

Peacebuilding Highlights

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DPPA
Preventing Conflict. Sustaining Peace

Editorial

by Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, DPPA

As the world grapples with growing and converging risks and conflict, it has become abundantly clear that the pursuit of sustainable peace is more critical now than ever before.

The urgency of the situation demands that we envision and embrace a New Agenda for Peace that places a premium on prevention, peacebuilding and sustainable solutions, in our approach to conflict. Since the Secretary-General proposed the development of a New Agenda for Peace, as part of Our Common Agenda, the need for it has only become more apparent.

The need for predictable, adequate and sustainable financing for peacebuilding has also emerged as a pressing concern, calling for renewed attention and action. The Secretary-General's report on the Peacebuilding Fund for 2022 underscores the need for more resources. Responding to national demand for peacebuilding support, the PBF approved a record \$231 million last year to support communities and institution-building in 37 countries. Without a commensurate increase in contributions, however, a consistent level of financing for peace will drop. This is especially challenging as peacebuilding needs continue to rise.

As part of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), our Office is contributing to the evolving thinking on the New Agenda for

Peace. This must include looking at how the UN peacebuilding architecture can effectively support this new vision. We want to ensure that our Office's work in support of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund, UN-system coherence across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, and the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agenda lead to inclusive and integrated approaches to prevention and peacebuilding.

DPPA/PBSO is committed to ensuring young people's meaningful participation in formal and informal political and peace processes at global, regional, and national levels. This includes processes to bolster the institutionalization of the YPS agenda, in line with UN Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535.

There is a critical need for peacebuilding initiatives that prioritize gender equality and local ownership, and the Peacebuilding Fund's Gender Promotion Initiative 2.0 is a significant step forward. By empowering those closest to the ground and most affected by conflict to take ownership of the peacebuilding process, the Fund is enabling national ownership of gender-responsive peacebuilding initiatives while expanding funding access to national and local civil society organizations. The upcoming Climate Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review which will be published in partnership with FAO, UNICEF, the Climate Security Mechanism and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, underscores

the urgency of the Fund's cross-border focus, given the transnational nature of climate-security threats. The Fund's commitment to expanding its support in prevention settings this year will further help create the conditions for sustainable peace.

To tackle the current and future multidimensional and converging threats to international peace and security, we need to reinvigorate multilateralism, with the United Nations at the center of these efforts. Effective prevention and peacebuilding require effective multilateralism that bridges peace and security, human rights and development. The Peacebuilding Commission is at the front and center of that effort. Our Office supports the Commission as a key institution within the multilateral peace and security architecture, mobilizing attention, resources, political accompaniment and sharing of experiences for better peacebuilding outcomes. This year, the Commission, with our support, will utilise a multi-country engagement format to facilitate cross-regional experience sharing on key issues related to peacebuilding. The Commission is also continuing to forge international partnerships for peacebuilding through regular exchanges with regional and subregional organizations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and through the Commission's country and region-specific meetings, such as its recent sessions on South Sudan and Mozambique.

Strengthening partnerships of the UN with IFIs in fragile and conflict affected countries is another key component of effective multilateralism. Our Office is charged with fostering systemwide engagement with the World Bank in crisis settings and has dedicated capacity to support UN-IFI partnerships, including through a small grants Facility (the "Partnership Facility") supporting joint analysis, shared data and liaison capacity. So far, 24 UN Country Offices through 27 grants under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator have benefitted from the Facility. We have also initiated a five-month policy initiative together with the World Bank on the fifth-year anniversary of the flagship UN-World Bank report "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict". The initiative invites

reflections from multilaterals, Member States, think tanks, civil society and regional partners on the legacy and continued relevance of the findings of the report in an evolving global landscape. Dovetailing policy thinking on prevention and peacebuilding through multilateral and inclusive approaches is an important priority for DPPA/PBSO.

The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, which will be convened in September during the UN General Assembly high-level week, offers an excellent opportunity to strengthen the international community's commitment towards all SDGs. This Summit represents an opportunity to generate increased momentum towards the special needs of conflict-affected countries. Ahead of the SDG Summit our Office is galvanizing the thinking around Peace in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, including through a policy event with UNDP. We are also promoting conflict-sensitive UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks with clear peacebuilding priorities, a crucial expression of the link between peace and development and one which could open more opportunities for financing from the Peacebuilding Fund.

Building on the New Agenda for Peace and the SDG Summit, the 2024 Summit of the Future will offer an opportunity to strengthen Member States' commitments towards achieving a just, equal, peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. We will be working closely with members of the Peacebuilding Commission and other Member States to support them in these efforts, ensuring that peacebuilding remains central in these key UN policy processes. The Summit's aim is to formulate a Pact for the Future that would help advance the SDGs by 2030. It should also include commitments toward realizing the vision of the New Agenda for Peace. If we are to truly deliver on a holistic approach to prevention and peacebuilding, those pledges should reflect the symbiotic relationship between peace and development.

With continued efforts, financing, and multilateral cooperation, the international community can work towards a world free of conflict, where sustainable peace is possible for all.

Peacebuilding Support Office

Financing for
Peacebuilding Branch

Peacebuilding Strategy
and Partnerships Branch

Peacebuilding Commission
Support Branch



What does prevention look like in Mauritania?

