

**Peacebuilding Commission
Working Group on Lessons Learned**

**Informal expert-level meeting on
“Political Institutions”
20 October 2015**

Main findings

I. Introduction

1. On 20 October 2015, the Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) of the Peacebuilding Commission convened an informal, expert-level meeting to discuss “Institution-building: The challenges for the UN system.” The purpose of this meeting, which followed the one held on 19 May 2015, was to hear from representatives of the UN system, civil society and from two countries on the PBC agenda on the different challenges in the strengthening of political institutions.
2. The meeting was opened by the Chair (Japan), and benefited from presentations by PBSO, DPA, UNDP, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), as well as by the representatives of Guinea and Sierra Leone.
3. The Chair opened the session by stressing the centrality of institution building in peacebuilding processes as also highlighted by the Report of the Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) on the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture. He stated that strengthening institutions is not only a technical task but also a political one, which might benefit from the convening role of the PBC.

II. Summary of Presentations by Panelists

4. PBSO stressed that political institutions were the core of the state and that in order for violence to decrease, the judicial mechanism and political institutions needed to be strengthened. He stated that questions of power and influence were fundamentally political with a variety of actors involved and stressed the importance of inclusive political dialogues to define the shape of the state. These dialogues needed to not only include national elites but all critical groups in order to ensure inclusive peace and sustainable peace agreements. PBSO noted that the international community did not put enough emphasis on this issue. For the Peacebuilding Fund, the areas of political dialogue, reconciliation and democratic governance, amounted to 40 per cent of the active portfolio in 2014.
5. DPA noted that building political institutions was at the core of their conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts but that the attainment of this objective had yielded mixed results. She noted that the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel identified strong accountable political institutions as crucial for stability, and that the strategy focused on strengthening state legitimacy and social cohesion through capacity building and accountability mechanisms. She noted that the United Nations Office in West Africa’s efforts aimed at establishing and strengthening democratic,

inclusive and accountable political institutions in close cooperation with regional and international partners to defuse tensions, engage in dialogue and include civil society, especially women networks.

6. DPA stressed the importance of a vibrant and empowered civil society as the cornerstone of democracy and referred to several DPA projects. She mentioned several challenges to the building of political institutions, such as institutionalizing dialogue space to enhance state-society relations; apathy and a sense of disconnection among populations; the issue of how to confer democratic legitimacy and promoting a democratic culture based on democratic ideologies, visions and values; the challenge of inclusive constitutional review processes; addressing organized crime and drug trafficking; and ensuring the continued availability of human and financial resources. DPA noted that the UN system provided critical support to tackle those challenges and that national ownership and responsibility and the support of regional actors as well as international actors were crucial, in order to ensure advocacy and essential technical and financial support.
7. UNDP shared five lessons from supporting the development and rebuilding of political institutions in the African context. She underscored the importance of understanding the context within which political institutions were created or evolve, thus understanding the political economy of the country, the nature of the political settlement, as well as the social contract. Secondly, she noted that engaging in design processes of peace agreements and constitutions at the outset was vital and that in this regard a South-South exchange could be very helpful. Thirdly, UNDP noted that it was of utmost importance to balance long-term approaches with "quick wins" in the development of political institutions and that crises like the outbreak of Ebola revealed the weaknesses of existing institutions. Fourthly, she noted that political parties must be understood as institutions of governance per se and that the UN could engage with political parties in a productive way when adhering to certain principles, such as transparency, equity and fairness in provision of support. The fifth lesson shared was the importance of a better understanding of the way globalization impacts political institutions and the pressure it placed on national leaders, including through social media. UNDP further highlighted the need for sustained support after the withdrawal of peacekeeping missions in regard to the strengthening of political institutions.
8. The representative of Sierra Leone noted the critical importance of building democratic political institutions for a strong, stable, peaceful and resilient state. He stated that Sierra Leone had developed several frameworks to strengthen political institutions, such as the Interim National Electoral Commission, the National Electoral Commission Act, the Political Parties Act, the Electoral Laws Act, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, as well as an electoral legal reform process, which identified legal reform as a priority area. Many of these developments had received support from major donors, including the PBF. Although these developments were critical to the strengthening of political institutions, certain challenges remained. He noted that the outbreak of Ebola revealed some of the flaws of the existing institutions, such as the weak capacity of the Electoral Commission due to a lack of equipment and adequate financing. The representative stressed the importance of ensuring the independence of political institutions, as well as taking into account the need for the development of trust of the citizens.

9. The representative of Guinea shared the experience of his country in building political institutions. Guinea had established several important institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the National Independent Commission for Human Rights. Yet, the need to strengthen the credibility of the institutions remained one of the key challenges. He added that one of the main issues was the building of capacities of the existing institutions. Technical assistance and South-South cooperation for the exchange of good practices would add value. He stated that the second issue in regard to tackling the challenge of capacity building of institutions was the responsibility of political leaders in building confidence in the existing institutions and for all actors involved to act according to the prevailing laws.
10. Finally, the representative of QUNO, referring to the recent reviews on Peace Operations and the AGE report, stressed the role of civil society in political institutions and the need for an inclusive and participatory approach. He stated that one of the major challenges for the international community, and the UN and its peacebuilding architecture in particular, was the issue of fostering the building blocks of a shared society and thus building national ownership beyond the government as well as strengthen the institutions of civil society in parallel with the institutions of the state. He stressed the importance of encouraging the broadening of ownership and participation; supporting the growth of informal as well as formal institutions; taking into account the underlying drivers of violent conflicts; supporting an inclusive approach to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16; and model inclusion in UN processes.

III. Discussion

Member States welcomed the discussion and stressed the importance of transparency, accountability and an inclusive engagement for the reestablishment of trust between the population and the state. Moreover, a number of delegations highlighted that sustainable peace could not be achieved through outside pressure, but that it needed to emerge organically from within the society over time. Support and assistance by the international community and regional and sub-regional actors, however, were considered crucial. Delegations stressed the need for the prevention of conflict and emphasized the reform of the security sector, the support for the rule of law, reconciliation efforts and the promotion of DDR programmes as key elements for strengthening political institutions. Some representatives welcomed the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goal 16 and elaborated on its link to the sphere of political institutions.

IV. Main findings

11. On the basis of the presentations and interactions between the panelists and the Member States, the following represents the main findings from this meeting:
 - There is no clear one-size-fits-all-approach, and the building of political institutions must take local developments and conditions into account.

- Building political institutions is a process that requires time. Adequate funding, political and technical support and the sharing of experiences are crucial for its success.
- Building capacity is of utmost importance in order to create effective institutions.
- The inclusion of civil society and the engagement in an active dialogue, especially from the youth group, is a crucial element for promoting sustainable peace as well as ownership of the institution building. Citizen's trust in their national institutions is key.
