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Sustaining Peace: How can human rights help?

2016 – 2020 Retrospective

by Florence Foster
in collaboration with OHCHR

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“This peacebuilding analysis or sustaining peace lens is really important, and it did bring back issues onto the table that had been forgotten – such as transitional justice, natural resources management—bringing them back into the bigger picture, the longer-term conflict trajectory of the country.”

—UN counterpart in Kyrgyzstan

“It's really useful as we think about our own peacebuilding priorities, to see [UPR] recommendations that are thematically relevant to our own priorities and that are at the same time nationally owned and accepted by the government – hopefully, this can be a basis to explore stronger collaboration at the country level. It also helps us think through how to address common challenges.”

—NGO counterpart in Kenya

Cover photo: “Palais des Nations, Geneva” (UN Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré)

Executive Summary

The 2015 Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) Review was pivotal in birthing the concept of sustaining peace, which was subsequently defined by the 2016 twin resolutions as preventing the “outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.” Since then, the UN system, numerous Member States and other stakeholders have come a long way in embracing its conceptual framework through reforms and initiatives aimed at generating greater system-wide coherence to sustain peace. There are, despite this progress, ongoing challenges.

The concept of sustaining peace has been increasingly integrated into the UN’s work, as evidenced by its inclusion in more than 300 intergovernmental outcome documents since 2015. Steps towards linking human rights to the work of other intergovernmental bodies in the development and particularly the peace and security pillars have also been positive, albeit cautious. The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has increased engagement and interaction with other intergovernmental bodies while the Human Rights Council’s (HRC) engagement on prevention has led to a standing yearly invitation to the PBC Chair. Member State initiatives, such as the 13 June 2016 appeal on putting human rights at the heart of conflict prevention and the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucuses, are further attempts to continue bridging current divides. A joint workplan that involves all parts of OHCHR and PBSO is also working towards more joined-up engagement at Headquarters and in country at the policy, institutional and programmatic levels. Furthermore, the UN Secretary-General’s development reforms provide significant opportunities to strengthen the integration of human rights in country-level programming. Importantly, policies and reports have noted the need for—and led to constructive engagement of—the peace and security and development pillars with all human rights mechanisms, beyond the UPR.

However, significant challenges of integrating human rights and sustaining peace remain—and some are systemic in nature both at the policy and programmatic levels. Ensuring stable, predictable, conflict-sensitive and sustained financing for peacebuilding that encourages collaborations across sectors and pillars remains critical. Furthermore, the potential for the Secretary-General’s development reforms to empower more independent

Resident Coordinator Offices and enable UN country teams to take more strategic and coherent approaches to sustain peace is weakened by capacity and resource gaps. These gaps continue to impede their ability to respond to significant prevention challenges on the ground and ensure coherence across the three pillars. Furthermore, more should be done to foster closer and more institutionalized collaboration between Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs) and Human Rights Advisers (HRAs) at the national, regional and global levels, which could help build a community of practice and broaden understanding of the overlaps in mandates. Additionally, the UN should do more to establish consistent, sustained, and transparent modalities to ensure civil society inclusion in long-term policy developments relating to sustaining peace, as well as strong partnerships with local actors. Continuing tensions and divergent views among Member States also remain—and are arguably more entrenched—while there is a continuing lack of awareness and understanding of the complementarities between human rights and sustaining peace. This, coupled with the continued misconception of human rights actions as encroachments into matters of national sovereignty, compounds practical challenges in implementing the sustaining peace agenda.

Building an evidence base to highlight the relevance and added value of human rights approaches and actions, and how they should be applied in joined-up and multidimensional sustaining peace efforts, is therefore a key area for continued action. Human rights bodies and mechanisms should also continue to reflect on how sustaining peace functions can be integrated into respective mandates. To those ends, further collaboration is needed, not only between traditional and specialized human rights and peacebuilding actors, but with a broader range of stakeholders, including within the development, humanitarian, and disarmament communities. In parallel, it will remain important to continue providing the necessary spaces for joint learning and understanding to mitigate concerns of overstepping mandates and risks of the agenda being misused and potentially undermining state sovereignty.

The implementation of the sustaining peace agenda should therefore continue with care—emboldened by its reaffirmation by Member States in the 2020 twin resolutions—but crucially should engage with ongoing concerns through building evidence, ensuring open dialogue and bridging divides.

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Foreword

This paper is based on joint work and learning undertaken by the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in New York over different projects between 2016 and 2020. They began with a narrower focus on the UPR¹—given its specific reference in the 2016 twin resolutions on the PBA Review²—as a gateway for advocacy and attention on the intrinsic links between the three pillars of the UN. Primarily, the projects sought to explore and illustrate through evidence how, with an alternative use of existing resources, the prevention of both destructive conflict and human rights violations could be made more effective and mutually reinforcing. The projects also aimed to raise awareness of the sustaining peace concept, inform through engagement, and build relationships across civil society, Member State representatives and the UN from the human rights, peace and security, and development communities. Over the years, increased engagement with Member States and other stakeholders provided valuable insights into the potential role of human rights in the UN’s work to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of crisis and conflict.

This paper will reflect on a selection of key developments, opportunities, and challenges in integrating human rights and sustaining peace for joined-up action across the three UN pillars. It will suggest areas for strengthening collaboration and coherence, including through effective engagement with human rights actors and mechanisms, and highlight questions to be considered in further work. The paper does not claim to be comprehensive but is intended to be the basis for continued reflection and discussions following the 2020 PBA Review.

Project Outline: “The UPR as a process to sustain peace”

Consecutive projects by QUNO in Geneva and then jointly with OHCHR in New York had several parallel components: focusing on a total of nine pilot countries undergoing their UPR review between 2016 and 2020; and engaging in policy and awareness-raising

around the concept of sustaining peace through the UPR and beyond. The pilot countries represented different stages of the peace continuum—from early preventive work, peacekeeping to post-conflict reconciliation and armed violence. UN country teams and Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)-supported projects were hosted by some of the pilot countries. The intention was to bring peacebuilding perspectives into the UPR by identifying local peacebuilding organizations in a first instance, and later also UN counterparts and state ministries; and supporting their engagement with the UPR process, including through formal submissions on peacebuilding priority concerns. One country visit was organised to support that process in 2019.

In parallel, QUNO and OHCHR engaged in meetings, such as a briefing together with the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform for diplomats ahead of the High-Level Mainstreaming Panel at the 34th Session of the HRC and in the intersessional seminars on the HRC’s contribution to the prevention of human rights violations—pursuant to resolution 38/18 and leading to resolution 45/31. QUNO and OHCHR also facilitated discussions and consultations on human rights as part of the 2020 PBA Review in Geneva and New York as well as informal exchanges with diplomats and civil society in both Geneva and New York.

These activities helped generate lessons and identify pathways forward on the broader scope of engagement between the human rights, peace and security, and development pillars of the UN. The findings of such projects exploring multiyear processes are necessarily limited regarding long-term impact. However, the dialogues that were started, and the challenges and opportunities identified, provide a solid basis for further work to better integrate human rights and sustaining peace.

1 [QUNO \(2018\) Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace.](#)

2 [A/RES/70/262 – S/RES/2282](#)

Background: A Brief History of Sustaining Peace

This section provides a brief overview and history of sustaining peace as a policy framework—giving the backdrop and timeline upon which the following section on progress, challenges, and opportunities for human rights and sustaining peace can be better understood.

Following UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report 'An Agenda for Peace', peacebuilding was understood within the UN as a set of exclusively post-conflict activities.³ Prevention of destructive conflict—and with it the integration of human rights in conflict prevention—was not given sufficient emphasis within the UN system despite periodic calls for less reactive policies and actions, which are widely acknowledged as being more costly and less effective.

The Peacebuilding Architecture and Human Rights Architecture—parallel evolutions

In 2005, there was increased recognition of the need for new institutions to strengthen strategic coherence in addressing conflict-affected countries, and to bridge the gap between international political, security and development efforts.⁴

The PBA was born at the 2005 World Summit to build synergies and coherence in the UN's institutional and Member-State-led peacebuilding efforts. The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was established to “bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery,” along with a Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and a standing fund for peacebuilding—the PBF.⁵ The 2005 World Summit outcome also resolved to create a new human rights intergovernmental body replacing the Commission on Human Rights. The General Assembly formally established the HRC as a subsidiary organ in 2006 through resolution 60/251.

Together, the PBA and the HRC filled what then Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the “gaping hole”

in international institutions.⁶ Tabled Security Council reform initiatives were not adopted, however.