Blog by Lila Pieters Yahia, UN Resident Coordinator in Mauritania

Deep in the heart of Southeastern Mauritania lies the district and town of Bassikounou, in Hodh el Chargui region, nestled on the border with neighboring Mali, over 1,200 kilometers from the capital city of Nouakchott. The border between the two countries is barely visible. The vast grasslands of Bassikounou have long provided nourishment for herds of livestock. However, in recent years, the region has experienced a decline in rain and pasture making life more challenging for the people and animals. Despite the invisible boundary that separates the two nations, the communities on either side remain tightly knit through their shared family ties, trading relationships and religious traditions.

As of 31 December 2022, over 82,816 refugees resided in the Mbera camp and 8,447 outside the camp. This influx of refugees with their livestock has added additional pressure on the pastures and water sources. The pressure on the diminishing natural resources is causing a multiplication of conflicts between communities for access to water and grazing fields. In 2022, Mauritania experienced an influx of new refugees, coupled with Mauritanian returnees from Mali due to the deteriorating security situation. Returning pastoralist herds are estimated at 800,000 livestock, exacerbating the scarcity of resources, and raising concerns about tensions with the host population over water access.

As part of my new role as Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, I visited Bassikounou district to observe

the efforts on the ground by the UN country team in utilizing the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund to foster conflict prevention and promote social cohesion among the host communities, IDPs and refugees. When we met with the prefect of Bassikounou, he underscored how social cohesion is a priority for the local authorities and appreciated PBF's support. The PBF's investment in Mauritania dates to 2018 when the FAO-UNDP-UNICEF and OHCHR collaborated to implement a pioneering project aimed at managing scarce natural resources, enhancing economic development, and supporting village committees in resolving conflicts. Although the project has ended, lasting effects can still be observed: the local radio station that it helped established is in operation and has become a vital tool in promoting social harmony between host communities and refugees. It is gratifying to note that the local authorities are now overseeing this radio station. As the head of the coordination cell of the Hodh El Charugui said, "the radio is a jewel, through its broadcasting and radio talk shows, it allowed to reinforce social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities" including young people and women.

During my visit, I had the privilege of meeting inspiring women and young girls who shared their hopes and priorities for economic empowerment. The Bassikounou women's network, consisting of 49 gender focal points, village committees and 20 women's associations, is now institutionalized. The

women spoke about the transformational change they brought to their communities by implementing simple rules to lift structural barriers regarding women's participation and rights. One such rule is to ensure that each time a man speaks, a woman should have the opportunity to voice her opinion. Today, the Bassikounou network is the technical branch of the newly created Observatoire National des Droits de la Femme et de la Fille (ONDFF), making it a powerful force for gender equality in Mauritania.



In Bassikounou, women spoke about the transformational change they brought to their communities by implementing simple rules to lift structural barriers regarding women's participation and rights.

I also had the honor of meeting with the Mourchidates, a group of fifty Mauritanian women religious guides, who are working tirelessly to deconstruct radical rhetoric arguments used by extremist groups in Néma, and prevent violent extremism. Their critical role in promoting peace, through an innovative pilot initiative supported by PBF and implemented by UNODC and UNESCO has been recognized by the Mauritanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education (MAIEO), as well as by the G5 Sahel. To learn more about their impactful work, do read this story

Mauritania's mostly desert territory is highly susceptible to deforestation and drought, with temperatures regularly exceeding 40°C during the dry season from September to July. Bushfires, a frequent occurrence during this period, threaten refugees and host communities, their herds and livelihoods. I was privileged to see the achievements of the Mbera fire brigade volunteers and to hear from the national local authorities and host communities their appreciation of the brigade in extinguishing the fires around the town of Bassikounou and the Mbera camp. Founded by refugees, this all-volunteer firefighting group has extinguished over 100 bushfires and planted thousands of trees to preserve the lives, livelihoods of the host communities and refugees and the local environment. Nearly 620 kilometers of firebreaks have been set up to prevent the spread of flames. These interactions between refugees and host populations in

the inclusive, equitable and sustainable management of natural resources is a strong illustration of the catalytic role by the Peacebuilding Fund in Mauritania by supporting a pilot initiative and scaling it up in the neighboring villages of Bassikounou and Fassala. The Fire Brigade's courage and tenacity in safeguarding lives, livelihoods and the environment that is increasingly under threat due to climate change, has earned them the title of the Africa Regional Winner of the 2022 Nansen Refugee Award .

During our visit to the Mbera camp and surrounding villages, we witnessed the devastating effects of climate change on refugees and host communities. However, we also saw inspiring initiatives led by youth and women volunteers to regenerate vegetation cover and promote social cohesion. Through the planting of 20,000 seedlings cultivated on five reforestation sites, women are now able to sell vegetables produced in community fields to sustain their families, invest in small businesses, and save for joint initiatives. In addition, a youth-led start-up is piloting biogas production in Bassikounou by employing youth to provide natural gas for vulnerable families.

Beyond Bassikounou, the Fund has invested in cross-border initiatives to address fragility risks, including in Mauritania due to its porous borders and security threats such as trafficking and terrorism. Between Mali and Mauritania, with PBF's support, FAO and IOM are strengthening the conflict prevention and management capacities of cross-border communities by setting up, training and equipping 24 village committees located on the Mauritano-Malian border zone, and developing the cross-border cooperation framework on the analysis of data on transhumance and development plans. The awareness of pastoral code through cross-border village committees has greatly reduced conflicts in the area.

