

Retreat on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

March 6–7, 2018

Organized by the President of the 72nd session of the General Assembly in collaboration with the International Peace Institute and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Through the twin resolutions on the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture (hereafter referred to as “the sustaining peace resolutions”), adopted by both the General Assembly and the Security Council in 2016, UN member states made a commitment to take a more comprehensive approach to building and sustaining peace, with conflict prevention at its core.¹

In Resolution 70/262, the General Assembly decided to convene a High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace at its seventy-second session. The meeting, on a date and in a format to be decided by the President of the General Assembly, would focus on efforts undertaken and opportunities to strengthen the United Nations’ work on sustaining peace. Pursuant to this decision, the President of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly decided to hold the High-Level Meeting on April 24 and 25, 2018. Taking place two years after the adoption of the twin resolutions, the meeting offers an important opportunity to look at the implementation of sustaining peace to date and how it can be strengthened in the future.

In accordance with the same resolution, the UN Secretary-General was invited to report to the General Assembly on the implementation of resolution 70/262 at least sixty days prior to the High-Level Meeting. The Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace A/72/707-S/2018/43 was released in February 2018 and will be primary basis for discussions at the General Assembly High-Level Meeting in April 2018.²

In the lead-up to the meeting, the President of the seventy-second session of the UN General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, in collaboration with the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), convened a retreat in March 2018. The event emerged from the President of the General Assembly’s Roadmap for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, which includes outreach to member states, different stakeholders, and the UN system.

The retreat provided another opportunity to engage with governments and international, regional, and subregional organizations to further discuss sustaining peace in practice. The retreat brought together representatives from member states, the UN, civil society, and academia. It sought to unpack the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s report, analyzing the implications, opportunities, and potential challenges to proposed changes. Discussions also focused on how sustaining peace links with the three reform streams proposed by the Secretary-General related to peace and security, the UN development system, and management.

Throughout the multiple panels and an interactive brainstorming lunch, participants sought to gain a deeper understanding of the Secretary-General’s report and experiences implementing sustaining peace at the local level, as well as to identify concrete actions for member states and the UN system to move

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/262; UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2282.

² UN General Assembly, *Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/72/707-S/2018/43, January 18, 2018.

forward on operationalizing the sustaining peace resolutions. Below is a summary highlighting key messages from the discussions, which were conducted under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution.

1. The sustaining peace resolutions are an integral part of the broader reform agenda to make the UN more effective.

Implementation of the resolutions is inherently linked to the broader reform efforts within the organization—and specifically the three reform streams focused on the UN’s peace and security pillar; on the development system; and on management. These reforms need to be considered simultaneously, be mutually reinforcing, and meaningfully speak to placing prevention and sustaining peace at the heart of the UN’s agenda. Concerns have been raised that the reforms, as well as the Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, have been presented as a “package deal,” indicating that the effectiveness of the proposed changes could be undermined if some or all of the reforms are not implemented.

While the concept of sustaining peace has been established, outside of UN circles, and even among UN actors outside of New York, the implications of the sustaining peace resolutions are not widely understood. Effective communication is necessary to secure buy-in and engagement in sustaining peace by a broader audience; this is essential to its successful implementation.

2. Achieving better policy coherence is central to achieving the vision of the sustaining peace resolutions, and the Peacebuilding Support Office’s (PBSO) role is critical in this regard.

The PBSO has a central role in promoting policy coherence and ensuring that prevention is at the core of the UN’s work through the guidance it provides to a wide array of actors. This is what is envisioned by the PBSO’s role as a “hinge” between the peace and security pillar and the rest of the UN system. More clarity is still needed on how this function will be operationalized and how it fits with the broader revitalization of the PBSO that calls for it to be adequately equipped to play its role in supporting the UN system in sustaining peace. While the PBSO can provide guidance in policy development, which can promote policy coherence, it needs resource support to make guidance implementable and therefore effective.

Policy coherence needs to be achieved not only at headquarters and with permanent missions, but also at the regional and country levels. This requires better communication and policy coherence among a wide range of UN agencies, funds, programs, and departments. In this regard, UN country teams and UN Resident Coordinators play a vital role in enhancing and implementing sustaining peace by working toward comprehensive approaches and collective outcomes across siloes with which resources and efforts can be aligned.