Pivotal PBA Review 2015

In 2015, the 10-year review of the PBA considered the *entirety* of the UN's work on peacebuilding for the first time. The Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) tasked with reviewing the PBA's “functioning, resources, and modes of engagement” and, importantly, its links with UN system entities, emphasized from the outset that the “principal *raison d'être*” of the creation and existence of the UN was precisely to “sustain international peace in all its dimensions.”⁷ It was in the AGE report that the concept of ‘sustaining peace’ was first introduced, with the Experts urging that, for the UN to fulfil its mandate, work to sustain peace must be seen as a “systemic challenge”—one that goes far beyond the limited scope of the entities created in 2005. Indeed, the report underlined the urgent need to engage all three UN pillars; overcome the UN system's fragmented processes and institutions; and deliver on the commitment to prevent violent conflict in UN work.⁸

Sustaining Peace Resolutions: A Paradigm Shift

The intergovernmental discussions that followed translated the AGE's recommendations into consensual policy decisions, namely the twin resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council on the review of the PBA.⁹ The concept of sustaining peace—as first articulated in the AGE report and integrated into these resolutions—is defined as an inherently political process aimed at preventing the “outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development”—a concern “at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions.”¹⁰ Sustaining peace was also understood as both a goal and process to build

3 [An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking & peace-keeping.](#)

4 Dan Smith (2013) Study on the impact of the Peacebuilding Commission: To Play to its Strengths.

5 [A/RES/60/180 - S/RES/1645](#)

6 In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All ([A/59/2005](#)).

7 Gert Rosenthal (2017) Reflections on the Meaning of “Sustaining Peace”, IPI Global Observatory.

8 [A/69/968 - S/2015/490](#)

9 [A/RES/70/262 - S/RES/2282](#): Preambular Paragraph 7.

10 Ibid

a common vision of society—emphasising inclusivity as key to ensuring that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account. Crucially, the need to address root causes was put forward, while adding that this was a shared responsibility of governments and national stakeholders, which should flow through all three UN pillars.¹¹ The twin resolutions also echoed concerns about fragmentation in the UN system and the lack of coherence and institutional collaboration that hinders effective prevention of human rights violations and destructive conflict in a range of societies. Specifically, the resolutions encouraged all Member States participating in the UPR process “to consider the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding, as appropriate.”¹²

This was a significant paradigm shift and a departure from the 1992 vision of peacebuilding within the UN—aligning it with longstanding civil society theory and practice in which peacebuilding was seldom narrowly confined to a post-conflict activity. The universality expressed in the 2030 Agenda, where each and every State is responsible for sustainable development, was also echoed with the task of sustaining peace similarly defined as a relevant national concern for all States.¹³

Peacebuilding Architecture Review 2020

The Secretary-General was tasked with submitting detailed reports on sustaining peace in connection with the 2015 Review and ahead of the 2020 Review.

A first report by the Secretary-General published in 2018 provided an “update on the progress made and contained specific recommendations to address existing gaps.”¹⁴ The report affirmed the importance of the human rights normative framework as a “critical foundation for peace” and recognized human rights violations as indicators of root causes of destructive conflict, on the basis of which preventive support through technical assistance and capacity building should be provided to Member States; it also affirmed the importance of civil society in peacebuilding. Notably, the report went beyond the specific reference to the UPR in the twin resolutions and extended the call to all the human rights mechanisms, including special procedures and treaty bodies, while also

encouraging a strengthened role for the PBC in enhancing coherence through its cross-pillar mandate. The 2019 report noted progress in efforts by UN intergovernmental bodies to integrate the concept of sustaining peace.¹⁵ It also elaborated various measures to strengthen coherence across the system, including with respect to joined-up analysis, risk monitoring and prevention and regional strategies. Importantly, the report called for greater use by Member States of, and strengthened UN system-wide support for, implementation of human rights recommendations in a collective effort to advance both the 2030 Agenda and conflict prevention.

Building on and complementing previous reports, the 2020 report¹⁶ highlighted results achieved in implementation of the 2016 resolutions and the Secretary-General’s management, peace and security, and development system reforms.¹⁷ The report reaffirmed the interlinkages between the UN pillars and the need for cross-pillar approaches, again calling for greater use of the human rights mechanisms and highlighting examples from a range of human rights projects supported by the PBF. Notably, given the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the report underlined the urgent need for multidimensional, coordinated and conflict-sensitive responses and whole-of-society approaches. The report also reaffirmed the importance of civil society in peacebuilding, particularly in the global context of shrinking civic space, and committed the UN to promoting and expanding a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

On the basis of formal intergovernmental negotiations—held virtually due to the constraints imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic—follow-up twin resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly and Security Council in December 2020.¹⁸ While some argued that there was no expressed need—or appetite—for more extensive resolutions, the formal process brought to the fore political dynamics and tensions between Member States and regional groups, and confirmed their expressed preferences for a simpler ‘procedural+’ text. The resulting text builds on previous resolutions without re-opening agreed language and concepts, and refers

11 [A/72/707 - S/2018/43](#): Paragraphs 1 and 2.

12 [A/RES/70/262 - S/RES/2282](#): Operative Paragraph 11.

13 [A/RES/70/1](#)

14 [A/72/707 - S/2018/43](#)

15 [A/73/890 - S/2019/448](#)

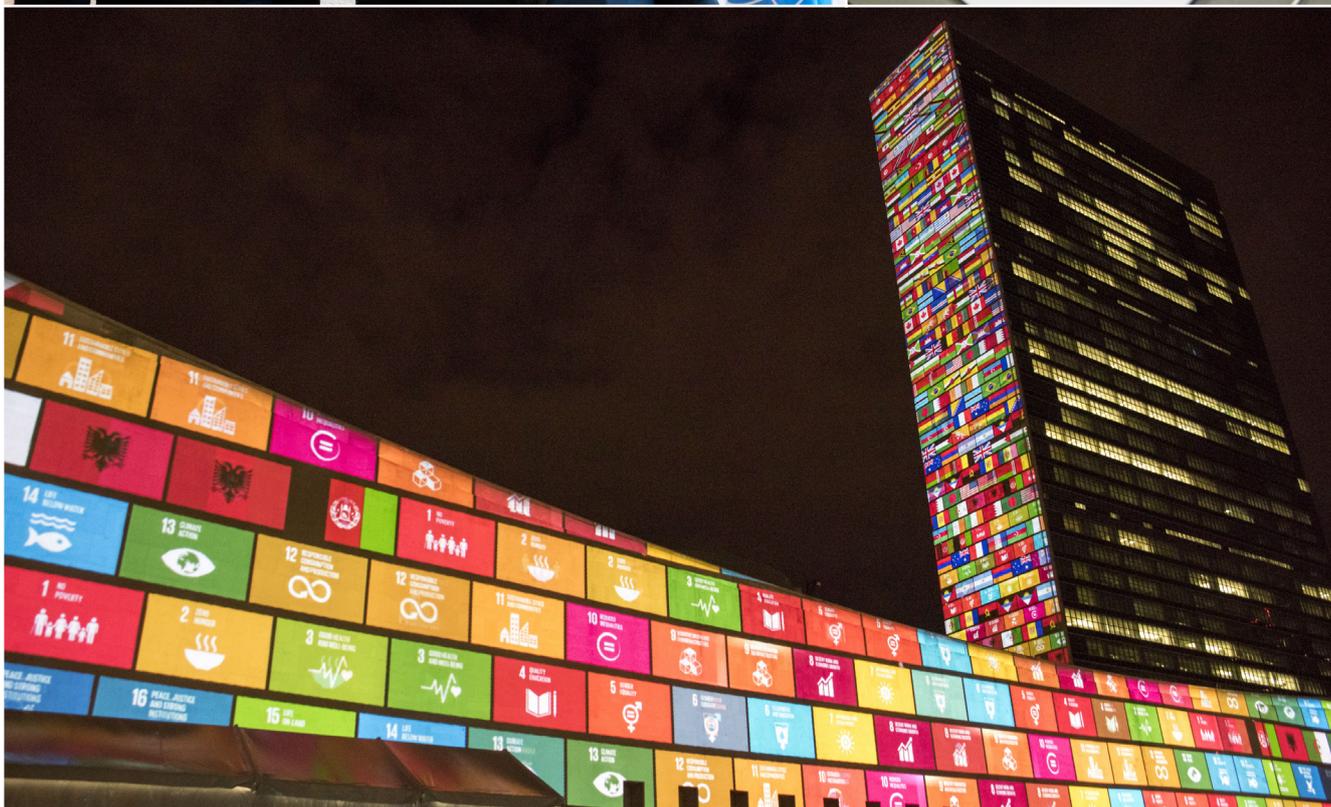
16 [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#)

17 <https://reform.un.org/>

18 [A/RES/75/201 - S/RES/2558](#)

to a select set of developments since the last review, such as on women, peace and security; youth, peace and security and the need for sustainable financing of the PBA; it also institutionalized reporting on sustaining peace. Consequently, the resolutions do not include new language nor do they include detailed references to human rights. Through these resolutions, however, Member States importantly recommitted to sustaining peace as a concept and as an agenda. This is key to continuing joint learning and understanding, enhancing integrated and coherent approaches to sustaining peace efforts—including on human rights—as well as strengthening the relevant linkages between the UN pillars.

In the context of what has been seen by many as the most inclusive and expansive review process yet—with inputs from the PBC,¹⁹ from the group of Independent Eminent Persons and numerous thematic and regional consultations—the 2020 report of the Secretary General as the main UN contribution to the 2020 PBA Review, and the resolutions as its main output, cannot be seen as the sole milestone. Previous reports, as well as the aforementioned submissions leading up to the formal review throughout 2020, including those by OHCHR and other UN entities, as well as from civil society organisations, should be considered together.²⁰ They complement and add context and depth in understanding where the sustaining peace agenda is today and should be going in the future.