In a world that is often plagued by conflict and strife, the need for peacebuilding initiatives has never been greater. The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding is a unique tool that can effectively prevent conflicts from escalating and support ongoing peacebuilding efforts. My visit to Bassikounou allowed me to see firsthand the changes and transformation on the ground supported by the PBF and jointly implemented by the United Nations Country Team and national partners and refugees communities. Integrated initiatives have been implemented that continue to have a significant impact on social cohesion, on the recognition of the critical role of women and young people in conflict management and natural resource management. I am more convinced than ever that we must continue to support such initiatives and invest in peacebuilding – only then can we hope to create a better future for all.

PEACEBUILDING STORIES

Building Bridges: Creating Peaceful and Inclusive Communities in Central America



"I feel that the course changed me because now I have new opportunities. It helped me open my nail salon," says Iris.

"I left Honduras 15 years ago, looking for the American dream, because of poverty. It was a very difficult journey, because the coyote (smuggler) that was going to take us to the United States stole all the money we carried. After that, we came to Esquipulas to look for work to survive," says Iris, a migrant from Honduras.

Forced to settle in Esquipulas, a municipality in Guatemala, Iris is just one of many Central Americans who have migrated in search of better opportunities and safety. Esquipulas, which is situated on a major migratory route 10 kilometers from the Guatemalan-Honduran border, has seen an alarming surge in human mobility, including irregular migration, over the past decade. The Central America-4 Free Mobility Agreement, signed by the Governments of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua in 2006, allows for free travel between these countries. One unintended result is that, Esquipulas has become a hub for migrants traveling to North America. Communities along the migratory routes struggle to provide basic services and support for both migrants and those who return, who are often endangered by criminal groups that profit from human trafficking. This puts a strain on community cohesion and can lead to conflict, creating challenges that require local institutions to work together to reintegrate migrants in a peaceful manner.

The Trilateral Project, implemented by UNHCR, UNDP and IOM and financed by the Peacebuilding Fund, has been paving the way for a more dignified, peaceful and inclusive human mobility experience in the northern region of Central America since 2021. By working alongside the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the project enhances institutional capacities and supports local authorities and organizations by establishing better coordination and knowledge-sharing mechanisms between institutions and civil society groups in the three countries.

The peacebuilding initiative's comprehensive strategy

includes trilateral, national, and local efforts to address issues such as forced displacement, irregular migration, and the sustainable reintegration of migrants. By prioritizing vulnerable populations and improving assistance and protection mechanisms, as well as integration within host communities, the project helps to reduce violence and manage conflicts while fostering a sense of belonging and unity.

Damaris Moscoso, Coordinator of the Municipal Directorate for Women in Esquipulas, said, **"The challenge we face as the Municipality of Esquipulas to promote the reintegration of the migrant population is basically the budget. The [national] budget does not allow us to invest in foreign population living in our territory."**

UNHCR, UNDP, and IOM have collaborated to strengthen the Esquipulas Migrant and Refugee Protection Roundtable, a multi-stakeholder space led by the Municipality that coordinates actions between the municipality, national ministries, civil society, and donors. This space is essential to avoid duplication of efforts, minimize wastage of resources and mitigate unintended negative effects and ensure adherence to "do no harm" principles. Through municipal policies, multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces, and public-private partnerships, the project facilitates integration into economic and social networks for people affected by human mobility. Local initiatives in the targeted municipalities of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have benefitted over 150 returned migrants, of which more than 60% are women. These actions have promoted their dignity and facilitated their inclusion in the local social networks.

Among the activities supported by the project in Esquipulas, a free vocational training program on aesthetician practices including makeup and acrylic nails, was offered to everyone including migrants. 46 women and 1 man completed the course, including five individuals from Honduras. For the first time ever, foreign students could take a technical training course, and all they needed was to show their ID. The training program aimed to help people who have had trouble finding work and to reduce unfair treatment based on things like gender, nationality, and immigration status.

The Municipality of Esquipulas and the Municipal Training Center of the Ministry of Education have formed a partnership to continue offering inclusive technical training courses in 2023 with government funding. By including course costs in government budgets, this partnership offers a sustainable strategy that builds on the project's initial support for vocational courses. This strategy will benefit both local populations and migrants by creating safe

spaces for them to learn together and build trust.

Iris accomplished her dream of starting her own business with the help of the course. “Before the course, I was dedicated to my home and children. I was somewhat frustrated because I felt that I had to teach my children to be independent and to feel that we’re valuable. I feel that the course changed me because now I have new opportunities. It helped me open my nail salon. Little by little, I have more confidence to work and charge for my work. With that income I help my family and manage to buy the other things I need for my nail salon.”

Miriam, another Honduran student who took the course, has expanded the services she provides at her beauty salon. She said, “I think it’s good that these opportunities exist because there are almost no opportunities for foreigners. It’s hard to find a job as people ask for a background check and letters of recommendation. Sometimes you can’t have all that paperwork, but with your own business, you are your own boss. Once you start a business, you already have an income.”

