

The UN Peacebuilding Commission: A Blueprint for Amplifying Women's Voices and Participation Discussion Paper

This document is a discussion paper sponsored and compiled by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, and the United Methodist Office for the United Nations. The aim of the paper is to highlight women's critical role in peacebuilding, as clearly recognized in SC resolution 1325, and ensure that women's voices and experiences inform the development and functioning of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

Summary and Key Recommendations

The Secretary-General's recommendation to establish a UN Peacebuilding Commission has been met with initial approval by member states and civil society, and the General Assembly confirmed its support in the outcome document of the September 2005 World Summit. To ensure the effectiveness of the PBC, it is critical that civil society organizations including women's networks and organizations, dedicated to peacebuilding, are fully integrated in its establishment, mechanisms, and activities.

UN member states mandated the full participation of women in all aspects of peacebuilding in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The creation of the PBC provides an opportunity for member states to fulfill this commitment and implement the resolution in its design, mandate, and activities, and strengthen the transition to sustainable peace and security.

The PBC's "main purpose is to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and advise on and propose comprehensive strategies for peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery." Yet, as it currently stands, there is no proposal for women's civil society participation in the organizational committee or other structures of the PBC. Advancing the solid foundation of women, peace and security, and supporting women's mobilization for peace, will lead to more effective and sustainable peace-building operations. The recommendations below draw on existing formats of this cooperation and build upon the UN's foundation and commitment to women's participation in peace processes.

- 1. In its establishment, structure, mandate, and programming, the PBC should seek to implement the commitments of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to include women in all initiatives to manage conflict and promote sustainable peace.**

As government representatives, leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists, students, and mothers, women worldwide mobilize to deter the escalation of conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. In recognition of this fact, the UN Security Council mandated women's participation in peacebuilding in resolution 1325 (2000), which

“stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”¹

UN agencies, member states, and civil society are implementing resolution 1325 through activities that range from disseminating the document itself to creating national action plans to preparing women for participation in the peace process. The PBC must not reverse this trend, but seek to fulfill the mandate and commitment of resolution 1325.

The PBC should ensure staff positions are created in the Peacebuilding Support Office (PSO) that are specifically dedicated to liaising with civil society, particularly women’s organizations. The PBC should ensure that gender expertise is included among PSO personnel by employing dedicated staff members at the appropriate levels for these issues, providing training for the entire unit. The PBC should also ensure gender balance among staff.

2. The PBC should institute formal country-level mechanisms, such as “civic forums,” to ensure that women’s organizations can be key partners in its efforts.

The PBC should seek to engage women’s organizations at the country level so that the local population—those most affected by the conflict and by any decisions the PBC will recommend—are able to voice their knowledge and perspectives, suggest creative strategies most conducive to the local context, and fully invest their networks and communities in the processes of peace and development.

When a given country enters the agenda of the PBC, the Commission should draw on resources from the Peacebuilding Fund to finance and convene “civic” or “civil society forums” to allow representatives from all sectors to provide input, identify gaps and areas for additional focus, and react to potential decisions.

To ensure unbiased outcomes of “civic forums” and provide legitimacy to their joint recommendations, specific efforts must be made to reach often excluded women’s organizations, and include a diverse group of women from various ethnic, racial, political, religious, and geographic backgrounds. As civil society feeds into the PBC’s work, the Commission should in turn strengthen the capacity of organizations with a mandate to promote UN principles of peace, human rights, and gender equality. Through technical and financial support to key actors, the PBC would help to ensure the long-term sustainability of women’s investment and activities for peace.

3. The UN and member states involved in the formation of the PBC, should immediately convene a consultation with key representatives of women’s networks and organizations in the peace and security community to discuss the modalities of partnership.

Given the current discussions surrounding the establishment, composition, role, and functions of the proposed PBC, timely action is necessary to ensure long-term engagement and full participation by women in the life of the Commission.

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Discussion Paper

Context

The Secretary-General's recommendation to establish a UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has been met with approval by member states and civil society, and the General Assembly confirmed its support in the outcome document of the September 2005 World Summit. The PBC is to begin its work by 31 December 2005, yet the specifics of its purpose, structure, and function remain the subject of significant, ongoing debate among UN member states and agencies. A critical constituency to immediately include in these discussions and throughout the mechanisms and activities of the PBC is women's networks, organizations and groups.

