

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**ADDRESS TO THE FIRST RETREAT OF THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION  
Greentree, 18 January 2008**

Excellencies,  
Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to meet with you on the eve of your important discussions on the future of the Peacebuilding Commission. I would like to congratulate you on a successful first year and offer some thoughts on the challenges ahead.

The Peacebuilding Commission embodies all aspects of the UN's work: peace, development and human rights. By integrating them into one coherent approach you are helping to close gaps in the international response to countries emerging from conflict.

You are showing that building sustainable peace requires much more than addressing security – it calls for tackling longer-term challenges.

And you are showing that addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor is not just a matter of delivering development assistance, or even addressing the Millennium Development Goals – it is also a question of building durable peace after conflict.

These elements are central to the Commission's mission of averting a relapse into conflict, but they apply equally to broader United Nations efforts to stop violence from breaking out in the first place.

As you well know, preventing conflicts and their recurrence saves immeasurable resources and, more importantly, countless lives. That is why I am working to bolster the UN's overall capacity for preventive diplomacy. This requires us to strengthen the Department of Political Affairs to make it more field-oriented and proactive. And we must expand capacities for mediation and good offices while strengthening partnerships on the ground.

We must also ensure that our work for peacebuilding starts early in enough in the stage of any peacekeeping operation to ensure that countries in the fragile stages of emerging from conflict do not risk sliding back into war.

As I said in the vision statement I laid out to regional groups of Member States last week, I regard consolidating the UN's peacebuilding apparatus as one of the priorities for the Organization in 2008.

The Commission has demonstrated its inherent value by providing sustained attention to the first two countries under its consideration. You have accompanied Sierra Leone through an election process that was at times tense, but ultimately proved to be successful. And in Burundi, you assisted in averting a major crisis when you brought together key stakeholders to help break the deadlock in parliament last fall.

In the process, you generated trust among Member States and forged a new spirit of partnership in the international community. Now you have the opportunity to capitalize on this momentum to provide advice to Guinea-Bissau. And to continue developing new peacebuilding tools, like the long-term political compacts known as “strategic frameworks” which are paving the way for coordinated action between the UN and national players.

As you know, peacebuilding is not just about ‘bricks and mortar’ – it is a transformative process involving changing attitudes about how to manage conflict. While we haven’t yet determined how to measure the Commission’s accomplishments, I am confident that the people of Burundi and Sierra Leone will soon affirm its positive impact on their lives.

National ownership is rightly the centerpiece of the Commission’s work. But at the same time we know that countries emerging from conflict need international support to build peace. You have proven that national ownership and international assistance are linked, and that neither one by itself can guarantee peace.

This approach to partnership extends to your mandate to ‘bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources...’ I prefer to define this task broadly to include all manner of resources required for peacebuilding. But financial support remains critical. We spend billions to keep the peace, but generally do not sustain funding after the blue helmets leave.

Can we afford to witness another country’s slide back into conflict because funding was not available to address the root causes?

We cannot.

The Peacebuilding Commission must ensure that funds are mobilized quickly. And it must be willing to find new ways to target those national capacities that offer the best chance of making peace irreversible.

The Peacebuilding Fund has provided catalytic support not only to Burundi and Sierra Leone but also to the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea. We must be clear that this support is intended to kick-start critical peacebuilding interventions – not serve as a substitute for funding peacebuilding.

The Fund will succeed if it attracts significant and sustainable financial support from both bilateral and multilateral sources. And let me say again: if investments are directed to building the needed capacity to make peace irreversible, the returns will be that much greater.

Another pillar of the peacebuilding architecture is the Peacebuilding Support Office. Through my Assistant Secretary-General, Carolyn McAskie, I am participating in the Commission’s deliberations. My role includes convening operational parts of the UN system to back strategic approaches you develop.

The Peacebuilding Support Office is a hinge between the intergovernmental Commission and the operational players carrying out peacebuilding activities. You have my continuing support in further strengthening this convening role and my commitment to enhance the coherence of the peacebuilding effort across the UN system.

But you must also consider how best to reinforce the operational relevance of the Commission's advice. There is a real opportunity for this through your participation in the respective governing boards of UN agencies, funds and programmes as they identify priorities and make plans.

The Peacebuilding Commission is leading the way in involving national actors in substantive decisions. I hope that you take this principle of national ownership to other bodies where you have influence and ensure operational consistency across the United Nations system.

Of course, the UN is not the only partner which needs better coordination. Even with its unique position, the United Nations represents only a portion of the international assistance provided by other multilateral institutions and bilateral donors.

That is why the Commission offers a new opportunity for broader coordination based on a shared understanding of the peacebuilding goals for each specific case. It can foster agreement on the most effective ways to achieve them. This will serve as leverage for sustained, coherent support. I look to you, the members of the Peacebuilding Commission, to seize this opportunity.

Dealing with the aftermath of war is costly, and strengthening the UN's capacity to resolve conflicts earlier rather than later is among the smartest investments we can make. The Commission will be critical to ensuring that our investment in peace is protected for the benefit of the people. I hope we will be able to renew our commitment and strengthen our capacity so that together, we can deliver on the aims of the Charter to "save succeeding generations from war" – even in the most war-ravaged lands.

I know that you will be dealing with many of these questions here at your retreat. Please take advantage of this opportunity to speak frankly and constructively. I look forward to the results of your deliberations, not only in a document but in the countries the Commission was set up to serve.

Thank you.