These courses have not only improved access to job opportunities and entrepreneurship, but also helped integrate the migrant population into the community. The project created spaces for locals and foreigners to interact, share their stories, and build social bonds. Understanding and tolerance of others increased, while discrimination and stigmas against migrants diminished.

“Sharing with classmates of other nationalities, such as Hondurans, was an experience that opened doors because here in Esquipulas there are many people who refer to migrants in a negative way such as when migrants come there’s a lot of robberies and kidnapping etc. But we need to coexist with other people to understand their reality and avoid judging them by their skin color or where they come from” said Cristina Vásquez, a Guatemalan student.

The inclusion and integration of migrants had a positive impact on host communities, including increased



Damaris Moscoso, Coordinator of the Municipal Directorate for Women in Esquipulas.

cultural diversity, socio-political participation, and economic development.

Damaris Moscoso, Coordinator of the Municipal Directorate for Women in Esquipulas, said “It’s important that the Municipality of Esquipulas works

together with all the institutions present in the area, to include the migrant population in opportunities for education, training, and employment. If the population is educated and skilled, we will help reduce levels of violence or discrimination towards the migrant population and promote a culture



of peace as we are raising the local population’s awareness of the fundamental role of migrants in our municipality’s development.”

Through 10 multi-stakeholder platforms, coordination has been enhanced between government institutions and civil society organizations across three countries. This has strengthened the focus on the needs of vulnerable populations affected by human mobility. Seven initiatives, including joint care protocols, have been approved.

Two regulatory and legislative reforms have been approved in Honduras and El Salvador, and one in Guatemala, which includes the prevention of forced displacement and the protection of victims of forced displacement. These new frameworks will contribute to institutional changes, enabling a comprehensive and articulated approach to addressing the needs of people in mobility and promoting their social and economic integration.

The three governments are working together more effectively by sharing information and analysis to identify joint strategies. As a result, they have identified seven specific areas for coordination, including the sustainable reintegration of returned migrants and, providing assistance to those with protection needs, such as victims of human trafficking, and migrant smuggling.

The ‘Hearts in Movement’ communications campaign has successfully promoted respect for the dignity and human rights of those affected by human mobility across the three countries. The campaign aims to counteract discrimination, xenophobia, stigma, and exclusion faced by these populations. It has been adopted at the local level and has reinforced solidarity and empathy between host communities, migrants and refugees in the region, leading to improved social harmony and integration.

Taking the vocational course has inspired Iris to think about her future. She said, “My dream, perhaps in about five years, is to set up my academy, to help people who, like me, want to start a business. For my family, my dreams are to teach my children that we can achieve anything we set out to do and to be good people.”

In Mauritania, Mourchidates take the Lead in Preventing Violent Extremism in Communities



To empower women in preventing and countering violent extremism, UNODC and UNESCO worked with the Government in a peacebuilding initiative in five regions of Mauritania funded by the PBF. Photo: © UNODC Country Programme Office in Mauritania.

“In Mauritania, men dominate the mosques, religious establishments, and Quranic schools that hold significant influence in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. I have a Quranic school in Rosso that I decided to open following a request from the women in the community. As women, we were largely invisible in these spaces until the Mourchidate initiative gave us a voice in the religious discourse. This program provided us with the opportunity to work alongside imams to prevent violent extremism,” reflected Mariya Bousneine, a Mourchidate from Trarza.

Mauritania, a country known for its relative stability in the Sahel, faces a number of factors that threaten its peace and security. These include rising community tensions fueled by social inequality and a growing threat of radicalization and violent extremism driven by terrorist tendencies in the Sahel. A key element that helps resolve these conflicts is the effective participation of women. As members of communities often most affected by violence and extremism, women are uniquely positioned to provide insights and solutions that may not be apparent to others.

To empower women in preventing and countering violent extremism, UNODC and UNESCO worked with the Government in a peacebuilding initiative in five regions of Mauritania funded by the PBF. The initiative created a network of 50 women religious guides and community leaders known as Mourchidates in charge

of transmitting alternative discourses to violent extremism.

The Mourchidates received extensive training on the crucial concepts of violent extremism and learned how to spot warning signs of radicalization in individuals and communities to intervene early and prevent potential violence. These women draw upon their vast knowledge of Islam and their roles as teachers and community leaders to effectively counter extremism.



The initiative created a network of 50 women religious guides and community leaders in charge of transmitting alternative discourses to violent extremism. Photo: © UNODC Country Programme Office in Mauritania.

This network of exceptional women empowers others by offering them tools to combat radicalization. So far, the Mourchidates have educated over 7,636 individuals including 4,667 women and 2,969 men in Néma (bordering with Mali), in Selibaby (near the border with Senegal and Mali), Rosso (bordering with Senegal), Bir Mogreihm (bordering with Algéria) and the capital Nouakchott.



The Mourchidates have a crucial role in preventing extremism. Photo: © UNODC Country Programme Office in Mauritania.

By providing an alternative discourse to violent radicalism, these brave women deconstructed the radical rhetoric of extremist groups using religious arguments, leaving a lasting impact on those they met.

