

IS THERE A ROLE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION FOR EUROPE IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING?

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At the 2005 World Summit, the United Nations took a significant step towards improving its capacity in preventing countries from falling back into war by recognizing the need for a convergence between security and development. The result was the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and related peacebuilding architecture¹⁰⁰. At the same time, a plethora of academic research on post-conflict peacebuilding in the past three years has shown that good governance and long-term sustainable development are keys to securing a sustainable peace after peace agreements are signed. But what does this have to do with UNECE?

The Peacebuilding Commission embodies all aspects of United Nations work: peace, development and human rights.
— Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“WE DON’T DO PEACEBUILDING”

In the burgeoning field of post-conflict literature, the United Nations regional commissions are often overlooked. In a recent worldwide survey conducted by the UNDP Policy Committee Working Group, all agencies and offices of the United Nations family were asked to explain how their activities contributed to peacebuilding¹⁰¹. Perhaps not surprisingly, several agencies reported that their work did not contribute to peacebuilding, that peace and security come under the purview of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Group. Yet as the survey progressed, a new perspective emerged.

The establishment of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission was an important evolution in the vital role that the United Nations plays in assisting post-conflict countries towards recovery, reconstruction and development and in mobilizing sustained international attention. — Sergei A. Ordzhonikidze, Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva.

FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING

The regional commissions report to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and as such are mandated to carry out economic and social activities. Norms and standards, statistics and conventions are the mainstay of their work. And their underlying modus operandi is supposed to be apolitical. So what contribution can UNECE and the four other commissions make to the field of post-conflict peacebuilding?

If poverty and economic instability are so often the root causes of war, then getting the economics right is key to sustainable peace and to preventing countries from falling back into conflict. Effective governing institutions are also critical to building a lasting peace. — Marek Belka, former UNECE Executive Secretary, in a speech to a conference on Peacebuilding convened by the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, November 2007.

⁹⁹ This article is based on a publication by Geoffrey Hamilton and Brinda Wachs, *Putting Economic Governance at the Heart of Peacebuilding* (Geneva, United Nations, 2008) developed within the UNECE Task Force on Peacebuilding set up under UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary Paolo Garonna.

¹⁰⁰ This peacebuilding architecture created by the United Nations World Summit in December 2005 includes the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the newly-established Peacebuilding Community of Practice (PBCoP).

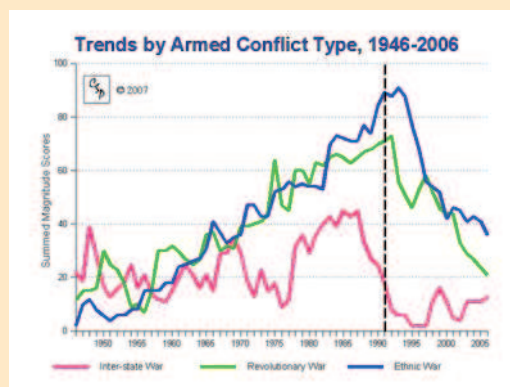
¹⁰¹ A similar mapping of peacebuilding expertise among Geneva-based United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and think tanks was carried out in the biennium 2006-2007 under the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, leading to the creation of a Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. See the *International Geneva Peacebuilding Guide* (<http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/IGPeaceProject/Guide/>).

While the technical and scientific activities of the regional commissions may not lend themselves to traditional notions of peace and security as in the case of, for example, regional organizations such as OSCE, NATO or the African Union, their work can go a long way towards building confidence, promoting mutual understanding and preventative diplomacy. Indeed, as one example, the history of UNECE shows how one regional commission played an instrumental role in post-Second World War reconstruction:

The responsibility for the financial and macro-economic aspects of the recovery programme were given to the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and the Bretton Woods institutions, while the ECE was asked to focus on the technical aspects.... (Y. Berthelot and P. Rayment Looking Back and Peering Forward: A short history of UNECE, 1947-2007 (Geneva, United Nations, 2007).

In the post-Cold War period, UNECE served as a bridge between East and West, bringing all the parties to the table to discuss environmental problems such as water management and air quality, and carving out norms and standards in customs, transport and trade. Politics took second billing, while sustainable development and good governance, including environmental governance, were at the forefront of discussions. This so-called functionalist approach formed the basis of UNECE work in both the post-Second World War reconstruction and in the post-Cold War transition to a market economy. It has been the backdrop for regional cooperation and integration ever since.

