
VIRTUAL INFORMAL EU CONSULTATIONS FOR THE 2020 UN PEACEBUILDING ARCHITECTURE REVIEW



On 27 April, the EEAS (Human Rights, Global and Multilateral Issues Managing Directorate and the Directorate for an Integrated Approach to Security and Peace), the EU Delegation in New York and the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, in cooperation with the EU Institute for Security Studies, organised a half-day virtual exchange on current opportunities and challenges for sustaining peace as part of the 2020 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (UN PBA).

Summary Report

The consultations gathered more than 100 of the EU's main conflict prevention and peacebuilding partners and stakeholders from around the world, including EU Member States. Among the contributors to the consultations were: the **UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco** and **two Independent Eminent Persons of the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture** – Ambassador Liberata Mulamula and Ambassador Annika Söder; the **UN Resident Coordinator in Kyrgyzstan, the UN Peace and Development Advisor in Ethiopia, a former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, ISP Director Stefano Tomat** and **FPI Director and Head of Service Hilde Hardeman**; alongside **EU Heads and Deputy Heads of Delegations, and leading civil society actors**.

The discussions focused on three intertwined themes, namely **supporting conflict prevention more effectively, reinforcing human rights protection, and strengthening linkages between peacebuilding and Agenda 2030 (Goal 16)** with the aim of “leaving no-one behind”. Particular **attention was paid to hearing perspectives from the field and civil society actors, on the EU's integrated approach and the interlinkages across the three pillars of the United Nations** – peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

Throughout the consultations, a few recurring topics and key issues were highlighted in the contributions, including **the importance of involving and engaging more systematically with local, informal civic actors as well as women and youth networks, developing good peacebuilding donorship, and fostering coordination and collaboration between various actors and sectors related to peacebuilding**. Several participants also **addressed the wide-ranging humanitarian, social and economic consequences linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how they constitute a major stress test for the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, and for societies at large**. This summary report synthesises the discussions around these and other key points made during the consultations with regard to the three main themes.

1. Conflict prevention.

The role of conflict prevention at the heart of peacebuilding and sustaining peace, as well as the UN PBA review, was recognised by the participants. Confirming that conflict prevention is essentially a political process and that building or sustaining peace does not necessarily mean deploying troops, participants acknowledged that **supporting mediation and dialogue processes on the ground** is equally important. Prevention of escalation or relapse of conflict requires **strong partnerships and coordination beyond *ad hoc* collaboration**. The participants highlighted the role of the Peacebuilding Commission as a convenor of different stakeholders and as a political platform for strengthening collaboration and coordination.

The participants noted that **operationalising and institutionalising conflict prevention** across various sectors and actors requires further work. Here, the importance of increasing **adequate, risk-tolerant and flexible funding** that can be disbursed swiftly when needed was highlighted. Moreover, speakers stressed the role of conflict-sensitive and **shockproof development and humanitarian programming** as building blocks for effective conflict prevention. Building and sustaining peace goes beyond signing peace agreements. Considering the complexity of contemporary conflicts, a balance needs to be found between implementation of frameworks and active conflict prevention.

Participants advocated for conflict prevention efforts to be based on national ownership and on inclusive processes led by local actors. In order for the UN and the EU to effectively support maintaining and building peace, **institutionalised partnerships between international and local actors, such as women peacebuilders, local civil society movements and youth are vital**. Mediation plays an important role in mitigating and preventing violence, yet for mediation processes to be effective they need to be inclusive, going beyond the main conflict parties. As part of the changing landscape for conflict prevention and mediation, it was emphasised that mediation teams needed to strengthen their presence in the cyber sphere to actively prevent escalatory dynamics and engage in preventive measures using ICT.

The participants agreed that the role of local peacebuilding actors amidst the unfolding Covid-19 crisis is of crucial importance and that the peacebuilding architecture needs to be adapted to support these actors directly. Strong partnerships between international stakeholders and actors in the field are ever more important as travel restrictions constrain the movement of international actors. More broadly, the current crisis highlights the value of the preventive approach to conflicts and crises, as well as putting it to the test. Covid-19 will have considerable negative socio-economic repercussions in fragile and conflict-affected countries, which calls for coordinated preventive action. On the other hand, as with any crisis, Covid-19 can also create opportunities for peaceful development. Seizing opportunities for peace and preventing escalation requires joint data-based conflict analysis and planning, for example through horizon-scanning exercises or Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments that identify vulnerabilities and support early to medium-term action with a conflict prevention angle.

2. Human rights protection.

Participants emphasised the inherent connection between human rights protection, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. As conflict prevention is hard to measure, **human rights can provide useful benchmarks that should be more systematically drawn upon but also better understood as preventive and peacebuilding actions are**

designed. Integrating human rights protection in the UN PBA requires further work both at the policy-making level and at the operational level: in terms of policies, integrating human rights needs to be innovative and does not always require an explicit human rights discourse; at the operational level, protecting human rights lies at the core of linkages between conflict prevention and global challenges such as climate change or the Covid-19 virus.

