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## The UN Peacebuilding Commission

# PEP BRIEFING NOTE

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### A Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping (PEP) Publication

The PEP is a non-partisan policy working group that brings together the humanitarian, human rights, peace and security, think tank, and academic communities in support of greater peace operations capacity. The PEP promotes public policy solutions to improve national and international peacekeeping infrastructure, and works to build the political will to support such policies by: providing an open forum for discussion of peace operations issues; serving as an information resource for media and policymakers; and engaging in educational efforts that facilitate greater understanding of peace operations. The PEP does not exclusively support any one particular solution for the capacity problems that prevent effective peacekeeping operations. Rather, the PEP facilitates the exploration of all potential pragmatic and achievable solutions in a candid and 'outside the box' atmosphere.

### Introduction

Around half of the countries that emerge from war fall back into conflict within five years. Many U.N. peace operations have failed to secure a permanent peace – indeed, they are more accurately called “lidkeeping” missions. Rather than eliminating the root causes of violent conflict, thus enabling a country to develop lasting institutions of governance and sustainable development, the U.N. often can do little more than contain and delay a renewal of violent conflict.

One particular problem is found within the U.N. system itself. In Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s own words, “No part of the United Nations system effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace.” For that reason, a Peacebuilding Commission and a Peacebuilding Support Office were proposed, most recently by the Secretary-General in his report *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*.

### The Peacebuilding Commission

On December 20, 2005, the UN General Assembly and Security Council respectively agreed to resolutions establishing a Peacebuilding Commission, making this initiative one of the first from the September World Summit to come to fruition. The adopted resolutions describe the central purpose of the Commission as maintaining attention on conflict-afflicted areas and preventing them from moving off the collective radar screen of the international community. UN General Assembly President Jan Eliasson of Sweden lauded the Commission as the first “[UN] mechanism which ensures that for countries emerging from conflict, post-conflict does not mean post-engagement of the international community.”

The Commission is to serve as the central point for developing comprehensive peacebuilding strategies by unifying the overall planning for peacebuilding operations and supporting, but not replacing, country-level planning for recovery. It will also provide a forum for exchange of information and lessons learned among representatives from the myriad institutions involved in ending conflict, including UN agencies, bilateral donors, troop contributors, regional actors and organizations, the international financial institutions and the national or transitional authorities of the focus country.

The Commission, at least in its conceptual form, was among the least controversial of the World Summit initiatives and enjoyed widespread support among UN member states. Generating more debate were the details of the Commission’s membership structure and lines of reporting. The establishment of a committee co-chaired by Denmark and Tanzania, tasked with facilitating agreement among General Assembly members on the Commission’s schema, helped to achieve agreement by the end-of-year deadline set at the Summit.

A 31-person Organizational Committee will lead the Commission, with members each serving two-year terms. Comprising the Committee will be seven representatives each from the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as five representatives each from among the top financial donors to the UN and the top contributors of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions. An additional seven members from the General Assembly will also join the Committee in an effort to provide the geographic balance and representation from countries with experience in post-conflict

recovery as called for in the Commission's founding resolution.

The resolution establishes that the Commission will act only by consensus, devising integrated proposals for stabilization, economic recovery and development, and providing recommendations for effective UN coordination on those efforts. It will set its agenda based on requests by the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, or Member States on the "verge of lapsing or relapsing into conflict."

The Commission will have support from a Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), which will house sixteen professional staff members and exist within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The PBSO will aim to connect the work of the Commission to the rest of the UN system and to maximize UN coordination on peacebuilding activities. The PBSO will assist the Commission in three specific areas: developing peacebuilding strategies; generating funds for peacebuilding and recovery activities; and gleaning best practices from UN peacebuilding activities and identifying where these activities cross-cut the UN system. The PBSO will also provide other substantive assistance to the Commission as requested.

