



## UN Peacebuilding Commission & GPPACs involvement by Renske Heemskerk



### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

First proposed in the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission at the UN was taken up by the Secretary-General as part of the UN reform agenda and heralded as one of the successes of the World Summit meeting in September 2005. In response, the General Assembly<sup>2</sup> and the Security Council<sup>3</sup> established the Peacebuilding Commission in concurrent resolutions in December 2005.

The PBC is a new body created by the UN intended to bridge the gap in the coordination of peacebuilding activities in countries just emerging from violent conflict. Studies have shown that about half of all countries that emerge from violent conflict relapse into violence within five years. The PBC is an intergovernmental advisory body that will be a new forum to bring peacebuilding stakeholders in a selected country together to coordinate their overall strategies, and particularly to identify gaps in the international community's effort to support sustainable peace in transitioning countries. The PBC will not undertake peacebuilding activities itself, but will provide advice to the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The Commission is supported by a Peacebuilding Support Office made up of 15 staff, headed by Assistant-Secretary General Carolyn McAskie. Main tasks of the Commission, as defined in the concurrent resolutions are:

- Propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
- Help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and sustained financial investment over the medium- to longer-term;
- Extend the period of attention by the international community to post-conflict recovery;
- Develop best practices on issues that require extensive collaboration among political, military, humanitarian and development actors.<sup>4</sup>

### Work of the Peacebuilding Commission so far

On 23 June 2006, the Commission held its inaugural meeting, which took place after nearly six months of negotiations about which Member States would be selected for membership in the Organizational Committee followed the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. During this meeting the Chair of the 31-Member-Organisational Committee was elected (Angola) as well as two vice-chairs (Norway and El Salvador).

At this moment, the Commission has held three different sessions. An informal briefing meeting was held on 19 July 2006, in which government officials, representatives of the UN country team, the World Bank and the IMF presented their views on the current status of peacebuilding for the two countries and identified challenges ahead. This was an opportunity for PBC members to become familiar with the post-conflict peacebuilding strategies for both countries and to consider how the PBC would interact with other stakeholders.

The first round of country-specific meetings (CSM's) took place on 12-13 October 2006 and was intended to define priority areas that the PBC would focus on. During these meetings, several priority areas were decided upon. The Chairman's summary of the Sierra Leone country-specific

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<sup>1</sup> This paper builds on the author's paper produced as background material for the Seminar "Getting the Peacebuilding Commission off the Ground – How to Include Civil Society on the Ground", organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and GPPAC on 5 September 2006, New York. The full background paper can be found at [www.gppac.net](http://www.gppac.net)

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/180 (2005). A/RES/60/180. New York: United Nations, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/498/40/PDF/N0549840.pdf?OpenElement> (28 Apr 2006)

<sup>4</sup> Security Council resolution 1645 (2005), S/RES/1645, New York: United Nations, 2005.

<http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/docs.htm> (28 Apr 2006)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>, 18 August 2006

meeting summarized the critical challenges, which included i) social and youth empowerment and employment, ii) consolidating democracy and good governance, iii) justice and security sector reform, and iv) capacity building. The Chair of the Burundi country-specific meeting captured the main priorities coming out of these discussions for Burundi, which include i) promoting good governance, ii) strengthening the rule of law and the security sector, and iii) ensuring community recovery.

After these meetings, the UN has worked together with both the governments of Burundi and Sierra Leone to map existing activities in the field of peacebuilding that address the identified priorities, and identified gaps. During the second set of country-specific meetings, on 12-13 December 2006, the progress so far was reported. Both for Burundi and Sierra Leone it was discussed that a country envelope of approximately 25 \$ million can be made available from the Peacebuilding Fund, as initial contributions. The PBC itself does not determine the disbursement of the Peacebuilding Fund. The Fund is administered by the Peacebuilding Support Office. The next steps, in both countries, are to develop a planning of ongoing and planned peacebuilding related activities, to be presented to the Commission. Follow-up meetings are planned for March 2007, and possible missions of members of the PBC and PBSO staff might take place to Burundi and Sierra Leone prior to the CSM's.