Clockwise from top left: Secretary-General António Guterres and HRC President Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger (UN Photo/ Jean-Marc Ferré); UN Sustaining Peace document (UN Photo); Projections on Sustainable Development Goals for the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations (UN Photo / Cia Pak)

Progress, Challenges & Opportunities for Human Rights & Sustaining Peace

This section provides an overview of the lessons learned from the QUNO-OHCHR projects on implementing operative paragraph 11 of the 2016 twin resolutions [see page 5 and 13 for more details], primarily through our engagement with stakeholders, including civil society, UN country teams and Member States working closely with the PBA.

The UN system, numerous Member States and other stakeholders working alongside the UN have come a long way in embracing *the conceptual framework* offered by the 2016 twin resolutions and now reaffirmed by the 2020 twin resolutions. This represented a major shift in understanding that sustaining peace is essential for preventing the “outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development”, as well as in action within and beyond the UN system.²¹ While not yet fully institutionalised, reforms and other initiatives are driving progress towards greater system-wide coherence to sustain peace.

However, the significant challenge of integrating human rights and sustaining peace remains—and it is systemic in nature. While some point to the continuing tensions and divergent views among Member States and fragmentation across the UN’s three pillars as the main barriers, others point to the continuing lack of awareness and understanding of their linkages and complementarities, and the continued misconception of human rights actions as encroachments into matters of national sovereignty.

I. Policy Frameworks that Institutionalize Sustaining Peace

Since the adoption of the 2016 twin resolutions, the concept of sustaining peace has been increasingly integrated into the UN’s work as evidenced by its inclusion in more than 300 intergovernmental outcome documents since 2015.²² This has contributed to broadening acceptance of the need for multidimensional approaches at all

stages of the conflict cycle and closer collaboration and coherence across the three pillars. Consequently, there is also increased recognition of the relevance of human rights in addressing root causes, triggers and drivers of crisis and conflict, and in anticipating or responding to contemporary challenges and risks, which has opened space for broader human rights engagement.

1.1 Human Rights in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions

There are twice the number of Security Council resolutions in 2019 compared to 2015 that integrate the concept of sustaining peace.²³ General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the UN system affirms that UN entities in the development system contribute to sustaining peace²⁴ and recognizes the contribution of human rights for sustainable development.²⁵ Sustaining peace has also been central in advancing the agendas on women, peace and security and on youth, peace and security. Coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, PBO and UN Women conducted a system-wide review of the Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding adopted in 2010. The Plan has now been revised to align with sustaining peace and the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and with the accountability framework on women, peace and security.²⁶

1.2 The Role of the Human Rights Council in Prevention and Sustaining Peace

Developments at the HRC also offer important opportunities to demonstrate how human rights interventions, tools and mechanisms ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of prevention and sustaining peace efforts. Reflecting on its role and mandate, the HRC discussed for the first time the contribution of human rights to peacebuilding at its annual panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming in 2017.²⁷

19 [A/74/935-S/2020/645](#)

20 <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/2020-review-un-peace-building-architecture>

21 [A/RES/70/262](#) – [S/RES/2282](#); Preambular Paragraph 7.

22 [A/74/976](#) - [S/2020/773](#); Paragraph 10.

23 Ibid

24 [A/RES/75/233](#); Operative Paragraph 36(b).

25 Ibid; Operative Paragraph 28.

26 [A/74/976](#) - [S/2020/773](#); Paragraph 37.

27 [‘Human Rights Council holds high-level panel on mainstreaming human rights with a focus on the contribution of human rights to](#)

In 2018, the HRC adopted resolution 38/18, which elaborated on its role and that of its mechanisms in preventing human rights violations and contributing to sustaining peace. The report by the rapporteurs appointed pursuant to that resolution²⁸ contains proposals to that end, including: the official sharing of HRC reports with the Security Council and/or the PBC through the Secretary-General; fostering the working relationship between the HRC, special procedures and the PBC; the development of a comprehensive framework linking peacebuilding activities to human rights prevention, also as guidance for the development of peacebuilding priority plans; and the inclusion of the recommendations of HRC mechanisms in conflict analyses and needs assessments for PBF-supported projects.²⁹ The follow-up HRC resolution 45/31 includes some of these proposals and calls for a strengthening of UN human rights early warning and action capacity, with the High Commissioner for Human Rights tasked with providing early warning briefings to the HRC. The resolution also calls for HRC reports to be systematically drawn to the attention of relevant UN bodies and invites the PBC Chair to brief the HRC annually on its work. Implementation of these provisions offers opportunities to enhance institutional collaboration and forge closer linkages between the human rights and peace and security pillars on prevention.

In addition, HRC resolution 42/6 on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights mandates a study (due in 2021) on the contribution of the special procedures in assisting States and other stakeholders in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses. HRC resolution 42/17 on human rights and transitional justice mandates an OHCHR report (also due in 2021) on how addressing gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law through transitional justice measures can contribute to sustaining peace and the realisation of SDG 16 on inclusive and peaceful societies.

Also of note, HRC resolution 45/28 on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 urges Member States and the UN system to ensure

women's participation in all levels of decision-making and implementation of conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, post-conflict reconstruction, peacekeeping, peace-making and peacebuilding. The resolution also calls for the inclusion, by the High Commissioner, of relevant information in country-specific work and thematic reports, and for consultations to be held with women human rights defenders, women's organizations and women peacebuilders. An OHCHR report on mainstreaming this issue in the work of the HRC and its mechanisms is mandated for 2021.

1.3 Call to Action for Human Rights

Rooted in the concept of sustaining peace, the Secretary-General's prevention agenda, launched in 2017, includes among its key elements, strengthening UN early warning and early action on preventing violent conflict and advancing the preventive approach to human rights; this includes support to Member States to tackle root causes of conflict and react earlier and more effectively in addressing human rights concerns.³⁰ The priority focus on prevention underpinned the Secretary-General's management, peace and security and development reforms, resulting in the establishment of an integrated prevention platform and the use of cross-pillar coordination mechanisms, such as the Regional Monthly Review mechanism, aimed at more joined-up analysis, planning and programming across the system and enhanced UN capacities at Headquarters and in country. In line with this agenda, OHCHR included prevention among four cross-cutting themes in its Management Plan for 2018-2021 and is implementing a more integrated approach that addresses the linkages between prevention of violence, social unrest and conflict, and prevention of human rights violations, with the promotion of equality and inclusivity, as also framed by the 2030 Agenda.³¹

While not directly referencing sustaining peace, the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, launched in February 2020, echoes in many ways the need for system-wide approaches to global challenges and the need to better integrate human rights in fulfilling the UN's mandate on prevention. In his call, the Secretary-General sets out overarching guiding principles and seven priority areas for action:

[peacekeeping](#)'.

28 [A/HRC/43/37](#)

29 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Contribution of Human Rights to Building and Sustaining Peace.](#)

30 [United Nations Secretary General, Remarks to the Human Rights Council \(27 February 2017\); https://www.un.org/sg/en/priorities/prevention.shtml.](#)

31 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Contribution of Human Rights to Building and Sustaining Peace.](#)

(1) sustainable development; (2) times of crisis; (3) gender equality and equal rights for women; (4) public participation and civic space; (5) future generations, especially climate justice; (6) collective action; and (7) new human rights frontiers.³² While several of the actions listed are not new and have already been considered by intergovernmental bodies, such as the HRC and General Assembly, operationalisation of the Call to Action presents a unique opportunity to strengthen human rights across the UN system as a shared responsibility. For instance, under the ‘Collective Action’ priority area, a practical guidance on UN engagement with the UPR mechanism was developed and issued in September 2020.³³ With respect to the priority area on ‘Rights in Times of Crisis’, the Call to Action also underlines the centrality of human rights considerations in prevention and outlines various areas of action including through continued engagement with the Security Council; the systematic use of human rights analysis to inform mandate implementation and/or engagement by UN Resident Coordinators and country teams; and the provision of necessary human rights capacity and expertise, including through an expansion of the presence of HRAs. The development of a common Agenda for Protection will also be key in articulating a common UN policy and operational framework for prevention grounded in human rights protection.

However, while there have been developments for the better in terms of support and integration of the sustaining peace agenda—some of which are outlined above—concerns from some Member States remain. Such concerns include its potential to overload the UN as system-wide coherence and cross-pillar work are pushed to their limits. It has also been alleged that elements of these policy frameworks significantly alter or undermine mandates. Furthermore, often mentioned are the risks of the possible misuse of the agenda to undermine state sovereignty, securitize or militarize development, or to militarize responses in fragile or conflict-affected countries.³⁴ Some concerns stem from questions about the impact on the UN’s effectiveness from more restrictive conceptualizations of human rights and the role of the UN in their implementation; others

are the result of larger geopolitical dynamics at the UN.³⁵ In addition conceptual disagreements remain—notably about the scope of the sustaining peace concept and its applicability to all countries—beyond those affected by conflict and fragility. These concerns should not be dismissed outright but rather addressed with sensitivity to and understanding of divergent viewpoints; there is a critical need to bridge divides, through dialogue and inclusive communication and outreach, notably by the Secretary-General and Member States, coupled with the careful implementation of the sustaining peace agenda.

