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# Secretary-General

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## **OPENING FIRST SESSION OF PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION, SECRETARY-GENERAL STRESSES**

### **IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL OWNERSHIP, BUILDING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

Following is the text of the address today by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the first session of the [Peacebuilding Commission](#) in New York:

It gives me great pleasure to open this first session of the Peacebuilding Commission. I would like to congratulate all the members on having been elected to this historic new body.

There are few issues on which there is greater consensus, or higher expectations, than on the responsibility of the United Nations to help States and societies recover from the devastation of war. So, it was not accidental that world leaders, at the 2005 UN World Summit, stressed the vital role of this Organization in post-conflict transitions, and called on the General Assembly and the Security Council to establish this Commission.

The international community now has at its disposal a unique intergovernmental body: the first devoted specifically to peacebuilding. This new Commission will aim to provide more sustained, more coordinated and more focused support to countries emerging from conflict.

It will bring together all the relevant actors. And, taken alongside the new Human Rights Council, the strengthened Central Emergency Response Fund, the Democracy Fund and other changes and reforms that have been put in place or set in motion recently, the Peacebuilding Commission marks another major step towards a United Nations that is fully equipped to meet the challenges of our times.

You begin work as the world grapples with a paradox in its efforts to promote durable peace, stability and development. There has been a very welcome decline in the overall number of conflicts, and the United Nations has done its best, through peacekeeping and other assistance, to contribute to this trend. At the same time, however, we have seen an unacceptable number of peace agreements disintegrate within five years after the end of a civil war, with countries lapsing back into deadly conflict.

Some of the weaknesses in current international responses to post-conflict situations are well known. One is a shortage of funds. Another is the lack of international coordination. A third is the tendency for international actors to leave too hurriedly. As we have just seen in Timor-Leste, undue haste to disengage from a transitional situation can result in reversals and a need to redeploy, at great cost to all, particularly the helpless civilian victims.

All of these challenges directly informed the design and mandate of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the creation of the Peacebuilding Support Office and Standing Fund.

But, we must also recognize that increased resources and improved coordination will not, in themselves, be enough to bring about lasting peace. Peacebuilding requires national ownership, and must be homegrown. Outsiders, however well-intentioned, cannot substitute for the knowledge and

will of the people of the country concerned. It is the latter who best know their own history, culture and political contexts. It is they who will live with the consequences of the decisions taken. And it is they who must feel that peacebuilding is their achievement, if it is to have any hope of lasting.

Experience tells us that peacebuilding involves more than just preventing renewed fighting and securing physical reconstruction. A core task is to build effective public institutions, within constitutional frameworks and the rule of law.

All too often, war-affected populations raise their hopes for new, more equitable governance arrangements, only to see exclusionary social, economic and political structures left untouched, perpetuated, or inadvertently strengthened. It is essential for citizens to regain their trust in State institutions. Peacebuilding can help solidify the social compact by which states deliver on their obligations to citizens, while citizens exercise their right to participate and take charge of their destiny.

We must also remember that peacebuilding is inherently political. At times, the international community has approached peacebuilding as a largely technical exercise, involving knowledge and resources. The international community must not only understand local power dynamics, but also recognize that it is itself a political actor entering a political environment.

The members of the Peacebuilding Commission are well equipped to support countries emerging from conflict, since among you are not only key stakeholders such as troop contributors and donors, but also countries which themselves have gone through the transition from war to peace.

You will be called upon to act as like-minded supporters, and as allies who will remain engaged in a country beyond the lifespan of a peacekeeping mission. This will mean managing expectations, since many elements of peacebuilding -- such as reconciliation -- can take years or decades, whereas people emerging exhausted from a conflict understandably want results much quicker than that.

The Commission is expected to support the development of peacebuilding strategies, and to build consensus among international actors for their implementation. It will work closely with other UN bodies. And, I am pleased to note that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as regional development banks and other organizations, will be part of this effort.

And, of course, the active participation of national authorities in the Commission's country-specific workings will be essential. This will give further weight to the dialogue at country level between the respective authorities and the international community. I hope the Commission will also find ways to reach out to local civil society, the private sector, and others in a position to contribute.

The Peacebuilding Support Office, for its part, will support the Commission by providing information and analysis, and by ensuring that the recommendations emanating from the Commission's deliberations are translated into concrete action at the country level.

The Peacebuilding Fund, meanwhile, will provide additional means, complementing other funding sources. I urge Member States to endow it generously and consistently.

The Commission represents a symbol of both hope and perseverance: hope for the many millions of people throughout the world who are striving to keep their societies on the fragile road to peace; and perseverance, because you have overcome considerable difficulties to get this new and vital endeavour up and running. I am sure you will show similar resolve in carrying out your mandate, and I wish you every success as your important work now begins.

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