Civil Society Recommendations for the
Reviews of UN Peace Operations and the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

This briefing note summarizes the recommendations and inputs made by civil society representatives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America who participated in a civil society consultation on the UN Peace Operations Review and the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review from March 11-13, 2015, in New York. The civil society representatives took part in a preparatory workshop at Quaker House, gave presentations directly to members of the Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations and the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture in a roundtable discussion, and were featured speakers in a panel event at the International Peace Institute. These meetings were organized by the New York Peacebuilding Group in New York and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

Key Recommendations:

- **Community Engagement Strategies**
    - The Security Council should mandate the development and implementation of community engagement strategies for all UN Peace Operations as part of a UN mission's overall political strategy. These strategies should be developed in cooperation and consultation with local civil society actors, and shared and reviewed with local communities on a regular basis.
    - The UN Peacebuilding Commission should develop engagement strategies with civil society for each of its Country Specific Configurations in order to assist the chair and its members in ensuring that community peacebuilding perspectives and activities are part of UN peacebuilding strategies at the national level as well as policy discussions in New York.
- **Local Peacebuilding Assessments**
    - Reports of the Secretary-General on UN Peace Operations and UN Peacebuilding should provide analysis of the diversity of perspectives and priorities across different groups within countries. To aid in this, UN missions (or UN Country Teams in the case of non-mission settings) should regularly carry out community-based assessments or perception surveys in these countries, preferably through local civil society networks if they are already in place, and provide regular feedback to communities on the UN's mandate and activities on peace and security.
    - The UN's Peacebuilding Architecture (PBC, PBF, PBSO) should integrate local views on peacebuilding in all of its work through the use of community-based assessments or perception surveys in countries it is engaged with in order to be able to be responsive to, and inclusive of, local perspectives when identifying national peacebuilding priorities and evaluating projects that are funded by the PBF.

Summary of Main Issues Raised in Three Key Areas of Concern:

Community Engagement and Peacebuilding
- <u>The trust deficit between the UN and local populations must be addressed.</u> In many areas, local populations do not have a clear understanding of the role of UN peace operations in their communities because there is no direct interaction. Communities perceive that the UN is there to help the government or the armed groups and not the people. This is further exacerbated when communities do not see accountability for crimes committed by peacekeeping troops.

- Youth should be seen as positive agents of change for peace, rather than victims or troublemakers. Youth are not just the future, but also the present, and should be considered active peacebuilders and peacemakers in their communities, rather than a 'livelihoods' problem or recruitment threat.
- Concerted efforts must be made to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 by involving women in peace and security initiatives at all levels. 1325 includes provisions for participation, promotion and protection of women during armed conflict, but it is inconsistently implemented on the ground. National Action plans or strategies should be developed and implemented.
- Inclusion of all under-represented populations, such as people with disabilities and religious, ethnic, linguistic minorities, is essential for sustainable peace. Exclusion of any group will seriously hamper peace and security efforts.
- Lessons learned from previous engagements must be taken into account. A great deal of documentation already exists on what makes for effective engagement with local partners for peace operations and peacebuilding, yet the political will to put these into practice is lacking.
- Put people back in the center of the UN. Institutional rigidity often prevents putting people as the main focus, but without addressing the needs of the people, there will be no lasting impact.
- Reconciliation is essential for traumatized populations to heal and make progress. Sustainable peace requires transformed relationships at all levels. It is equally important to address this with government officials and senior leaders as it is difficult for people suffering from trauma to effectively lead their country. They, too, need healing, and the UN could help provide space for this.
- The breadth and depth of civil society must be identified and recognized. There are significant local peace resources, capacities and programmes, and they must be empowered to sustain peace. Issues raised by local civil society actors that might be critical of government should not be ignored by the UN but rather be acknowledged and addressed.