As government representatives, leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists, students, and mothers, women worldwide mobilize to deter the escalation of conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. In recognition of this fact, the UN Security Council mandated women's participation in peacebuilding in resolution 1325 (2000), which reaffirms the "important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."² This landmark decision has been referenced in subsequent Security Council resolutions on peace and security, and various UN agencies, donor organizations, and civil society are actively implementing its mandates.

Despite the fact that UN member states "reaffirm[ed] [their] commitment to the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)" in the outcome document of the World Summit, there is currently no proposal for women's organizations' participation in the design, structure, or mechanisms of the PBC.³ In early drafts of the outcome document, provisions were made for the participation of non-member state actors in PBC country-specific discussions, specifically "other parties directly relevant for the country under consideration."⁴ Yet later drafts removed this category of participants.⁵ To ensure the effectiveness of the PBC and to fulfill international mandates, it is critical that women's organizations dedicated to peacebuilding are fully integrated in its establishment, mechanisms, and activities.

Fulfilling International Commitments

With the adoption of resolution 1325, UN member states mandated the protection of women in armed conflict, their participation in decision-making and peace processes, the integration of gender perspectives and training in peacekeeping, and mainstreaming of gender issues in UN reporting systems and programs related to conflict and peacebuilding. Nearly one year later, the Security Council explicitly recalled the mandates of 1325 in resolution 1366, recognizing the role of women in the prevention of conflict and calling for a gender perspective in UN

prevention, peace-keeping, and peace-building efforts. Women's participation, through channels that bring their voices to decision making tables, is key to upholding these commitments.

The passage of resolution 1325 has been followed by annual Arria Formula meetings in the Security Council to mark the resolution's anniversary, as well as various open debates on the issue and references in subsequent Security Council resolutions. The contribution of women leaders, professionals and activists is often highlighted. Across the agencies of the UN, implementation of the resolution's commitments has begun in earnest, as documented by the Secretary-General in a 2004 progress report.⁶ Activities within the Department for Peacekeeping Operations provide an example: numbers of gender advisers have dramatically increased; gender concerns are raised in all peacekeeping mandates; specific units of police stations have been established to assist victims of sexual violence; and gender-sensitive training has been designed for all personnel. In addition to UN actors, implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 is occurring at international, national, and local levels by donor organizations, national governments, and individual women and women's organizations—often in partnership with each other.

As a third-party mediator to peace talks, Norway fulfills resolution 1325 in a unique way, often directly influencing parties at the peace table. In Sri Lanka, for example, Norway supported the formation of a Sub-Committee on Gender Issues to the negotiations between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Both parties appointed five women, and Norway provided an advisor and facilitator for the committee, which makes proposals and provides input into the main negotiations to bring a gender perspective to the process of negotiations and reconstruction.⁷

As a country in conflict, Colombia is particularly dedicated to implementation of resolution 1325. The Presidential Council for Women's Equity and the Ministry of Foreign Relations launched an initiative in 2002 to disseminate the document throughout the government and raise awareness of the issue nationwide. At the local level, 120 Women's Community Councils were formed as of 2003 to promote women's participation, gender equality, and a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict; members included mayors or officials and women in civil society—Afro-Colombians, academics, peasants, indigenous, and private sector leaders.⁸

Civil society organizations implement resolution 1325 at national and local levels, often connecting international commitments to the grassroots. In Fiji, the women's group Fem'Link Pacific utilizes mobile radios to reach rural women and is conducting 1325 capacity building for local leadership of all ethnic and political backgrounds. They publish and disseminate their activities to national and international policymakers as an example for incorporating 1325 in the national agenda. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women's groups advocated before their government and the UN mission to ensure a gender component and perspective in peace negotiations and UN structures. Women distributed 1325 to all delegates and experts at the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and continue to partner with the gender adviser at the UN mission to translate and disseminate the resolution through dialogue, print, TV, and radio.

