

Ambassadorial-level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on Institution Building
17 May 2021

Chair's Summary

1. On 17 May 2021, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held a virtual ambassadorial-level meeting on “*Building and Sustaining Peace through Institutions*”, convened by the Chair H.E. Mr. Mohamed Edrees (Egypt). Building on PBC’s past engagements on institution building, the meeting focused on sharing good practices and lessons learned from experiences in institution-building on the ground and exploring ways on how best the UN system, in particular the PBC, and relevant stakeholders can work collaboratively to help governments strengthen national and local institutions to address the root causes of conflict and develop capacities to deliver universal services responsive to the needs of the population.

2. In his opening remarks, the Chair underscored the importance of building resilient and viable institutions that were instrumental in enhancing national ownership and leadership of peacebuilding efforts, identifying national priorities and achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Weak institutions, he added, contributed to severing the social contract between citizens and governments and were conflict drivers. Recalling remarks delivered by him on behalf of PBC at the 2021 “Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development”, the Commission noted that the multifaceted threat of COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated governance gaps across the African continent affecting the health, economic and social sectors with implications for the peace and security landscape, most notably through exploitation by armed groups and terrorist organizations. To lay the foundations for rebuilding better African societies and economies, national policies and systems must integrate crisis preparedness and prevention that give robust attention to addressing root causes and structural vulnerabilities. In line with the notion of national ownership, governments must invest in building responsive institutions and inclusive governance through a whole-of-government approach. The UN, international financial institutions, regional and other actors must better support and coordinate national institution building efforts as a core instrument for building and sustaining peace in conflict-affected countries.

3. Mr. Achim Steiner, the UNDP Administrator, noted that the role of state institutions, their capacities, resilience, and vulnerabilities, have been center stage during the pandemic. Pointing to worrying reversals on the global human development and SDG fronts relative to the previous year due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, he underscored that the poorest and most vulnerable had been hit the hardest. The reversals on the SDGs included a pattern of restricting rights and freedoms, exacerbating existing grievances and inequalities and eroding social cohesion which were easily exploited by extremists. In 2020, UNDP had spent over 50% of its total budget in fragile and crisis contexts in 2020 to support people and institutions, and to build long-term stability. UNDP continues to promote coherent and collaborative approaches among the peace, development and humanitarian actors, to address acute governance crises and build

institutions that will invoke confidence and trust, improve service delivery, address key challenges like climate change, and better manage and mitigate multidimensional risks. To help prioritize and focus, the Administrator outlined a Call to Action in three critical areas: (i) ramping up collective efforts to build effective, accountable, inclusive and resilient national and local institutions, using innovative mechanisms and technology such as *e-services* guided by the UNDP Digital Strategy; (ii) supporting institutions to become more people-centered, integrate a gendered approach including through use of the recently launched UNDP Gender Seal for Public Institutions, and boost participation of youth; and (iii) increasing access to adequate and predictable multi-year low-cost financing and debt restructuring. He stressed that transformational change within governance institutions was a long-term and highly complex process in conflict-affected and crisis settings. Unfortunately, institution building and SDG 16 were significantly underinvested, with only 2.6% of ODA going towards conflict, peace, and security in 2019.

4. Mr. Emilio Archila, the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization and Consolidation of Colombia, reiterated his Government's commitment to the implementation of the peace agreement and underscored the importance of context-specific institutions suited to the peculiarities of each conflict and transition process. He informed that while Colombia has a long-lasting democracy and strong institutions, new institutions were set up to administer the peace implementation and address key issues such as transitional justice. Similar to experiences of other countries, it is intended that these parallel institutions will be discontinued at the appropriate time. He highlighted the importance of measures and programs that aim to integrate ex-combatants into socio-economic and political spheres of life. He also stressed the need for dedicated resources for peacebuilding, including for the implementation of the peace agreement. He expressed appreciation for the support of international partners, including the PBC and the UNDP managed multilateral fund, which comprises contributions from the PBF, in the implementation of government-led and owned peacebuilding initiatives that are aligned with national priorities and help ensure progress in the peace agreement.

5. Dr. Rukmini Banerji, the Chief Executive Officer of the Pratham Education Foundation in India, emphasized that building strong foundations for children through education built fundamental foundations of communities and resilient institutions critical to a country's peacebuilding efforts. Building from within and cooperation between governments and citizens was imperative to this. In India, Pratham was ensuring that national attention focused not just on "all children in school" but also on "every child learning", including through a new national education policy launched last year and a focus on solving the problem, dedicated resources and a multi-year strategy. Through nearly 25 years of continuous experimentation, innovation and adaptations in its own laboratories - in villages, communities and local schools, with participation of local young people and often parents - Pratham had improved learning outcomes while reducing time and costs. It had developed the 'Teaching at the Right Level' (TaRL) solution which has been internationally evaluated and proven adaptable and generalizable to contexts well beyond India. For example, in

the ‘School for All’ program developed by the Japanese Development Agency in partnership with governments to address the learning crisis in multiple African countries, TaRL has been integrated as a good practice and currently reaching large-scale programming in Niger and Madagascar. Similarly, during COVID-19, combining human and digital resources, Pratham was ensuring collective action across India to keep every child in school and learning well while sharing such solutions with global partners. In its work with communities, Pratham was committed to empowering young mothers and youth to take charge, including through Catch Up and Second Chance interventions.

