

Peacebuilding Commission: Working Group on Lessons Learned
Meeting on Regional Approaches to Peacebuilding
June 8, 2007

Summary Note of the Chair

1. Burundi and Sierra Leone, the two countries under consideration by the PBC, have highlighted the need to underpin peacebuilding in their sub-regions as part of their integrated peacebuilding strategies. Recognizing the importance of regional approaches to peacebuilding, the third meeting of the Working Group on Lessons Learned focused on selected experiences from Africa and Central America in addressing the regional dimensions of conflict and regional strategies for peacebuilding. In specific, the meeting focused on several sub-regional initiatives in the Great Lakes region and West Africa as well as the Contadora-Esquipulas peace process and the International Conference on Refugees in Central America. The meeting was chaired by the Permanent Representative of El Salvador H.E. Carmen María Gallardo Hernández and brought together expert panelists, including a distinguished former Minister of Foreign Affairs from El Salvador, member states and civil society representatives. (See attached programme).

2. The two speakers who focused on Africa confirmed the regional dimensions of African conflicts but drew attention to the specificities of each sub-region. For example, West Africa is a more compact and integrated region with various sub-regional institutions. While conflicts in neighboring countries have consequences across West Africa, there are also various sub-regional mechanisms for conflict management and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, the Great Lakes is a region that now encompasses eleven countries with various degrees of cohesion beyond the three core states--Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Until recently, the region did not have a common definition or coherent sub-regional institutions.

3. In West Africa, the most serious problems with regional repercussions have included the rise of civilian militia groups, weak governance, dire socio-economic conditions, youth unemployment, proliferation of small arms and predation of natural resources to finance conflict. However, West Africa also has strong regional assets including intergovernmental institutions such as ECOWAS, ECOMOG and the Mano River Union, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) as well as various civil society networks such as the Mano River Women's Network.

4. The conflicts in the Great Lakes were greatly fuelled by the steady flow of refugees and armed groups, the illegal exploitation and export of natural resources and the failure of the state throughout the region. In the absence of a regional approach to deal with these problems, conflicts in various countries became intricately interconnected. It was only after the Rwandan catastrophe that regional approaches gained proper attention. The appointment of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Great Lakes in 1999 gradually led to an extended international process which was supported by the United Nations and the African Union. That process

in turn culminated in the conclusion of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region in December 2006, although the Pact has yet to be ratified by member states. Meanwhile, the Secretariat of the International Conference has now been established in Burundi.

5. In Central America, the conflicts that reverberated throughout the region in the 1980s had various internal and external dimensions. The absence of democracy and socio-economic inequality within individual states was compounded by Cold War politics and extensive intervention of external actors in the affairs of the region. The Contadora peace process (which was actively supported by Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela) was initiated in the early 1980s to prevent the internationalization of the military conflicts in Central America while generating a regional solution to several interlocking conflicts. Although the Contadora process itself was not successful, it prepared the grounds for the Esquipulas process that followed. The combined Contadora-Esquipulas process had several mutually-reinforcing elements: affirmation of multilateralism, searching for a political solution, advancing democracy, socio-economic reform, demobilization and demilitarization and the principle of the non-interference in the region's affairs by outsiders. The Central American peace process proved to be lengthy but ultimately successful.

6. During the conflicts in Central America, two million out of a total population of eight million were uprooted by civil wars. Given the regional scope of the problem, one of the most important peacebuilding initiatives was the International Conference on Central American Refugees held in May 1989, known by its Spanish acronym CIREFCA. This initiative sought a durable solution for the problems of refugees, returnees and displaced people within the framework of social and economic development in the region. Initially starting as an international conference, CIREFCA evolved as part of the ongoing peace process in the region. Coordinated by UNHCR and UNDP, and supported by the resources of the international community, CIREFCA enabled the governments of the region to link emergency assistance to ongoing development plans. Innovative ideas promoted by CIREFCA (such as Quick Impact Projects or QIPs) have subsequently been adopted in other contexts. While CIREFCA was unable to transform the region's deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities, it was an important model for regional peacebuilding in addressing the problems of war-affected populations within a larger framework.

7. The four presentations on Africa and Central America were followed by comments from the floor. Speakers affirmed the utility of regional approaches to peacebuilding and welcomed the opportunity to learn from cross-regional experiences. They also raised additional issues which further enriched the discussion. The concrete observations and recommendations that are particularly relevant for the work of the Commission are as follows:

- Traditionally, there has been greater appreciation of the importance of regional approaches in conflict resolution and peacemaking rather than peacebuilding.
- While peacebuilding efforts at the country level are indispensable, they should be complimented with regional approaches. Peacebuilding should not be exclusively

state-centric but should address the trans-national dimensions of conflict and opportunities for peacebuilding.

- Regional approaches to peacebuilding go beyond establishing regional institutions. In fact, they should capitalize on existing institutional mechanisms to address problems that cannot be resolved at the country level.
- In this context, the long-standing partnership between ECOWAS, the United Nations and the European Commission merit special attention. The European Commission is committed to reinvigorating regional structures in West Africa and the Great Lakes by drawing upon previous experiences.
- The European Commission is also interested in developing regional funding envelopes through the European Development Fund (EDF) to support the peace and security architecture of the African sub-regional organizations as well as exploring how to adjust EDF financing to the specific needs of fragile and post conflict states. EC is also examining ways of cooperating with partners in the field through, for example, a tripartite ECOWAS/UN/EU capacity programme.
- From a sectoral programming perspective refugee flows, small arms, youth gangs and natural resource management are promising areas for regional cooperation. However, it is particularly important to identify concrete problems in each sub-region and to program around them through cross-country or border zone projects.
- In West Africa a regional approach to youth unemployment and the extractive industries (along the lines of the Kimberley Process for diamonds) would be particularly appropriate.
- In the Great Lakes region, the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region provides a powerful instrument for regional peacebuilding. The Peacebuilding Commission can play an important role in supporting the ratification and implementation of the Pact.
- More broadly, since socio-economic development is essential for sustainable peace, regional economic integration and trade can further enhance regional approaches to peacebuilding. The spill-over effects of regional economic growth would have far-reaching positive impacts on sustainable peace and development.
- The international community currently does not have a wide range of peacebuilding tools and instruments that can be deployed at the regional level. Many governments as well as inter-governmental organizations (including the United Nations) do not program at the regional level. Instead, donors as well as UN agencies generally operate at the country level. Given its mandate, the Peacebuilding Commission would be well-placed to urge donors to provide funding for peacebuilding initiatives at the regional level.

8. In closing, the Chair highlighted the relevance of the topic for the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and thanked the panellists and all the participants for their contributions to the meeting.