should continue to be decided on a consensus basis and that this should indeed be viewed as a key strength of the PBC. Regarding other types of outputs or activities such as the Chair’s participation in various panels as well as statements to non-UN bodies or press releases, a more flexible approach could be considered. In terms of the Chair’s position, some participants noted that the ability to fully exercise the leadership role should not unnecessarily be constrained or undermined and, thus,

¹ An annual index published by the Institute for Economic and Peace covering 163 countries, accessible at www.economicsandpeace.org/

statements and engagements in external meetings by the Chair should not be subject to a consensus driven decision-making or clearance process. Such an adjustment could be agreed by the members without requiring new resolutions and would enable the Chair to fully exercise their role in raising the visibility and awareness about the PBC's work with wider audiences.

A second point raised by participants was the engagement and number of **Vice-Chairs of the PBC**. Participants proposed a more effective division of labour between the Chair and the Vice-Chairs, the latter of whom could take responsibility for follow up on country-specific and regional discussions. Participants expressed their interest in further considering a proposal to increase the number of Vice-Chairs from two to four (with continued selection from among PBC members for a term of one year as per current rules of procedure) to increase engagement and leadership in advancing the PBC's efforts. Recognising the limitations of two-year mandates, it was also proposed that future Chairs could serve as a vice-chair the preceding year to promote continuity.

It was also proposed that the PBC could play a greater role in peacekeeping transitions and in supporting UN presences, possibly in the format of "light footprint civilian missions", that continue assisting countries in building trust and addressing the root causes of conflict. To be able to effectively accompany such processes, it was suggested by some that the PBC should be enabled to provide recommendations in such situations.

Finally, participants discussed **the idea of holding a Ministerial level PBC meeting** on 22 September 2023 during the High-level week of the General Assembly. Such a meeting was viewed as providing space to have a strategic discussion on the PBC's role in light of the outcomes of the SDG Summit and the Ministerial Preparatory Meeting for the Summit of the Future, and to provide political guidance on ways to strengthen the Commission during the 2025 review of the peacebuilding architecture. Participants stressed the need to set a clear objective for the Ministerial meeting.

In concluding the session, participants agreed that a regular review of the Commission's working methods would be welcome and useful. The 2025 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture presents an opportunity to operationalise recommendations in the New Agenda for Peace and, in that regard, to consider what changes can be made to the PBC's working methods, composition, and support capacities so that it can more effectively perform its functions.

Working lunch: Building stronger synergies between PBC and PBF

To initiate the discussion on stronger synergies between the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), Ms. Sara Pantuliano, Chair of the Advisory Group of the PBF, provided a brief overview of recent developments in the PBF's Advisory Group, highlighting a shift in composition to represent broader geographic diversity that includes two former chairs of the PBC (from Kenya and Egypt). Ms. Pantuliano also outlined the four priorities of the current Advisory Group: 1) strengthening peace as a central element at the core of the UN's work; 2) supporting the "hinge" function of PBSO within the UN system, designed to bring greater coherence across the peace, development and humanitarian dimensions of UN activity; 3) assessing and communicating the impact of peacebuilding programming; and 4) increasing financing for peacebuilding (including through assessed contributions to the PBF).

Calling attention to the ongoing negotiations in the Fifth Committee on the proposed allocation of assessed contributions to the PBF and questions raised by some Member States on accountability and oversight, Ms. Pantuliano shared a few ideas for strengthening the Fund's engagement with the PBC as part of its accountability mechanisms. These included more regular briefings to the PBC on progress of PBF-funded projects; an annual exchange between the full membership of the PBC and the full PBF Advisory Group; and a standing invitation for a PBC member to join field visits by the Advisory Group to PBF project sites.

ASG Spehar followed up by noting PBSO's attentiveness to the interest of Member States in the accountability and governance aspects of the Fund. She highlighted the idea of an annual interactive strategic dialogue between PBSO and the PBC towards the beginning of each calendar year that can discuss results of the previous year and preview national demand for the upcoming one.

Participants underscored the importance of addressing concerns about oversight without compromising the unique nature of the PBF where funding decisions are responsive and driven by national ownership and national priorities. There was also a call to recognize the strong symbolic value of assessed contributions to the PBF, as demonstrating Member States' full commitment to peacebuilding as a core objective of the UN's work. The working lunch closed with an impassioned plea for all Member States to come together and continue to develop options for how to ensure adequate, predictable and sustained financing for peacebuilding.

Concluding reflections on the way forward

The retreat concluded with reflections on the need to continue to strengthen the work of the UN on peacebuilding and prevention. In this regard, the New Agenda for Peace and the upcoming SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future offer critical opportunities to recommit to multilateralism, to advancing sustainable peace and sustainable development, to building a more effective collective security architecture and to provide strategic political guidance for the 2025 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture. The Peacebuilding Commission has important contributions to make in these efforts.

While the PBC has continuously improved and is increasingly fulfilling its advisory, bridging and convening roles for a broader set of countries and regions, participants recognized that there is still room for improvement and to step up the Commission's engagements.

Participants identified strengthened engagement with the IFIs and with regional and subregional organizations as a priority for the PBC to address. Another specific area to improve is the assessment and communication of the PBC's impact at the country level. The DPPA's development of an Impact Hub will offer welcome support in that regard. To continue to increase the attractiveness of the PBC to a diverse set of countries that could benefit from its support, there is a need to continue to improve its visibility to a broader set of Member States and to clarify its offer. Enhanced communications efforts with related support capacities, in collaboration with countries considered by the Commission and with the support of the Department of Global Communications could thus be further explored, building on the discussion at the 2022 PBC retreat.

Finally, it was agreed that a document outlining the potential format and objective of the proposed Ministerial level meeting of the PBC during the High-level week of the General Assembly would be shared soon by the Chair to allow for further discussion among PBC members and a refinement of the concept by the Chair in due course.

In closing, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation committed to consult with Member States about how to maximize the utility of annual PBC retreats in order to inform future planning and extended its offer to support further discussions in smaller groupings and at expert level on the themes raised during the retreat over the coming months, in close coordination with DPPA.
