

The Peacebuilding Commission: New York-based, Field-oriented

Workshop hosted by the Permanent Mission of Norway

9 July 2013 (1:00 – 4:00 PM)

SUMMARY

Introduction

On 9 July, the Permanent Mission of Norway, in its capacity as coordinator of the Peacebuilding Commission's workstream on the "PBC-field interface", convened a workshop entitled: "The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC): New York-based, Field-oriented". The workshop is part of a broader policy discussion on bridging the gap between the performance of the PBC in New York and in the field.

The coordinator invited members of the Organizational Committee, countries on the PBC agenda, Chairs of country configurations, and representatives of lead United Nations entities to participate in the workshop. A concept note was developed and shared with participants to facilitate substantive preparation by presenting key questions for discussion. Two panellists, **Ms. Clare Lockhart**, Co-founder, Institute for State Effectiveness; and **Mr. Robert Piper**, UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel and former UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal were invited to lead off the discussion.

Key findings

1. Addressing fragmentation and competing agenda

The PBC should support the primary coordination role of the UN leadership (whether S/ERSG or Resident Coordinator) in the field and help overcome fragmentation of efforts by providing a link to: a) relevant UN funds and programs aiming at a more coherent UN-Approach, b) decision-making processes in capitals, and c) the wider development community, especially the IFIs and regional development banks. Working through the S/ERSG and resident embassies, the PBC can assist in information-sharing and for enhancing coherence of international effort. However, this role of the PBC will remain unfulfilled unless there is greater consistency and coherence of decisions made by its Member States on bilateral assistance, as well as positions and actions taken in multilateral fora.

2. Supporting the transition from UN mission to UN Country Team

The PBC can play a useful role in the phase where a country is undergoing transition from a UN mission to a UN Country Team (UNCT). A clear niche for the PBC in this regard is to address recurring shortcomings in the international system's handling of its medium-term engagement with the country concerned during this critical phase of peace consolidation. The role of the PBC would be particularly appreciated in sustaining the attention and focus of the international community on key peacebuilding objectives and by offering a platform in New York for the UNCT to provide political backing and enhance coordination of efforts.

Highlights from the discussion

The PBC's role as an intergovernmental body based in New York and oriented to support field actors can be expressed around the following two broad issues:

1. Fragmentation and competing agenda

Support to peacebuilding by bilateral and multilateral actors is characterized by overlapping and competing agendas that do not always respond to the specific needs and priorities in the field. This fragmentation of support leads to lack of sufficient focus on and attention to critical challenges, especially over the medium to long-term timeframe of the peacebuilding process.

The PBC, therefore, should be able to:

- Promote improvement in policy coherence within its membership. Such coherence could rationalize funding decisions, as well as ensure consistency in positions taken at various multilateral fora. In this regard, the role of resident embassies assumes particular significance in order to strengthen the link between the field and New York, as well as to facilitate coherence of national positions and actions taken by Member States.

In addition, the PBC could further help address fragmentation and lack of coherence in peacebuilding support by:

- Responding to field-based analyses of the critical needs, priorities and challenges of the peacebuilding process by mobilizing and aligning multilateral and bilateral attention and support, and by advising on the appropriate sequence of peacebuilding interventions;
- Advising partners on the most appropriate country-specific approach to peacebuilding. For example, the PBC can draw attention to relevant activities at the local level; as well as help mobilize technical support for national and local capacity development (e.g. revenue collection systems);
- Highlighting the crucial role that the economic aspects of the peace process play in long-term sustainability by partnering with and engaging IFIs, regional development banks and the private sector; as well as by encouraging the alignment of peacebuilding and development strategies.

2. “For the marathon, not the sprint”

The critical focus and support to long-term peacebuilding objectives, such as institution-building, economic revitalization and job creation, begins towards the end of the lifetime of a UN peacekeeping or political mission with the transition to UNCT. This is around the same time when the attention of the Security Council shifts to other acute crises, donor enthusiasm wears off, the UN capacity to sustain high-level political engagement and to operate at the local level weakens and the need for a joined up effort with IFIs becomes more crucial. A clear niche for the PBC would be to help address these shortcomings and to help the UN Resident Coordinator manage the transition from a UN mission to a UNCT (non-mission) setting. This is particularly the case in countries in which there is little or limited attention from the international community. In this regard, the PBC, as an intergovernmental and New York-based body, can become increasingly field-oriented by:

- Sustaining the peacebuilding effort for the medium term, through calibrating international support to the ongoing needs and priorities of the peace process, after the departure of a UN mission or at an appropriate moment in the transition from a mission to a UNCT setting;
- Providing a positive success indicator (as an incentive measure) that signals qualitative progress in the peacebuilding process. The PBC engagement in support of the UNCT should be seen as the natural evolution of the UN's engagement in the countries concerned. A transition to a PBC-related mechanism could be programmed from the start of a mission design, and as part of the planning for its transition/exit;
- Providing political support to national peacebuilding and development strategies, especially by supporting more coherent UN and IFIs assistance strategies, ensuring systematic follow-up on progress in implementation and by sustaining the necessary focus on peacebuilding-related targets and objectives.
- Supporting UN leadership effort in preparing for the transition and for addressing gaps in UNCT capacity to take on remaining political and peacebuilding-related tasks inherited from the UN mission. There is also a need to create the political space and support for UNCT in New York, as well as with the Government and the main partners in the field.

3. Other issues

The discussion also touched upon a number of issues related to the nature of PBC's field orientation such as:

- A challenge facing the PBC remains the extent to which concepts and approaches can be implemented in practice. There is a need for a combination of leadership and supporting structures to ensure that the PBC remains relevant to the work of and challenges facing operational actors in the field. However, PBC must not become an additional actor that increases transactions costs and add to the existing fragmentation.
- There is a need for the PBC to approach its medium-term political engagement by building trust with the national authorities and the UN leadership in the field. Trust can only be achieved through clarity of purpose and dynamic communications channels. The role of resident embassies cannot be overemphasized.
- The PBC should increasingly work through and rely upon the UN leadership in the field to orient the Commission towards the areas where it could offer the most value added.
- The PBC's field orientation depends on the level of support and buy-in which it will receive from the UN system. It, therefore, needs to identify working modality which would help clarify how it is able to support the objectives of the UN system in country-specific contexts.
- The PBC should be able to establish links with and tap into innovative global approaches to peacebuilding engagement (e.g. New Deal). This could help shape more relevant policy discussions on peacebuilding.
- The PBC should become a repository of knowledge on peacebuilding good practices in order to help the UN system learn from previous lessons and identify practical solutions to long-standing challenges.