2. Comprehensive Cross-Pillar Approaches to Peace

2.1 Linkages between Intergovernmental Bodies

While some Member States are particularly cautious about linking human rights to the work of other intergovernmental bodies in the development and particularly the peace and security pillars, the persistent disconnect between Geneva and New York also plays a part. Member State initiatives, such as the Friends of Sustaining Peace,³⁶ the 13 June 2016 appeal on putting human rights at the heart of conflict prevention and the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucuses, are attempts to bridge current divides.³⁷

HRC outcomes are formally reported to the General Assembly’s plenary and Third Committee with interactive dialogues held annually at its main session with special procedure mandate-holders and treaty body chairs, while the Fifth Committee considers related administrative and budgetary matters. There is often a disconnect between Third and Fifth Committee delegates—even within the same Permanent Mission—which compounds the Geneva and New York divide. At the same time, interaction and collaboration between the HRC and other intergovernmental bodies, for example the PBC and Security Council, remain limited or are ad-hoc. In addition, the work of the human rights mechanisms is not systematically integrated into the discussions or outcomes of these bodies. The HRC and PBC could create space for informal discussions, one option could be to choose country situations or thematic issues of mutual concern or interest, and to invite representatives

32 [United Nations \(2020\), The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights.](#)

33 [OHCHR, Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at country level.](#)

34 [QUANO & GPPAC \(2018\), Building Sustainable Peace: How inclusivity, partnerships and a reinforced UN Peacebuilding Architecture will support delivery.](#)

35 *Ibid*

36 Mexico heads an approximately 40-member Group of Friends for Sustaining Peace.

37 [Switzerland launches the appeal of June 13th to put Human Rights at the Heart of Conflict Prevention: “Security and human rights make a perfect match.”](#)

of the HRC to participate at the PBC and vice versa. If this approach appears unfeasible in the present political climate, identifying countries with positive experiences under the HRC's agenda item 10 to speak at the PBC could be a less ambitious initial step.

The PBC has increased engagement and interaction with other intergovernmental bodies—namely the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the General Assembly and the Security Council. It has also expanded its advisory role with the Security Council,³⁸ including through written advice, particularly with regard to the review and drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.³⁹ The PBC has also increased focus on issues related to women, peace and security and youth, peace and security while increasing the range of countries and regions under its consideration including through briefings by PBF recipient countries. The PBC could also explore its relevance to the Fifth Committee in its advisory role in critical peacebuilding contexts.⁴⁰ Also worth noting is that some Member States have come before the PBC and highlighted national efforts to promote and protect human rights as a means to build and sustain peace. Thus, while the PBC does not formally have 'human rights' meetings, its country-specific discussions offer opportunities to address human rights issues with the approval or at the suggestion of the country concerned. Whether this practice can be enhanced and encouraged in future years remains to be seen.

The annual briefing by the PBC Chair to the HRC will be a concrete step forward given past challenges in initiating interaction between the two bodies—as part of the implementation of HRC resolution 45/31. This provides an entry point for increasing formal and informal interactions through briefings and meetings at principal and expert levels, which could see more regular exchange of good practices and information. Building on the 2020 twin resolutions, which called on the PBC to continue strengthening its advisory, bridging and convening role,⁴¹ opportunities for innovation in its working methods and practices could also be explored to promote more integrated and coherent approaches. Using good practice examples from the PBC's consideration of the Gambia and Liberia, human

rights information can be more regularly integrated into the PBC's work; for example, briefings or reports by the special procedures could be considered on relevant thematic or country-specific issues. Also, in this regard and given the PBC's efforts to enhance partnerships with a range of stakeholders, such as regional and sub-regional organizations or international financial institutions including through interactive dialogues,⁴² the increased participation and involvement of civil society, women's and youth organizations, and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) should be encouraged. This is inherent to promoting national ownership of sustaining peace efforts and can strengthen coordination and coherence across sectors.

Of priority for advocacy and strategic engagement is identifying and utilising available entry points or thematic overlaps offered by relevant intergovernmental outcomes and other policy instruments to broaden awareness of how the human rights framework should be applied in joined-up and multidimensional sustaining peace efforts. While the policy framework for sustaining peace has driven efforts for greater institutional coherence, inclusion and collaboration across the pillars, more progress is needed to address continuing fragmentation at UN Headquarters and at the country level. Building the evidence base of the relevance of a human rights-based approach and harnessing the knowledge and experience of UN partners and national stakeholders are also important in this regard.

2.2 Human Rights Mechanisms

While the UPR is the only human rights mechanism referenced in the 2016 twin resolutions, subsequent policies and reports have noted the need for the peace and security and development pillars to make better use of *all* the human rights mechanisms. These include the 2018, 2019 and 2020 reports of the Secretary-General on sustaining peace—echoed strongly by the letter from the Independent Eminent Persons addressed to the Secretary-General.⁴³ Furthermore, the Secretary-General's Call to Action also highlighted the importance of collective action in responding to multiple global crises, while the HRC report prepared pursuant to resolution 38/18 suggests ways to operationalise system-wide preventive responses, in particular using the human rights mechanisms.

38 In accordance with Presidential Statements [S/PRST/2017/27](#) and [S/PRST/2018/20](#).

39 Ibid: Paragraph 13.

40 [Identical letters dated 6 July 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council: Page 8, Paragraph 1.](#)

41 [A/RES/75/201 - S/RES/2558: Operative Paragraph 2.](#)

42 [Joint Statement of the Peacebuilding Commission and the World Bank \(30 June 2017\).](#)

43 [A/74/94 - S/2020/67](#)

It should be noted, however, that engagement with and implementation of the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms should be approached holistically and in a coherent manner—through national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up for instance.⁴⁴ The analyses derived from their work, as well as their recommendations—identifying root causes and drivers of crisis; proposing responses to mitigate risks and prevent the lapse or relapse to conflict; and providing a platform for dialogue and collaboration across sectors at the international and national levels—are complementary and mutually-reinforcing.⁴⁵

The Universal Periodic Review

As observed in and encouraged by the QUNO-OHCHR projects, the UPR is increasingly recognized as a platform and process for facilitating national dialogue, a key feature of peacebuilding, and for inclusive context analysis through the universality of rights addressed. The UPR thus serves as a bridge between human rights and sustaining peace.

The UPR cycle as participatory process for engagement and dialogue.

The inclusivity, universality and peer nature of the process have not only resulted in its universal acceptance by Member States and by a range of stakeholders, but have also opened space for increased public participation, dialogue and collaboration on human rights issues at the national and international levels. The UPR process can enable collaboration and trust-building between different segments of a population, civil society and other national stakeholders with the State, as well as across sectors and with the international community. These are crucial to address complex and multidimensional challenges and issues relevant to human rights and sustaining peace. This happens through the three-strand input for review from (1) Member States, (2) UN entities and UN country teams, and (3) civil society and NHRIs who can also submit jointly.⁴⁶ Additionally, the UPR cycle provides opportunities for dialogue through national consultations; joint submission processes; pre-session consultations in-country and in Geneva; questions in advance processes; the UPR Working

Group session itself; bilateral discussions with States that wish to or have posed recommendations either in-country, or in Geneva, New York, or other UN regional or international hubs; and the adoption of the UPR outcome by the HRC.

As part of the projects, peacebuilding organisations were encouraged to participate in in-country pre-sessions and follow-up discussions and in pre-sessions in Geneva. This facilitated the development of accepted recommendations that could be leveraged to open space for dialogue with the government concerned. It also enabled human rights actors at the country level to include other perspectives and consider their possible implications on the longer-term conflict trajectory of the country (and vice versa), while similarly enabling those working on human rights at the international level to be exposed to different viewpoints.

Further good practices include the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucus in Geneva increasing engagement—through QUNO and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform initially and now separately—to ensure prevention-oriented discussions with peacebuilding experts ahead of select pre-sessions, the first of which took place in October 2020. This follows the precedents established by others, including discussions convened by the International Service for Human Rights on business and human rights issues, and those organised by the Permanent Mission of Canada on women, peace and security issues in the margins of UPR pre-sessions.

Lastly, when recommendations are accepted by States under review, they can provide important entry points for discussion between governments, the UN and civil society on areas for engagement, including technical assistance and advice, and can be integrated into national action plans and/or UN and civil society programming. They also offer a space for dialogue on the measures needed to address human rights challenges or gaps, in support of governments, including those that have a direct bearing on peacebuilding efforts and in realizing the SDGs.⁴⁷ For instance, UPR recommendations can inform the preparation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and Common Country Analyses (CCAs), Humanitarian Response Plans and other instruments to help countries address national priorities and gaps

44 [OHCHR \(2016\) National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up: A Practical Guide to Effective State Engagement with International Human Rights Mechanisms.](#)

45 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Contribution of Human Rights to Building and Sustaining Peace.](#)

46 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Universal Periodic Review and Sustaining Peace.](#)

47 *Ibid*

in meeting international commitments.⁴⁸ This enables state actors, the private sector and communities to come together, exchange and build relationships and understanding around specific legislation that may impact them differently. The process could also identify risks and pathways for mitigation, prevent misunderstandings and manage expectations further down the line.

