The United Nations Approach to Sustaining Peace:

Insights for the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace of the General Assembly on 24-25 April 2018

Meeting hosted by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) under the auspices of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and with the participation of the President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly.

Maison de la paix, Geneva
Tuesday, 27 February 2018

Summary Report

Introduction

The concept of 'Sustaining Peace' has emerged as a new and comprehensive approach to preventing the outbreak, continuation and recurrence of conflict.[1] It marks a clear break from the past where efforts to build peace were perceived to be mainly restricted to post-conflict contexts. The concept, framed by the twin sustaining peace resolutions[2] and the recently adopted United Nations (UN) Secretary General Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace,[3] recognises that a comprehensive approach is required across the peace continuum, from conflict prevention, through peace-making, peacekeeping and longer-term development. It therefore necessitates an "integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, security and developmental actors, within and outside of the United Nations system".[4]

While efforts to sustain peace have gained increasing traction at the policy level, there are many challenges to their effective implementation. Recognising the need to further explore challenges and opportunities to strengthen the UN's work, the President of the General Assembly will convene on 24-25 April 2018 a High-level Meeting on 'Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace'. In particular, the event will aim to reflect on how to (1) respond to the renewed emphasis on prevention; (2) strengthen policy and operational coherence across the UN system; (3) increase, restructure and better prioritize funding; (4) strengthen partnerships; (5) and enhance the role of women and youth.[5]

In preparation of that event, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) hosted under the auspices of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and with the participation of the President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, an informal breakfast meeting on 'The United Nations Approach to Sustaining Peace: Insights for the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace of the General Assembly'. The event brought together over 25 representatives of Geneva-based institutions working on peacebuilding, including non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and other international organizations. The meeting served to collect insights on how to strengthen the UN's work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

This report summarises the main discussions and is intended to provide input for the High-level Meeting in April 2018. It is structured according to the main themes addressed and which relate to the objectives of the April event: i) operationalising sustaining peace through a prevention lens; ii) building synergies between related UN agendas; and iii) strengthening partnerships to promote sustaining peace.

Operationalising sustaining peace through a prevention lens

The concept of sustaining peace is considered ground-breaking in that "it redefines the UN approach to peace by adopting a long-term perspective and focusing on prevention."[6] Participants underlined the importance of recognising that prevention is not a new concept. While it is clear that there is much to be gained by investing in prevention efforts, it was highlighted that there are many **challenges**. First, a key challenge is the reality that prevention requires early efforts before 'symptoms' are evident. It is therefore difficult to identify where prevention efforts are needed, with the consequence that support is often not provided until it is too late and violence has already broken out. It was therefore recognised that more efforts are required in identifying and acting on

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[1] UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016), [on Review of United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture], S/RES/2282, 27 April 2016, Preamble.
[2] UN General Assembly, A/RES/70/262 (2016) and UN Security Council, S/RES/2282(2016).
[3] UN Secretary-General Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, A/72/707–S/2018/43, 18 January 2018.
[4] UN Security Council Resolution 2282, S/RES/2282 (2016).
[5] Concept Note of the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace of 24-25 April 2018, p.1.
[6] Roadmap of the President of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, 16 November 2017, p.1.

early warning indicators. Second, and linked to this, is the reality that if prevention has not gained sufficient traction beyond the policy level it is also because many Member States prefer to engage through a post-conflict lens, rather than through the perspective of prevention which may be seen as coming along with an interventionist agenda and thus constituting a threat to national sovereignty. While national political support is a fundamental precondition for effective prevention efforts, in some contexts this is not forthcoming. It was underlined that in such environments civil society and the private sector have an important role to play in raising their voice and highlighting their concerns to Government. Empowering these non-state actors to recognise early warning signals and to advocate for change accordingly should be a key priority.

In order to improve approaches to prevention it was highlighted that further developing the international community's **understanding of the root drivers of violent conflict** is important. Current international support is rarely grounded in rigorous conflict analysis, and examination of the political economy is often neglected due to challenges in analysing informal relationships and practices within the short time span of international assessment missions. It was noted that the World Bank-UN Study has shed light on important drivers of conflict which would merit further attention in both assessments and practice. Among others, the quality and legitimacy of institutions was recognised to be central to the capacity of societies to manage risks. In particular, improving the good governance of national security institutions was considered crucial for rebuilding mutual trust and establishing security cooperation in regions which are confronted with legacies of conflict as well as significant security challenges spilling across borders in its aftermath. Similarly, it was recognised that in the periphery, sub-regional disparities, marginalisation, and poor governance of public institutions are all important dimensions of violent conflict. Strengthening the provision of security and justice at the local level in order to minimise grievances can therefore make it harder for violence to spread. Promoting gender equality after violent conflict was also recognised to contribute to the prevention of violent conflict because discrimination against women and violations of women's human rights are direct precursors for repression and violent conflict.

Regarding the need for more long-term perspectives to feed into prevention efforts, it was noted that the international community should recognise that peace agreements are not a panacea for sustaining peace. In many cases these agreements fall apart once it becomes evident that the root causes of conflict had not been addressed. As part of a mitigating measure, it was noted that more efforts are needed to invest in strengthening the **resilience of institutions and society as a keystone of prevention.** However, this requires moving beyond the current tendency of building new structures without a thorough understanding of existing endogenous capacities. This challenge is further compounded by the reality that international actors more frequently engage with state structures and do not sufficiently consider existing traditional mechanisms where these are relevant. It was thus recognised that more comprehensive approaches to institution-building support are required in line with the principle of 'do no harm'.

Building synergies between related UN agendas

The sustaining peace resolutions call for an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, security and development actors. This is in line with the recent UN Secretary-General's report which has called for the closer alignment of the peace and security pillar with the development and human rights pillars.[7] Participants recognised that there is much to be done to reduce siloes and to contribute to a greater impact on the ground.

