

## **Multidimensionality of peace and development: a DESA perspective**

by

José Antonio Ocampo,  
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,  
United Nations, New York

*"Peace, development and justice are all connected to each other. We cannot talk about economic development without talking about peace. How can we expect economic development in a battlefield?"*

Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize, 1991

One of the major challenges that the United Nations faces today lies in its global task of preventing conflicts and restoring peace through resolution of the causes leading to violent conflict. Today, conflicts are primarily intra-state, protracted and increasingly complex in nature. They mostly occur in the poorer countries of the world, where the development imperative is greatest. More than fifteen of the twenty poorest countries in the world have had a major conflict in the past one and a half decades. Significantly, more than fifty percent of conflicts have recurred and peace agreements broken down within the first decade of achieving peace. Most victims of such civil conflict have been the civilian population rather than parties involved in conflict. The average cost of a civil conflict in a developing country is about US\$ 64 billion – exceeding the average annual Official Development Assistance of US\$ 62 billion in the 2000s. The impact of internecine civil conflicts has been devastating not only in the conflict affected countries but their spill-over to neighbouring countries has been equally serious. Not surprisingly, therefore, armed conflicts have become a major impediment to economic and social development and sustained peace in many countries. Not only have they reversed development, but the burden of their impact is felt for long years after peace has returned and the work of recovery started. Though conflicts tend to reverse development, in many ways, lack of development itself constitutes a powerful source of grievance fuelled by a combustible mix of poverty, inequality, marginalization and exclusion that often precipitate into violent conflagrations.

### ***Integrating conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development: key United Nations actors***

Recognizing the causal interrelatedness between peace and development, the United Nations has taken several steps in resolving conflicts, rehabilitating conflict-affected countries and assisting them in rebuilding their economies and restoring them on the development path. The Security Council, which is the principal organ of the United Nations responsible for the peaceful settlement of disputes and maintaining peace has progressively been integrating development with both peacekeeping and peacebuilding. At the peacekeeping stage, the primary development focus of the United Nations' activities has been addressing the immediate reconstruction needs. In the subsequent peacebuilding stage, the stress has been on long term development and resolution of the structural causes of conflict. Other principal organs of the United Nations, dealing with economic, social, human rights and humanitarian issues i.e. the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its Functional Commissions, have also been increasingly integrating peace and development issues in their legislation and deliberations.

Within the United Nations Secretariat, relevant departments have been addressing peace and development in a more holistic and integrated manner. For example, the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) have increasingly been addressing socio-economic and developmental issues along with enforcement of peace and security. Similarly, DPA has

increasingly been integrating development, human rights and humanitarian issues in its political analyses. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is actively involved in crisis prevention, early warning and conflict resolution and recovery. In cooperation with other departments, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has also undertaken several policy initiatives and actions to address the nexus between peace and development. In addition to these departmental efforts, several inter-agency processes have brought together various UN actors in order to develop a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to conflict prevention. Examples of these are the Interdepartmental Framework for Co-ordination on Early Warning and Preventive Action ("Framework Team") and the Informal Group on the Political Economy of Armed Conflicts.

### ***Addressing new threats and challenges***

The world today faces new threats and challenges which are increasingly becoming more interconnected and multidimensional. In recognition of this, the Secretary-General established a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in the fall of 2003. Its mandate was to assess the efficacy of existing approaches, instruments and mechanisms in the light of new threats and challenges and recommend changes necessary to ensure effective collective action by the international community to address them. The panel's report identifies six clusters of threats with which the world must be concerned now and in the decades ahead:

- Economic and social threats, including poverty, infectious diseases and environmental degradation
- Inter-State conflict
- Internal conflict, including civil war, genocide and other large-scale atrocities
- Nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons
- Terrorism
- Transnational organized crime

The report emphasizes that development "is the indispensable foundation for a collective security system that takes prevention seriously. It serves multiple functions. It helps combat the poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation that kill millions and threaten human security. It is vital in helping States prevent or reverse the erosion of State capacity, which is crucial for meeting almost every class of threat. And it is part of a long-term strategy for preventing civil war and for addressing the environments in which both terrorism and organized crime flourish."<sup>1</sup>

The panel's report as well as the Report of the Millennium Project, which was established to review progress and make recommendations on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, have informed the Secretary-General's report for the forthcoming September high-level Summit of the General Assembly entitled *In larger Freedom*.<sup>2</sup> In this report, the Secretary-General has forcefully emphasized that development, security and human rights go hand in hand and must be addressed together. Only by doing so, can the world live in larger freedom – free of fear and free from want. Towards this end, the Secretary-General has made far-reaching recommendations and proposed several reforms, including within the United Nations, which are currently being debated in the United Nations.