### **Civil Society Engagement**

In the concurrent resolutions establishing the PBC, both the GA and the SC "*encourage[] the Commission to consult with civil society, non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, and private sector engaged in peacebuilding activities, as appropriate.*"<sup>5</sup>

Effective civil society engagement in the coordination of peacebuilding activities and the development of best practices through the PBC will be critical in several key areas:

- Central to successful peacebuilding is local ownership of the peacebuilding process and engagement in the development and implementation of strategies for rebuilding. Civil society organizations are uniquely equipped to mobilize individuals in peacebuilding activities and may be some of the few remnants of social networks in post-conflict situations.
- Additionally, civil society organizations may be able to provide a valuable link between the PBC and local populations both in identifying local priorities in peacebuilding and transmitting information about the coordinated peacebuilding strategy. Civil society organizations can be important resources for local knowledge and expertise in various sectors related to rebuilding societies after conflict and should be utilized as such.
- Finally, civil society organizations are often engaged in providing goods and services as part of humanitarian relief and coordinating other essential activities, including justice mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>
- Additionally, civil society could play a role in delivering large-scale, unarmed, civilian peacekeeping by neutral, global INGOs.<sup>7</sup>

No formal procedures for civil society engagement with this new UN body have been created; negotiations between the members of the Commission are still taking place. We could not have foreseen that the issue of civil society engagement with the PBC would be one of the 'hot' issues that member states continue to discuss a year after the resolutions to create the new body were signed. Some member states call for an innovative form of relationship with civil society, while others view the PBC as an inter-governmental body in which civil society organisations do not belong, and they do not want to extend NGOs the rights to take part in formal UN member state discussions. However, we are convinced that in particular in the field of peacebuilding the input from civil society is crucial to ensure a strategy and implementation of activities that is not solely decided by the government in charge, but a result of interactive dialogue between all actors involved, including civil society. This promotes sustainable peace in the long term, and a locally owned process.

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<sup>5</sup> A/RES/60/180, p.2, and S/RES/1645, p.2

<sup>6</sup> World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy, *Effective Civil Society Engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission: Principles and Mechanisms*, May 2006, p.3

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please visit: [www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org](http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org)

### **GPPAC – in-country activities**

It is crucial to link the work of the PBC with existing peacebuilding activities in the countries affected by conflict. GPPAC plays an active role in informing its regional and local partners about the work of the PBC, and to make sure that civil society is involved and can deliver input in the work of the Commission. Therefore, GPPAC is helping its local partners to facilitate civil society consultations on the PBC. These meetings are locally and regionally driven and ensure that civil society gets more familiar with the work of the PBC, and is prepared to give timely and informed recommendations to the PBC. Two civil society processes are currently taking place in Sierra Leone and Burundi. With facilitation of the international secretariat of GPPAC, regional and national networks have started to organise civil society organisations in these countries in order to effectively give input in the work of the PBC.

Through these consultations, local NGO representatives were designated to present recommendations to the Peacebuilding Commission during the October meetings. They had the occasion to address the Commission formally during the official inter-governmental meetings and also in an informal briefing arranged by the Chairs of the Commission.<sup>8</sup>

After the October country-specific meetings, the representatives of these civil society consultation processes have arranged follow-up activities to inform their constituencies about the outcomes of the meeting, and the way forward. In Burundi, a steering committee of members of several NGOs came together to discuss the outcomes of this meeting, and the next steps. They decided to organize a national workshop that took place on 23-24 November 2006 in Bujumbura. The meeting brought together 83 participants from 68 civil society organisations. The discussion was focused around the three key priorities identified, and a work plan with activities to be undertaken, both by government, UN and civil society, was produced.

In Sierra Leone, civil society organizations have also set up a working committee. In the process towards the first country specific meeting members of this working committee met with UNIOSIL's PBC Focal Point. In preparation for the second round of country-specific meetings, the members of the working committee met with representatives from UN, and also with the PBC focal point within the government.

Both processes self-selected a representative to take part in the official second round of country-specific meetings, as well as an informal briefing prior to the meetings, arranged by the Chairman of the PBC, with members of the Commission and non-governmental organisations.

### **GPPAC- activities International Secretariat**

The international secretariat of GPPAC, based in The Hague, plays a liaising role between the processes of the PBC in New York and translating the development to its regional and national partners. In New York, the secretariat works closely with World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy to monitor the meetings. Regular visits to New York and meetings with members of the PBC, as well as with staff of the PBSO, make sure that the international secretariat is up-to-date with the recent activities, and is able to facilitate informed activities in the selected countries.

At this moment, GPPAC is not able to create a GPPAC New York office, therefore staff of the international secretariat travels regularly to New York and Geneva. During these visits several meetings are always scheduled with staff of the PBSO, as well as the so-called 'like-minded' permanent missions. Furthermore, meetings are taking place with other members of the Organisational Committee to strengthen relationships. GPPAC hopes to work closely with the 31 members, who we see as the governments within the UN that have chosen to focus on long term peacebuilding and who could potentially lobby for this cause. The visits are extremely fruitful, lots of information is gathered through visits, contacts are build and relationships are made stronger. This in turn leads to invitations for meetings, and helps both member states and GPPAC to be up to date with each other's activities and increases a fruitful working relationship.