3. Greater commitment is required to address the recognized gap between the need and the availability of financing for peacebuilding and to make the quantum leap called for in the Secretary-General’s report.

There is ample evidence to support the business case for more financing and investment in conflict prevention, including the quantitative analysis presented in the recently published World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Though the report makes a strong case for investment in prevention, it remains difficult to incentivize investment, as the effects of prevention are not easily apparent. The ability to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention tools may help in this regard. The Secretary-General’s report provides a set of recommendations on how this can be

achieved, which needs to be viewed holistically rather than as a menu of individual options if the financing gap is to be narrowed.

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has proved itself to be a catalytic instrument that promotes policy coherence, as it requires cross-agency partnerships on initiatives that support national peacebuilding priorities. A stronger and better funded PBF could apply its potential as a quick-response mechanism willing to invest in high-risk contexts in more regions. However, concerns about the absorption capacity of the PBF and the need for better communication about its impact should be addressed.

A strengthened, more robust PBF is one important piece of a much bigger effort needed to meet the needs of financing for peacebuilding. That effort should be complemented by thorough consideration of the potential increased use of other pooled funding mechanisms at the national and regional levels. It also calls for investing in strategic partnerships beyond those with state and regional actors, deepening engagement with civil society and the private sector, and exploring the potential use of blended financing, including assessed contributions. Member states will be crucial in this regard; their ability to scale up financing will be a measure of success, though it should not be the only one.

4. The nexus between peace and development is complex and varies significantly among different contexts but is an important aspect of sustaining peace.

While there is recognition that without peace there is no development, and without development there is no peace, it is also important to acknowledge that not all peace leads to development and not all development leads to peace. This underscores that while the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a critical mechanism, the 2030 Agenda is not the only approach to sustaining peace. Peace and security, development, and human rights are generally understood to be mutually strengthening, but there is a need for greater clarity on how the mechanisms and policies in these three pillars work together operationally both at UN headquarters and at the country level.

The Resident Coordinator and the UN country team, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on sustaining peace and in the proposed reforms of the UN development system, play critical roles in providing leadership for sustaining peace. At the same time, there must also be a focus on promoting the concept in countries that do not have a Resident Coordinator or a UN country team, reinforcing the universality of the SDGs and the need for sustaining peace approaches.

5. Since the impact of the sustaining peace resolutions primarily will be gauged at the country level, implementation should be focused there.

There has been a renewed recognition that the impact of the changes sought by the sustaining peace resolutions should ultimately be at the country level, where communities and individuals are most affected by violent conflict. Some work on sustaining peace is already taking place; these positive examples should be identified, supported, and communicated to provide evidence and lessons for policymakers and other stakeholders. Benchmarking can be useful to assess their effectiveness and to identify and communicate intended and unintended outcomes. Unintended outcomes especially need to be identified and avoided to make sure that peacebuilding efforts do no harm.

Fragmentation at the country level undermines efforts to sustain peace. Greater coordination and coherence with national and local stakeholders on the ground is therefore required. This goes hand in hand with the imperative to strengthen meaningful partnerships with civil society actors, especially

women's and youth groups. In addition, the importance of regional and subregional organizations in building and sustaining peace calls for better cooperation and stronger partnerships between the UN and regional actors.

6. Implementing the sustaining peace resolutions should remain a priority for member states and the UN system as a whole.

There has been overwhelming support from member states for a procedural resolution to ensure that momentum on implementing the sustaining peace resolutions is not lost after the High-Level Meeting in April. While the review of the peacebuilding architecture mandated to be conducted in 2020 provides a mechanism for assessing progress and illuminating where further efforts are needed, waiting for that process runs the risk of losing engagement and missing the opportunities presented now with the reform efforts and the focus on implementation of the SDGs.

The data presented in the *Pathways for Peace* report underscores that effective prevention requires investments across the development, security, political, and humanitarian sectors. As such, options, proposals, and innovative ideas for securing adequate and predictable financing for peacebuilding should continue to be explored and developed with a sense of urgency.