

Security Council Open Debate on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Institution Building
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Statement by Mr. Peter Wittig, Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

I would like at the outset to thank the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for convening this important debate and preparing the draft presidential statement.

I particularly welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and also thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Mr. Guterres, for his comprehensive briefing.

Allow me to make the following remarks in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I have just five more days as PBC Chair, but I will relish them.

The question of national capacity development in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding has been particularly addressed as a main theme in the Secretary-General's 2009 report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (S/2009/304). Today's debate will allow us to delve deeper into the critical aspect of institution-building in complex postconflict settings. To this end, I wish to highlight three overarching points from which we can possibly approach institution-building from a peacebuilding perspective.

First, the principle of national ownership, as the Secretary-General has made very clear, should stand at the beginning of any effort to build or rebuild institutions in countries emerging from conflict. Every post-conflict situation is unique, there is no one size that fits all and, thus, approaches to institution-building might vary considerably.

In many cases, most notably such as in postconflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, we should not assume that the institutions and capacities needed to transform and rebuild the State and society are completely absent. We should encourage ongoing mapping of existing national institutions and capacities in critical peacebuilding areas — such as in the security and justice sectors, basic services and economic revitalization — and build on these existing national capacities. At the same time, a thorough analysis and dialogue with national stakeholders are crucial to prioritization within a broader national peacebuilding vision.

Secondly, there is an important need to develop a common institutional understanding within conflict-torn societies. Institution-building goes beyond establishing and nurturing organizational structures. From power-sharing and rotation, and the active participation of women in decision-making processes, to the fair distribution of wealth and economic opportunities, societies emerging from conflict struggle to rebuild themselves on the basis of new rules of the game.

Thirdly, it is important to keep in mind that entities such as the community, community-based organizations, the private sector and civil society also represent forms of institutions and are essential to advancing national reconciliation, restoring trust, rebuilding the social fabric and generating economic opportunities in conflict-affected societies.

Peacebuilding is certainly a major challenge for the whole United Nations system, but how can the United Nations peacebuilding architecture contribute to institution-building in post-conflict environments? The General Assembly and the Security Council tasked the PBC to focus on, inter alia, institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict.

I wish to offer a few ideas on how the Peacebuilding Commission's role could further evolve in this respect. The Commission's engagement offers a political forum necessary to facilitate among national stakeholders the development of their own prioritization for peacebuilding. The Commission can encourage the identification of the crucial institutions and mechanisms needed to make post-conflict societies more resilient and capable of addressing tensions and challenges through non-violent means.

The Commission's engagement also provides a framework for the development of partnerships and mutual commitments between national Governments and their international partners in support of national peacebuilding priorities. The development and monitoring of its instruments of engagement allows the Commission to sustain focus on institution-building, to promote integration and coherence of efforts among United Nations and non-United Nations actors, and to help address funding gaps where they exist. As an advisory body to the Security Council, the Commission can keep the Council informed of evolving opportunities for and challenges facing peacebuilding in countries on the agenda.

Supporting national capacity development for building, transforming and managing viable institutions at the earliest stage should remain at the heart of our collective efforts. In taking forward relevant recommendations from the 2010 peacebuilding review, the Commission has undertaken to focus its instruments of engagement on practical approaches to national capacity development around critical peacebuilding priorities.

To conclude, I would like to welcome the joint statement to be delivered by the Chairs of the five country-specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission later on in this debate. I think that such a joint statement is a first for this body and testifies to the efforts to develop synergies among the five country configurations.

Allow me to add a few brief points in my national capacity.

First, international support to national institutionbuilding should be designed in such a way as to support national ownership, rather than supplant it. One positive example of this is the phased-out involvement of international judges and prosecutors in the Bosnian State Court, which could serve as an important model in this regard.

In Timor-Leste, we have seen that, while the development of national capacities went very well, the early withdrawal of international judges, prosecutors and investigators was, with hindsight, perhaps premature. This can teach us some valuable lessons for the future on how to better sustain the ability of national actors to continue to fight against serious crimes.

Secondly, we need to understand the term “institution-building” in a very broad sense. This is the approach Germany adopts in its bilateral development assistance. Institution-building, or rather Statebuilding, is not only about constructing Government institutions and State capacity; it is about the whole social fabric of a society and how the State interacts with its society. Thus, guaranteeing active participation of women, supporting the establishment of vibrant social organizations and integrating former childsoldiers, for example, into their local communities can all be part of institution-building.

In addition, we must think in medium- and longterm perspectives. For too long, the international community has based its approaches on too narrow and short-term perspectives. Let us face the fact that building States from scratch takes decades, not years. One good example of a nationally owned and broad, long-term institution-building approach is the institution-building plan of Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad — the Fayyad Plan — launched in 2010. It aims at creating sustainable foundations for a viable democratic Palestinian State and focuses on areas such as good governance, social issues, infrastructure and economic revitalization.

Thirdly, post-conflict institution-building efforts should be combined with efforts to build national capacities in fighting impunity and in vetting human rights violation perpetrators, especially in the areas of judicial reform and police and corrections capacities, to rebuild victims’ and public trust in State institutions. To cite a positive example, Germany funds the International Legal Foundation’s expert day-to-day mentoring of local lawyers in Afghanistan and the West Bank, which has led to major changes in the practice of lawyers, shifts in lawyers’ assumptions about their role in the justice system, shifts in the authorities’ views of the importance of counsel, and the establishment of a true culture of defence where none previously existed. Without the involvement of organizations with the necessary local expertise to build national capacity, rule-of-law projects fail to develop adequately the capacities of national justice institutions to strengthen the rule of law and protect the rights of their citizens.

Lastly, the Security Council should address the issue of institution-building as early as possible, especially when mandating, extending or downsizing existing peacekeeping operations. Germany hopes that, especially during this phase, the relationship between the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission will become closer and more organic. Germany welcomes the most recent initiatives of the Council, such as the informal exchange of views between the Council and the Chairperson of the PBC country-specific configuration on Liberia, and would like to encourage more interaction of this nature in the future. We believe that in this way a more coherent, comprehensive, effective and timely approach to institution-building in particular, and post-conflict situations in general, can be achieved.

In conclusion, we very much look forward to the soon to be released Senior Advisory Group’s review of civilian capacities and its recommendations regarding a more effective and comprehensive approach to postconflict institution-building. We are confident that the review will give us valuable guidance on many aspects that are being touched upon during today’s debate.