UPR as an inclusive thematic platform to bridge human rights and peacebuilding.

The value of the UPR inherently lies in the universality of rights covered. Different stages of the process provide valuable information that can be used to assess risk factors for crisis and conflict: both underlying root causes and potential triggers, including structural inequalities and discrimination; highlight gaps and propose responses to mitigate risks in the longer term.⁴⁹ The human rights issues contained in UPR reports and recommendations often reflect the analyses and recommendations of other human rights mechanisms along with inputs received from a range of stakeholders. Relevant issues on the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding in a State under Review are regularly included in the three-strand input whenever such information is available, in the Working Group interactive dialogue, and in the recommendations. These include: peace processes and peace agreements; transitional justice; security sector reform; demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration programmes; rule of law, access to justice and good governance; poverty reduction; education, employment, health situation; the situation of ethnic minorities; women, peace and security; gender equality and gender-based violence.⁵⁰ Consequently, while the UPR may not be effective to respond to fast-changing crisis situations or conflict, the mechanism provides valuable information on root causes and drivers, which should be utilized for analysis and as a source of early warning for upstream preventive action. Systematic implementation of key recommendations, anchored in human rights obligations and commitments, and fully integrated with efforts to achieve the SDGs, can have a preventive effect.⁵¹

It should be noted, however, that linkages with sustaining peace are often not explicitly recognised or acknowledged. For instance, in the current third UPR cycle, OHCHR received more than 300 UN submissions, including more than 60 by country teams, though only 18 or so referred explicitly to preventing conflict and human rights violations.⁵² Beyond fulfilling the peacebuilding potential of the mechanism by increasing the public participation of a broad set of relevant actors therefore enabling more holistic and sustainable recommendations, bringing in peacebuilding actors and their narratives into the process could precisely help bring attention to those violations which, if left unaddressed could lead to violence or conflict. In fact, integrating a broader set of actors including peacebuilding perspectives is likely to diversify the issues addressed, also increasing the attention given to violations of economic, social and cultural rights as causes, consequences and even predictors of violence, social unrest and conflict.⁵³ Similarly, the foreign policies of States under Review, their arms trade or the ways in which businesses operate transnationally may not be frequently addressed in the review, but remain of importance, particularly in complementing existing relevant processes and mechanisms for monitoring international commitments and agreements in these areas. Recommendations could include specific action-oriented solutions of a peacebuilding nature or other processes, tools or approaches, such as the organization of participatory consultations on legislative reforms.

The submission of inputs by PBSO for the first time in 2020 for several countries undergoing the third cycle review in 2021—along with the submission by some peacebuilding organisations supported by QUNO and others working at the intersection of human rights and peacebuilding—is a welcome step and can help address this gap if done more systematically and regularly in the future. OHCHR has developed guidance and tools to support broader engagement with the UPR process and implementation of recommendations. These include the UPR Practical Guidance;⁵⁴ UPR Tips for NHRIs and non-governmental organisations;⁵⁵ UPR Tips for parliaments;⁵⁶ High Commissioner letters to Foreign

48 [OHCHR, Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at country level.](#)

49 Ibid

50 Ibid

51 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Universal Periodic Review and Sustaining Peace.](#)

52 Ibid

53 [OHCHR, ESCR & Early Warning – Amanda Cahill-Ripley and Diane Hendrick \(2018\) ESCR & Sustaining Peace.](#)

54 [OHCHR, Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at country level.](#)

55 [OHCHR, Universal Periodic Review: Tips for Engagement at Country Level for National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society.](#)

56 [OHCHR, Universal Periodic Review: The Specific Role of Members of Parliament Before, During and After the Review.](#)

Ministers highlighting areas for priority action ahead of the next review, as well as matrices and infographics on trends in recommendations, and clustering recommendations by themes and linked to the SDGs.

Beyond some of the above lessons, and ahead of the fourth UPR cycle, we would encourage OHCHR and other UN entities, as well as civil society organizations, in their supporting roles in the submission and implementation processes, to increase the participation of peacebuilding civil society, government counterparts and parliamentarians. Joint reporting by peacebuilding and human rights actors should also be encouraged, while national consultations in preparation for a review should systematically include peacebuilding actors. These proposals may be included in future guidance on engagement with the UPR. These suggestions could also be bolstered by having sustaining peace focal points within OHCHR; within its UPR Branch, the focal points could also ensure access to relevant peacebuilding knowledge and information. Additionally, awareness of the UPR's added value to prevention and sustaining peace should be increased, particularly among peacebuilding and New York-based stakeholders. Countries under the PBC's purview could for instance suggest holding informal discussions - exploring how implementation of relevant UPR recommendations could support their national sustaining peace efforts. Building on recent developments and good practice by the likes of the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucus in Geneva who have been exemplary in facilitating discussions with peacebuilding organisations prior to country reviews, Member States should consult widely, including with New York-based representatives throughout the UPR cycle, to enable a holistic approach drawing on conflict analysis and peacebuilding practices.

More generally, follow-up and the integration of accepted recommendations into country programmes also remain key for prevention at the national level; noted recommendations should also be a basis for engagement. States should be encouraged to give due consideration to the High Commissioner's letters containing priority areas for action, as well as the matrices and infographics developed by OHCHR. The setting up of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up should also be encouraged. Engagement with the UPR and implementation of recommendations should be strengthened across the UN system and UPR recommendations should be more systematically integrated in the work of UN prevention processes and coordination mechanisms.

In light of the lessons learned from our projects on the UPR's role in prevention and sustaining peace,⁵⁷ the vital and as yet underutilised contribution of the special procedures, investigative bodies and treaty bodies also merit further consideration.

Special Procedures

The system of special procedures has, over the years, drawn international attention to emerging crises involving human rights violations and recommended early action to mitigate risks of violence and conflict.⁵⁸ Additionally, through country visits, communications, public statements and reports, and dialogue with national and international stakeholders across sectors, their independence and expertise, as well as reach and accessibility to a range of actors and stakeholders make them valuable sources of timely information and analysis to contribute to more upstream prevention. While 16 of the 56 special procedure mandates already include a specific dimension on prevention and others are relevant to a prevention or peacebuilding analytical framework and approach, these areas of focus are not systematically integrated into their work nor are they broadly understood and explicitly recognized - resulting in a missing layer of analysis regarding the implications of violations in the conflict trajectory of the countries or communities concerned.⁵⁹ Additionally, while the special procedures have engaged with the PBA through informal information exchanges for country visits and the provision of advice on country situations or thematic areas, including to inform programmatic responses supported by the PBF, such engagement has remained ad-hoc or on a case-by-case basis. In 2018 and 2019, OHCHR and PBSO organized working sessions with the special procedures on prevention, early warning and implementation of recommendations, and discussed entry points and possible areas of collaboration going forward. A similar interaction was not possible in 2020 due to the global pandemic and progress on increasing engagement and collaboration has been limited.

Clarifying the linkages and relevance of the mandates and activities of the special procedures in broader prevention and sustaining peace efforts builds on developments at the HRC and contributes to the ongoing process of reflection on its mandate and role in this regard. Notably, HRC resolution 45/31 urges

⁵⁷ [QUNO \(2018\) Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace.](#)

⁵⁸ [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Contribution of Human Rights to Building and Sustaining Peace.](#)

⁵⁹ Based on an interview with OHCHR's Regional Office for Central Asia regarding the country visit of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

all HRC mechanisms to “integrate prevention into their work and, where appropriate, into their reporting in accordance with their respective mandates.”⁶⁰ Additionally, as previously noted, HRC resolution 42/6 mandates a study by OHCHR (due in 2021) on the contribution of the special procedures in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses.

Investigative Bodies

The 2016 twin resolutions affirmed the importance of transitional justice in consolidating peace and stability and preventing countries from lapsing or relapsing into conflict. As described in OHCHR’s thematic paper on transitional justice,⁶¹ the HRC affirmed in its resolution 42/17 that combating impunity and implementing transitional justice processes can prevent the recurrence of human rights violations and abuses and requested an OHCHR study (due in 2021) on how transitional justice measures can contribute to sustaining peace.