Trends by Armed Conflict Type, 1946-2006



Source: "Measuring Systemic Peace", Centre for Systemic Peace

Indeed, the Security Council underlined the role of regional organizations when it considered post-conflict peacebuilding on its agenda in 2008:

"The Security Council reaffirms the role of regional organizations in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, and the need to strengthen the capacity of regional organizations in helping countries recover from conflict" (Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2008/16, 20 May 2008).

The question is: how can the international peacebuilding community tap into the resources and expertise of the regional commissions to maximize this potential?

While the work of the Peacebuilding Commission focuses on individual countries, there is a clear recognition of the need to consider these in a wider regional perspective. Both causes and consequences of conflict are often embedded in a complex regional context.... Sharing experiences across regions is a valuable contribution to strengthening this key regional dimension of the peacebuilding response. —Sergei A. Ordzhonikidze, Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva.

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND PEACEBUILDING

Based on the lessons learned from the economic transition process from central planning to market-led capitalism, several core principles of economic governance have emerged as particularly relevant for peacebuilding in a post-conflict setting:

- The importance of building sound and viable institutions
- Promoting public participation and a bottom-up approach to policymaking
- Fostering strict transparency in national budgets
- Promoting long-term sustainable development
- Applying a regional approach to peacebuilding.

Selected indicators of success in applying principles of economic governance

Institution and capacity-building

- Legislation defining and protecting property rights
- Existence of independent auditing agencies and offices
- Institutions that promote vertical linkages between civil society and government

Public participation/bottom-up approach

- Legislation supporting public participation in decision-making
- Involvement of key stakeholders in policymaking
- Existence of independent think tanks in policymaking

Transparency in financial management

- Number of convictions on corruption charges
- Number of civil servants separated from post due to corruption
- Number of articles published by media exposing corruption

Sustainable development

- Legislation on environmental protection
- Ratification of multilateral environmental agreements
- Implementation of Aarhus Convention in access to justice and public information on environment

Regional focus

- Number of international conventions signed
- Membership of regional cooperation bodies
- Number of agreements implemented as part of membership in regional economic organizations

Source: Geoffrey Hamilton and Brinda Wachs, *Putting Economic Governance at the Heart of Peacebuilding* (UNECE, 2008).

These five principles of economic governance form the basis of the potential contribution of UNECE to conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. Moreover, UNECE work on economic governance has provided an entry point to its involvement both with International Geneva (e.g. the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform under the Geneva Centre for Security Policy) and within the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), based at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. A particularly useful channel for the cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge-sharing is the PBSO's Peacebuilding Community of Practice (PBCoP), the virtual pillar of the United Nations new peacebuilding architecture.

PEACEBUILDING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

As part of the new PBCoP, a first face-to-face workshop was held in July 2008 in Hiroshima. The event was organized by PBSO, the Hiroshima Peacebuilders Center, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and United Nations University. UNECE was asked to present its work on peacebuilding and economic governance, and in particular, to share lessons learned from the transition process in Europe.

The Hiroshima workshop brought together peace practitioners from United Nations field offices (in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Timor-Leste), the World Bank and members of Japanese civil society to share best practice across a range of expertise and to carve out a common vision for a Peacebuilding Community of Practice.

The Peacebuilding Community of Practice is a mutual support and advocacy network that provides – through real-time knowledge and experience sharing – support to United Nations practitioners seeking to help conflict-affected countries and peoples achieve durable peace and sustainable development... (from the PBCoP Mission Statement, first Annual PBCoP workshop¹⁰²).

The workshop showed that several agencies within the United Nations system are working together to provide expertise across disparate mandates to facilitate post-conflict State-building and peacebuilding, including the rule of law, electoral reform, transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and security sector reform. UNECE presented examples of its work programme in the areas of environmental and economic governance, a clear niche for the regional commissions within the overall United Nations family.

The Peacebuilding Commission is increasingly advocating an integrated and strategic approach to peacebuilding across several areas of expertise, as well as the need to link integrated peacebuilding strategies to the poverty reduction strategies in the conflict-affected countries.