Multilateralism redefines power relations by creating collaborative relationships between countries based on participatory principles. It can serve to promote conflict resolution, long-term peacebuilding and capacities of nations to govern themselves in a manner that responds to grievances, removes inequalities and is driven by justice and the rule of law. Contrary to this, unilateral actions often rely on force to attempt to resolve conflicts. This only serves to deepen grievances and harden societal divides that remain fundamental causes of perpetual instability, particularly in fragile nations. On the other hand, multilateralism discourages the use of force and provides the tools necessary to resolve conflicts through peaceful means by, inter alia, public awareness, education, respect for diversity, dialogue, mediation and

diplomacy. It encourages nonviolent means of conflict resolution grounded in international law. In an increasingly interconnected world, multilateralism provides a solid foundation for peace, security and development. In the words of the United Nations Secretary-General: “It is in the interest of every country to have international rules and to abide by them. And such a system can only work if, in devising and applying the rules, the legitimate interests and points of view of different countries are accommodated, and decisions are reached collectively. That is the essence of multilateralism and the founding principle of the United Nations.”

### ***Understanding the underlying causes of conflict***

It is essential to understand the linkages between development in its broadest sense, including human rights, environmental sustainability, good governance, participatory democracy, removal of inequalities and discrimination and gender equality, with peace and security if policies, strategies, programmes and initiatives are to be successful in conflict prevention, resolution and sustained recovery. There is abundant literature today on what causes violent conflict. However, there is no one single explanation or model that provides a complete and satisfactory explanation as to why violent conflicts erupt. Some theorists have argued that societies end up in ‘structural violence’ or live without conflicts depending on the way a society is structured.<sup>3</sup> If they embrace a ‘security approach’ in which those in power have a superior strength to defeat or deter opponents, there is peace but there is also a structural possibility of violence. If societies follow a ‘peace approach’ in which differences are resolved peacefully and to the satisfaction of all parties, the possibilities of structural instabilities and violent conflicts are reduced considerably. Some studies focusing on ethno-political groups and non-state communal groups (Minorities at Risk<sup>4</sup>) argue that conflicts most often occur when basic human needs, e.g. the need for physical security and well-being, communal or cultural recognition, participation, and distributive justice are repeatedly denied, threatened, or frustrated, especially over long periods of time. Some analysts, basing themselves on this ‘Needs Theory’<sup>5</sup> have argued that a primary cause of protracted or intractable conflict is the unyielding drive of people to meet their unmet needs at the individual, group, and societal level. These ‘needs’ require to be fulfilled simultaneously and in an intense and relentless manner.<sup>6</sup>

Researchers attempting to connect violent conflict and poverty have found that conflict, particularly recurring conflict causes poverty,<sup>7</sup> but the reverse relationship is not as clear. In many cases, when poverty coincides with ethnic, religious, language or regional boundaries, underlying grievances can explode into open conflict, often triggered by external shocks (such as sudden changes in the terms of trade) or mobilized by groups or individual who are able to benefit, directly or indirectly, from conflict. In this context, transient poor, i.e., those who move in and out of poverty, are particularly prone to the building up of grievance that can lead to violent conflict due to their relatively greater deprivation.

Several recent empirical studies of civil wars have produced crucial conclusions on the links between inequalities and violent conflicts.<sup>8</sup> These studies conclude that vertical inequality does not, *ipso facto*, increase the risk of internal armed conflicts. Since violent conflicts are primarily group organized conflicts, *horizontal* inequalities (systematic inequality between groups formed on the basis of ethnicity, language, religious, geographic or other lines) are significantly related to intrastate armed conflict. These studies have found that not only is it important to be aware of the group boundaries of horizontal inequalities, but that it is also important to recognize that inequality itself is a strong cause of grievance that may include political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions.<sup>9</sup> Others studies have found that although every society has motives or grievances, not every group in a society has the opportunity to launch a violent conflict and sustain it. Greed and opportunity provide this ability. These studies also point towards greed being a stronger cause for conflict than grievance.<sup>10</sup>

