

Summary Report

Sustaining Peace: Partnerships for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding

A UN-led dialogue with governments, the private sector, civil society, and academia

Faculty House, Columbia University

8 December 2017

Background

The President of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, in cooperation with six civil society and academic partners, convened a dialogue on December 8, 2017 to discuss the critical role of partnerships in sustaining peace and prevention.

The dialogue served as an important step in the process leading up to High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace on 24 and 25 April 2018, which President Lajčák is organizing in accordance with the twin resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture in 2016, in the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262) and the Security Council (S/RES/2282).

The dialogue was intended as a valuable platform for relevant stakeholders to present their perspectives, facilitate learning and exchange, and foster conversation among all participants on challenges and opportunities for sustaining peace in practice. It forms part of the President's roadmap for peacebuilding and sustaining peace, which encompasses five priorities that will guide the President's work leading up to the meeting: (i) outreach to the relevant stakeholders; (ii) supporting the work of the UN; (iii) focusing on experiences and best practices; (iv) making a strong financial case for sustaining peace; and (v) strengthening links to human rights and sustainable development.

What follows is a thematic summary of the event, including opening remarks, and followed by two panels on "Prevention in Sustaining Peace" and "How Partnerships Can Support Sustaining Peace."

Opening Remarks

The opening speakers emphasized the immense costs of war and conflict, the crucial role of conflict prevention in sustaining peace, and some of the ongoing challenges for effective prevention of and response to conflicts.

Specifically, speakers noted that the cost of violence annually is an estimated \$10 trillion globally, yet the amount of money and resources currently dedicated to conflict prevention pales in comparison. There were repeated calls for more predictable, sustainable, and sizeable financing for prevention in particular, and sustaining peace in general – along with increased recognition among donors that greater investment in these areas makes sense, given the massive costs of letting potential and existing conflicts go unaddressed.

As part of an overall strategy on conflict prevention and sustaining peace, speakers highlighted that the UN and other actors must work together to address: inequality and exclusion; radicalization; a proliferation of non-state and transnational actors in conflict; refugee and migrant crises; cyber security; climate change; food security; lack of mediation and diplomacy in certain parts of the world; and a shortage of reliable data on aspects of conflict including arms flows, financial flows, combatants, casualties, damage, and costs.

Given these complex and multifaceted challenges, emphasis was placed on the importance of partnerships, between public and private entities. The importance of UN partnerships with local organizations and experts was also underlined, as was the potential of partnerships with private companies. Credit card companies, for example, could work with governmental and international actors toward shared goals, such as expanding access to financial services and combating illicit financial flows. Within the UN, it was noted that there is often a significant need for greater coordination and pooling of resources.

Panel 1: Prevention in Sustaining Peace

With the twin resolutions, the United Nations has made a commitment to taking a more comprehensive approach to peace. Following the high-level reviews of peacekeeping and peacebuilding during 2015, there is growing understanding that the international community often responds only after a crisis starts – when lives have already been lost and fragile social fabrics undone. As a counterpoint, the 2016 resolutions place prevention of conflict at the core of the UN engagement, and they call for a robust engagement of all partners in service to a common vision of peace. The emphasis on prevention represents a significant shift in the UN’s approach to peace, and therefore an opportunity for non-governmental sectors to reaffirm their commitment to more peaceful and just societies, as well as to take concrete steps to make the visions laid out in the resolutions a reality.

The first panel therefore focused on how prevention plays a key role in sustaining peace, by unpacking sustaining peace in practice and in the context of mutually supportive areas, such as Agenda 2030 and human rights. Prevention, in this context, is the broad set of activities that address root causes of conflict, in addition to the existing tools for conflict prevention such as mediation, preventive diplomacy, cooperation, and dialogue. This approach dispenses with time-bound ideas of pre- and post-conflict environments, which can lead to path-dependent responses, and proposes instead of a continuum in which all tools should be available at all times. This panel also looked at how different actors can best contribute to the preventive aspects of sustaining peace.

In particular, discussants noted the importance of improving upon early warning systems for identifying potential or nascent conflicts, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques. It was also repeated, however, that such systems are of limited use if the appropriate resources and cooperation for proactive approaches to conflict are not available. This includes not only sufficient and sustainable financing, but also the consent, cooperation, and – crucially – ownership and leadership of host governments throughout peace processes in states where the UN or other actors have been involved.

Specific areas of focus for conflict prevention and early detection were also discussed. For

example, a study was cited to the effect that states with robust civil society are less prone to conflict, even in the presence of other red flags – suggesting that the international community should consider ongoing engagement with local civil society actors and peacebuilders as an important aspect of prevention. In another example, a private company doing considerable pro bono work related findings from a summit it convened on rule of law in Central America: in at least one country, a lack of financial and human capital for timely court proceedings precipitated spikes in domestic violence (as cases of domestic abuse were going unheard), which was in turn correlated with increased youth membership in gangs, more violence, and so on, forming a vicious cycle.

The importance of national ownership and local involvement in peace processes was reiterated through examples from Liberia, where recent elections, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, have proceeded peacefully. These accomplishments were attributed in part to the thoughtful involvement and inclusion of various civil society actors, especially women and youth. It was mentioned, for instance, that former victims of conflict and former child soldiers in Liberia have done significant work to help reintegrate and care for others who faced similar circumstances.

