



MEETING BRIEF

Workshop for Incoming Members of the UN Peacebuilding Commission

The next two years mark a new juncture for the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). In advance of a comprehensive five-year review in 2015, it needs to demonstrate accelerated progress, cohesion in New York and around the world, and concrete added value in the field. These key insights resulted from a workshop organized by IPI and the Quaker United Nations Office, in collaboration with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, on February 27, 2013.

PBC members, UN experts, and representatives from civil society and academia discussed challenges and opportunities for the PBC in accompanying countries through political transitions and reconciliation after conflict, and revisited the broader role of PBC membership. The roundtable discussion among approximately fifty participants yielded the following recommendations.

- **Political Accompaniment and Cohesion:** More cohesion at UN headquarters and in capitals is needed to ensure that members can build trust between national governments and UN actors. Fragmentation interferes with the delicate and consistent approach required in accompaniment. The PBC has the difficult role of a “critical friend,” advocating for the government but also reporting conditions truthfully. A clear understanding of the relationship between the chair of a PBC country configuration and the special or executive representative of the UN Secretary-General in the country is also necessary.
- **Civil Society and Citizen Engagement:** The PBC may want to move away from its state-centric approach and engage with other actors to maximize its impact in building sustainable peace, according to lessons from countries like Burundi. Participants viewed this as a complex challenge for the New York-based commission and called for further exploration of how to best support the citizens of a country throughout postconflict transitions. Engaging on this level ensures processes—from politics to trauma healing—will be inclusive of previously excluded voices, like those of women and minorities.
- **Transforming Relationships and Institutions:** Engaging across society is also central to reconciliation, a highly complex and context-specific process. All but one country on the PBC’s agenda is undergoing an official reconciliation process, with many more informal activities occurring at the community level. PBC members need to understand the history of violence and its impact in order to facilitate an environment conducive to inclusive reconciliation.
- **Demonstrating Added Value:** PBC members have a responsibility to deliver results, and participants identified three broad ways to demonstrate added value in countries on their agenda. Members should mobilize resources to fill funding gaps, share their experiences of peacebuilding in their own countries, and increase political will through enhanced coordination. These methods again raise the significance of cohesion in the field and at UN headquarters, including the Security Council.

Going forward, a call was made for each member of the PBC to ask how their influence, expertise, and resources can be brought to bear in the work of the commission, to enhance cohesion, and to make important connections between local, national, and international peacebuilding processes.

– Andrea Ó Súilleabháin