Moreover, the regional approach to peacebuilding was considered as vital and another area where the regional commissions could provide value added in a post-conflict situation: since the spillover effects of war are so often transboundary (including the human toll, e.g. refugees and displaced populations, as well as the impact of war on environment and natural resources), the solutions should also be transboundary.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORT ON PEACEBUILDING AND EARLY RECOVERY

Following the recent appointment of Jane Holl Lute as Assistant Under-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, international consultations are under way on a forthcoming report by the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and early recovery. Inputs to the report developed earlier by the Policy Committee Working Group appointed by the Secretary-General were specifically targeted to employment creation, income generation and reintegration of ex-combatants into viable (and non-military) economic activity. Several aspects were emphasized:

- The importance of integrated strategies
- Women and youth job creation
- Transition to unsubsidized job growth
- The importance of functioning markets
- Differences between urban and rural job opportunities
- Protection of property rights, including for internally displaced persons and returnees.

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP IN THE STUDY OF POST-CONFLICT ECONOMY

For post-conflict societies, returning to economic viability necessitates focusing attention on employment generation, youth employment programmes, the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs), intellectual property, land and property rights, and the enforcement of contracts. Again, this is an area where the regional commissions, and in particular UNECE, have a comparative advantage.

Employment creation and income generation for ex-combatants is an important part of rebuilding a post-conflict economy. However, more far-reaching and integrated strategies for promoting long-term sustainable economic development are lacking.

One slice of the post-conflict peacebuilding "pie" that needs further attention and more profound reflection is post-conflict economy.

¹⁰² See: <https://sharepoint.undp.org/sites/peacebuilding/Pages/hiroshima2008.aspx> (Username: undpmoss\peace.generic2, password: Peace2008).

While much of the recent literature examining the challenges of post-conflict state-building have focused on the importance of good governance, human rights and democracy. New thinking on post-conflict economic development is scant. Several authors have pointed to the economic costs and causes of war and the importance of transparency and accountability (anti-corruption measures) vis-à-vis building up new institutions in the post-war setting¹⁰³.

In addition, recent work by both UNDP and ILO has shown the importance of local-level initiatives in post-conflict recovery¹⁰⁴.

Yet there is a clear gap in the recent academic literature on how to move from the point of initial macro-economic stabilization after war to long-term sustainable development, e.g. on the basis of sound principles of economic governance, and including environmental governance¹⁰⁵. Aside from the principles of economic governance set out above, several concrete programmes and activities within UNECE are conducive to long-term economic viability and can provide a model for other regions of the world.

HOW ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE ARE BUILDING PEACE

Innovation and economic dynamism

Innovation – the introduction of new products or processes, often with a superior technological content – is an essential driver of economic dynamism and sustained prosperity, including in post-conflict societies. Innovation is the result of a complex set of interactions between public authorities, business, research institutions and consumers. The outcome depends on the availability of inputs used in the innovation process, such as education or research and development spending. Innovation and economic dynamism is an important part of the work of the UNECE Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration, and is increasingly recognized as a critical ingredient to spurring long-term economic growth¹⁰⁶.

Public-private partnerships: access to funds for reconstruction

Another focus of the same Committee is promoting public-private partnerships (PPPs) for improving infrastructure and public services. The key challenge in promoting the use of the PPP model is the lack of skills within Governments to launch successful programmes. UNECE has prepared best practice guidelines on promoting good governance in PPPs. Using the guidelines as a basis, it is preparing “training the trainers” modules that can build local capacity to transfer the skills to agencies in transition economies so that they can undertake PPPs. These modules refer to policy and critical issues in PPPs – organizing an effective PPP programme within Governments, creating the right legal and regulatory framework, and achieving delivery and skills required at each stage of the PPP project cycle. This involves specific tasks such as writing a PPP business case, evaluating and allocating risks, procuring a partner, ensuring contract compliance and performance monitoring, and teaching the specific skills for projects in different sectors, e.g. transport, health, education or energy.