In order to protect human rights, and build and sustain peace, participants emphasised the need to develop more targeted peacebuilding funding towards **civil society organisations, civic groups and social movements**. Moreover, human rights and equality policies and action need to be upgraded, marked more cohesively and tracked throughout programme design and implementation across UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) grants. Current funding mechanisms have to be adjusted so that they can **better respond to the actual needs as identified and perceived by those in the field**. It was acknowledged that many human rights agencies, such as the Human Rights Council and the UN Forum for Business and Human Rights, are crucial for peacebuilding efforts and strengthened coordination between these and UN peacebuilding structures is vital.

The importance of national ownership and **active listening and engaging with locally-embedded actors and groups was recognised as crucial for addressing human rights issues** and building sustainable peace. Several participants stressed that the UN PBA needs to strengthen its capabilities **to address the root causes of conflicts**, which often connect to human rights and equality and require inclusive processes to be tackled. **A whole-of-society approach** must apply in addressing grievances and supporting sustainable pathways to peace. **Engaging with civil society is crucial**, including media and political actors to counter hate speech in particular, **as is ensuring inclusivity** at all times with particular focus on women's participation in decision-making.

Human rights are at the core of the Covid-19 crisis, and the pandemic and responses to it can seriously undermine human rights and peacebuilding efforts. The current developments highlight the **need for coordinated leadership and focus on protecting rights and maintaining peace**, as well as regular political dialogues with governments. **The crisis should be an opportunity to support reforms in fragile countries**, even if there is currently no conflict, and context-specific support should be sustained in the long-term.

3. Agenda 2030 – “leaving no one behind”

Finally, participants stressed the interdependence between the Sustainable Development Goals, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Here, a people-centred approach that “leaves no one behind”, i.e. protects and empowers societies' most vulnerable and discriminated against groups, was recognised as crucial, particularly in the face of the current global pandemic crisis and other global issues challenging peace and sustainable development, especially climate change.

With regard to achieving these goals, **participants emphasised the importance of focusing and strengthening peacebuilding efforts at the peace process stage**, beyond facilitating the signing of agreements, as it is here where considerable challenges remain and there is a risk of conflict resurgence. Working in this space **requires collaboration across the UN's three main pillars** – peace and security, human rights and development. One sphere where this collaboration was deemed particularly important is in **addressing grievances**, for example through transitional justice, and providing development support in conflict-sensitive ways.

Participants emphasised how important it was also for peacebuilding to be steered from the political level and recognised the usefulness of reforms to the role of **the Resident Coordinators and Peace and Development Advisers and called for further strengthening of their capacities**. A number of concrete proposals were made on how **the UN PBA and in particular the Resident Coordinator system could be further strengthened to better engage in fragile situations and support local civil society actors**, also in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Participants suggested it was necessary to upscale the civilian capacities of the Resident Coordinator offices, especially as budgets and peacekeeping operations are reducing. For example, the **UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs regional offices** could play an active role in ensuring strong partnerships with local actors, for example by appointing civil society liaison persons, while the Peacebuilding Fund should further consolidate its Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative and improve its engagement with local stakeholders and local non-formal partners. Furthermore, in order to address the threat posed by climate change, **partnerships between peacebuilding and climate change communities** are important as well as considering climate change vulnerabilities in the planning of the use of the PBF.

Participants emphasised that in order for the PBA to strengthen existing and new partnerships with local actors, it needs adequate funding. Several participants **called for good peacebuilding donorship working towards more coherent and joined-up approaches** – the EU and the UN together with International Financial Institutions, as well as local actors. In order to “leave no-one behind”, **donors must raise their voices to support fragile states and be willing to support local actors. The UN PBF needs more resources if it is to act as a catalyst**. At the same time, participants noted the importance of **transparency and accountability in managing and using peacebuilding resources** and the continuing importance of “do no harm” in peacebuilding efforts.

As several participants highlighted, Covid-19 presents a major test **for the entire global system**, which also defines how we relate and respond to its conflict and humanitarian consequences. Simultaneously, how we respond to the challenge presented by the pandemic influences the impact on human rights violations and conflicts and/or peace processes. Covid-19 highlights the need to strengthen rapid, risk-tolerant, and flexible but institutionalised peacebuilding funding as well as mechanisms to support community resilience, local peacebuilding and conflict prevention actors. The global crisis also underlines the importance of the UN PBA and other **common platforms within the UN PBA that allow donors to come together and work with communities in a transformative and coordinated manner, corresponding to the needs on the ground**.

4. Concluding remarks.

The informal consultations underlined several urgent and long-term challenges and opportunities for the UN PBA review. Three interconnected insights were highlighted in the concluding remarks: (i) ensuring an **integrated approach** across the triple nexus of peace and security, human rights, and development is of paramount importance; (ii) strengthening of partnerships and finding new and innovative ways to **engage with a wide range of stakeholders** is key to ensuring effectiveness on the ground; and (iii) **Covid-19 will challenge the UN PBA and the world at large but** our policy and operational responses will influence how the socioeconomic and political repercussions play out.