In its review of the peacebuilding architecture, the Advisory Group of Experts introduced the language of “sustaining peace.” But what does sustaining peace mean in practice? To answer this question, IPI organized a conversation on April 10, 2017, to unpack the definition of sustaining peace and provide examples of what it looks like at the national and international levels. This is the third in a series of monthly high-level conversations among member states and other stakeholders to clarify and make concrete the idea of prevention for sustaining peace.

The conversation began by focusing on how a sustaining peace approach could work in practice in the Gambia, Burundi, and the Central African Republic:

• The peaceful conduct of the Gambia’s 2017 parliamentary elections demonstrates the resilience of the Gambian people, particularly women, who played a leading role in mobilizing voters and promoting accountability. Despite remaining challenges, the government is now working to establish a truth and reconciliation commission, which could further contribute to sustaining peace. The International Contact Group on the Gambia can help coordinate international support to such efforts, and the Peacebuilding Forum can play a key role in identifying and mobilizing stakeholders, as well as in supporting security sector reform, judicial training and accountability, and opportunities for women’s leadership.

• Despite Burundi’s political and economic challenges, its capacities for peace include a highly engaged civil society, several independent media outlets, the leadership of the Catholic archbishop, and an enduring desire to abide by the Arusha Agreement. The population at large is also reluctant to return to conflict. Nonetheless, without action to address economic and livelihood challenges, especially among youth, these capacities could eventually be exhausted. Moreover, unlike the Gambia, the Burundian government has a troubled relationship with the UN and other leaders in the region. The Peacebuilding Commission could represent an entry point for the UN to reestablish constructive relations with Burundian authorities.

• While the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) remains fragile, armed groups have agreed to disarm and join a national dialogue, a prosecutor has been appointed to the Special Criminal Court, and a nascent civil society has emerged in Bangui. A human rights mapping report on the CAR will be published in May 2017 in an effort to move the country toward reconciliation and to end impunity. The African Union has committed up to $20 million to invest in infrastructure in Bangui and is supporting the compact proposed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to integrate international, regional, and bilateral support. Such efforts to develop Bangui should serve as a base for developing the rest of the country.
The conversation also offered the following insights:

- It was agreed that the primacy of politics and the “do no harm” principle should guide all national and international partnerships for peace. Sustaining peace should also build (and build upon) relationships of trust between citizens and state authorities.

- The sustaining peace lens provides alternative ways to think about conflict and peace based on the understanding that every society has capacities for peace. By understanding “what still works,” even in situations of conflict or crisis, the international community can support the positive changes already being driven by internal actors.

- Participants emphatically agreed on the importance and effectiveness of “everyday peace,” which people develop for themselves and their communities, both in countries experiencing or emerging from conflict and in countries at peace. As one participant remarked, however, “everyday peace cannot be sustained if everyday needs are not met.”

- Participants endorsed the preventive potential of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, noting that sustaining peace and sustainable development are part of a single stream of efforts. Sustaining peace can reorient international efforts from crisis response toward these long-term goals.

- At the UN, Secretary-General António Guterres can use a sustaining peace lens in the analyses and options presented in his reports and briefings to the Security Council. An interesting question is what the structural and financial implications of a sustaining peace approach will be for the UN, and whether ongoing plans to reform the UN can address them.

- The Peacebuilding Commission can play a unique role in situations of fragility and conflict by integrating international support to local peace efforts and capacities, especially as it incorporates all three pillars of the UN’s work. The Peacebuilding Commission’s regular country-specific interactions could further enable it to identify and engage with local actors, including women’s, religious, youth, and tribal groups, and to document their success stories.

- Other national initiatives that were deemed to contribute to sustaining peace included the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, the practice of “Fragile to Fragile Cooperation” among the G7+ countries, and the third National Dialogue Conference organized by the government of Finland, which highlighted the potential peace dividends of dialogue.