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Workshop on “Civil Society Organisations and the UN Peacebuilding Commission: Mapping the Contribution of Geneva-based organisations”

29 September 2006
Quaker House, Geneva
10:00am – 13:30pm

Welcome and Introduction

David Atwood, Quaker United Nations Office, welcomed participants and outlined the agenda for the meeting. The strength of Geneva-based organisations working in the area of peacebuilding was noted. The aim of the workshop, a follow-up to a first such meeting held on 4 May, was to seek to map the potential contributions of Geneva-based civil society organisations in relation to the nature and functions of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and suggest possible ways forward for such a group to collaborate in the future. This would help strengthen other initiatives currently taking place in Geneva with regard to the contribution of Geneva to the work of the PBC. Participants then introduced themselves and their organisations. (See attached participants list)

Update on recent initiatives

Paul van Tongeren, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), gave a brief summary of civil society engagement with and contributions to the PBC. GPPAC had seen the need to establish a global network of organisations involved in peacebuilding and conflict prevention work. In 2004 - 05, fifteen regions had held conferences to consider the contribution of civil society organisations in conflict prevention. A global conference was then held in New York in July 2005. With the evolution of the PBC, GPPAC felt that it was important to try to build on what had already been set in motion by this process.

The General Assembly Resolution establishing the Peacebuilding Commission, including as it did, recognition of the role of civil society in peacebuilding,¹ had provided a mandate for GPPAC to work with others to lobby for civil society organisations to be allowed to contribute in meaningful ways to the work of the PBC. Thus far, however, no mechanism for regular engagement has been established.

GPPAC had undertaken initial efforts to bring together civil society organizations in Burundi and Sierra Leone, the first two focus countries of the UN PBC, as an early contribution to the work of the PBC in those two countries. In addition, they had taken steps to inform key contacts in Timor Leste and Haiti,

¹ “*Recognizing* the important contribution of civil society and non-governmental organizations, including women’s organizations, to peacebuilding efforts”, General Assembly resolution 60/180 (2005). A/RES/60/180. New York: United Nations, 2005, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/498/40/PDF/N0549840.pdf?OpenElement>, (viewed 4 October 2006)

expected to be the next two countries of focus by the PBC. Despite these efforts, it was not yet clear if or how civil society organizations will be able to engage upcoming visits by members of the PBC to Burundi and Sierra Leone.

GPPAC and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung organized a meeting on 5 September in New York, entitled “Getting the Peacebuilding Commission off the ground – How to include Civil Society on the ground”². The role of civil society was a key focus for the discussion, yet civil society representation at the meeting had not been great.³ Country specific consultations are to be held on 12 and 13 October in New York. A preparatory meeting will be held on 10 October, hopefully with representatives of Burundi and Sierra Leone civil society.⁴

Van Tongeren noted the importance of determining what lessons could be learned from other UN initiatives to include civil society in an active way. He also noted the need for civil society organizations to be well prepared in their efforts to participate, given the scepticism there is about “who is civil society?” “Mapping” exercises are needed to get a picture of the key organisations that need to be involved. This mapping and the collecting of lessons learned and best practices need to be gathered. A Geneva “mapping” needs to be part of this. It was also suggested that efforts should be to have positive civil society peace initiatives fed to the media. The preparation of “OpEds” should be part of this.

It was noted that the next meetings of the PBC will be in December 06 and March and June 07. Details of the meetings are at this point unclear.

Discussion

In the discussion that followed the presentation, a number of useful points were made with reference to ways in which Geneva-based civil society organisations can usefully be engaged.

Caroline McAskie, head of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office had expressed the hope that lessons learnt from other countries in similar situations would also be fed into these consultations, and certainly, civil society organisations could provide extensive information on lessons learnt. However, it was noted that the tiny UN Support Office would realistically not have the capacity to receive and process large amounts of information. Therefore one important task would be to “pre-digest” material so that it could

² Heemskerck, R. (2006) “Getting the Peacebuilding Commission off the ground: How to include Civil Society on the ground”, 5th September 2006, Background Paper, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. http://www.gppac.org/documents/GPPAC/process/UN_Peacebuilding_Commission/Seminar_PBC_position_RH_29082_006.doc (viewed 12th October 2006)

³ Wyeth, V. H. (2006) “Getting the Peacebuilding Commission off the ground: How to include Civil Society on the ground”, Report of the Meeting. http://www.fes-globalization.org/publicationsNY/PBC_CS0_Conference_5_Sep_06_Report.pdf#search=%22getting%20the%20peacebuilding%20commission%20off%20the%20ground%22 (viewed 12th October 2006)

⁴ The World Federalist Movement has reported the following on what transpired at the 10 October meeting: “The PBC finally made a decision on consultations with CSOs. Without prejudice to arrangements to be established by the Committee with respect to consultations with civil society, the Committee decided to extend invitations to Ms. Emma Kamara, a representative of the civil society of Sierra Leone, and Mr. Emmanuel Nshimirimana, a representative of the civil society of Burundi, to participate in the meetings of the Commission relating to Sierra Leone and Burundi, on 12 October and 13 October, respectively, subject to concurrence of the Governments of Sierra Leone and Burundi. Note that the agreement to invite these colleagues, who are local representatives that were designated through civil society consultations in Sierra Leone and Burundi, is not intended to set a precedent. Long-term arrangements for consultations with civil society have not yet been finalized. For further information, see UN Journal, of the Commission was deferred. For more information, please see the UN Journal, <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/En/lateste.pdf> .

be made the best use of. Some process for collecting and processing such information needs to be established, perhaps via a seminar. In the meantime, however, participants wanting to contribute such information could do so through Paul van Tongeren.