As can be seen, there are myriad factors that can have a causal relationship with the occurrence of violent conflicts. And these structural causes of conflicts are complex, inter-linked, multidimensional, and often

intertwined with a society's history. No one single cause explains the underlying socio-economic causes of conflict fully nor does a single prescription or remedy apply. Therefore, it is critical that each conflict situation or a situation with the potential to erupt into violent conflict be fully analyzed in order to reach an in-depth understanding of situation-specific structural causes that can help to develop sound prevention and resolution strategies. However, while situation-specific causal analysis is critical, there are certain common features of conflict situations that should be borne in mind when formulating strategies and programmes:

- Conflicts exist in all societies and rarely erupt into violence suddenly or without warning;
- There is a differential impact of conflict on women and men, and women can play a vital role in peace building;
- The long-term precursors of violent conflict invariably involve ill-considered governmental policies, inequitable development, social exclusion/marginalization, deteriorating economic conditions and overall institutional decay;
- The international community's security and development sectors need much earlier and more robust coordination to address the underlying causes of conflict so as to forestall the social and institutional disintegration that often leads to violent civil strife;
- The internal dynamics of conflict situations are best understood and can best be addressed by locally conceived and domestically driven solutions that encompass a broad array of inter-linked social, political, economic, security and governance dimensions;
- External assistance must build on, rather than substitute, national capacities, resources and initiatives, using local ownership and building on in-country experience;
- Complex, unique and highly combustible combinations of ethnic/religious differences, economic hardship, and ineffective governance are present in many developing countries. Yet, the actual eruption of destructive conflict depends largely upon the degree to which government and societal institutions have the foresight, skills and capacity to manage tensions and grievance before they deteriorate to violence.

### ***DESA's role, strengths and activities***

Addressing the root causes of violent conflict has been a matter of ongoing concern of DESA. Its role as convener of intergovernmental bodies, promoter of norms, mobilizer of civil society, coordinator of the United Nations Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs, and source of subject-specific expertise for Member States and the rest of the UN system give it a valuable comparative advantage in dealing with conflict issues. Drawing on its comparative advantages and its comprehensive mandate in the field of social and economic development, DESA has a pivotal role to play in addressing socio-economic factors that underlie violent conflicts. Its expertise is of particular relevance in identifying and addressing socio-economic and institutional causes of potential conflicts through research, analysis and information sharing with Member States, civil society and other UN entities. Its strength particularly encompasses activities in peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation through policy analysis and development, capacity building, advocacy and information sharing, including on best practices. In post-conflict situations, DESA has a particular role in developing policy frameworks for the integration of such disrupted economies in the global economic arena.

DESA is involved in global policy analysis, norm setting and assisting inter-governmental bodies. In doing these, DESA's *niche* is drawn from its mandate which gives it unique strengths and advantages, some of which are outlined below.

DESAs activities and initiatives in integrating peace and development are based on its mandate and comparative advantages. As the Secretariat of the ECOSOC, DESA has been providing reports, analyses

and substantive content in the follow-up of the United Nations Development Agenda<sup>11</sup> that has, at its core, the internationally agreed development goals emanating from United Nations conferences of the last fifteen years as well as the Millennium Summit. Realizing this agenda is critical for the world to achieve freedom from want and freedom from fear. DESA also provides substantive support to the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African Countries Emerging from Conflicts, such as the Groups on Guinea-Bissau and Burundi and the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, working closely with DPA, UNDP and other relevant stakeholders. In addition, it participates in inter-agency mechanisms devoted to conflict prevention, such as the “Framework Team” established in 1995. DESA also works to mainstream gender perspectives in peace processes, including conflict prevention, management and resolution, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building. At the country level, it is engaged in strengthening technical cooperation activities for capacity building for conflict prevention and peace-building. In the area of social integration, DESA is developing a conceptual/operational framework: “Social Integration as Peace-building: By, For and With People”, which addresses the interrelationship of social integration and peace-building. Interlinkages between natural resources and conflicts are also being addressed through analysis of the impact of conflict on natural resource management and the relationship between natural resource endowments and causes of conflicts. DESA is also involved in mainstreaming conflict prevention in governance and institutional development and in the post-conflict reconstruction of institutions. Conducting population census in a number of post conflict situations is yet another important area of DESA’s work. Moreover, DESA is developing on-line tools for information sharing and networking among civil society organizations working in conflict prevention.