Mariya Bousneine, a Mourchidate from Trarza further adds, **“Once, I was contacted by a representative of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in Rosso to speak with a young woman who refused to allow her children to attend school, claiming it was ‘haram’ i.e. forbidden. I engaged with this woman on the alternative discourse to violent extremism, and over time, she accepted to register her children in school and even shifted away from her radical views.”**

The Mourchidates have a crucial role in preventing extremism. They work in places like mosques, prisons, youth centers, hospitals and schools to promote a tolerant form of Islam and work to dismantle misunderstandings. While their main focus is prevention, they also step in to handle more serious cases. When issues fall outside their religious expertise, they refer people to the appropriate authorities.

Women’s participation has been effective in managing conflicts and their presence has been recognized by everyone involved. The Mourchidates initiative has helped women share their knowledge with other women, and now they feel more comfortable expressing their views in public. More women can now openly talk about preventing violent extremism, gender equality, women’s roles in military and security professions, and the criminal justice system. The project has helped shift attitudes as women who

were once excluded from decision-making are now involved and valued.

Mouna Bint Alban, a 24-year-old Mourchidate from Nouakchott says, **“I have opened a Mahadras because I wanted to make the messages of Islam accessible to all. I decided to be a Mourchidate because I strongly believe that extremists views are contrary to the values of Islam and results from a misunderstanding of the religion. As a Mourchidate, my role is to correct misinterpretations and show these young people in my Quranic school that Islam calls for tolerance.”**

Mariem Ali, a Mourchidate from Néma, said, **“I have a Quranic school that is registered with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. In Arabic, the term Mourchidate refers to the role of a guide or advisor, which has traditionally been fulfilled by Mauritanian women. As women, we have always been responsible for educating children and providing guidance to the youth who trust and confide in us. This responsibility aligns with our natural role and has made a positive impact on our community in Néma. We are well-recognized in our community, and we have become a source of support for women seeking not only religious knowledge but also parenting advice. Many communities have benefited from our efforts to strengthen their resilience. As a result, they are now equipped to identify extremist rhetoric and effectively respond to it with alternative religious-based arguments.”**

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has acknowledged the valuable work of the Mourchidates and has pledged to make this network an official part of their system. The Mourchidates have also been invited to share their work in Mali so that such an approach could be replicated there.



Mariem Ali, a Mourchidate from Néma. Photo: © UNODC Country Programme Office in Mauritania.

The Gambia Advances Transitional Justice to Help Achieve Sustainable Peace



The PBF has invested \$30.9 million across 16 initiatives since 2017 in the Gambia.

Despite facing significant political and social challenges, The Gambia has undergone a process of democratic transition, with a new government committed to promoting transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. As part of this transition, the country is engaging in transitional justice to address past human rights abuses and promote healing.

The United Nations has supported The Gambia's prioritization of transitional justice by utilizing complementary approaches, including the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and the Partnership Facility in the Peacebuilding Support Office.

The PBF has invested \$30.9 million across 16 initiatives since 2017 in the Gambia. As an early supporter of the transition, the PBF quickly financed security sector reform and transitional justice actions. For instance, UNDP and OHCHR worked together to assist the government in establishing credible transitional justice processes.

Responding to the Gambians' national priorities for justice, the support by the UN laid the foundation for establishing two major institutions: The National Human Rights Commission and the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). The TRRC was founded in 2018 to investigate and establish an impartial historical record of human rights violations that occurred in the country between 1994-2017, provide interim reparations to victims, recommend prosecution, and promote national reconciliation.

After years of intensive investigation, the TRRC released its long-awaited report, "Never Again," in December 2021, containing 265 recommendations that pave the way for justice, healing, and reconciliation. These recommendations go beyond just compensations and prosecutions, focusing on preventing future atrocities as well. The report marks a significant breakthrough in the Gambia's journey towards healing and reconciliation.

Following the release of the TRRC report, the PBF supported the government in developing its White Paper on the TRRC recommendations by enabling a series of nationwide engagements with diverse stakeholders, including women and youth. In May 2022, the White Paper was published, marking an additional milestone in the country's journey towards transitional justice. The document officially confirmed the government's acceptance of 263 out of the 265 TRRC recommendations, setting the stage for designing a time-bound and budgeted implementation plan to advance the process further. The implementation plan is currently being finalized by the government and it will require technical, financial, and political support from national, regional and international stakeholders.

Working in synergy with the PBF's on-the-ground support, the Peacebuilding Commission has provided essential political accompaniment for the new reform agenda since 2017. Last October, the PBC convened a meeting on the Government's White Paper on the TRRC recommendations. The Attorney General

and Minister of Justice of The Gambia, a civil society representative and senior UN officials provided an update on the priority areas and related actions on the implementation of the TRRC recommendations.

The PBC commended The Gambia's remarkable progress in transitional justice, while underscoring the need to implement the TRRC recommendations as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable and inclusive peace, development, and stability. Key priority initiatives and support needs were addressed, including establishing a Peace and Reconciliation Commission and providing support to the victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Members of the PBC underlined the imperative to reinforce capacity-building and strengthen national institutions to support the TRRC recommendations, including in the security sector, legislative and economic reforms. They committed to sustaining international support for the country's peacebuilding priorities.