Other suggestions or contributions included:

- A civil society representative, sponsored by civil society networks, could be seconded to the UN Peacebuilding Support Office to enhance the capacity of that Office.
- In Geneva, one way of organizing ourselves could be through an appropriate committee of CONGO.
- The Geneva Environmental Network, made up of NGOs and UN agencies, could be a possible model for Geneva-based peacebuilding network. This body puts out a “green guide” every 2 years and is financed in part by the Swiss government.
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response representing major NGO humanitarian agencies being a member) represents a Geneva-based network through which peacebuilding discussion could also take place. For example, they have done considerable work on early recovery.
- The International Council on Human Rights Policy also seeks to bring organizations with overlapping interests together, such as in the fields of human rights, peace and security, and trade
- The development of appropriate peacebuilding machinery requires capacity to fill the gap (“early recovery”) between humanitarian/emergency response and longer-term peacebuilding and development initiatives. The “convening role” of the UN “in country”, e.g. through the development of integrated offices, should for post-conflict needs assessment to be done and for this to be linked to the work of the PBC. UNDP will be working alongside the Support Office in the implementation of peace consolidation strategies.

Mapping

Participants were asked to contribute to a large “map” by briefly writing up the work of their organisation in relation to the four key sectors identified by the Peacebuilding Commission: Security and Public Order, Justice and Reconciliation, Governance and Participation, and Social and Economic Well-being. This mapping exercise provided an opportunity for participants to view the connections between their work and the work of others, as well as how their work could be conceived to fit into the way of thinking of the UN thus far on its peacebuilding roles. See attached sheet for the outcome of this mapping exercise. The exercise also served as a way to enhance a sense of community and common purpose among the disparate organisations present at the meeting.

Following the mapping exercise, participants reflected and commented on what had been revealed. The following summary represents some of the further elaborations which were made:

- It was noted that the UN University of Peace is working on a Masters in Media and Peace Programme.
- The connection between Oxfam’s fair trade campaign and peacebuilding was noted.
- Initiatives of Change is involved in journalist training and farming training, with a specific focus on ethical and peace building methods.
- The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue noted that its contributions are more closely aligned with peacemaking and peace negotiations.

- The Business Humanitarian Forum fosters communication between business and NGO sectors working in post-conflict countries. Concrete projects such as medicine production in Afghanistan brought together the transport authorities and local production owner to produce medicines.
- Other organisations are involved in impact assessment.
- It was noted that it would have been good to have the health sector present at this meeting, e.g. “Médecins Sans Frontières” (MSF). Many organisations have a health dimension to their work, e.g. HIV/AIDS, even if it is not their core mission.

Next Steps

A number of ideas on how to go further from this meeting were suggested:

- Further civil society meetings regarding the Peacebuilding Commission would be held in December 2006, and March and June 2007.
- A Summit “From violent conflict to sustainable peace: A global summit on government and Civil Society infrastructure for peacebuilding” is planned for June 2006. There are discussions with the government of the Philippines undergoing at the moment, to discuss possible hosting of the event, in partnership with GPPAC and others. The summit will provide an international forum for governments, civil society organisations and key peacebuilding agencies to explore best practices and lessons learned from having ‘peace’ infrastructures in governments.
- Further emphasis was put on the importance of in-country engagement in the work of the PBC. Thus, the work of the PBC should not just consist of Ambassadors meeting in New York, but the work of the Commission should be brought to the field to the extent possible and include local government and civil society representatives.
- The idea of involving Commission members' local embassies was raised. It was thought that this would be a good way to improve involvement of the country itself, rather than just the NY Mission. It would also allow for local input without the travel costs. The group was reminded, however, that engagement with local civil society organizations needs to be undertaken with great care so that their work and lives were not put at risk. Efforts would need to be sustainable and enforced.
- The representative of the UN Office in Geneva noted that it is part of the Core Group that has been set up in Geneva to develop thinking about the contribution of Geneva agencies and organisations to the work of the PBC. They wish to create a mechanism of dialogue here in Geneva, to foster an intellectual response to the PBC and to help sift and synthesize information. A series of workshops over the next year may be proposed.
- One-page papers on civil-society peacebuilding work (external and internal) in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Timor Leste and Haiti could be prepared.
- Further thinking should be done about engaging private sector groups (including, perhaps, arms producers) and the media.
- Meetings could be held with the Geneva representatives of the 31 countries on the PBC.
- The World Federalist Movement-sponsored yahoo group was mentioned as an excellent source of information about the Commission. To be put on this group contact: pbcc-info@yahoo.com
- A number of organisations with relevant experience were not present in this meeting. We might wish to include them in future meetings. Those suggested were: CONGO, ICVA, MSF, ICRC and IFRC, Femmes Afrique Solidarité, Caritas Internationalis (Rome Office: Mr. Michele Cesari; Fr. Brian Williams); OCHA; OHCHR (post-conflict and rule of law work), in addition to those invited to this meeting who were unable to attend.

It was felt that a meeting in 8-12 weeks would be useful to continue the discussion. A subgroup was formed, to begin preparations, consisting of David Atwood (QUNO), Aletia Dundas

(QUNO), Mireille Widmer (HDC), Peter Batchelor (UNDP), Rolf Carriere (NVPF), Cesar Henriquez (Marist Brothers) and Susan McCrory (ICHRP).

Appendix A: Participants List, Civil Society Workshop, 29th September 2006.

<u>Invitees</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>E-mail</u>
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