

PBC ANNUAL SESSION: PARTNERSHIP FOR FINANCING FOR PEACE 2018

By Eleanor Bennett



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (centre) addresses the annual session of the Peacebuilding Commission on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Sahel region. At her left is Ion Jinga, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajormas)

On 12 November 2018, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), a body created to connect and fill in silos within the UN system, held its annual session to discuss Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in the Sahel region, with the primary focus on peace and development operations within the region. The purpose of the discussion was to improve partnerships and develop comprehensive policy for efficiency reforms or improved gender mainstreaming. The session's discussion featured grass roots organisations, civil society, UN missions, bodies, regional organisations and the private sector.

Following the mission of the Peacebuilding Commission, the main theme of the discussion was the need to better communicate between organisations and create a more comprehensive strategy within the region. Despite dedication to finding a way of doing so, participants barely suggested any viable alternatives to overcoming fragmentation. Other major themes were the seriousness of the threats of transnational crime, terrorism, and climate change, which pose specific challenges in the context of the situation in Sahel. The theme of inclusion was taken seriously, with both breakdown sessions dedicated to discussing the ways to better engage women, youth and local actors in peacebuilding.

Opening Session

The opening session featured six speakers, of these three mentioned women. The opening speech, by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission - H.E. [Dr. Ion Jinga](#), focused on the recent work of the PBC and that of some of the opening session speakers. The major issues raised were; the ongoing problems with extremism and terrorism, transnational crime, human trafficking and climate change. The major priorities identified were; the importance of increased collaboration and communication, support for the [SDGs](#) and [Agenda 2030](#), and the inclusion of women and young people in the peacebuilding process.

One of the themes was the importance of the inclusion of women, exemplified well by the Deputy Secretary General, [Amina J. Mohammed](#), stated that "The need to include women in peacebuilding processes is imperative." and dedicated much of her speech to advocating for the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding. Speaking on behalf of UNGA president [María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés](#), the Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso and Vice President of the UNGA, [Yemdaogo Eric Tiare](#), stated that "...we must ensure full participation of women and young people." The President of ECOSOC, [Inga Rhonda King](#), spoke at length about the importance of including women in peace processes and economic development.

Another key theme was a focus on terrorism and extremism, an example of this was the permanent representative of China and the current President of the Security Council,, [Ambassador Ma Zhaoxu](#), who focused his speech on advocating for a more comprehensive response to ongoing border issues and response to terrorism; his speech did not mention women.

Interactive Working Session 1: Partnership with key stakeholders at strategic and operational levels for coherent international support to the Sahel region.

This session was moderated by the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Sahel – [Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw](#), in his opening remarks he spoke about the importance of ending fragmentation between different organisations working in the Sahel and about the great potential for renewable energy resources in the region; although he mentioned women's participation, this was not the primary focus of his speech.

The importance of collaboration between the African Union (AU) and the UN specifically was raised by the majority of speakers, and many of them spoke more about different UN bodies and Missions as well as specific AU programmes. A significant proportion of speakers advocated for resource pooling by the different organisations working in the Sahel, however none posed a model, nor a potential timeline for doing this. The representative for Colombia advocated for the inclusion of local expertise and engagement, when formulating development and peacebuilding strategy. One of the examples of such collaboration was the [workshop hosted by Egypt](#) and aimed to provide a platform for national, regional and international actors to engage in peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel, and to deliberate on implementation improvements.

In terms of meaningful participation, Ms. Diago Deande President of Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region ([NOPSWECO](#)) spoke at length about the failure to protect women's human and economic rights within the Sahel, the importance of working towards emancipating women from economic and social barriers, and the disproportionate

effect poverty has on women. She also argued that it was vital to earmark funds specifically for programmes and projects supporting women's empowerment and that "Women are everywhere, and must be supported everywhere." The representatives for Canada, Norway and Italy all also stated their support for women's engagement. The session lacked Member State's comprehensive engagement with women's meaningful economic, democratic or peacebuilding participation. It is not enough that states voice their support, they must also take action, and understand the barriers that women face.

Interactive Working Session 2 *Empowering youth and women as agents of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Sahel region.*

This session was moderated by the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth – [Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake](#). In her opening remarks, she explained the importance of the meaningful participation of youth in peacebuilding and governance. The key points of the discussion included support for women's economic empowerment and participation in peace work. Another major theme was the impact of climate change on women, and strengthening capacity building of women to engage across different areas.

