

January 3, 2006

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## **New UN Peacebuilding Commission Requires Resources and Authority to be Effective**

On December 20, 2005, the UN General Assembly and Security Council respectively agreed to resolutions establishing a Peacebuilding Commission, making this initiative one of the first from the September World Summit to come to fruition.

The Commission aims to fill a critical gap in the UN's capacity to move beyond traditional peacekeeping towards instilling a sustainable peace that does not require outside enforcement in war-torn countries. Lack of funding and authority to manage the conflict transition process, however, may compromise its ability to meet its ambitious goals.

The adopted resolution describes the central purpose of the Commission as maintaining attention on conflict-afflicted areas and preventing them from moving off the collective radar screen of the international community. UN General Assembly President Jan Eliasson of Sweden lauded the Commission as the first "[UN] mechanism which ensures that for countries emerging from conflict, post-conflict does not mean post-engagement of the international community."

The Commission is to serve as the central point for developing comprehensive peacebuilding strategies by unifying the overall planning for peacebuilding operations and supporting, but not replacing, country-level planning for recovery. It will also provide a forum for exchange of information and lessons learned among representatives from the myriad institutions involved in ending conflict, including UN agencies, bilateral donors, troop contributors, regional actors and organizations, the international financial institutions and the national or transitional authorities of the focus country.

The Commission, at least in its conceptual form, was among the least controversial of the World Summit initiatives and enjoyed widespread support among UN member states. Generating more debate were the details of the Commission's membership structure and lines of reporting. The establishment of a committee co-chaired by Denmark and Tanzania, tasked with facilitating agreement among General Assembly members on the Commission's schema, helped to achieve agreement by the end-of-year deadline set at the Summit.

A 31-person Organizational Committee will lead the Commission, with members each serving two-year terms. Comprising the Committee will be seven representatives each from the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as five representatives each from among the top financial donors to the UN and the top contributors of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions. An additional seven members from the General Assembly will also join the Committee in an effort to provide the geographic balance and representation from countries with experience in post-conflict recovery as called for in the Commission's founding resolution.

The resolution establishes that the Commission will act only by consensus, devising integrated proposals for stabilization, economic recovery and development, and providing recommendations for effective UN coordination on those efforts. It will set its agenda based on requests by the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, or Member States on the "verge of lapsing or relapsing into conflict."

The creation of the Commission is important as a demonstration of international commitment to peacebuilding, but several aspects of its formation are problematic. The strong support that the Commission received from all levels of the UN ostensibly signals broad comprehension within the organization of the urgent need for it to expand peacebuilding capacity. Yet already the Commission is facing the same key obstacle to effectiveness that has plagued UN peace operations—insufficient resources. The Secretary-General proposed the creation of twenty-one new positions to staff the Commission and its Peacebuilding Support Office. The UN budget committee nixed this idea, however, preferring to stick to the language of the Summit outcome document, which advised that the Commission members come from current UN staff and utilize "existing resources."

It is unreasonable to expect the UN to take on such a significant new challenge without increasing its human and capital resources. Overarching reform efforts at the UN will attempt to streamline some facets of the organization, resulting in budgetary savings that could be reprogrammed towards efforts such as the Commission. But real increases in the UN budget will be necessary to give the Peacebuilding Commission the requisite resources. It is ironic that the process of creating the Commission, a response to the shortcomings of peacekeeping operations, is not incorporating one glaring lesson from those shortcomings—you get what you pay for. Turning conflict into peace is challenging even if those attempting to do it are highly trained and well-equipped. To undertake such a challenge without providing adequate funding invites failure.

The gap in resources extends further to the proposed Peacebuilding Fund, money for which would come from voluntary contributions. The High-Level Panel report released in late 2004 proposed \$250 million for the Fund. Even if countries contribute enough to match this figure, it cannot hope to meet the needs of conflict-affected countries. At the March 2004 Berlin conference, Afghanistan's government alone requested \$27.5 billion in aid over a seven-year period, nearly \$4 billion per year; the urgent needs of nations such as Sudan, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will increase exponentially the number of aid dollars required in the coming years.

An equally critical obstacle to the effective performance of the Commission is that it has no real authority to manage the conflict transition process. It has been designed to be a forum for discussion and coordination, but it has no executive management responsibility to assure the adherence of the multitude of UN agencies, international institutions, bilateral agencies, national and local agencies, and civil society organizations to an agreed-upon coherent and effective post-conflict plan. These institutions may choose to participate in the workings of the Commission or they may not, but the Commission will be able to do little to ensure cooperation. That may prove to be a major flaw in the design of this essential reform.

## REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ The member states of the United Nations allow the Peacebuilding Commission to live up to its potential by providing the funding, staff and the authority necessary for the Commission to be effective in resolving conflict and staving off future violence.
- ❑ The U.S. Congress act to ensure optimal funding for the Peacebuilding Commission by supporting an increased UN budget and by opposing any proposal to withhold funds to the UN.

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