UN agencies, member states, and civil society are implementing resolution 1325 through activities that range from disseminating the document itself to creating national action plans to

preparing women for participation in the peace process. The PBC must not reverse this trend, but seek to fulfill the mandate and commitment of resolution 1325 to include women in all initiatives to manage conflict and promote sustainable peace. This principle was reiterated by a number of women ministers for foreign affairs in a letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly following the World Summit.⁹ These leaders—representing member states ranging from developed nations such as Switzerland to conflict-affected countries including Burundi, Colombia, Macedonia, and Mozambique—noted the importance of women’s representation on the PBC’s organizational committee and in country-specific meetings as well as the inclusion of a gender perspective in PBC decision making, activities, reports, strategies, and analyses.

Maintaining a Critical Partnership

The knowledge, networks, resources, and skills that civil society women’s organizations bring to peacebuilding at local, national, and international levels have been officially recognized by UN organs and agencies. Security Council resolution 1366 explicitly recognized “the role of non-governmental organizations, civil society actors, and the private sector in the prevention of armed conflict...”¹⁰ In June 2004, the Security Council held an open debate on the role of civil society in post-conflict peacebuilding in conjunction with the release of the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations. In *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations, and Global Governance*, experts advocate for strengthening the UN-civil society relationship because “enhancing dialogue and cooperation with civil society...will make the United Nations more effective.”¹¹

Substantiated examples abound of UN partnership with civil society to prevent violence, build peace, and cope with the aftermath of war. At headquarters, in preparation for the World Summit, the General Assembly conducted two days of informal interactive hearings with representatives of civil society for the first time in its history in June 2005. Over 200 civil society groups—from high levels to the grassroots—presented their views on peacebuilding and other issues to member states.¹² At the hearings, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security presented a proposal for the inclusion of a gender perspective and the equal participation of women in the PBC.

In the field, UN agencies are supporting women’s organizing and peacebuilding efforts at all levels through financial and technical support. For example, the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, established by the General Assembly in 1996 and managed by UNIFEM, has funded innovative civil society programs to address violence against women worldwide; their projects include public education and awareness raising, coalition building, and capacity building for law enforcement, health professionals, and government officials.¹³ In West Africa, the UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA) supports the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET), which trains local-level leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, raises awareness among the general population of the importance of maintaining peace in the region, and promotes dialogue among official stakeholders. DPA recognized MARWOPNET’s solid background and history of peacebuilding in the region; their knowledge of the situation on the ground; their connectedness to major actors

and the general public; and their commitment and impartiality—unique civil society qualities otherwise unavailable to the UN or the international community.¹⁴

All aspects of the establishment of the PBC must build upon and advance the solid tradition, foundation, and mandates for UN engagement with civil society, particularly women’s groups. The experiences and contributions of civil society must be captured in the PBC’s mandate, structure, mechanisms, and activities. Doing so will lead to more effective and sustainable UN peacebuilding operations.

Identifying Entry Points for Civil Society Engagement

The purposes and functions of the PBC are outlined in more detail in the Secretary-General’s Explanatory Note on the Peacebuilding Commission and in the outcome document of the September 2005 World Summit. Each goal, structure, and function of the proposed PBC necessitates the need for women’s networks and organizations’ engagement and would be enhanced by their participation.

A. Mandate and Purpose

“[The PBC’s] main purpose is to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and advise on and propose comprehensive strategies for peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. To that end, it will provide necessary information in the immediate aftermath of war and focus attention on development and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery and will support the development of integrated strategies for countries emerging from conflict, in order to prevent them from relapse into conflict.”—Outcome Document, Para. 77.

In its mandate, the PBC should explicitly commit to partnering with women’s organizations and promoting women’s participation through formal mechanisms at headquarters and at the country level.

Building on the foundations of mandates and experiences outlined above, the UN must demonstrate its commitment to women by recognizing them as partners in peace and reconstruction and by establishing formal mechanisms for their participation in the mandate of the PBC. Given the PBC’s “main purpose is to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and advise on and propose comprehensive strategies for peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery,” to exclude women’s organizations from official structures would be a grievous error, ultimately undermining the mission of the PBC itself.