### ***Substantive challenges faced by the United Nations in integrating peace and development***

Although, DESA’s activities undertaken in collaboration with the larger UN system have advanced the integration of peace with development, many substantive challenges remain – challenges related to the inherent difficulties of operationalising the conceptual understanding of the interlinkages among conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development – which the UN system faces. They include the following:

- i. Structural causes of conflict are multi-layered and multidimensional and policies for prevention and post-conflict need to address *several issues simultaneously* –horizontal inequalities; poverty, underdevelopment and particularly youth unemployment; weak governance institutions and mechanisms; policies of exclusion and marginalization, and issues connected with governance of natural resources.
- ii. Each conflict situation has a *unique set of causes with a unique interplay* among them, making the development of a universal model of both diagnosis and policy difficult. Each conflict situation or fragile society needs to be studied individually and analyzed within its own national context.
- iii. Causes of conflicts or fragility of states need to be addressed in a proactive manner. Usually, as empirical studies show, a decade passes before grievance turns into violent conflict. Thus, interventions have to be designed in such a manner that a resolution is found *before* societies come to the brink of violent upheaval. In this context, accurate monitoring and diagnosis of horizontal inequalities, identifying ways to reduce them and strengthening governments’ capacities to rectify them, are particularly important.
- iv. The focus of economic and social policies aimed at reducing poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment and improving government services and distribution of resources need to be geared to attain ‘*equality of opportunities*’ and even some measure of ‘*equality of outcomes*’ and not merely a ‘*leveled playing field*’. Such policies should be and perceived to be fair in their processes. Two particular difficulties arise in advising Member States on such policies. The first is more political and relates to sovereignty of states. Designing advice and assistance in a manner that Member States do not perceive them as threats to their sovereignty is a delicate issue. The second difficulty has to do with the fact that preventive policies *per se* need to be nationally driven and owned. Mechanisms that maintain national

ownership of policies and programmes while at the same time are subject to international monitoring is a particular challenge.

v. Long-term prevention requires addressing deep-rooted socio-economic, institutional, and other structural causes that underlie immediate symptoms of conflicts, through the strengthening of the capacity of States. It requires good governance; socio-economic policies which enable equitable distribution of wealth; policies or mechanisms for promoting social integration/foster social cohesion while recognizing, protecting and valuing diversity. Specifically, these include having a sound macro-economic structure, putting in place an effective framework for conflict-sensitive fiscal, trade and external debt policies; timely, adequate and equitable delivery of basic social services; an effective judiciary; a depoliticized and professional security sector; participatory national consultative and legislative structures; regular free and fair elections and mechanisms for consultative processes reaching the local levels. All these require a *long-term frame*. Sustaining such activities, including through provision of adequate and timely resources, over a long-term frame is a critical challenge.

vi. The global economic environment can negatively impact on conflict-prone countries. This is particularly so as poorer countries depend on export of a few primary commodities. An additional problem is that trade regimes of developed countries do not encourage export diversification. In the short term, this makes conflict affected/prone countries particularly dependent on the global economic cycle of a narrow list of commodities, while in the longer term such countries suffer from deterioration in their terms of trade. Over time, these economic constraints cause macro-economic adjustment problems, e.g. sudden depreciation of exchange rates, rising oil/fuel prices, cuts in public expenditure. Such external constraints can have negative consequences on good governance by decreasing public sector revenues, and hindering social integration as economic opportunities are reduced. Unfortunately, efforts to address these global market issues are undertaken in discussions outside of the United Nations, hampering efforts to advance the agenda of integrating conflict prevention in the global market discourse.

### ***Structural challenges faced by the United Nations in integrating peace and development***

There has been a prevailing awareness that the United Nations can and needs to do more to integrate peace and development in a more integrated fashion and, in that respect, design policies, initiatives and activities that are synergistically and seamlessly interlinked. A major frustration in this endeavour has been the absence of any institutional platform or body dedicated to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development. The reason for this is that when the Charter was adopted, inter-state wars were the predominant type of conflict. It could not have been foreseen that intra-state and internecine conflicts would overtake inter-state wars. For this reason, the United Nations was conceived without any institutional mechanism that could address this changed nature of conflicts. This crucial shortcoming has been highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report *In Larger Freedom*, prepared as a framework for the forthcoming September 2005 Summit. To overcome this and in order to address the several dimensions of peacebuilding at one institutional point, among other measures, the Secretary-General has proposed the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission. This Commission will serve to deal with peace and development in a holistic compact. Member States of the United Nations are currently consulting on these proposals and their outcomes will determine how much the United Nations and its component parts, including DESA, can do to prevent violent conflicts and build sustainable peace with development.