Panelists also touched upon the potential of partnerships for conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Some significant partnership-driven achievements were cited, including an ongoing initiative to catalogue and map local peacebuilders around the world, and a largely successful effort to preserve evidence of war crimes, which was spearheaded by an international legal association and involved mobile communications service providers and international courts.

Concrete actions recommended in the dialogue included:

- Operating on the principle that sustaining peace should be locally led, regionally anchored, and internationally supported
- Ensuring joint analysis and programming in order to address complex root causes; such analysis and programming should include local civil society
- Recognizing and scaling up local, civil society-led approaches to sustaining peace
- Advocating for inclusivity, especially of women and youth, in prevention actions; also, greater inclusion of women in the UN's peace operations
- Identifying more sustainable approaches to financing
- Solidifying gains after the departure of a peacekeeping operation
- Leveraging creative partnerships
- Using human rights instruments to address upstream prevention

The panel closed by reemphasizing that the role of prevention in sustaining peace is to highlight the need of all actors to address root causes – not just immediate causes – of conflict.

Panel 2: How Partnerships Can Support Sustaining Peace

While the primary responsibility for identifying and implementing priorities for sustaining peace pertains to Governments, the General Assembly acknowledged the role of a variety

of stakeholders in assisting these national authorities fulfill their goals. The twin resolutions underlined that “the scale and nature of the challenge of sustaining peace can be met through close strategic and operational partnerships between national Governments, the United Nations, and other key stakeholders, including international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, regional and other development banks, civil society organizations, women’s groups, youth organizations and, where relevant, the private sector.”

Across the first and second panels, partnerships with diverse stakeholders were recognized as essential. All acknowledged that local expertise and capacities – paired with national, regional, and international resources and capabilities – go a long way toward sustaining peace. Collaboration on contextualized analysis, strategizing, implementation, and monitoring of policies and actions for peace is indispensable, as is breaking down barriers and silos that impede cooperation within and between organizations. Further, all agreed that the UN, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector can play a crucial role in strengthening the capacities of national governments in their initiatives to build peaceful and inclusive societies.

The second panel explored some specific partnerships along these lines that have emerged between UN and regional organizations, governments, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), civil society, academia, and the private sector. Discussion focused on cases that have worked well and their implications, as well as ongoing challenges and ideas for the future of partnerships toward sustaining peace.

Discussants considered, for example, the ongoing peacebuilding process led by the Colombian government with support from the UN and other actors, which has made historic progress over the last few years. This success was attributed, in part, to the government and its partners’ emphasis on – and financial support for – reintegration, inclusive processes, civil society, gender equality, access to justice, and national ownership. The panel also reflected positively on government-led, internationally supported efforts to strengthen the private sector within Colombia (and other countries), to foster firms’ capacity for meaningful engagement with government and civil society, and to encourage illegally operating enterprises, such as certain mines in Colombia, to transition to legal operations.

Another example with potentially wide-ranging implications was a relatively simple but effective initiative in Brazil, involving public and private sector actors, which provided much needed low-income housing and vocational training to LGBT youth in certain parts of the country. As a result, according to early indications, this community has seen its life expectancy and wellbeing increase by orders of magnitude.

Using innovative financing approaches in peacebuilding contexts, including fundraising initiatives that utilize “microlevies”; campaigns tied to particular products or other kinds of purchases, like the successful (Product)RED campaign; and social impact bonds were also mentioned in the panel.

The discussants also brought attention to advocating for wider adoption of the Equator

Principles, a risk management framework used to help identify and establish criteria for what are likely to be high-impact, minimally wasteful projects.

Concrete actions recommended in the dialogue included:

- Recognizing the regional dimension of sustaining peace and engage regional actors
- Engaging private sector in conflict-affected and recovering parts of countries, as in Colombia and Liberia
- Encouraging private sector-civil society dialogues on grievance mechanisms, for example around extractive industries
- Using innovative financing approaches in peacebuilding contexts
- Tapping into pro bono assistance from law firms and other private sector actors

Conclusion

There were a number of recurring themes from this event relevant to the UN's approach to sustaining peace as well as the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

First, panelists stressed that proactively addressing the root causes of conflict – ranging from socio-economic inequalities, to mediation and diplomatic shortfalls, to transnational flows of non-state actors and illicit finance, to weak civil society and lack of access to justice – is absolutely essential, yet drastically underfunded at the UN and elsewhere.

Second, the importance of nationally led, inclusive processes came up continually, across many different contexts. When states take ownership of their peace processes, and those processes include women, youth, other marginalized groups, and local organizations, significant progress tends to be made toward peace and stability.

Third, breaking down barriers to coordination within and between organizations – especially the UN – was viewed as a high priority, as was greater engagement with the private sector. Even in the absence of substantial additional funding, panelists pointed to a growing set of successful joint programs between development, security, and humanitarian actors that could serve as models going forward, as well as peacebuilding initiatives that have successfully bridged public and private capacities.

Finally, it was emphasized that although the UN has done good work on the SDGs and climate change, it is currently failing in prevention, which was the primary motive for its creation. Speakers advised that multilateralism and the principle of non-intervention are crucial instruments for peace, and that in countries and regions where these are weak, preventing conflict is made all the more difficult.