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<sup>8</sup> Deller, Nicole, *Overview of the UN Peacebuilding Commission*, October 2006

The role of the secretariat is to ensure input from the civil society processes in-country in the discussions of the PBC. Successful lobby efforts, in close cooperation with World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy, have ensured participation of representatives of the in-country processes in the two sets of country-specific meetings so far. But the secretariat also is able to inform members of the PBC about the civil society organisations in the particular countries, and therefore is able to fulfil a bridge function.

Furthermore, the international secretariat is involved in discussions in Geneva among 'International Geneva', and the added value of the Geneva-based institutions and organisations for the work of the PBC. Several meetings have been organized, and a link to the processes in New York and in-country is being made, in order to most effectively work together with all actors.

### **Challenges**

Establishing the PBC has been recognition of a significant deficiency in the UN system: there was no central department dedicated to the promotion of peace, despite the UN's mandate to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.' It is of great importance that the PBC shows results over the first few years of its works, so that donors and allies can have a strong basis to call for its expansion and for increased funding.

For the PBC to be effective, a coordinated and long-term approach is needed that involves not just UN agencies, but donors, international organisations and civil society. While the PBC holds out some promise in helping to move conflict-affected areas towards longer-term sustainable peace, a number of difficulties will need to be overcome.

Firstly, the PBC is only an advisory body with no independent authority. Without ability to enforce the obligations, its value will depend on the relevance and quality of its recommendations and willingness of the members to implement them.

Secondly, the tasks of the PBC are monumental, but the resources for the PBSO and Peacebuilding Fund are limited.

Thirdly, it will be impossible for the PBC to set to work in all armed violence-affected countries, and it is understandable that the Commission will deal with a limited amount of cases in the first year of its existence. But neither should those countries that are likely not to be selected be completely ignored. Therefore, hopefully the PBSO will find ways to also pay attention to these non-selected cases. Also the Organisational Commission should establish clear, well-understood criteria to guide the selection process, to guard against resentment and confusion.

Fourthly, the PBC has no mandate to prevent conflicts, which inhibits its ability to act on early warning signs. Given that the impacts of armed violence escalate when fighting breaks out, this was a regrettable sacrifice in the negotiations that established the body. This is a major difference between the PBC as established and what was recommended in the High Level Panel Report. The resolutions seem to allow a member state to request advice when it is on the verge of 'lapsing into conflict', only in 'exceptional cases.'

Fifthly, contemporary security threats and conflicts increasingly tend to pay little respect to state borders, and effects are often felt in neighbouring states, the wider region and beyond. It seems of utmost importance to have multidimensional approaches and strategies to address these issues. Also in-regional advice and assistance appears generally more welcome in addressing in-regional problems and threats, and more likely to be accepted. Hopefully the PBC will provide further tools, guidance and resource mobilization and will actively engage all who can contribute at the regional and sub-regional levels.

Sixthly, the views of the various actors participating in the PBC meetings, especially in the country-specific meetings, should be reflected in the final strategy decided upon. Criteria should be developed for a strategy, so that the governments could follow these. The PBSO could set up an advisory group that they can use for assistance for issues such as criteria development for a peacebuilding strategy. This advisory group can include various actors, including civil society.

Finally, although the international community has a vital role to play, sustainability in peacebuilding ultimately relies on the work done by national governments and societies. The key to a successful transition and sustainable results is early engagement with the functioning of the state, such that strategies are rooted in a shared compact between the society and the international community. The PBC must have the credibility to pressure donors to orient attention

to areas that are chronically under resourced, for example reform of the security sector and justice.

### **Next Steps**

The civil society consultations in Sierra Leone and Burundi have brought forth working committees, which will continue working on ensuring input of local actors into the work of the PBC. It is crucial for the ongoing activities of the PBC, and the activities carried out by the government to include civil society in all phases of the process in order to ensure ownership, efficiency and transparency.

Furthermore, for effective planning of meetings and producing input for the work of the PBC it is extremely helpful to have a planning of the meetings of the PBC, both in New York and elsewhere. Until this moment, the invitations to civil society have been last-minute, creating logistical complications for NGO representatives to travel to meetings in New York. Some of the invited participants were not able to attend as a result.

Moreover, between meetings, there has not been significant engagement with civil society to brief them on the PBC's activities, making it hard for national and international NGOs alike to give substantive feedback on the work of the Commission.

The process of the next selection of cases to be considered by the Commission is also not known. Therefore, civil society processes in other countries, besides the already selected ones, is not easy to facilitate. However, GPPACs international secretariat is in close contact with its regional partners, and they have informed their networks about the work of the PBC. Therefore, if the next selection is known, GPPAC can build upon the lessons learned of these past months of work and will continue to work to ensure civil society engagement in this new UN body.

Finally, the PBC has taken an important place within the UN family, and several of its members in close cooperation with the PBSO are seeking for ways to create innovative mechanisms to tackle global issues. GPPAC values the relationships it has build over time with the players in the peacebuilding field, and is committed to work together to make the PBC a success.

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