### ***Actions initiated by DESA to overcome the challenges***

DESA has began a process of introspection and self-evaluation of its mandate, activities, outputs, gaps, and future direction for which a Task Force on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development within the Department has been created. This Task Force draws on the membership of several of its divisions dealing with specific thematic facets relevant to the integration of peace and development. The Task

Force has been mandated to examine the question of consolidating and deepening the on-going activities of DESA in the area; examining ways to strengthen institutional linkages with other organizations and departments working in this area; and identifying specific initiatives and/or approaches on which DESA could focus in order to deepen its work and contribution in this field. The consultative process of the Task Force has been ongoing and as a part of that process, the Task Force held an Expert Group Meeting at the United Nations Headquarters on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2004 with participation of a cross-section of experts, from the United Nations, academia, practitioners, and Breton Woods's institutions. The Meeting examined several issues and made several far-reaching recommendations. Some of them are reproduced below.

- The interrelationship between underdevelopment and eruption of violent conflicts is deeply complex and requires multidimensional analysis and approaches. DESA's evaluative capacities, analytical strengths and convening power makes it well positioned to contribute to the understanding of the socio-economic causes of conflict, including with regard to specific conflict situations.
- Efforts at preventing conflict and peacebuilding at the national level are important. There is, however, increasing recognition of the need to develop sub-regional, regional and global approaches in which a more conducive global policy framework to enable better integration of conflict-prone and countries emerging from conflict in the global economy is critical. Efforts should be made towards this end by all stakeholders.
- Systemic causes of conflict should be addressed in a more comprehensive manner and policy actions should seek to attain 'equality of opportunity' and, as mentioned above, some measure of 'equality of outcomes' and be responsive to grievances.
- There is need for translating the conceptual side of conflict prevention and peacebuilding into operational priority for all UN actors, including DESA.
- Privatization of conflicts, including the growing trend of the business sector involving itself in conflict issues, needs to be arrested and reversed including by engaging the business sector, within the existing conflict prevention fora.

The recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting and the outcomes of consultations provide the United Nations system, including DESA, with important guidance in its work in integrating peace and development.

### ***The road ahead: making the UN development agenda work for peace and progress***

On the road ahead lies the twin task of achieving development while building and maintaining peace. Although these goals are not new for the United Nations, they contain new challenges at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The complexion of wars has changed. Not only are they more internal, they are becoming more protracted. Spillovers of internal wars are becoming wider with refugees crossing several borders, proliferation of small arms and light weapons in war zones abound, land mines prevent agriculture and daily bread-winning activities, and environmental degradation due to civil wars have become more severe. In the light of this changed complexity of civil wars, the bulwark for peace lies in the comprehensive implementation of the broad development agenda which originated from the commitments and the agreed goals contained in the outcomes of the United Nations conferences and summits of the last fifteen years.<sup>12</sup> Making the development agenda work in the task of peacebuilding, in particular, is important if peace is to be sustained and recurrence of wars avoided. These are the challenges faced by the international community on the road ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> See *A more secure world: our shared responsibility*, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, United Nations, 2004(A/59/565).

<sup>2</sup> A/59/2005

<sup>3</sup> Johan Galtung, 2004, 'The Security Approach and the Peace Approach', presented at the World Culture Open on "Building Peace through Harmonious Diversity".

<sup>4</sup> This project and dataset is featured in the UNDP Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed., Harper & Row, 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Rothman, 1997, 'Resolving Identity-Based Conflict in Nations, Organizations, and Communities', San Francisco, CA.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Goodhand, 2003, 'Enduring Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of Current Knowledge on the Linkages Between War and Chronic Poverty', *World Development*, Vol. 31 No. 3

<sup>8</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 2002, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', Oxford; Hegre, Gissinger & Gleditsch, 2003.

Amartya Sen in *Inequality Reexamined*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, also argues that inequality must be analyzed in terms of groups, rather than specific individuals, and the focus should be on inter-group variations.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Stewart, 2004, 'Development and Security: working paper 3', Center for Research on Inequality, Human security and Ethnicity, CRISE, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford

<sup>10</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, *op.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> See the Report of the Secretary-General to the 2005 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council (E/2005/56).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*