Responding to Local Peace and Security Needs
- Multidimensional problems require multidimensional solutions. Although there may be threats that require a military response, political dialogue is necessary to address the root causes of conflicts and find sustainable solutions. Furthermore, securitized approaches to peacebuilding neglect the power of local solutions that do not rely on the presence of armed actors in communities. A long-term military response is not sustainable. Hence, a human security approach is necessary to ensuring sustainable peace and security.
- There are existing civil society-led efforts to identify and address community security needs, but the UN is not constructively engaging with them. Small-scale, local efforts are more sustainable than top-down, externally-imposed activities. Engaging with communities is not only an opportunity for the UN to learn about their security needs, but also to explain in practical terms what the UN can and cannot do.
- Local civil society has an important monitoring and accountability role that is not always put to use. Local civil society has firsthand knowledge of the situation on the ground, and can contribute to early warning systems and also monitor the impact of peacebuilding activities throughout project cycles as well as once the UN leaves.

Broadening Local Participation and National Ownership

- Context-specific conflict analysis is rarely done, and even then, local peacebuilders' perspectives are not incorporated. Conflict analysis informed by local voices is necessary before, during, and after UN peace operations to understand the context, comprehensively address the challenges, and ensure there is lasting impact and 'Do No Harm'.

- Even when community engagement is conducted, the voices of people who are not linked to any institution are not always reflected. UN strategies that do not reflect and address the concerns of community members are not sustainable.

- Youth and women are heard only in relation to a narrow selection of issues. As vital segments of society (often composing the majority in post-conflict countries), youth and women should be consulted in the analysis and design phases of all peacebuilding initiatives and not only with regards to the implementation of gender or livelihood projects.

- UN strategies lack long-term vision. In some countries, the UN has been present for decades but is still making short-term plans and strategies. The high staff turnover rate also affects sustainability of peace operations.

- Community engagement should be continuous and systematic rather than ad hoc and sporadic. Often, community members are consulted one time and do not hear how their input is used, making them reluctant to participant in future consultations. Effective information feedback loops in conjunction with consultations are critical.

- Although it can be difficult, access to rural areas is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all voices.

- There is no monitoring mechanism for international expenditures for peace. Once the UN has completed a project or activity, there is no system in place to monitor its effectiveness. While communities have firsthand knowledge of the impact, there is no established feedback mechanism for them to share this with the UN.

- Statebuilding often focuses on developing physical infrastructure but does not address how it will be used. Enormous resources are expended on buildings, cars, and other material items but there is minimal effort made to identify how these efforts will benefit local communities, and they are often misused (or not used at all) while the challenges they were meant to address remain.

- The UN sometimes tries to play too many roles and does not succeed at any of them. The UN should focus on how it can uniquely contribute to improving state-society relations, and identify ways to support existing, community-led mechanisms rather than creating new systems

Civil Society Participants:

Mr. John Ahere
Peacebuilding Unit Coordinator
ACCORD
South Africa

Mr. Bernardo Arévalo de Léon
Senior Peacebuilding Adviser
Interpeace
Guatemala

Mr. Luis da Costa Ximenes
Director
Belun
Timor Leste

Ms. Martine Ekomo-Soignet
Local Consultant
GPPAC & Peace Direct
Central African Republic

Ms. Oulie Keita
Board Member/WANEP
Special Advisor/GPPAC
Mali

Ms. Nelly Maina
Gender Expert
World Vision
Kenya

Mr. Adrien Niyongabo
Coordinator
Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities
Burundi

Mr. Roosevelt Woods
Executive Director
Foundation for International Dignity
Liberia

The **New York Peacebuilding Group** is a gathering of organizations (the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, the International Peace Institute, Interpeace, PAX, Peace Direct, the Quaker United Nations Office, and World Vision) engaged on various peace related issues at the UN and in the field. Since September 2014 they have actively worked together to strengthen the role of civil society at the UN on peacebuilding as well as create space for dialogue and collaboration with the UN and member states.