In particular, the PBC should seek to engage women’s networks and organizations at the country level so that the local population—those most affected by the conflict and by any decisions the PBC will recommend— have a channel whereby to voice their knowledge and perspectives, suggest creative strategies most conducive to the local context, and fully invest their networks and communities in the processes of peace and development. Full participation of women in an established structure at the country level will provide insight

into the decision-making process that will lead to more effective and sustainable peace-building programs.

These specific benefits were recently expounded within the UN system; in 2004, ECOSOC passed a resolution commending the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict for utilizing participatory methods that included consultations with civil society. Because of their holistic approach, the Secretary-General noted, “the Groups were able to foster a comprehensive and integrated approach to peace, stability, recovery, and long-term development. For all these reasons, the process has been perceived by the countries concerned and their development partners as open, transparent, and participatory, leading to balanced and meaningful results.”¹⁵ In his explanatory note on the PBC, the Secretary-General specifically recommended that the PBC learn and build upon the experiences gained by the ECOSOC ad hoc post-conflict groups as it proposes strategies for peacebuilding. This is a lesson that must be transferred directly into the mandate of the PBC, and space must be made available to amplify women’s voices.

B. Membership

“The Peacebuilding Commission shall meet in variable configurations. Country-specific meetings of the Peacebuilding Commission should comprise: a) the national authorities of the country under consideration, as appropriate; b) countries in the region engaged in the post-conflict process, as well as relevant regional and sub-regional organizations; c) the major financial and troop contributors involved in the recovery effort; the senior United Nations representative in the field and other relevant UN representatives; e) such regional and international financial institutions as may be relevant.”—Outcome Document, Para. 82.

At headquarters, the PBC should:

- **Invite representatives of relevant agencies from within the UN system to ensure a gender perspective in the analysis and strategies of the PBC.**

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Population Fund, the Division for the Advancement of Women, and the Office of the Special Advisor to Advance Gender Issues, as well as various departmental offices possess enormous expertise to assist the PBC in including a gender perspective in its analysis and strategies. In addition, it would behoove the Commission to draw from the body of research these agencies have produced, including the independent expert’s assessment commissioned by UNIFEM, *Women, War, and Peace*,¹⁶ which provides useful context, and the annual reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council that are launched in October in conjunction with the anniversary of resolution 1325.

At the country level, the PBC should institute a formal mechanism to ensure that the knowledge and experience of local civil society is central to its efforts.

The PBC provides a unique opportunity to ensure that reconstruction priorities are shaped by the population that they will most affect, including poor and rural women. But ironically this constituency is often least represented in peace and security discussions. Security and development cannot be imposed from the outside. Providing a voice for in-country women's networks and organizations, in particular, in the earliest phases of peacebuilding and development will help to assure stronger local investment in the peace plan and a greater likelihood of sustainability. Drawing on local and grassroots networks as a resource for information can facilitate a more accurate and complete evaluation of operations.

When a given country enters the agenda of the PBC, the Commission should draw on resources from the Peacebuilding Fund to finance and convene "civic" or "civil society forums" to allow representatives from all sectors to provide input, identify gaps and areas for additional focus, and react to potential decisions. It must never be assumed that the creation of space for consultation with civil society automatically results in the representation of women and the expression of their interests. Deliberate measures are always needed to promote women's full and equal access and participation.

To ensure unbiased outcomes of "civic forums" and provide legitimacy to their joint recommendations, specific efforts must be made to include a diverse group of women from various ethnic, racial, political, religious, and geographic backgrounds. As civil society feeds into the PBC's work, the Commission should in turn strengthen the capacity of organizations with a mandate to promote UN principles of peace, human rights, and gender equality. Through technical and financial support to key actors, the PBC would help to ensure the long-term sustainability of women's investment and activities for peace.