Investigative bodies, which include commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions or other non-judicial mechanisms tasked with investigating allegations of violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, have contributed to combating impunity, ensuring accountability, and preventing non-recurrence of conflict and violations. Such bodies are mandated to collect, archive and/or preserve information on evidence of human rights violations, identify alleged perpetrators or map trends and patterns of violations, make recommendations to enable transitional justice, accountability and reconciliation to be pursued, and publicly report.⁶² Yet their role and contribution in sustaining peace have not been fully considered or understood given that such mechanisms are established *after* or *in response to* a human rights emergency or a conflict. Additionally, their mandates are perceived as politically sensitive as they are often established by intergovernmental bodies (normally the HRC or Security Council) by vote. Thus, they are not often accepted by the State concerned and arguably hinder dialogue with it; in some cases, they have increased tensions at the country level. Nevertheless, the more than 30 investigative bodies created by the HRC since its establishment in 2006 have identified

root causes of violations, triggers and drivers of crisis and conflict, and recommended necessary institutional and structural reforms. While their positive impact on sustaining peace is still debated, the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria has identified individual perpetrators and reported on the role of institutions in facilitating violations.⁶³ Meanwhile, the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and the Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar utilized the UN’s Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to identify structural risk factors and triggers of future violations and/or an expansion of potential war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.⁶⁴ The focus on legal accountability by some of these mechanisms has arguably also served as a deterrent against the recurrence of violations.⁶⁵

More analysis and evidence is needed on the impact of investigative bodies on the non-recurrence of violations and on broader prevention and sustaining peace.

Treaty Bodies

The potential for treaty bodies to consider the linkages of human rights with sustaining peace in the review of State party reports and in the formulation of concluding observations, General Comments or Recommendations has not been fully explored and could be further developed.⁶⁶ By considering and assessing a wide variety of information received from States parties, civil society, NHRIs, UN entities and others, the discussions and observations of the treaty bodies can inform analyses of risks of conflict and violence.⁶⁷ For example, the work and deliberations of the Committees on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR),⁶⁸ the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the Human Rights Committee are intrinsically relevant to sustaining peace given the linkages of identity, discrimination and exclusion, abuses of fundamental freedoms and other rights in driving crisis and conflict. Notably, CESCR is considering convening a general discussion on the transformative nature of economic, social and cultural rights in sustaining peace. These treaty bodies (amongst others) may wish to explore

60 [A/HRC/RES/45/31](#) Operative Paragraph 3.

61 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: Peacebuilding, Sustaining Peace and Transitional Justice.](#)

62 [Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Briefing Paper: Human Rights Council Investigative Mechanisms and Mass Atrocity Prevention.](#)

63 Ibid

64 Ibid

65 Ibid

66 [OHCHR, Thematic Paper: The Contribution of Human Rights to Building and Sustaining Peace.](#)

67 Ibid

68 For example: [E/C.12/COL/CO/6](#) - [E/C.12/COD/CO/4](#).

the peacebuilding dimensions of relevant rights and obligations in their dialogues with States parties and concluding observations, including to assess possible risks of crisis or conflict if some of the concerns raised are not addressed.⁶⁹ Additionally, since the treaty bodies monitor implementation of obligations to which States have voluntarily committed, they can open space for national dialogue and negotiation between different segments of a population and the State, and strengthen national ownership in implementing international norms and standards.

2.3 UN at the Country Level

UN Resident Coordinators

Throughout our joint engagement in two of the pilot countries undergoing their UPR review in 2020, the potential impact of the Secretary-General's reforms in ensuring a more comprehensive and holistic approach to sustaining peace and strengthened system-wide action on prevention of human rights violations, violence and conflict was highlighted, and in some cases challenged.⁷⁰ Notably, the reforms to the development system strive to empower more independent Resident Coordinator offices and enable UN country teams to undertake more strategic, and coherent approaches, including through joint analysis and joined-up planning and programming, as well as ensure more robust lines of accountability.⁷¹

While our own experience of the results in these areas is anecdotal, many interlocutors highlighted mixed hopes, progress and challenges on the ground. Capacity and resource gaps—that include at times a lack of understanding or experience to fulfil the scope of their mandates, failing institutional authority or little to no policy and political support from Headquarters - continue to impede the ability of Resident Coordinators to respond to significant prevention challenges on the ground and ensure coherence across the three pillars.⁷² In addition, many UN entities report that separate funding streams impede complementary action.⁷³ Data collected by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2019 indicates that most UN organizations

reported difficulties in advancing collaboration between pillars in crisis settings—related to articulating complementary results, agreeing on accountability frameworks and/or assessing impact, and mobilizing financing for collective action.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the reforms do provide significant opportunities to strengthen the integration of human rights in country-level programming for the Agenda 2030, underpinned by robust analysis, a focus on leaving no one behind, and meaningful participation, and enhance joined-up support to Member States in implementing human rights commitments and obligations. To that effect, CCAs and UNSDCF's feature stronger multidimensional analyses of drivers of vulnerability and better highlight interlinkages of interventions by different pillars⁷⁵ while the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Coordination at Headquarters supports the development of synergies in interventions.⁷⁶ These components are essential for prevention. And indeed, data indicate that 57 per cent of the UNSDCF's explicitly addressed peacebuilding and 90 per cent substantively addressed drivers of needs, risk, and vulnerability.⁷⁷

To make good of these opportunities, stepped-up engagement with country teams and peace operations, including through HRAs equipped to work on rights-based approaches, could ensure that relevant CCA processes, joint analysis and programming make better use of human rights information and the recommendations of human rights mechanisms (also in line with the Call to Action). Attention should also be paid to the voluntary national reviews, which assess national progress in achievement of the SDGs, gaps and lessons learned for presentation to ECOSOC's high-level political forum on sustainable development; such reviews have seen limited integration of human rights information and data to date. Of note, intersessional seminars held as follow-up to HRC resolution 37/24 on human rights promotion and the 2030 Agenda (2018) resulted in recommendations calling for SDG implementation in the work of the special procedures and the UPR and a joint meeting of the HRC and ECOSOC to explore complementarity between the UPR and voluntary national reviews. OHCHR has initiated formal communications between the High Commissioner and relevant Foreign Ministers of

69 [Amanda Cahill-Ripley and Diane Hendrick \(2018\) ESCR & Sustaining Peace.](#)

70 For more details: <https://reform.un.org/content/development-reform>.

71 [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 17.

72 For example: [Gert Rosenthal \(29 May, 2019\) A Brief and Independent Inquiry into the Involvement of the United Nations in Myanmar from 2010 to 2018.](#)

73 [A/75/79](#): Paragraph 252.

74 Ibid: Paragraph 250.

75 [E/2020/54](#): Paragraphs 41 and 52.

76 Ibid: Paragraph 52.

77 [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 17.

States that have committed to undertake voluntary national reviews encouraging the use of human rights information. Additionally, recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, as well as guidance, data and indicators are shared on such issues as multi-stakeholder participation, leaving no-one behind and national institutions. It is clear, however, that more can be done to ensure that these reviews take into consideration human rights analysis and information.

Additionally, the Secretary-General has called on the UN development system to facilitate better integration and participation of States in intergovernmental forums and processes, including enhanced support in preparation for, and for participation in UN-led processes, such as HRC sessions and intergovernmental meetings.⁷⁸ General Assembly resolution 75/233 calls upon UN system entities to assist Member States in respecting and fulfilling their human rights obligations and commitments.⁷⁹ In this respect, good practices of country teams and UN entities in engagement with the human rights mechanisms, for example the UPR, should be consolidated and more widely disseminated for potential replication. Proposals contained in the report of the rapporteurs appointed pursuant to HRC resolution 38/18 may also be considered, such as the systematic inclusion of Resident Coordinators in HRC country-specific discussions, and the setting up of national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up with the participation of country teams.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the presence of UN country team members in Geneva or New York during visits or their annual retreats should be used as opportunities for increased and direct engagement with Member States.

Peace and Development Advisers and Human Rights Advisers

The Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) has expanded the deployment of regional and national PDAs - now totalling 56. The deployment of HRAs has also been scaled up, now present in 37 countries to support Resident Coordinators and country teams to engage in a more active, joined-up and strategic manner on human rights and to better leverage the full breadth of the UN's mandates and norms on human rights.

⁷⁸ [A/75/79 - E/2020/55](#): Paragraph 250.

⁷⁹ [A/RES/75/233](#) Operative Paragraph 28.

⁸⁰ [A/HRC/43/37](#)

The respective mandates of these two positions share many common areas, providing fertile ground for a community of practice; examples abound of close operational and normative collaboration between PDAs and HRAs, such as through joint work on CCAs and UNSDCFs, and support to governments and national stakeholders on a range of initiatives, including with respect to preventive diplomacy, social cohesion, and civil society, women, and youth participation in inclusive dialogues. Collaboration and cooperation between PDAs and HRAs, where present, have guided Resident Coordinators, Heads of Agencies, and programme implementers to better incorporate strategies that ensure cohesion and create space for more systematic collaboration across the three pillars. Such collaboration has also resulted in the development of national prevention strategies or recommendations, and the development and use of integrated information management or analysis platforms for country teams, in which human rights information is integrated into joint conflict or risk analysis and planning. They constitute an important tool for institutionalizing cross-cutting and joined-up peacebuilding approaches that avoid competing strategies and analyses.⁸¹

Fostering closer and more institutionalized collaboration, including through the convening of meetings between PDAs and HRAs at the regional or global levels, should therefore be encouraged. Similarly, closer linkages between the work of regional PDAs, Development Coordination regional offices and OHCHR regional presences should also be encouraged. This should include building an understanding of the practical and operational features of partnerships; considering normative and theoretical approaches to building national capacities for prevention; ensuring stronger collaborative interagency dynamics within Resident Coordinator offices and UN country teams; and supporting approaches to strengthen engagement with host governments, national partners, and civil society. Importantly, more systematic exchanges through the cross-pollination of experiences and data, and the sharing of information and analysis in real time can provide Headquarters with more comprehensive information on the basis of which informed decisions can be made at multiple levels.⁸²

⁸¹ For example: [Gert Rosenthal \(29 May, 2019\) A Brief and Independent Inquiry into the Involvement of the United Nations in Myanmar from 2010 to 2018](#).

