



Dag Hammarskjöld
Foundation

Retreat of the Peacebuilding Commission

Strengthening the Peacebuilding Commission and its Advisory, Bridging and Convening roles

*Organized by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the UN Department of Political and
Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)
5-6 May 2022, Greentree Estate, Manhasset, NY*

Summary note

On 5-6 May 2022, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs co-led an informal retreat of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) at Greentree Estate, Manhasset, New York. The retreat convened Permanent Representatives from the Peacebuilding Commission's membership and from countries that have engaged with the Commission, as well as senior officials from relevant UN entities.

The retreat provided an opportunity to stimulate dialogue and to advance plans for action in implementing the identified priorities of the PBC's 2022 Programme of Work.¹ A particular focus was placed on strengthening the PBC's advisory, bridging, and convening roles in support of nationally owned priorities and efforts in the countries and regions that seek its support. The retreat also provided an informal space for the PBC to reflect on its results and good practices, and to identify ways to improve internal and external communication of these results to diverse stakeholders, including through the sharing of peacebuilding experiences and lessons learned of the countries that engage with the Commission and that receive support from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The retreat opened with a reception and welcome dinner during which the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Elizabeth Spehar, and the PBC Chair, Ambassador Rabab Fatima (Bangladesh), shared their reflections on progress in advancing peacebuilding and sustaining peace and in realizing the full potential of the PBC, including through implementation of the 2022 Programme of Work.

The retreat was structured around three sessions, covering the following topics: 1) the impact of the work of the Peacebuilding Commission; 2) the need for strengthened communication of results regarding the work of the Commission; and 3) ways to enhance the PBC's advisory, bridging and convening roles with other intergovernmental bodies and peacebuilding fora.

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

Session 1. Greater focus on impact of the Peacebuilding Commission

The session started with reflections from countries that have been under consideration of the Commission on the value of the PBC's engagement for their national peacebuilding efforts.

¹ Provisional Annual Programme of Work of the Peacebuilding Commission 2022, 4 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/commission/programme-of-work>

Technical and financial support mobilized by the PBC and/or provided through the PBF have continued to allow countries that have experienced conflict, and are undergoing transitions, to establish mechanisms that promote reconciliation and peace. In Burkina Faso, the PBC mobilized support for programs that strengthen social resilience and participation of women and youth in civic and political life, strengthening the country's national dialogue process. In Chad, the PBC helped mobilize support for a timely and inclusive transition process. In synergy with the PBF, the Commission has sustained attention on the need to continue investing in equitable management of natural resources and prevention of inter-communal conflicts, which is particularly critical given the negative effects of climate change on access to water and arable land in this region. In the Central African Republic, the PBC and the PBF have focused on strengthening access to justice and psycho-social support for women.

PBC engagement has raised awareness and interest in UN support for the Gambia in the areas of youth and women's empowerment, strengthening of Human Rights institutions and assistance to victims. This in turn has given hope, in particular to young people. For Liberia, PBC support was considered invaluable in preparing for the drawdown of UNMIL and in the transition to the UN Country Team and the development of a national peacebuilding priority plan. The PBC served as a multi-stakeholder platform for governments and local actors of the Sahel region to share their perspectives on peacebuilding priorities, leading to the development of peacebuilding programming that addresses root causes of conflict, in close cooperation with UN Country Teams. The need for continued support going forward was emphasised, noting in particular the vulnerability of the Sahel to the effects of climate change, which adds to the complexity of the humanitarian, security, political and development challenges in the region.

The session also provided an opportunity for participants to hear from a civil society organization in Niger, working closely with local communities in border areas to advance the work of grassroots women and youth peacebuilders. The civil society representative reported that their organisation's participation in PBC meetings allowed them to align with relevant discussions and processes at the global policy level, enabled their input into PBC advice to the Security Council (SC) and attracted more attention to their work from PBC members and national actors in the Sahel region. They recommended that the PBC continue inviting them and other civil society actors to meetings, to listen to their recommendations, and to continue translating this advice into policy and action.

Representatives of countries who engage with the Commission recognised the challenges to financing peacebuilding. While appreciative of the funds they received from the PBF, they reported continued resource and funding gaps. They expressed the need for increased resources, both monetary and in terms of capacity, and underscored the importance of expanding beyond traditional donor sources towards domestic resource mobilization. They called for greater alignment of existing funding mechanisms (including the PBF) with joint peacebuilding strategies and expressed the need for increased support from International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the private sector, and other innovative partnerships to advance peacebuilding priorities. Several of the countries under the PBC's consideration invited the PBC membership to participate in visits to their countries to witness the peacebuilding successes enabled by PBC support as well as the remaining needs.

Participants recognised that assessing the impact of peacebuilding support on country-specific issues can only be done in dialogue with the countries in question. The PBC should "help people where they are", not in conference rooms. Participants underscored the importance of continuing to listen to national actors regarding country-specific priorities and to continue building trust while accompanying these countries.

