

Peacebuilding Commission

Ambassadorial-level meeting on education's role in building peace in Nepal and Sierra Leone

14 September 2023

Chair's Summary

On 14 September 2023, the Peacebuilding Commission convened a meeting on education's role in building peace in Nepal and Sierra Leone. This meeting was held within the context of the fourth International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September 2023. The Commission facilitated an exchange of experiences, good practices and lessons learned regarding education and peacebuilding in Nepal and Sierra Leone, in the spirit of South-South and triangular cooperation. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Education Above All Foundation from the State of Qatar. Member States stressed the important role education plays in peacebuilding and sustaining peace and called for ensuring the provision of education to all youth and children, especially women and girls, as an essential tool for protection and empowerment. They also shared experiences on education from their own past peacebuilding processes. Acknowledging ongoing efforts to revise and update international standards relating to peace, human rights and education, they called on the international community to scale up its support for national efforts to build peace through the provision of transformative, inclusive and equitable quality education.

1. On 14 September 2023, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on education's role in building peace in Nepal and Sierra Leone, which facilitated an exchange of experience, good practices and lessons learned regarding education and peacebuilding in Nepal and Sierra Leone, in the spirit of South-South and triangular cooperation.
2. In his opening remarks, the PBC Chair noted that the International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September is a reminder of the importance to protect all students, especially those in vulnerable situations, and stressed the need to strengthen efforts and increase funding to promote safe school environments and facilitate access to education in conflict. He underscored four key points: (1) the importance of securing physical learning environments and free access to education for all; (2) education as a confidence-building and conflict prevention measure as well as a tool against hate speech; (3) the need to adopt transformative pedagogical approaches that equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviors they need to deal with conflict and violence; and (4) the importance of maintaining the quality of education despite challenges. He noted that the UN has undertaken significant steps in this regard through the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022.
3. **Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations**, stressed that education is a pathway to a better future for every person and a more peaceful world. She

noted that conflict exacerbates inequality in access to education and education inequality increases the risk of conflict. This dangerous cycle must be broken, she emphasized. Noting that inclusive and equitable quality education is essential for conflict prevention, resilience-building and participation of youth in society, she underscored the importance of investing in the education system, especially training for teachers and educational tools, and supporting mental health of children and youth. She commended the progress made in Nepal, notably through the "Schools as Zones of Peace" initiative, and the significant investment in more inclusive and equitable quality education, with a focus on young women and girls. She commended Sierra Leone's commitment to and investments in human development through the establishment of free and quality basic education and underscored the country's Education Sector Plan and the 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill protecting women's and girl's right to education. The Deputy Secretary-General called for scaling up efforts and investment in education, particularly in the face of worsening climate emergencies and economic situations in developing countries. She expressed the commitment of the United Nations and its agencies to continue supporting education, including through the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). She encouraged the Commission to elevate its support for global, regional and national efforts to build peace through inclusive and equitable quality education, building on the Transforming Education Summit.

4. **H.E. Mr. Narayan Prakash Saud, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal**, noted that the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement not only marked the beginning of Nepal's unique and country-led peace process but also recognized that education plays a central role in peacebuilding. He emphasized the significance of Nepal's 2015 Constitution, which was made possible by strong political will and led the way to the institutionalization of education as a fundamental human right. While the education sector was severely affected by the decade-long conflict, Nepal prioritized education as an important vehicle for national advancement and social cohesion, including through the adoption of a School Sector Reform Plan (2009 – 2015), which promotes education in mother tongue to address the learning needs of all communities. He noted that the Government endorsed a directive declaring all schools as "Zones of Peace" in May 2011, aiming at ensuring that schools remain safe for children, and teaching and learning continue unhindered. Efforts were also made to provide training and support to teachers, particularly in conflict-affected areas, reintegrate former combatants into the formal education system, implement community-based education programmes to reach children in remote areas, and promote linguistically inclusive and locally relevant learning materials that incorporate peace education. He also highlighted Nepal's effort to promote gender equality in education, including through encouraging girls' enrolment and retention in schools. He emphasized the importance to focus on promoting a culture of peace through education and engage communities and civil societies in the education process. In concluding, he expressed Nepal's commitment to complete its transitional justice process and provide justice and reparation to victims and requested the international community's support to this end.
5. **H.E. Mr. Timothy Musa Kabba, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone**, stressed the urgent need to safeguard the right to education as well as the "Safe School Declaration", and noted education being an essential component of building and sustaining peace as well as an instrumental prevention and resilience-building

mechanism. He recalled that President Bio, together with the UN Secretary-General, co-chaired the Transforming Education Summit in 2022, in response to a global crisis in education and reiterated continued commitment to the six calls to action launched by all Member States and partners during the Summit. He stressed that inclusive and equitable quality education systems responding to historical grievances and exclusions are key in reinforcing social cohesion and accelerating sustainable development. He underscored Sierra Leone's continued dedication to ensuring basic, inclusive, and free quality education, while noting the 20 per cent budget allocation to education as well as the increase of 1 million students' school enrolment since 2018. He informed of the measures to support educational opportunities, including free education, distribution of textbooks, school feeding and increased salaries for teachers. He commended the work and commitment of the PBC and development partners and urged Member States to continue to support Sierra Leone's efforts in sustaining peace and advancing development.