⁸² Ibid: Pages 25 – 26; [Identical letters dated 6 July 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council](#): Page 10.

3. Partnerships for Sustaining Peace

3.1 Civil Society

Civil society actors, including human rights defenders and local community peacebuilders, often play key roles in prevention, early warning, mediation, and other peacebuilding activities in many contexts, particularly in conflict-affected societies and in situations of extreme fragility or transition. Such actors are typically well placed to advocate, encourage and work with governments for change in a manner that is locally owned, while also possessing the expert knowledge acquired from long-term engagement and cooperation at the community level. Undoubtedly, the engagement of local civil society and community actors is a critical component of sustaining peace, the success of which depends on broad societal commitment and national ownership.

Civic Space

Restrictions on civic space, however, are prevalent in many countries, with reprisals and prosecutions on the rise. Many countries continue to adopt controversial laws that impose for instance legal and regulatory barriers to the registration of internationally funded civil society organisations. In addition, civil society actors experience difficulties participating in meetings organised by Member States, regional organisations and the UN because of the lack of institutionalised processes for engagement; while many do not have the capacity or resources to establish liaison offices in New York or Geneva where they can directly engage in intergovernmental process and establish contact with policy makers. Furthermore, despite the broad recognition that partnerships with local and national peacebuilding actors are the most effective, these actors and in particular women and youth are not always engaged in a meaningful way in the development and advancement of national peacebuilding priorities.⁸³ In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been greater civil society participation *electronically*, though it remains difficult to ensure a diverse range of participation. In some circumstances, however, civil society participation in meetings of intergovernmental bodies has been one of the first things to be cut. Local peacebuilding work is facing further limitations, including financial and mobility constraints. Restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including through emergency measures, have also resulted in

increasing reports of arrests and intimidation of civil society actors.⁸⁴

The recognized role of civil society and the urgent need to do more to protect civic space and participation is a priority area in the Call to Action under which a system-wide guidance note on protecting and promoting civic space was launched in September 2020.⁸⁵ The guidance outlines concrete actions to be taken by the UN to ensure the participation of civil society within UN processes and fora, actively promote civic space, including participation in national decision-making processes, and protect civil society actors, including from reprisals for cooperating with the UN.

Community Engagement to Build and Sustain Peace

In recent years, there has been greater recognition of the critical need for enhanced partnership and coordination between the UN and other international stakeholders with communities and locally based organizations. The Secretary-General noted that an “ecosystem of partners” is needed for sustaining peace, for which “community engagement by the UN was a critical component”.⁸⁶ Following his call in that report for “community engagement strategies” to be developed across the system, the UN released in 2020 the *UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace* (CEG). Led by PBSO jointly with other UN entities and civil society organizations through work carried out in a Joint Working Group over the course of two years,⁸⁷ the Guidelines were developed following extensive consultations with civil society partners.⁸⁸ The Guidelines are aimed at supporting UN presences to develop country-specific engagement strategies on sustaining peace and set out seven core recommendations, including building or strengthening partnerships with community-based stakeholders. Additionally, the Guidelines should also be understood in conjunction with the process, led by OHCHR and UN

⁸⁴ [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 4.

⁸⁵ [United Nations, Guidance Note: Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#).

⁸⁶ [A/72/707 - S/2018/43](#): Paragraphs 58 and 59.

⁸⁷ The Working Group was composed of the Department of Peace Operations; DPPA; OHCHR; UN Women; UNDP; Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict; International Peace Institute; and the Quaker UN Office - New York.

⁸⁸ Recognizing that inclusion was at the heart of this process, the Joint Working Group conducted consultations throughout the development of the CEG, including: an online survey in four of the five UN languages which yielded over 300 responses; over 40 virtual discussions with civil society actors working at the country level; a multi-day online workshop to test emerging messaging; and an in-person meeting with civil society representatives based at the UN.

⁸³ [A/74/935 - S/2020/645](#)

Women, to develop the system-wide guidance note on civic space.⁸⁹ Given the ever-expanding responsibilities of Resident Coordinators and country teams, stronger partnerships with civil society organisations and private actors could also contribute to the UN delivering better and more sustainably on its mandate.

Civil Society in the Peacebuilding Architecture

While the PBC has engaged with civil society—namely through their inclusion in briefings on country-specific, regional or thematic issues, partnerships should be enhanced and institutionalized in its working methods as previously noted, also to include grassroots organizations, women and youth groups. As indicated by its Chair, the PBC is committed to enhancing implementation of its gender strategy, by more systematically including women and representatives of women's groups in its meetings.⁹⁰

The Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) of the PBF is another means for engagement with and direct funding of civil society. In 2019, the GYPI focused on diversifying partnerships and engaging with local actors and approved \$12.9 million USD directly to civil society organizations.⁹¹ In 2020, the GYPI approved close to \$37 million USD, including for eight joint UN and civil society projects, and 11 civil society projects. The Secretary-General committed to encouraging initiatives that allow civil society organizations to receive peacebuilding funding directly and that specify percentages to be allocated to local organizations.⁹²

The UN could do more to establish consistent, sustained, and transparent modalities to ensure civil society inclusion in long-term sustained policy development relating to sustaining peace, while similarly supporting Member States and regional organisations to do so. For instance, PBSO and other UN entities could continue the model of joint civil society-UN working groups at Headquarters, as used in developing the CEG and the guidance note on civic space, to follow, monitor and report on progress made on sustaining peace approaches and implementation of connected recommendations. This model not only improves partnership with civil society but also increases transparency and allows accountability models to develop. It also allows for more diverse

perspectives to inform policy development through direct connection or access to practitioner expertise, and facilitates learning on the part of civil society.

As noted above, innovations in working methods should be considered to increase engagement by the PBC with civil society and local stakeholders, while the PBF could further consolidate its GYPI and explore other initiatives to allow civil society to directly receive peacebuilding funding. UN country presences could also play a more active role in ensuring strong partnerships with local actors, for example by appointing civil society liaisons where not present.

3.2 UN Entities—OHCHR and PBSO Joint Work Plan (2019-2020)

As part of the Secretary-General's peace and security reforms, PBSO was merged into the new DPPA and tasked to act as the 'hinge' on sustaining peace for the three pillars. Also in 2018, OHCHR provided dedicated capacity through its Prevention and Sustaining Peace Section in New York to engage on these agendas. In recent years, OHCHR increased engagement with PBSO and the PBA to further integrate human rights in the UN's sustaining peace agenda. OHCHR and PBSO undertook joint consultations over the course of 2018, resulting in the adoption of a joint workplan for 2019-2020 and the co-location of an OHCHR staff in PBSO.

The joint workplan involved all parts of OHCHR and PBSO and covered engagement at Headquarters and in country at the policy, institutional and programmatic levels. This included engagement with the PBF, relevant intergovernmental bodies - the HRC and PBC, and the human rights mechanisms - as well as training and public information activities. Implementation of the workplan strengthened collaboration and regular exchange between the two entities, resulting in greater awareness and integration of the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding in various workstreams. Results include the systematic involvement of OHCHR in the drafting team for the Secretary-General's reports on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and as part of the development of the PBF Strategy for 2020-2024, the focus on human rights promotion and protection of women and youth peacebuilders and defenders for the 2020 PBF GYPI, for which the High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered a message at its launch, the series of joint webinars held in 2020 on peacebuilding programming for OHCHR staff, and the webinar for PBSO staff on the UPR and peacebuilding. Additionally, PBSO engaged

⁸⁹ [United Nations, Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#): Page 4.

⁹⁰ [A/74/935 - S/2020/645](#)

⁹¹ [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 57.

⁹² *Ibid*

in the intersessional seminars held in 2019 pursuant to HRC resolution 38/18 and participated in meetings of the special procedures in 2019 and an HRC panel on human rights mainstreaming at its 43rd session in 2020. There was also engagement with several special procedure mandate-holders to include language and recommendations relevant to sustaining peace in their reports and, for the first time in 2020 (as previously noted), provision of inputs for several countries undergoing the third cycle UPR review in 2021.

At the time of writing, a new joint workplan for 2021–2022 was under development. The new workplan is intended to build on progress made and increase collaboration and engagement at all levels. It also takes into account developments relating to operationalization of the Call to Action and follow-up to HRC resolution 45/31, including the invitation to the PBC Chair to brief the HRC annually. It is hoped that the workplan will continue progress in furthering human rights integration in the work of the PBA, as well as in strengthening intergovernmental and institutional coherence. This should result, for example, in the more systematic use of human rights information, for early warning and action, and in joint analysis, planning and programming at the country level. It should also lead to greater consideration of human rights information, including the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, in the work of the PBC and the more systematic consideration of the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding in relevant thematic and country-specific discussions at the HRC.