The advisory, bridging and convening roles of the PBC were identified as giving the Commission a unique mandate; the PBC membership should work on translating commitments into concrete support for countries. Participants felt that the PBC and the Security Council should work more closely together, given the linkages between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In this regard, the importance of the PBC providing timely and quality advice to intergovernmental bodies through briefings and submissions was highlighted as key.

This 'ABC' role was also described as an opportunity to support the UN's work at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and to bring greater coherence to the UN's offer at the country level. Despite progress following the recent reforms of the UN development system as well as of the peace and security pillar, silos persist, with different UN entities working on similar priorities and vying for dwindling resources. Efforts to ensure synergies thus remain crucial. Participants urged the PBC to further strengthen its convening role to help reduce siloed approaches in peacebuilding efforts.

Acknowledging the need for more coherent UN action in peacebuilding, participants pointed to the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace as an opportunity to advance a comprehensive and integrated approach to prevention, peace and security, as proposed in his *Our Common Agenda* report.² Participants felt that this new agenda should place a renewed focus on the needs and actions of women and youth, and build on efforts within the PBC and PBF in advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas. The PBC's Gender Strategy and Action Plan, as well as the Gender Marker system of the PBF were cited as best practices.

Reflecting on the General Assembly (GA) High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding Financing held on 27 and 29 April 2022, participants emphasised the growing need to secure adequate, predictable and sustained financing for peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Effective peacebuilding requires considerable and predictable investment that is driven by the national priorities of countries. Participants underscored the importance of investing in early-warning systems, highlighting that prevention is cost-effective. As such, some participants encouraged the PBC to play a role in making the "business case" for peacebuilding by showcasing examples of populations positively affected by the work of the PBC.

Various participants recognized that a wide array of options, including assessed contributions, should be considered to more predictably and sustainably finance the PBF, while also recognizing that these contributions alone would not solve the growing financing gap. Participants further noted that, while important, the PBF is not the only mechanism to resource peacebuilding activities. Stronger partnerships with development banks, IFIs, philanthropic actors and the private sector are also critical to channel resources into peacebuilding activities. The importance of mobilizing for future peacebuilding needs was underscored, with a suggestion being made for an endowment fund to be established to guarantee a minimum amount available for peacebuilding activities over the longer-term. This would limit volatility and overreliance on Member States for resources.

Finally, participants noted the importance of further revising the working methods of the PBC to make it more effective and impactful in its work, including by exploring ways to foster greater engagement of its members. Following reflections by some on the work and breadth of responsibilities of the PBC, participants emphasized the importance of adequately resourcing the Office in order to strengthen its capacity to support the PBC to realize its full potential.

² Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf, pg. 59

Session 2: Communicating results on the work of the Peacebuilding Commission

In recent years, there have been increasing requests from Member States to enhance the visibility of the Peacebuilding Commission and its work. This session sought to facilitate dialogue on what can be done to make the work of the PBC more visible to a broader audience, including other Member States; across the UN system; and in the countries in which it provides support. Moreover, the session explored how the PBC could engage with the Department of Global Communications in developing a strategy to communicate its peacebuilding and prevention contributions.

Participants recognized the challenges in effectively communicating on peacebuilding. It is easier to communicate on crises, conflicts, and the statistics of suffering, than on the quiet and delicate work of prevention of conflict. However, it was noted that in recent times of great turmoil audiences have begun turning away from stories of 'gloom and doom', providing an opportunity to more effectively communicate the work of bodies like the PBC and to make the case for why investment in prevention and peacebuilding is essential.

To facilitate the discussion, the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications presented the UN's Global Communications Strategy. It was suggested that three questions could help guide the communications of the PBC: *What problems are we trying to solve? Why should one care, and who are the key audiences we are trying to reach?* And finally, *what now? When informing an audience on an issue, what are we asking them to do about it?* The USG of the Department of Global Communications expressed appreciation for the opportunity to join the retreat to learn more about the work of the PBC, with a view to strengthening the Department's collaboration with the PBC in communicating the work and value of the UN's Peacebuilding institutions to a broader audience.

Some participants felt that greater clarity was needed on what the PBC's specific objectives are in order to effectively communicate its value proposition. Participants also felt that strategic communications should be built into peacebuilding operations (especially at the country level), rather than being considered an added dimension after operations have concluded. This would increase awareness in countries that engage with the PBC – including civil society and government partners – as well as at the global level. Several suggestions shared included the use of Goodwill Ambassadors and global campaigns to promote the work and mission of the PBC. Members were encouraged to actively advocate for the work of the PBC, including with other multilateral organisations; regional bodies; academic institutions; and on radio, tv, and social media. To this end, some members asked for media training to be made available, in particular for newly elected members of the PBC.