6. **Mr. Fahad Hamad Hassan Al-Sulaiti, CEO of the Education Above All Foundation of the State of Qatar**, reiterated the core role of inclusive and quality education in peacebuilding efforts while also commending the initiatives of Nepal and Sierra Leone in this area. With increasing amounts of violence and the subsequent displacement of civilians, he noted the role of Education Above All Foundation in bringing education to more than 15 million out-of-school children in more than 60 countries. Acknowledging the rise of attacks against students, educators, and places of education, he underscored the importance of strong accountability and justice for victims. He urged for a wholistic solution that addresses the root causes of conflict and can provide quality education, jobs, and training for young people.
7. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following remarks:
 - They welcomed the commemoration of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September and stressed the need to respect international human rights and humanitarian law, which recognizes education as a fundamental human right.
 - They commended Nepal and Sierra Leone for their national efforts in building and sustaining peace through inclusive and equitable quality education and for sharing their good practices with the Commission, in the spirit of South-South and triangular cooperation.
 - Several Member States also shared their own experiences in building peace through education, including the important role that education can play in reconciliation and addressing historical grievances and legacies of conflict.
 - They emphasized the prominent role that education plays in prevention, reconciliation and peacebuilding. They called for ensuring the provision of education to all youth and children, especially women and girls, as an essential tool for protection and empowerment. They called on the international community to scale up its support for national efforts to build peace through the provision of transformative, inclusive and equitable quality education.
 - Stressing the importance to ensure inclusivity of education, they underscored the need to ensure equal access of young women and girls, persons with disabilities and refugees and internally displaced persons to quality education.
 - They emphasized the importance to incorporate peace education in school curricula and textbooks.

- They called on the PBC to focus more on the link between education and peacebuilding and work closely with the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, and other partners including regional organizations, international financial institutions and private sector, in support of education's role in building peace.
- They encouraged the Commission to utilize its advisory role to the Security Council to follow up on the Council resolution 2601(2021).
- Acknowledging ongoing efforts to revise and update international standards relating to peace, human rights and education, they encouraged Member States to support the adoption and follow up implementation of the revised 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

8. **Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support,** emphasized the clear link between education and peacebuilding, which is also reflected in the strong demand for the PBF support. She recalled that from 2015 to 2021, the PBF had funded 189 projects in 43 countries worth over \$350 million, which have at least partially contributed to the achievement of SDG 4. Emphasizing the importance of follow up to PBC meetings, she noted that the PBC could consider championing the calls to action made during the Transforming Education Summit, especially calls for protecting education in crisis situations and advancing gender equality. She encouraged the Commission to make specific recommendations on building peace through inclusive and equitable quality education, as advice to the General Assembly and the Security Council. She suggested that the PBC could use its political platform and convening power to support calls and action to ensure the visibility and importance of the education and peacebuilding nexus.

Chair's recommendations

- Encourage Nepal and Sierra Leone to continue to engage and share their peacebuilding experiences with the PBC as champions of South-South and triangular cooperation for peacebuilding. Continue to support Nepal and Sierra Leone's peacebuilding processes
- Mobilize and scale up support for national efforts to build peace through the provision of transformative, inclusive and equitable quality education, recognizing that all people must have equitable access to a good quality lifelong education to achieve lasting peace.
- Call on the Member States to enable education authorities and institutions, teachers and personnel to provide programmes that contribute to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, developed through inclusive dialogue, including intergenerational exchange with relevant stakeholders.
- Urge the Member States to support safe and inclusive learning environments that incorporate principles of inclusion, respect for cultural diversity, justice and care, and actively challenge all forms of harmful, discriminatory and hateful biases and practices.
- Encourage the Commission to advocate for further PBF investments on programmes in support of education's role in building peace.
- Strengthen the Commission's focus on the education and peacebuilding nexus, including through championing the calls to action made during the Transforming Education

Summit, using its political platform and convening power, and making specific recommendations to the General Assembly and the Security Council.

- Enhance the Commission's collaboration with the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, including UNESCO and UNICEF, and its partnerships with regional organizations, international financial institutions and private sector in support of education's role in reconciliation and building peace.
- Continue to utilize PBC platform for facilitating exchanges of experiences, good practices and lessons learned, in the spirit of South-South and triangular cooperation.
- Consider engaging in the promotion and rollout of the revised 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education for human rights and fundamental freedoms once adopted by the forthcoming UNESCO General Conference.