3.3 Member States—Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucuses

The Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucuses are cross-regional groups of Member States in Geneva and New York established following the 13 June 2016 appeal.⁹³ Co-Chaired by the Permanent Missions of Germany and Switzerland, the Caucuses aim to put human rights at the centre of conflict prevention efforts, bridge Geneva and New York intergovernmental discussions and processes, and foster greater coherence across the three pillars. They also advocate for maximizing the resources of the international community to protect human rights and prevent conflict more effectively.

The Caucuses have been a centre for discussions on human rights, prevention and sustaining peace and an important reference group for engagement by stakeholders on these issues. For the QUNO-OHCHR projects, they have been a great partner in discussing the potential of UPR not least in the pilot countries, but also in convening consultations and discussions around the 2020 PBA Review.

Some of these discussions have become regularized, such as those on prevention and peacebuilding ahead of UPR reviews, which are important opportunities for dialogue and interaction with relevant actors who may not have otherwise engaged in the UPR process. Such good practice examples could be expanded or institutionalized with other human rights mechanisms or processes as relevant. Regular interaction and exchange between the Caucuses in Geneva and New York should also be encouraged, particularly around relevant intergovernmental processes and outcome negotiations. Additionally, the Caucuses could expand its role as a reference group and platform for exchange for Member States, as well as UN entities and civil society—helping to overcome silos across the system and among Member States so that human rights information is effectively channelled and integrated. The Caucuses may also wish to consider broadening its membership to further its cross-regional nature. These actions may go a long way in addressing misconceptions among Member States and broadening acceptance of cross-pillar and joined-up actions.

4. Financing for Peacebuilding

Ensuring stable, predictable, conflict-sensitive and sustained financing for peacebuilding, particularly to support local peacebuilding actors, was an issue raised by interlocutors in our engagement on UPR and implementation of the 2016 twin resolutions. The Secretary-General recognized this as a critical challenge—exacerbated by the global economic downturn—with growing demands to address the COVID-19 pandemic potentially weakening capacity for sustaining peace efforts and risking gains already made.⁹⁴ Other financing challenges include the multiplicity of funding mechanisms and instruments relevant to peacebuilding that remain separate across sectors and pillars, and the dependence on voluntary contributions from a limited number of donors, which impede strategic and integrated sustaining peace

⁹³ [Switzerland launches the appeal of June 13th to put Human Rights at the Heart of Conflict Prevention: "Security and human rights make a perfect match."](#)

⁹⁴ [A/74/976 - S/2020/773](#): Paragraph 38.

actions, and result in competition for donors between different funding streams. As recommended by the PBC Chair, funding streams should be brought together in the spirit of “good peacebuilding donorship” to enhance coherence and coordination, and more regular monitoring of funding for peacebuilding activities.⁹⁵

Options proposed by the Secretary-General in 2018 to increase, restructure and better prioritize peacebuilding funding have yet to be taken up and implemented.⁹⁶ These concerns were reaffirmed by Member States in the 2020 twin resolutions which, in noting the high-level meeting to be convened at the 76th session of the General Assembly on these issues, invited, starting in the 75th session, relevant UN bodies and organs, including the PBC, to present inputs for consideration.⁹⁷

During 2017-2019, contributions to the PBF almost doubled resulting in a similar increase in approved investments in 34 countries in 2019. In response to COVID-19, the PBF is supporting Resident Coordinators, country teams and national actors in such areas as crisis response, local peace initiatives and community engagement in implementing ceasefires; inclusive dialogues; public information to combat hate speech; and women and youth participation. Nevertheless, without the quantum leap in contributions called for by the Secretary-General, the PBF is not able to respond to the rate of requests and various peacebuilding efforts could not be supported.⁹⁸

The PBF has strived to encourage the integration of human rights in peacebuilding programming, including by funding OHCHR and other UN entities, in such areas as transitional justice and reconciliation, gender equality and combating gender-based violence, support to victims of violations, countering hate speech, protection and promotion of civic space and support for NHRIs. The PBF has also supported regional and cross-border interventions with a strong human rights dimension, for instance in Latin America on protection and reintegration of returnees. OHCHR is the ninth largest recipient of the PBF, having received more than \$30 million USD since 2009. In 2019-2020, the PBF supported interventions involving OHCHR in eight countries, including first-time projects in Bolivia and Lebanon, as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, and Uganda. The PBF Strategy for 2020–2024, launched in April 2020, shows an increased emphasis on prevention with approximately 40% of the portfolio dedicated to it, compared with 50% on post-conflict recovery and 10% on peacebuilding in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many priority areas of the Fund⁹⁹ provide opportunities for the greater integration of the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms in programming and for alignment with the strategic actions outlined in the Call to Action. In 2020, as previously noted, the GYPI focused, for the first time, on human rights promotion and protection of women and youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders, resulting in 14 out of 29 total approved projects focused specifically on human rights and protection.

There is however further scope to broaden PBF support to human rights-related projects by strengthening UN capacity to translate human rights analyses and approaches, integrating the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, into concrete programmes and projects. This could go some way to countering the problematic bifurcation of funding. Stronger operational partnerships with relevant UN entities, and with civil society and other stakeholders, as well as more innovative financing options are essential in supporting more joined-up and integrated programming on the ground, as well as local or grassroots efforts to build peace. This would also increase peacebuilding funding that is accessible to grassroots organizations. There is also a need to allocate an increased share of available resources for coordination of prevention efforts, including through recourse to pooled and multi-donor trust funds.

95 [A/74/935 – S/2020/645](#)

96 Ibid: Paragraph 45.

97 [A/RES/75/201 – S/RES/2558](#) Operative Paragraph 4.

98 [A/74/976 – S/2020/773](#): Paragraphs 42 – 44.

99 PBF priorities include: support to Resident Coordinators and country teams for peacebuilding responses to the pandemic include crisis management and communications, including to assess conflict risks and ensure integrated conflict-sensitive strategies; inclusive response and recovery, particularly to address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups; inter-community social cohesion and border management; countering hate speech, stigmatization and addressing trauma; and implementation of the SG’s global ceasefire call.

Conclusion

This paper reflects on a selection of key developments, opportunities, and challenges in integrating human rights in sustaining peace that have contributed to joined-up action across the three UN pillars. It highlights initiatives that have yielded results and identifies opportunities and entry points offered by relevant intergovernmental outcomes, policy frameworks and instruments, and UN reform processes to address remaining gaps.

The integration of human rights information, analysis, approaches and mechanisms in coherent and multidimensional prevention and sustaining peace policies, strategies and programmes has made some gains. At the same time, despite growing recognition and understanding of the concept of sustaining peace, further operationalization and integration into policies and programming is required, particularly considering the continuing fragmentation across sectors and pillars in the UN system. To that end, this report suggests areas for strengthening collaboration and coherence, including through effective engagement with human rights actors and mechanisms.

More work is needed to put into practical effect relevant intergovernmental outcomes, policy frameworks and instruments to join up UN efforts on the ground.

Accordingly, continued cross-pillar support to UN peacebuilding activities at the country level is vital, with PBSO playing an important role in supporting effective interface among UN entities and the PBC serving as a convener and platform for discussion on these issues. With strengthened leadership and enhanced responsibilities, capacities and resources, Resident Coordinators and UN country teams should ensure more systematic exchange and sharing of real time data, information and analysis. This is crucial to allow informed and timely decisions to be made at multiple levels.

In parallel, human rights bodies and mechanisms should also continue to reflect on how sustaining peace functions can be integrated into respective mandates.

This should be coupled with efforts to ensure that their recommendations guide the PBC's efforts to formulate peacebuilding responses, and towards ensuring that the PBA in return supports the efforts

of national governments to protect and advance human rights. To those ends, further collaboration is needed, not only between traditional and specialized human rights and peacebuilding actors, but with a broader range of stakeholders, including within the development, humanitarian, and disarmament communities.

These efforts will also help to **build the evidence base** of the relevance and added value of human rights approaches and actions, and how they should be applied in joined-up and multidimensional sustaining peace efforts in all States - another key area for continued action. This is particularly important to counter any lingering misconceptions or reticence.

Lack of political will on the part of some UN entities and Member States also remains a challenge in implementation of the sustaining peace agenda. Persistent conceptual disagreements about its scope, coupled with concerns that it may overload the UN, overstep or alter existing mandates, be misused to undermine state sovereignty, or to securitize or militarize development, should not be dismissed outright by Member States and other stakeholders, but rather addressed by multiplying opportunities to exchange and learn from each other.

Efforts to implement policies and to institutionalize programmes to build sustainable peace must therefore as a priority provide the necessary space for joint learning and understanding, and for contextualized planning and implementation of the agenda to prevent its misuse and politicization.

Please note that this paper does not claim to be comprehensive but is intended to be the basis for continued reflection and discussions following the 2020 PBA Review.

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