Multilateral environmental agreements as conflict prevention tools

It is essential to bring the parties to the table to discuss shared water resources, air quality standards, environmental impact assessments and public participation; such discussions build confidence, foster mutual understanding and promote regional cooperation. UNECE work under the Committee on Environmental Policy covers the implementation of its five multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and their numerous protocols, as well as its Environmental Performance Reviews, a Water and Security Initiative for Central Asia and the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP). Each of these activities constitutes an important framework for environmental protection and cooperation in the region, with strong implications for stability and security. The five MEAs provide the machinery to address complex, long-term, politically sensitive and technically demanding transboundary issues. If not dealt with effectively, over time such issues can create tension and possibly ignite conflicts.

¹⁰³ See Ahsraf Ghani and Claire Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States* (Oxford, United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2008); Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Falling into War and What Can Be Done about it* (Oxford, United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2007); and Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, Colorado, United States, Lynne Rienner, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ The importance of local dynamics and local actors in promoting economic recovery in countries ravaged by war is highlighted in *Post-Conflict Economic Recovery: Enabling Local Ingenuity* (UNDP, 2008); ILO is developing a series of workshops devoted to local economic recovery (LER) approaches that target local solutions for post-conflict economic recovery, employment and reintegration in peacebuilding settings (ILO International Programme on Crisis Response Prevention and Recovery).

¹⁰⁵ As this essay is going to press, UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery released *Post-Conflict Economic Recovery: Enabling Local Ingenuity* (UNDP/BCPR, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Iraq in August 2008 to carry out a science, technology and innovation policy review (STIP) to help Iraq take practical, effective steps to reconstruct its economy and speed its future development.

Environment as a security issue

The Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative¹⁰⁷, of which UNECE is a partner with UNDP, UNEP, OSCE, the Regional Environmental Center (REC) and NATO (the latter as an associated partner), works to assess and address environmental problems, which threaten or are perceived to threaten security, societal stability and peace, human health and/or sustainable livelihoods, within and across national borders in conflict prone regions. The ENVSEC Initiative collaborates closely with Governments, particularly foreign, defense and environment ministries, national experts and NGOs. Together with the stakeholders, the ENVSEC Initiative has carried out assessments and published reports documented by maps that help us better understand the linkages between environment and security in the political and socio-economic realities in South-Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. Based on the assessments, the Initiative develops and implements work programmes aimed at reducing tensions and solving the problems identified. Through extensive regional consultations and multi-stakeholder participation, the Initiative seeks to:

- Identify environment and conflict hot spots by carrying out desk and field assessments
- Present the results of the assessments in graphically rich maps, reports and websites, and draw the attention of politicians and people to situations and hot spots where risks are high
- Help societies to deal with priority issues by raising awareness, building capacities and strengthening institutions
- Support concrete action and catalyze specific solutions for the identified security-relevant environmental problems on the ground.

These challenges are being tackled with a combination of political, socio-economic and environmental insights as well as the capacity and skills of the six partners. The ENVSEC Initiative also collaborates with think tanks and research institutes to increase the understanding of the interdependency of natural resources, socio-economic development and political stability.

In autumn 2002, OSCE, UNDP and UNEP joined forces with a range of United Nations agencies and NGOs to promote better environmental management as a strategy for reducing insecurity in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Through extensive regional consultations, and under the expert guidance of an international steering committee, this effort sought to:

- Deliver regionally appropriate definitions of the environment and security linkages of greatest relevance in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Map these risks and opportunities in the form of a graphically rich final report and websites
- Present the maps and their conclusions at the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Kiev, 2003), with recommendations for follow-up action
- Mobilize resources and expertise to implement the suggested follow-up activities¹⁰⁸.

Land and property rights

From a legal perspective, victims of war are often unaware that their property rights are being violated. Concurrently, there is often a lack of reliable information on land rights and registration. A highly controlled environment often exists in which local officials can coerce landowners, and poor citizens generally cannot afford legal assistance. Third-party arbitration courts across the Commonwealth of Independent States region reduce the overall costs of delivering legal information and consultations and provide access to justice for the poor in remote areas. They also give people the confidence to claim and defend their constitutional rights to land and property. Land-titling programmes have been also widely promoted by Governments and international agencies in developing countries as a means of increasing tenure security, improving access to formal credit, stimulating investment in home improvements, and strengthening urban land and housing markets.

