

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

Statement by H.E. Mr. Ivan Barbalčić, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations

I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Deputy Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, His Excellency José Luís Guterres, and the Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission, His Excellency Peter Wittig, for their statements.

Having come to recognize that institution-building plays a crucial role in preventing the renewal of conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina convened this debate to ensure that post-conflict institution-building, as such, becomes one of the priorities on the Security Council's agenda. We hope today's debate will highlight the importance of a more effective and coherent international response to this complex and challenging task.

Given the experience of my country, among others, I would like to draw the Council's attention to a few key issues.

Building accountable, legitimate and resilient institutions should be a strategic objective from the early stages of a peacebuilding process. The traditional approach leaves institution-building for a later stage, focusing first on providing humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance. However, it is usually too late to start developing institutional capacities when peacebuilding efforts are at the end stage. The immediate post-conflict period offers the greatest opportunity to strengthen the institutional capacities needed to see peacebuilding efforts through.

Priority has to be given to the development of those institutions that will prevent a relapse into conflict and secure the survival and renewed credibility and legitimacy of the State. While specific institutions that should be given primacy will vary from country to country, certain institutions are crucial to consolidating peace regardless of the country context, and significant efforts should be invested in their development. They are: first, institutions carrying out political functions — implementing peace agreements, carrying out elections, resolving political disputes peacefully and making and implementing laws and regulations; secondly, security and rule of law institutions; thirdly, public finance institutions; and fourthly, institutions entrusted with economic revitalization and the delivery of basic services.

The post-conflict institution-building process should be carried out based on the principle of the rule of law. All international and domestic actors in the process should fully respect a post-conflict country's constitution, its internal legal order, its international agreements, rights and obligations, including the peace agreement that ended the conflict, as well as all other applicable principles and norms of international law.

The success of post-conflict institution-building critically depends on forging between the international community and a post-conflict society a partnership that is based on a set of shared goals. When domestic and international stakeholders build consensus on a set of common goals, achieving those goals itself becomes a driving force for institution-building. That in turn stabilizes a post-conflict society by bringing all stakeholders to collaborate on a shared agenda until the risk of relapsing into conflict is eliminated.

Given the weakened and vulnerable state of post-conflict countries, the international community may initially have to assume much of the responsibility for post-conflict institution-building and, in certain cases, set up transitional institutions that carry out functions and provide services that would normally be rendered through domestic capacities. However, the objective of institution-building should be to progressively reduce dependence on the international community and promote self-reliance by creating stable, viable and responsive domestic institutions.

National ownership is a condition sine qua non for the establishment of effective institutions and the securing of sustainable peace. The transfer of responsibility from the international community to domestic actors and institutions is a very delicate and extremely important task that should be carried out in a gradual and timely manner. The installation of transitional administrative mechanisms by the international community should go hand in hand with enhancing the capacity of domestic institutions.

Peacebuilding missions should be allowed more flexibility in adjusting their institution-building activities in order to account for changes and developments on the ground. Coordination between missions mandated by the Security Council and country teams, including development agencies and donors, must be clearly defined in order to avoid redundancy and overlapping. The assessments of the institution-building process in regular reports of Council-mandated missions need to be improved. That should also be taken into consideration when drafting resolutions for renewing mission mandates or peacebuilding configurations.

The Security Council should make greater use of the advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission, in particular with regard to the development of viable and accountable institutions, in supporting domestic stakeholders in the countries on its agenda, identifying priority institutions to be developed and determining existing capacity gaps that require immediate and long-term support from the United Nations and the international community as a whole.

Allow me to offer two examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first is our defence reform, which started in 2003 and resulted in unified modern armed forces that are operating under civilian command and with democratic oversight in accordance with commonly adopted standards. Several factors greatly contributed to the success of this process: political will and the consensus of domestic stakeholders in the first place, followed by extensive consultations, the involvement of all relevant domestic and international stakeholders, a proper and well-executed strategy, clear and coherent standards, good timing and a sufficient level of financing.

The second example is our electoral process, which in the first few post-Dayton years was organized with the extensive support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The responsibility for the electoral process was gradually transferred to domestic authorities, so that Bosnia and Herzegovina today has full ownership of this process and the capacity to conduct fair, transparent and credible elections.

I would like to conclude by stressing that coordinated, rapid action to support post-conflict Governments in building credible and accountable institutions is of critical importance to the success of a peacebuilding process as a whole. If properly executed, such action helps restore security, legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness, thus delivering clear peace dividends. Post-conflict institution-building is a complex and demanding process, involving multiple stakeholders and the need to find a balance between achieving short-term results and long-term capacity development. The search for optimal solutions that achieve synergy in this multifaceted endeavour never ends.