First, enhanced **collaboration between the peace and security pillar and the humanitarian/development pillar** was identified as a key priority – particularly against the background of the increasing blurring of lines between peace and conflict. It was noted for instance

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[7] UN, Report of the Secretary-General, Restructuring of the UN peace and security pillar, A/72/525, 13 October 2017.

that within a single country, there may be regions which are at peace while others have fallen prey to violent conflict. As such, there is a need to build bridges across peace and security and development actors which are often engaged in different contexts in the same country. In particular, it was noted that more efforts are needed to connect the knowledge of development/humanitarian actors to the analysis conducted by peace and security actors who would benefit from up-to-date information on current security trends in regions where they do not have access. Such information sharing could contribute to enhanced efforts to engage in early warning as part of the broader approach to prevention.

Second, participants raised the need for increased **linkages between the peace and security pillar and the human rights pillar**. There were calls to properly unpack the human rights concept and its important contribution to sustaining peace which was underlined to not have been sufficiently addressed in the sustaining peace resolutions. It was recognised that adopting a human rights lens to sustaining peace could contribute to prevention efforts as the violation of human rights is often an early warning indicator for the high risk of conflict. Moreover, it was noted that the extensive human rights framework, and in particular Member States obligations under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, provides the political space for the international community to discuss sensitive developments within countries without violating national sovereignty. As such, as recognised in the Report on Sustaining Peace, the human rights framework can play a critical role in sustaining peace.[8] However, more efforts are needed to raise awareness of these potential synergies among peace and security actors which often view human rights as too political.

Strengthening partnerships to promote sustaining peace

While the primary responsibility for driving efforts to sustain peace lies with national authorities, there are increasing calls to re-think the United Nations, and the broader international community's approach to supporting these efforts. Building more effective partnerships among international actors, including bilateral donors and multilateral organisations, as well as national actors, including civil society, is an important precondition for sustaining peace.

At the **international level**, it was recognised that strengthened efforts are needed to ensure that all actors have a shared understanding of priorities and are engaged towards achieving a common nationally-driven goal. In this respect, it was noted that there has been a tendency for headquarters to drive priorities on the ground, when more efforts are needed to build dialogue at the field level to generate a common understanding of priorities from the bottom-up. Related to this, it was recognised that the increasing amount of information generated through assessments has not gone hand in hand with its effective analysis and dissemination. There is a need to further invest in the collection of data and the development of accompanying analytical tools to enable the elaboration of a common and empirically-founded understanding of the needs for sustaining peace in a given country. This was considered vital to contribute to more evidence based planning and decision making.

It was also noted that more efforts are needed to strengthen partnerships with a wider array of regional and sub-regional organisations than those typically engaged in the area of sustaining peace. For instance, it was noted that specialized organizations in Geneva (e.g. World Health Organisation, International Committee of the Red Cross) can play an important role in providing support to prevention efforts. Similarly, financial institutions such as the World Bank also need to be engaged, not only because of their capacity to mobilize resources, but also because of their useful analytical tools which have not been sufficiently exploited in the context of sustaining peace. Thus, more efforts are needed to engage a wide variety of actors in the UN's strategies for sustaining peace to reduce siloes and efficiently use the resources available through a better division of labour.

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[8] UN Secretary-General Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, A/72/707–S/2018/43, 18 January 2018, para. 21.

At the **national level**, calls were made for more inclusive partnerships with national actors. While there is awareness on the need to strengthen partnerships with civil society, women and youth organisations and the private sector, it was noted that the UN still tends to have closer relationships with the executive powers. Calls were made for enhanced UN engagement with other branches of government, including parliaments. Similarly, it was noted that there is still much untapped potential in engaging the private sector in the promotion of peace. It was raised that inclusive approaches to sustaining peace should start from the peace agreement phase and continue throughout all phases of international support. It was recognised that in line with the principle of national ownership, inclusive approaches to partnerships should be predicated on dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including those which can play a potential destabilizing role (e.g. armed groups) and thus need to be carefully integrated into consultation processes.

Summary and Way ahead

The meeting has identified a number of avenues for strengthening the UN's approach to sustaining peace. Some of the **key priorities** include:

➢ Improving the understanding of root drivers of violent conflict and engaging in strengthened conflict analysis, including of the political economy;

➢ Enhancing approaches to identifying early warning signals, including by building the capacity of civil society and the private sector to play their role and highlight public concerns;

➢ Recognising that peace agreements are not a panacea, and that significant efforts are required in their follow-up to build the resilience and legitimacy of both existing and newly established state institutions;

➢ Strengthening collaboration between peace and security and development actors, particularly to ensure that relevant information is shared and can contribute to information on security trends as input to early warning;

➢ Recognising the need for a human rights lens to sustaining peace, both as an indicator of potential violent conflict, as well as a means to provide the political space to openly discuss developments within a country;

➢ Fostering the development of a common understanding of nationally-driven priorities for international support in a country, and ensuring that planning and decision-making are based on empirical evidence;

➢ Strengthening inclusive approaches to partnerships which are predicated on dialogue with all actors, including those who may play a potential destabilizing role but need to be part of the consultation process.

In order to address these priorities, a crosscutting theme was the need to deal with the tension between the UN's mandate to develop universal concepts and the reality that these should be entirely adjusted to meet specific needs at regional, national and local levels. As such, there were strong calls for context-specific solutions and for investing in research and analysis on why some approaches may work in one context but not in another.

The present report is intended to serve as a contribution to the High-level Meeting on 'Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace' to be held in New York on 24-25 April, which will be an important milestone for further strengthening the coherence of the sustaining peace agenda within and outside the UN system.