Furthermore, to support the government address the root causes of fragility and conflict and ensure a sustainable political transition after 22 years of authoritarian rule, the World Bank has approved a Turn Around Allocation (TAA). Under the TAA, the Government has identified five strategic objectives, including security and political stability, governance and transitional justice, land management, environment and climate change, human capital development and inclusive growth and economic stability. The UN and the Bank have agreed to work together and support the Government to achieve these objectives. The Partnership Facility is supporting the design and implementation of a joint UN-World Bank mechanism to facilitate UN support to the Government's implementation of its TAA, with a focus on the first three strategic objectives. This joint mechanism will also facilitate information and data sharing between the UN and the Bank on the Government's annual performance in achieving key milestones under these strategic objectives.



Responding to the Gambians' national priorities for justice, the support by the UN laid the foundation for establishing two major institutions.

Independent Evaluation Finds a Promising Foundation for Increased Security and Resilience in Madagascar's Great South



Since 2017, the Malagasy Government and the United Nations have been working together with a shared commitment to respond to the sources of tension and improve security and resilience for vulnerable communities.

A recently completed peacebuilding initiative implemented by UNDP, IOM and UNFPA and financed by the PBF provided holistic support to communities in Madagascar's Great South by addressing some of the underlying factors contributing to instability.

An [independent evaluation](#) found evidence of positive change supported by the project, specifically in reducing organized crime and promoting more inclusive community planning. An overwhelming majority of people, more than 94 percent, as well as local administration officials interviewed in a survey during the evaluation agreed that the security situation improved in their localities. Furthermore, around 83% of the population (with an almost equal distribution between men and women) reported feeling safe when going to the market, compared to only 54% before the project began in the Great South region.

Living in the isolated region of the Great South, the Malagasy face numerous challenges. Frequent natural disasters and weak institutional presence have led to poverty and instability, which in turn exacerbate organized crime. The Dahalo bandits, who steal cattle including the iconic Zebu cattle from rural communities, are a particularly significant threat. Their criminal activities devastate livelihoods and increase tensions due to the impunity with which they operate.

Since 2017, the Malagasy Government and the United Nations have been working together with a shared commitment to respond to the sources of tension and improve security and resilience for vulnerable communities. These efforts are focused on the town

of Betroka and nearby municipalities, with financing from the Peacebuilding Fund. To date, the Fund has invested \$10 million in various peacebuilding initiatives in the region, with projects implemented by UN agencies including UNFPA, UNDP, IOM, FAO, UNCDF and UNESCO in partnership with authorities and civil society organizations. These investments have enabled the establishment of a joint United Nations office in Betroka, marking the first-ever international presence in the area. The office provides a vital platform for supporting efforts to foster social harmony and security in this often-neglected region.



To date, the PBF has invested \$10 million in various peacebuilding initiatives in the region, with projects implemented by UN agencies including UNFPA, UNDP, IOM, FAO, UNCDF and UNESCO in partnership with authorities and civil society organizations.

To address critical gaps in security needs in the region, the peacebuilding project worked closely with the government to strengthen the presence of gendarmerie security bases by setting up additional posts in strategic locations, providing greater coverage. Eleven gendarmerie outposts were constructed and equipped in areas of high insecurity, including five through this project by IOM. These security posts were equipped with much-needed technology, such as drones, motorized boats and motorcycles, to effectively monitor organized banditry and other criminal activities in vast and remote areas.

The project also supported a series of activities to improve relationships and trust between the gendarmes and the local communities they serve. This involved better information sharing, participation in peace rituals, and cultural and sporting events that brought young people together with the gendarmerie, fostering greater understanding and encouraging collaboration between them. In addition, a campaign against sexual and gender-based violence led by the gendarmerie and implemented by UNFPA drew 10,000 participants, with women comprising 60 percent of the attendees, highlighting their shared commitment to ending this pervasive problem.

The evaluation report underscored the significance of the project's specific focus on empowering the voices of women and young people in communities where they previously had little space due to historical and cultural factors. Activities such as mentoring, coaching, inter-generational dialogues, and valuing young people's cultural and sporting talents as a means of self-expression and dialogue helped change the perceptions of the communities regarding women and young people. As a result, women are now playing a more active role in their communities as agents of change and progress, participating in the design of projects that address their community's needs.

"I was able to gain self-confidence and develop my capacities as a young leader, because it is important for me to be able to play a role in my community, so that everyone can live in peace and security. I met other youth and I found that now the youth are more involved, they can talk with the elders, and try to find solutions to problems when there are conflicts in the community," said Rasoanirina Garcia, a young woman from Betroka.

Economic opportunities were created for those who were most in need – like young people and vulnerable groups who often face poverty and exclusion, which can lead to increased social tensions. These activities were carefully chosen to address the critical needs of the communities and improve their access to markets and agriculture. UNDP organized community-led income generation activities such as cleaning of irrigation canals and the rehabilitation of rural roads that provided additional income to more than 6,900 people including 2,500 women. This took place during a particularly difficult time after the devastating drought in 2021, which pushed many people to the brink of absolute poverty and increased tensions within communities.

Moreover, the project actively supported the delivery of local services in isolated areas where state services were not always available, exacerbating conflict. Mobile legal clinics provided critical information, awareness and legal advice, processing over 5,000 cases of disputes within communities. Efforts to improve administrative presence made it possible for people to obtain essential documents like birth certificates and other key administrative services.