Successful precedents exist for UN partnership with civil society in decision-making processes devoted to peace and reconstruction. In Guatemala, for example, UN-mediated negotiations established a standing forum, the Civil Society Assembly (ASC), in a framework agreement signed by the parties to the conflict. Funded by bilateral donors, the ASC represented a wide cross-section of Guatemalan society and was composed of 11 sectoral groupings, including indigenous organizations, women's groups, business associations, academics, the media, and others. The ASC was mandated to discuss the substantive issues under consideration at the official negotiating table; develop and offer consensus-based, non-binding positions in each area; and review and endorse the final draft agreements. Although the ASC's participation declined during implementation, it "became a historic milestone because of the capacity for dialogue, negotiation, and agreement between the different sectors...it is likely that the peace process would have been very different—and probably much less comprehensive—without them."¹⁷

As the activities of the PBC at headquarters will be primarily driven by member-states, civic forums at the country level would establish a vital and necessary link for the local population to the PBC's decision-making process.

C. Structures

“We request the Secretary-General to establish within the Secretariat and within existing resources a small Peacebuilding Support Office to assist and support the PBC. It should draw on the best expertise available within the UN system.”—Outcome Document, Para. 85.

The PBC should ensure staff positions are created in the Peacebuilding Support Office (PSO) that are specifically dedicated to liaising with civil society.

In order for civil society to be involved in various functions of the PBC, it is necessary for a staff member(s) to be knowledgeable about and dedicated exclusively to liaising with women’s groups. In the initial stages, he/she should design mechanisms by which civil society representatives can engage in the PBC’s design process. Once work is underway, the liaison would be responsible for ensuring that women involved and gender considerations are considered at every stage of country-specific PBC activities as well as relevant proceedings at headquarters. In this way, the PBC can demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling the UN’s principles of participation and inclusivity and enrich its own work in the process.

The PBC should ensure that gender expertise is included among PSO personnel by employing a dedicated staff member for these issues, providing training for the entire unit, and ensuring gender balance among staff.

According to the Secretary-General, recruited staff for the Peacebuilding Support Office must have expertise “in several of the substantive areas that form the core of the civilian aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding”¹⁸—of which women, peace, and security is a critical component. In addition to the recruitment of a senior adviser to ensure a focus on these issues throughout the work of the PBC, the terms of reference for all PSO staff should highlight comprehension and special attention to gender and conflict. This requirement notwithstanding, substantive training on women’s role in post-conflict reconstruction should be a standard component of orientation and ongoing education for all PSO personnel, pursuant to various UN requirements for staff training to mainstream a gender perspective in all activities.¹⁹ The Peacebuilding Commission can also draw on gender and conflict analysis expertise, as well as links to active local women’s organizations, available through UN offices, funds and programmes including OSAGI, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNFPA, DPA and DPKO.

Finally, as reiterated by the General Assembly in 2000, the PBC should “encourage the implementation of measures designed to achieve the goal of 50/50 gender balance in all posts...including in peacekeeping missions, peace negotiations, and in all activities...”²⁰ This requirement is applicable to the PSO and should be implemented accordingly.

Urging Timely Action

Given the current discussions surrounding the establishment, composition, role, and functions of the proposed PBC, timely action is necessary to ensure long-term engagement with civil society in the life of the Commission. Thus, an immediate and overriding recommendation to the Security Council, Secretary-General, and General Assembly as they move closer to the PBC's creation is:

Immediately convene a consultation with key representatives of women's organizations and advocates in the women, peace and security community to discuss the modalities of broadly engaging women and supporting gender equality through the design and implementation of the PBC.

In addition, the General Assembly should resume consultative, treaty, conference, and prep-com procedures for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the negotiations for the PBC. In order to guarantee women's participation, the founding mandate of the PBC must address this issue. Any delay may risk losing a window of opportunity to build upon previous UN mandates, principles, and standards for civil society engagement. Committing to a partnership at the outset of the PBC, however, will heighten women's investment in the new structure, facilitate a multi-stakeholder approach to peacebuilding, and ultimately lead to more effective UN interventions in post-conflict states.

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- ³ *Draft Outcome Document 13 September 2005*. 1 October 2005 http://www.un.org/summit2005/Draft_Outcome130905.pdf. Para. 116.
- ⁴ *Revised Draft Outcome Document of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly of September 2005 Submitted by the President of the General Assembly*. 22 July 2005. Future Document A/59/HLPM/CRP.1/Rev.1. New York: United Nations, 2005. Para. 65.B.vi.
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- ⁸ For more information, see “Colombia” (Spanish only) at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/responses1325.htm>.
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