6. Brigadier General Mahamadou Abou Tarka, the President of the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP) in Niger, stated that the country struggles in the face of droughts, terrorist activity, and wide-spread poverty. He explained that deteriorating desertification reduces agricultural land which, combined with rapid population growth, increases food insecurity, and exacerbates pre-existing tension between farmers and herders. He added that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated existing conflict drivers, caused severe socioeconomic, political and security repercussions, and worsened the humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, including in Niger. He expressed grave concern about persisting security and humanitarian challenges in border areas. He mentioned that HACP, the only national institution with such a mandate in the Sahel region, promotes and supports non-military measures for conflict resolution and stability. These include political dialogue, but also initiatives that aim to build local community resilience. These include activities that aim to support alternative livelihoods for young people to prevent them from being recruited by terrorist groups. The High Authority also promotes civil-military collaboration and supports local justice systems. In that regard, the Brigadier General expressed appreciation for UN support for peace and development in Niger, including with PBF contributions, and made a plea for more direct technical and financial support for national and local-level government initiatives that aim to enhance resilience.

7. Mr. Helder da Costa, the General Secretary of the g7+ Secretariat, emphasized the importance of perspectives from fragile and conflict-affected countries that have hosted peacekeeping, political and humanitarian missions and ongoing contextualized international support to them in state building and strengthening institutions beyond the timeframe of the missions to ensure protection of hard-won gains. He underscored that capable institutions were a prerequisite to sustaining peace and stability and no matter how fragile state institutions were in the g7+ countries, they bore the ultimate responsibility of service delivery. National ownership of the transition was a tested principle for effective assistance, as underpinned by the peacebuilding and statebuilding goals of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. To make this principle work, predictable and flexible support to the state institutions and their leaders and people was needed over the long-term together with a framework of mutual accountability with agreed benchmarks that can be used to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

8. Participants welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- Institution building and inclusive governance, both a means and an end, lie at the core of preventing conflict, strengthening social cohesion, building and sustaining peace, and accelerating progress towards achievement of the SDGs, particularly SDG 16.
- They reiterated that nationally owned and led efforts to build effective and people-centered institutions were critical to address the root causes of conflict and structural vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience against unexpected shocks, develop capacities to fight corruption and deliver services responsive to the needs of the population, including women, youth, and foster legitimacy and trust between the state and society.
- They recognized the unique advisory, bridging and convening roles of the Commission in support of nationally owned institution-building efforts and called for its continuing engagement on institution building in countries under its consideration.
- They expressed concern over recent challenges in the implementation of the SDGs and preserving hard-won peacebuilding gains around the world due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating existing grievances and inequalities and eroding social cohesion.
- They called for ramping up collective efforts in strengthening effective, accountable and inclusive public service institutions, within the framework of the rule of law and justice, cutting across all SDGs, in an integrated manner, as strong actors and enablers to prevent, mitigate and build back better from crises and conflict.
- They appreciated the cross-regional sharing of scalable experiences and expertise from Colombia, India and Niger, and underlined the importance of supporting institution building in countries under its consideration, including through systematically sharing good practices, lessons learned as well as innovative approaches and solutions in the area of institution-building. South-South and triangular cooperation was recognized as a valuable approach in this regard.
- They underscored the role of the UN system, particularly the UNDP, in promoting context-specific and whole-of-system coordination and synergies among humanitarian, development and peace multi-stakeholders at all levels with the expertise and experience in strengthening inclusive institution-building, including through new and digital tools.
- They recommended that UN field presences should be fully equipped to effectively work with various partners, in line with national peacebuilding priorities, to implement peacebuilding-related activities aimed at supporting the building of national and local institutions and capacities critical to ensuring equitable and peaceful transitions and sustainable development.
- They emphasized the need for further alignment of resources between the UN and international financial institutions in line with national peacebuilding priorities, strengthening of partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations, and inclusion of all segments of society, to ensure meaningful participation of civil society and local actors, including women and youth representatives, and enhanced capacity of institutions and trust between the people.

- They acknowledged the valuable role of the Peacebuilding Fund to institution building in conflict-affected countries and catalyzing follow-up investments. They called for adequate, predictable, and sustained financing for institution and capacity building, drawing upon domestic and international public and private sectors. They also called for bold new mechanisms to help countries address crippling debt which has been sharply worsened by the pandemic.

9. Responding to the interventions and questions, the UNDP Administrator underscored the importance of aligning all external peacebuilding support with the “reality of within.” In this context, he highlighted three fundamental contradictions and dilemmas that the PBC may wish to consider in order to better address the downward spirals and missed opportunities in the countries under its consideration: (i) need for attention to the seemingly parallel universe of UN Country Teams and field (political/peacekeeping) missions to ensure better synchronization of deployments, capacities and transitions and continuity and consistency in efforts; (ii) approaching the peace-development-humanitarian nexus from an operational and not a political perspective to promote coherence and coordination with national efforts; and (iii) while respecting national sovereignty, be prepared to negotiate the reality of sub-optimal settings where national actors might lack the capacity, the legitimacy or the willingness to be effective partners.

10. The Chief Executive Officer of Pratham, in her response, reiterated that the experience of collectively dealing with impacts of COVID-19 had underscored the importance of effective collaboration among all stakeholders. She noted that some sectors, and working closer to the ground, might be easier to achieve results.

11. Following the meeting, the PBC issued a [press statement](#).

12. For a video recording of the PBC virtual meeting on institution building, see [here](#).