Finally, participants recognised that while more can be done to improve communication of the work of the PBC, this cannot be done through the efforts of PBSO alone without additional resources. In recent years, PBSO has undertaken a number of initiatives to draw more attention to the work of the PBC. These include a greater social media presence and social media campaigns (for example on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the PBC); the creation of a communications group (comprising communications focal points of PBC members) to help disseminate PBC information more widely; translation of PBC press releases into French for local circulation; and interviews with PBC members, UN representatives and local actors - to name a few. Enhanced communications efforts and advocacy (and allocation of additional resources to the PBSO), as well as strengthened collaboration with the Department of Global Communications are to be further explored. To facilitate this engagement, some participants suggested sending a formal request to the Department of Global Communication for more regular support to the PBC.

Working lunch: Advancing the Advisory, Bridging and Convening roles of the Peacebuilding Commission

The final session, convened over an interactive working lunch, explored in more detail the advisory, bridging and convening roles of the Peacebuilding Commission. As outlined in its annual programme of work, the Commission continues to provide submissions and briefings to other intergovernmental bodies and peacebuilding fora, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The total number of instances of PBC advice to these intergovernmental bodies has increased over the years.

In 2021, the Peacebuilding Commission provided advice or made submissions to the GA, the SC as well as other intergovernmental bodies and non-UN fora a total of 39 times, through letters and formal briefings to meetings, as well as interactive dialogues on thematic and country-specific issues. A particular focus of the lunch discussion was the role of informal coordinators in aligning the Commission's programme of work to those of the GA, SC and ECOSOC and strengthening the Commission's bridging role. Informal coordinators were invited to share experiences in facilitating this effort, and the discussion featured presentations by the PBC's informal coordinators for the GA and SC.

The informal coordinator role for the GA within the PBC was first established last year and it was recommended that this role be further explored and strengthened in the context of the current process of revitalizing the work of the GA. This was deemed particularly relevant given the increasingly important role of the GA, reflected in recently adopted resolutions such as those calling for the cessation of hostilities in Ukraine and addressing the use of the veto in the SC. To continue developing this informal coordination role, the representative suggested three questions to be answered in coordination with the GA: *What are we trying to achieve together, as well as with the SC and ECOSOC?* In this regard, the representative recommended that the work programmes of the GA and PBC be further aligned. Next, *what best practices and lessons exist within the GA that can be built upon, and how can the GA and PBC learn from one another?* And lastly, *what processes, practices and partnerships can be introduced in the GA to make it more effective, and in what ways can the PBC support this effort?*

Following this, the informal coordinator to the Security Council reflected on the long and established relationship between the SC and PBC. In 2021 alone, the PBC briefed the SC nine times. The informal coordinator facilitated continued close collaboration between the monthly Council presidencies, the PBC and countries under its consideration, and PBSO. In doing so, the informal coordination function enables meaningful and sustained engagement across bodies and with relevant countries; promotes synergy across respective areas of work; and helps to identify entry points for PBC support and advice to the SC. The Chair of the PBC has been able to participate in SC meetings as well as in the SC Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. To assist in strengthening the relationship, the representative posed the following questions: *What should the SC do with the advice from the PBC? What can be done to ensure that the Council takes action on the advice provided by the PBC in its work?* And finally, given the dynamics within the SC, *what should be the role of the permanent members of the Security Council in championing action on advice provided by the PBC, and to ensure long-term commitment to this action?*

In order to advance the Commission's advisory, bridging and convening roles, participants recommended that the PBC – with the assistance of the informal coordinators – continue working to align the Commission's work plan with that of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Moreover, the PBC's advisory, bridging and convening roles should also be guided and driven by the priorities of the increasing number of countries who seek its support. The PBC should consider expanding its geographic and thematic scope, including on issues like human rights and climate change, which are increasingly being brought to its attention by concerned countries, and

building on the messages of Our Common Agenda and the anticipated New Agenda for Peace. A greater geographic coverage would increase opportunities for briefings and relevant, meaningful advice to the Security Council and other intergovernmental bodies.

Concluding remarks

The retreat of the Peacebuilding Commission concluded with reflections on the need to continue the quiet, discrete, and difficult work on the prevention of violent conflict and building peace. Participants recognized that while peace is the most important UN task, it is becoming more difficult to accomplish. The world faces compounding threats that affect peace and security and challenge the peace and security architecture of the UN, including: geopolitical threats and governance failures; climate change; the shift to hybrid conflicts; technological disruption; disinformation and hate speech; and the use of new and autonomous weapons. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the limitations of global preparedness and solidarity.

Participants urged the PBC to maintain an ongoing focus on conflict prevention and acknowledged that the New Agenda for Peace offers a precious opportunity to advance an updated, comprehensive and integrated approach to peace and security. The PBC has a very important role to play in this, and to this end participants outlined ways to ensure that it is able to advance the New Agenda for Peace. This includes:

- Expanding the geographic scope of countries under the consideration of the PBC;
- Strengthening and expanding the advisory, bridging and convening roles of the PBC in order to continue ensuring quality and timely advice to other intergovernmental bodies;
- Continuing to engage with regional and sub-regional organisations; IFIs; civil society organisations; women, youth and other peacebuilders working to advance peace in their communities; and
- Investing in prevention, and ensuring adequate, sustained and predictable funding for peacebuilding activities (including by resourcing the Peacebuilding Fund).