The UNECE Working Party on Land Administration recently held a workshop on land tenure that focused on legal empowerment for the poor, including property rights and security of land. The workshops were to identify the challenges faced by UNECE countries vis-à-vis upgrading and modernizing their land management and administration systems, to better clarify a possible role for UNECE donor countries with respect to land-related issues and to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Gender in post-conflict recovery

Post-conflict economic recovery, especially at the local level, is often in the hands of women. As remaining heads of households, their economic independence is vital in the reconstruction period. A gender-sensitive approach also reduces the

¹⁰⁷ For more information, see: <http://www.envsec.org/about.php>.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.osce.org/activities/13040.html>.

risk of new conflicts and instability, which are often linked to the tendency of young males to engage in criminal activities in depressed economic environments. This also gives women a public role in rebuilding market institutions and peace.

UNECE has begun to promote gender-sensitive economic policies through disseminating good practice and organizing capacity-building workshops for policymakers on such subjects as small and medium-sized enterprises, business associations and women entrepreneurship; contributing to building a gender-sensitive information society; developing methodologies; collecting gender-disaggregated data; and training on gender statistics.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE-THINK

So if UNECE is gradually carving out a niche for itself by recognizing the value of its contribution to post-conflict peacebuilding making the link between economic development, peace and security, how can this model be shared with the other regional commissions? How can UNECE play a more active role in International Geneva, and how can its programmes and activities be better shared with the rest of the world?

A high-level dialogue on peacebuilding among the regional commissions

One entry point could be a High-level Dialogue on Peacebuilding involving the five economic regional commissions. This would allow the other regional commissions to start looking at their heretofore largely economic and social work as playing a vital role in peace and security in their respective regions¹⁰⁹.

A framework agreement on post-conflict governance

Another approach is to mainstream the principles of economic governance cited above into international policymaking in a post-conflict context. At present, there exists no overarching internationally agreed convention or standard regarding the behaviour of States, donors and other actors in post-conflict societies. There is currently considerable discussion on setting standards for reforming and improving economic development. Could similar standards be drawn up for post-conflict societies using as a basis the principles set out in this essay?¹¹⁰

One could, for instance, mainstream the principles of economic governance into international policymaking for post-conflict regimes by transforming the principles into an international framework agreement, convention, charter or compact. UNECE sets norms and standards and draws up international conventions in economic cooperation in many areas. Moreover, the EU standards, as set out in the *acquis communautaire*, were critical to setting out a course of action and to providing incentives (EU membership) for countries to follow in the transition process.

Building on these principles, it can be argued that an internationally accepted compact – a set of standards or a convention – could be agreed upon during the process of negotiating the peace. Such an agreement on post-conflict governance could provide a number of critical actions for peacebuilding, for instance:

- Improve regional economic cooperation
- Promote bottom-up approaches and greater involvement of society in peacebuilding
- Ensure the implementation of budgetary arrangements that improve financial transparency
- Encourage transparency in the financial dealings of banks and companies in their interactions with post-conflict societies
- Set out ways to implement the standards in post-conflict societies through capacity-building.

Even if these aspects are only a start, they are the essentials for building successful post-conflict regimes, and would serve as a confidence-building measure, not only among former belligerents but also for neighbouring States.

Since the spillover effects of war and conflict (including environmental and economic effects) are transboundary, the solutions should also be transboundary. For this reason, regional approaches to peacebuilding are gaining ground in the post-conflict debate, giving the United Nations regional commission's a clear role to play in the aftermath of war.

¹⁰⁹ A number of examples can be readily found. *Development assistance in mitigating and exacerbating conflict* (UNESCWA, 2006) examines ways in which sustainable development can be pursued in countries marked by conflict and socio-political instability, and *Monitoring and analysis report of political, social and economic development in countries affected by conflict* (UNESCWA, 2006) focuses on political, social and economic developments in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Iraq. The relevance of African traditional institutions of governance (UNECA, 2007) uses a theoretical framework to explain how traditional institutions can contribute to Africa's socio-economic transformation and identifies areas in which the application of traditional institutions of governance could have significant transformative impact.

¹¹⁰ For a more in-depth discussion, see Geoffrey Hamilton and Brinda Wachs, *Putting Economic Governance at the Heart of Peacebuilding* (Geneva, United Nations, 2008).