

Regional Dialogues on Sustaining Peace: *Shaping UN Strategies for 2018 and Beyond*

**An Informal Planning/Scoping Discussion at
Columbia University Law School**

Note for Discussion

Proposed Objectives of the Regional Dialogues

By engaging a mix of government, UN, regional organization, civil society, academic, and business participants, the proposed multi-stakeholder regional dialogues could offer unique opportunities for multi-party feedback to inform and enrich the preparations of the Secretary-General's Sustaining Peace Report. The report is expected to be shared with Member States by late January 2018. In anticipation of its publication, the regional dialogues will be convened between September and December 2017 by local partner organizations, in collaboration with the Stimson Center.

The drafting team for the Sustaining Peace Report has been consulted and supports the convening of such dialogues, which can also elicit new perspectives, generate ideas, and build regional support for the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace planned for 2018, as called for by the 2016 Resolutions on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/ 2282).

Proposed Dates, Venues, and Partners for Regional Dialogues

- September: Africa (Savannah Center for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development led by Professor Ibrahim Gambari)
- October: Middle East and North Africa (Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, Doha Institute, led by Professor Sultan Barakat)
- November: Asia (discuss prospective local partners)
- November: Latin America and the Caribbean (discuss prospective local partners)
- December: New York (multi-stakeholder dialogue that could synthesize some of the best ideas from the regional dialogues)

Potential Value of Regional Dialogues

For Issues Related to Conflict Prevention and Peacemaking/Mediation.

The parallel Resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and Security Council on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture of April 2016 stressed the importance of cooperation across all facets of the United Nations with regard to prevention and peacemaking; how economic insecurity and

relative deprivation can be sources of stress and motivation for turning to violent extremism; and the need to “strengthen partnerships between the United Nations and key stakeholders, including international, regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions, and civil society organizations” in pursuit of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.¹

The President of the General Assembly, in his summary of the “High Level Dialogue on Building Sustainable Peace for All” (24–25 January 2017), stressed the importance of “pursuing strategic partnerships that bring together key actors from across government, the UN system, regional organisations, civil society, international financial institutions, and the private sector, so that their work is coordinated, complementary and mutually-reinforcing,” on behalf of sustainable development and sustaining peace.²

In his first address to the Security Council since taking office, Secretary-General António Guterres declared conflict prevention to be his top priority, outlining a necessary shift in UN policy from crisis response toward preventive peacemaking. He spoke of the need for cooperation between Member States and to include regional organizations, the private sector, and civil society groups in the prevention dialogue to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are being addressed.³

With a view to enhancing capabilities in the area of mediation, the UN Department of Political Affairs established a Standby Team of experts in 2006 to provide technical advice to United Nations officials and others leading mediation and conflict prevention efforts. According to the UN Department of Political Affairs, standby teams are to “have the flexibility to deploy on short notice to assist UN or non-UN mediators globally, or to provide analysis and advice remotely” and with “support from donors, the Department has also established a rapid response fund to start up mediation processes at short notice.”⁴ The Standby Team includes just eight persons, however, and as the quoted passage indicates, its operational capacity relies on voluntary funding.

Offering solutions to increase the UN’s valuable but limited capacities in this domain, the 2015 report of the Albright-Gambari Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance proposed that the United Nations staff and support a Standby Team of 50 experienced mediators and potential UN Envoys, with adequate operational support funding built into the practice.⁵ Regional dialogues would offer the opportunity to solicit views of the value—and way forward for—UN conflict prevention and mediation capabilities at many levels, especially in coordination with regional and sub-regional bodies and in concrete cases where participants have had experience of UN mediation field work.

For Issues Related to Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, and Linkages to Sustainable Development and Human Rights

The 2016 annual report from UNDP’s Global Programme on Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights for Sustaining Peace and Fostering Development underlines the challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding, including persistent inequality, social exclusion, and the inability of states to build and strengthen enduring institutions. These are some of the underlying issues that obstruct peacebuilding and long-term reconciliation. UNDP’s report noted the importance of

peacebuilding efforts that address immediate issues recognized by citizens of affected places, whose internal peace the international community was hoping to rebuild.⁶

The report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture also stressed the need to view conflict issues, human rights, and sustainable development holistically: “A broader, comprehensive approach of sustaining peace is called for, all along the arc leading from conflict prevention (on which, in particular, the United Nations system needs to place much greater emphasis), through peacemaking and peacekeeping, and on to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The success of such an approach critically relies on uniting the peace and security, human rights and development pillars of the Organization.”⁷

In addition to following up on the 2016 Peacebuilding Resolutions with the United Nations Sustaining Peace Report, for which the regional dialogues are intended to offer opportunities for interactive third-party inputs and awareness-raising, Secretary-General Guterres commissioned, at the start of his tenure, an internal review of the UN’s Secretariat functions for dealing with peace and security issues. That study is anticipated to be released in mid-July, and it will provide further official background to both the sustaining peace report and the regional dialogues.

Questions for Consideration

The organizers of this discussion seek your input on how best to conceptualize and shape the regional dialogues. Relevant issues and questions for discussion are suggested below. The questions posited here are, of course, intended merely to open the dialogue.

- How can regional dialogues, representing the voices of diverse constituencies, best contribute to the Secretary-General’s Sustaining Peace Report and to the development phase of the UNGA’s High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace?
- How could such dialogues best elicit new and helpful perspectives on the UN’s broad range of activities and tools to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of violent conflict, including in the related area of innovative financing, governance strengthening, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the SDGs)?
- How can the dialogues focus greater attention on efforts to further advance the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, as presented in UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000)?
- What types of individuals and organizations, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa, would be most beneficial to the proposed dialogues from, for example, governments, civil society, community leaders, women and youth leaders, the UN system, and business?
- How might dialogues best discuss ways to enhance cooperation between the UN and (sub-) regional organizations in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding and their connection to sustainable development, human rights, and the rule of law?
- How can inclusive coalitions among Member States, civil society, and the private sector be encouraged to reinforce recommendations from the UNGA’s High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace and corresponding Secretary-General’s Report?

References

¹ UN General Assembly, *Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture*, A/RES/70/262, 27 April 2016, paras. 19, 30.

² “Closing Remarks of H.E. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, at High Level Dialogue on Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace,” 25 January 2017, <http://www.un.org/pga/71/event-latest/building-sustainable-peace-for-all-synergies-between-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-and-sustaining-peace>.

³ UN Secretariat. *United Nations Meetings Coverage. Secretary General, in First Address to Security Council Since Taking Office, Sets Restoring Trust, Preventing Crises as United Nations Priorities*, Security Council, 7857th Meeting, AM Summary, 10 January 2017 (Press Release SC/12673).

⁴ See UN Department of Political Affairs, “Prevention and Mediation,” <http://www.un.org/undpa/en/diplomacy-mediation>; also “Standby Team,” <http://peacemaker.un.org/mediation-support/stand-by-team>.

⁵ Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance. *Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance*. The Hague and Washington, DC: The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the Stimson Centre, 2015. <https://www.stimson.org/content/report-commission-global-security-justice-governance>.

⁶ UNDP, *Building Inclusive Societies and Sustaining Peace through Democratic Governance and Conflict Prevention: An Integrated Approach*, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/access_to_justiceandruloflaw/rule-of-law-annual-report-2016.html.

⁷ United Nations, *Challenge of sustaining peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture*, A/69/968–S/2015/490, 30 June 2015, pp. 3–4.