

Security Council Open Debate on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Institution Building
21st January 2011, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Gary Quinlan, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

I would like to thank Bosnia and Herzegovina for convening today's debate. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and Deputy Prime Minister Guterres of Timor-Leste for his insightful comments today. Timor-Leste itself is a nation that has faced immense challenges but has demonstrated strong, effective leadership over its own institution-building process. It is to be congratulated on its commitment to sharing that experience with others and on continuing to call for more effective international support to post-conflict States, including as Chair of the Group of Seven Plus, to which Australia is very pleased to provide support.

I also would like to thank the outgoing Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Wittig, for his contribution to the debate. Australia remains a strong supporter of developing a more organic relationship between the Council and the Commission.

Australia's own experience over the past decade in supporting post-conflict institution-building, particularly in Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, has yielded many lessons. Perhaps most important, and one that has been central to the debate today is that national leadership and ownership are fundamental to success. Assistance should support national priorities and objectives, and careful consideration must be given to how assistance can best foster national capacities and, more importantly, avoid stifling them.

The process of institution-building — and it is a process — must be timely, flexible and sustainable. Planning and implementation need to start as soon as possible in the project, and also progress at a pace and in a manner appropriate to local needs. We must avoid imposing ill-fitting models and ensure that we harness and strengthen existing capacities as we seek to develop them further.

It is important to ensure strong coordination among international actors. We must garner available expertise in a coherent manner. Australia encourages opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation, and for enhanced cooperation with regional organizations — something we ourselves have tried to do, for example, through our leadership of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands.

Assistance obviously should be extended beyond capitals to the subnational level, civil society and the private sector. We need to strengthen the fabric of stable and prosperous communities through political, security, service delivery and economic institutions. We must recognize and promote the role of women, who must be empowered to contribute to decisionmaking and the implementation of institution-building.

Institution-building in any environment is obviously complex. Institution-building in post-conflict situations clearly presents even greater challenges. That is why it is important that we share ideas and best practices.

The United Nations has a vital role to play in peacebuilding owing to its unique legitimacy and comparative advantages. We encourage the Security Council to consider institution-building when setting mission mandates, but to do so while also giving consideration to the role that other actors should play. It should also continue to mandate integrated United Nations missions to ensure comprehensive approaches. We would also encourage better definition of roles and responsibilities in key peacebuilding sectors within the United Nations system.

My own country has been pleased to contribute to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) over the past year. We believe very clearly that the PBC can play a stronger role in supporting post-conflict institution-building, particularly by monitoring progress, assisting coordination and providing expert guidance to the Council. The Council should increasingly draw on the PBC's advisory role. We endorse the comments made earlier today by Ambassador Grauls of Belgium on behalf of Brazil, Canada, Jordan and Switzerland in their respective capacities as Chairs of the PBC's country-specific configurations.

We also encourage greater coordination between the United Nations and the World Bank and other regional development banks, given their influential role in institution-building.

Obviously, we need to use our resources to greatest effect. In that regard, we look forward to the conclusion of the forthcoming review of international civilian capacities, which we hope will enhance the United Nations effectiveness in supporting postconflict institution-building, including by increasing its ability to draw on truly relevant expertise in response to defined needs from the global North and the global South.

We stand ready to contribute expertise through the Australian Civilian Corps, which we established in 2009

specifically to provide skilled personnel to support countries experiencing or emerging from conflict or natural disasters.

At times, the challenges of institution-building can obviously seem overwhelming. The international community must be realistic in its expectations, set clear objectives and coordinate and sustain support for institution-building over the long term, regardless of the challenges; otherwise post-conflict success does not happen. This work requires patience, but it is critical, given the centrality of strong national institutions in delivering robust and sustainable peace.