Another major trend was identifying unemployed and disinfranchised youth as being disproportionately likely to be recruited by extremist groups. A major theme was focusing on the empowerment of youth through education, particularly vocational education; many stated that there was an imperative need to invest in education but none mentioned a specifically earmarked fund, or a particular preventative educational initiative that had been successful in the past.

Ms. Diago Deande President of NOPSWECO in her speech outlined in detail the importance of women's economic, social, medical and land rights. Ms. Deande outlined also the necessity of allocating funding for women's projects and women's empowerment. Ms. Deande, like many of the representatives from Africa, expressed her frustration at international

funds not affecting life on the ground level; she argued that this could only be amended through comprehensive partnership with local and national organisations.

A major theme was women's empowerment. For example; Member of Parliament and Mayor of Dori, Burkina Faso – [Mr. Ahmed Aziz Diallo](#) outlined a project in Burkina Faso in which [women were given plants](#) and seeds as a to support their economic and social empowerment. Another example was [Paivi Kannisto](#), Peace and Security Head, from UN Women who detailed some of the priorities of UN women in the Sahel, and about the importance of educating women and girls.

Also related to the major theme of women's empowerment, Programme Associate Marina Kumskova made an [intervention](#) on behalf of WILPF, in which she outlined some of the discussion's gaps such as; protections for women's human rights advocates, and the importance of real and meaningful engagement with and funding for grassroots women's organisations.

Similar to the first interactive session, the second session lacked the coherence and comprehensiveness its participants advocated for. In the future, it would be more effective to outline a plan and timeline for policy and resource consolidation. It would also be advisable for more grassroots organisations to be part of the discussion, this would include more local, national and regional representatives from multiple sectors

Conclusion

The meeting offered a number of opportunities for Member States, civil society and UN representatives to strategise around building up a gender perspective in peacebuilding. Indeed, a great number of speakers have addressed the issue, talking about capacity building, providing the opportunities for women to engage from their own experiences, and ensuring that barriers for their meaningful participation are removed. The references from Sweden, Norway and the

Netherlands on these issues were particularly strong. Such an engagement is the foundation of policy change, and thus is the start of the change it needs to be.

However, many gaps that disproportionately affect the role of women in peacebuilding remained mis-prioritised. One of the key challenges was around financing women's engagement. Many Member States have referenced it as a key gap, however, only few provided viable solutions, including through fund allocation to the [Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund](#). Moreover, while financing such initiatives, relevant actors should be mindful of what agenda these allocations embrace. Often, funding into gender equality translates into a top-down strategy; otherwise, investing in women's civil society only covers engagement and does not address capacity. Member States must do more to learn from civil society on where and how money has to be allocated.

The engagement with civil society, despite being referenced as crucial for peacebuilding, remained limited in the convening. Only three civil society representatives spoke for the duration of the session. In future, the PBC should do more to ensure the participation of grassroots civil society representatives on all levels; more representatives must be invited to these meetings and listened to.

The Peacebuilding Commission has an important role to play in building partnerships and shared analysis: Resolution 2282 asks the Peacebuilding Commission to serve as a platform to convene all relevant actors, including civil society and women's groups, in order to develop and share good practices in peacebuilding (OP 4d). Today, we are here to strengthen your role as a "hinge mechanism" and ensure meaningful participation of local women civil society and consistent gender conflict analysis UN work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

In this regard, we recommend:

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- Ensure strong partnerships and meaningful participation of independent and diverse women civil society by fostering environments and safe spaces and continuing to support, strengthen, and deepen platforms for engagement such as with the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform;
- Strengthen gender analysis of peacebuilding work in the Sahel in a way that addresses masculinity, militarism, and power;
- Substantially increase financial resources for grassroots women human rights defenders and peace activists including by continuing and strengthening the Gender Promotion and Youth Promotion Initiatives of the Peacebuilding Fund and ensuring that these funds better reach grassroots organisations;
- Strengthen responses to attacks, intimidation, targeted violence and disappearances of civil society and call for appropriate mechanisms to be in place to prevent and address this violence, including around decisions, reporting, and visiting missions.