The project also focused on promoting more inclusive local planning as a critical step towards strengthening the social contract between the state and the communities. Through a series of facilitated dialogue platforms supported by UNDP, the municipalities developed peace plans that reflected the needs and aspirations of the communities.

"Since the establishment of the dialogue platforms, I have seen the growing confidence of our communities in our capacities to resolve conflicts, without having to involve the gendarmerie. Now I feel confident in my skills," said a member of Fokontany Ifarantsa in the municipality of Beraketa.

The establishment of local consultation committees paved the way for more inclusive and collaborative governance by ensuring that one-third of the members are women and one-third are young people. These committees, along with the joint development of the peace plans, have enabled people to discuss, identify and prioritize their most pressing needs, while also fostering better communication with government officials. Due to this, the project was able to support some of the priorities from the peace plans, which led to positive results. For instance, based on suggestion from residents, the project installed 200 streetlights in town centers of Kelivaho, Marotsiraka, Betroka and Isoanala communes, which helped improve security in these areas.

"PBF projects have made changes in the Betroka district. Before people couldn't sleep in safety, now they can sleep in peace in their homes; they can go out in the evening in the city, no matter what time; people can move around," said Jean-Dédé, member of the Mpikambana Local Consultation Council in Betroka.



Since 2017, the Malagasy Government and the United Nations have been working together with a shared commitment to respond to the sources of tension and improve security and resilience for vulnerable communities. Photo: © PBF Madagascar

Featured Partners

The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund is grateful to all its donor partners for their continued trust and support

In each newsletter, we will feature a small number of donor partners.



Croatia

As Croatia has just taken on the role as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) on its 17th session, they have reaffirmed their commitment to coherent approaches to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Croatia has emphasized the need to foster partnerships with governments, regional and sub-regional organizations, and civil society organizations. They have also underscored the need to ensure flexibility in the work of the Commission with a view to increasing outreach and interactions, and to ensuring that the Commission can further strengthen its advisory role to the Security Council and continue to provide a platform that countries can use to share good practices in peacebuilding.

As the PBC recently approved its programme of work for 2023, Croatia is keen to ensure that the activities of the Commission can have an impact on the lives of people in conflict-affected countries.

Croatia has also recognized that there is widening gap between needs and availability of resources for peacebuilding and has called for increased, sustainable and more predictable and diversified financing.

Ambassador Ivan Šimonović, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and Permanent Representative of Croatia to the UN in New York said, "In this time of darkness, when number of conflicts and victims are on the rise, PBC is a candle. We need to upgrade this candle into a torch: darkness cannot be overcome by darkness, but by light. We need examples of good practices in strengthening resilience of societies, conflict prevention and successful peacebuilding."



Japan

Japan is a committed partner of the United Nations in promoting and advancing peace. The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is grateful to Japan for responding to the Secretary-General's call to support PBF to enable it to act effectively to sustain peace in countries at risk of or affected by violent conflict. Most recently, Japan contributed \$1.04 million to the PBF in 2023 for peacebuilding and sustaining peace globally.

To date, Japan has contributed over \$62 million to the PBF since its inception in 2006, placing Japan consistently among the top donors. The PBF works in a coherent way with Japan's commitment to strengthening conflict prevention, stabilization and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Japan has been an engaged member of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), advocating for sustainable institution building. As member of the Security Council, Japan has also been keen to foster a stronger collaboration between the Commission and the Council. Japan remains committed to promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda through close cooperation between the PBC and the Security Council.

Ambassador Kimihiro Ishikane, the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations in New York said, "Japan is fully committed to supporting the United Nation's agenda for building and sustaining peace. The Peacebuilding Fund's comparative advantages vis-a-vis other funds are its ability to respond quickly and flexibly to peacebuilding needs on the ground. Such characteristic is indispensable in supporting cross-regional and transitional programs. Japan is a long-term committed partner of the Peacebuilding Support Office, and we have been steadily implementing our commitment of \$10 million to the PBF for 2020-24."



Ireland

Ireland is one of the top donors to the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) supporting flexible investments in peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-affected areas globally, with a strong focus on empowering women and youth, and on sustaining peace in UN transitions. As one of the earliest supporters of the PBF, Ireland has contributed over \$31 million since the Fund's inception. The Peacebuilding Fund is grateful to the Government of Ireland for a new contribution of \$3.2 million in 2023 for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, in addition to the \$7.4 million already contributed to the Fund's current Strategy 2020-24.

The PBF works in a coherent manner with Ireland's commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. For example, in Liberia, the PBF supports initiatives to ensure increased participation by women in all dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms and contribute to a positive change in the mindsets of communities about women's rights to land and property ownership. As a long-standing global champion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, Ireland shares the PBF's important commitment to gender equality, advocating for strengthening women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding and greater international implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325.

Ireland's funding enables the PBF to focus on critical prevention and peacebuilding activities globally. For instance, in Colombia, as part of the Transitional Justice measures outlined in the Final Peace Agreement of Colombia, a PBF-funded initiative provided legal assistance to women and LGBTQIA+ individuals who were victims of the armed conflict.

Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in New York said, "Supporting and sustaining peace is a key priority for Ireland as a UN Member State, including during our recent term on the Security Council. It is also a central component of our international development policy and a necessity for achieving the sustainable development goals. Ireland has been a strong and committed partner of the UN Peacebuilding Fund since its creation in 2006. In particular, we value the PBF's flexible and responsive approach, its increasing focus on regional, cross-border conflicts and its active engagement in UN reform processes. With the support of UN member states including Ireland, the Peacebuilding Fund has been able to react quickly, identifying emerging risks and opportunities, enabling ongoing programs to adapt and encouraging new proposals to mitigate conflict risks. This is peacebuilding in action and it is more essential than ever that the Peacebuilding Fund receives all of our support."



European Union

Ensuring peace and security is at the core of the mandate of the United Nations. Fostering peace is one of the European Union's core policy goals. The European Union and its Member States remain steadfast supporters of the United Nations in its work on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund is grateful to the European Union for its longstanding commitment to peacebuilding and for responding to the Secretary-General's call to ensure sustainable and predictable funding for comprehensive, all-inclusive approaches to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The European Union has continued working in close cooperation on peacebuilding on the ground with the Fund and the wider UN system. The European Union strengthened its engagement in peacebuilding with a contribution of more than \$8 million to the Fund for its 2020-2024 Strategy period.

The European Union has regularly contributed to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, welcoming the convening role of the Commission and its efforts to enhance UN coherence on peacebuilding.

Ambassador Olof Skoog, Permanent Representative of the European Union at the United Nations in New York said, "The Peacebuilding Support Office including the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund are increasing the impact and results on the ground through cooperation across the UN system and increased cooperation with other main actors – national or international. The PBF plays a key role in supporting coordinated efforts across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The Fund is an essential tool in achieving our core policy goal of fostering peace and we are proud to support it. "Our Common Agenda" established that peacebuilding – also through the political convening power of the PBC and the actions and projects of the PBF – is at the centre of the UN's future role in ensuring peace and stability. We will continue to work in close cooperation with the UN to strengthen its readiness to respond to global challenges to peace and stability."

Partner Country Visits

UN Delegation Visits the Democratic Republic of the Congo



28 February 2023

Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Elizabeth Spehar visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 8 – 13 February with a delegation from UN headquarters comprising also Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Martha Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions Alexandre Zouev, and UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa, Ahunna Eziakonwa. The World Bank and representatives of the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region also joined the delegation. Led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Bintou Keita, the delegation met with national authorities, civil society organizations, women's groups and the international community, with the aim of ensuring the alignment of UN initiatives with national priorities for the consolidation of peace in DRC, and with a particular focus on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and stabilization. It also provided an important opportunity to discuss and strengthen partnerships, both with the government and with CSOs in the context of political processes and the transition.



Empowering Young Women in Guinea-Bissau



30 March 2023

The long-term engagement with Guinea-Bissau illustrates the complementary nature of the work of the different peacebuilding tools of the Peacebuilding Support Office: In this case, the political accompaniment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund's support to Guinea-Bissau to achieve its national peacebuilding priorities and build sustainable peace and development.

During a recent trip to Guinea-Bissau from 14-16 February, Ambassador Ronaldo Costa Filho, the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, had the opportunity to witness the impact of the long-standing support of the PBF in Guinea-Bissau and the Peacebuilding Commission's advocacy for women's and youth empowerment. The delegation met future female leaders of Guinea-Bissau who had just graduated from a 6-month "Female Talent Activation Program" at the Leadership Academy, a UNDP project supported by the PBF. In partnership with the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Territorial Administration, and in collaboration with Mozambican NGO GirlMove, the Program aimed to strengthen the capacities of young women to become agents of change.

The Chair and the Assistant Secretary-General heard from three young graduates directly, who attested to how the project helped them to recognize their potential and supported them in enhancing their leadership skills and competencies. The graduates described the social and cultural barriers to gender equality in Guinea-Bissau and described the ongoing challenges faced by women and girls in the country, including discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence. The young women informed that the program helped them to adopt a gender-sensitive lens, gain self-esteem and self-confidence, and become more aware of their rights and duties. The graduates expressed their determination to teach others what they learned and to promote gender equality and female leadership, which left the delegation confident in the positive impact they will make in their communities and beyond.



Peacebuilding Fund's Partners Visit Honduras



30 March 2023

To highlight the impact of the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund's support to Honduras, the Peacebuilding Support Office organized a donor visit from 13-17 March. Participants included representatives from Germany, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The participants met with the Foreign Minister, Minister of Human Rights and other senior officials from justice and environment ministries, as well as the UN Country Team and other counterparts. Meetings reviewed the peacebuilding context in Honduras and the Fund's contributions to the prevention of violence and land conflict, human rights, women's empowerment, the fight against corruption, the protection of vulnerable populations especially youth and mobile populations and the rule of law. The partners also explored opportunities to deepen peacebuilding collaboration, including plans for engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission. During the visit, the partners interacted with local authorities and communities in Tegucigalpa, La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula and visited PBF-funded investments implemented by FAO, IOM, OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC and WFP. The visit provided an opportunity to meet with civil society representatives, women and young leaders, indigenous and afro-descendant leaders and other partners and discuss issues of human rights, gender-based violence, impunity and access to justice. The visit also highlighted the potential for subregional coordination efforts to support migrants, returnees and victims of internal forced displacement and facilitate the peaceful and sustainable integration of migrants and host communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