### **Progress of the Commission**

On May 16, 2006, the UN announced the finalized membership of the Commission's Organizational Committee. The General Assembly elected Chile, El Salvador, Jamaica, Egypt, Burundi, Fiji and Croatia to the Committee, with Jamaica and Croatia designated through a drawing of lots to serve an initial period of only one year. Elected from the Economic and Social Council are Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Poland, Brazil and Belgium. The other members are China, Denmark, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, United States, Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands and Norway.

The Secretary-General also announced on that date the appointment of Carolyn McAskie of Canada as the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, a position responsible for providing support to the Commission. Ms. McAskie was formerly the UN Special Envoy to Burundi and head of the UN peacekeeping operation there.

### **Analysis**

The Commission aims to fill a critical gap in the UN's capacity to move beyond traditional peacekeeping towards instilling a sustainable peace that does not require outside enforcement in war-torn countries. Lack of funding and authority to manage the conflict transition process, however, may compromise its ability to meet its ambitious goals.

The creation of the Commission is important as a demonstration of international commitment to peacebuilding, but several aspects of its formation are problematic. The strong support that the Commission received from all levels of the UN ostensibly signals broad comprehension within the organization of the urgent need for it to expand peacebuilding capacity. Yet already the Commission is facing the same key obstacle to effectiveness that has plagued UN peace operations—insufficient resources. The Secretary-General proposed the creation of twenty-one new positions to staff the Commission and its Peacebuilding Support Office. The UN budget committee nixed this idea, however, preferring to stick to the language of the Summit outcome document, which advised that the Commission members come from current UN staff and utilize "existing resources."

It is unreasonable to expect the UN to take on such a significant new challenge without increasing its human and capital resources. Overarching reform efforts at the UN will attempt to streamline some facets of the organization, resulting in budgetary savings that could be reprogrammed towards efforts such as the Commission. But real increases in the UN budget will be necessary to give the Peacebuilding Commission the requisite resources. It is ironic that the process of creating the Commission, a response to the shortcomings of peacekeeping operations, is not incorporating one glaring lesson from those shortcomings—you get what you pay for. Turning conflict into peace is challenging even if those attempting to do it are highly trained and well-equipped. To undertake such a challenge without adequate funding invites failure.

The gap in resources extends further to the proposed Peacebuilding Fund, money for which would come from voluntary contributions. The High-Level Panel report released in late 2004 proposed \$250 million for the Fund.

Even if countries contribute enough to match this figure, it cannot hope to meet the needs of conflict-affected countries. At the March 2004 Berlin conference, Afghanistan's government alone requested \$27.5 billion in aid over a seven-year period, nearly \$4 billion per year; the urgent needs of nations such as Sudan, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will increase exponentially the number of aid dollars required in the coming years.

An equally critical obstacle to the effective performance of the Commission is that it has no real authority to manage the conflict transition process. It has been designed to be a forum for discussion and coordination, but it has no executive management responsibility to assure the adherence of the multitude of UN agencies, international institutions, bilateral agencies, national and local agencies, and civil society organizations to an agreed-upon coherent and effective post-conflict plan. These institutions may choose to participate in the workings of the Commission or they may not, but the Commission will be able to do little to ensure cooperation. That may prove to be a major flaw in the design of this essential reform.

There are two other key points of concern with the Commission. It lacks the mandate to prevent conflicts, resigning the body to reacting when conflict breaks out but not in response to early-warning signs. Second, the large number of representatives on the Commission could make it difficult for the body to reach consensus and delay its progress.

### **Looking Forward**

The expected date of the Commission's first meeting is in early June. As it moves into its inaugural year, some initial objectives warrant the attention of its members. Of foremost importance is that the Commission develops a coherent, comprehensive framework for post-conflict recovery and long-term peacebuilding. Equally important, moreover, is that Commission members look beyond the bureaucracy and integrate the experiences and knowledge of civil society organizations throughout its planning process. The PBC should also work to formulate clear criteria for selecting countries to review, as the current activity around country selection lacks transparency and appears haphazard. Finally, the PBC will strengthen its credibility if it can figure out ways to keep abreast of the status of conflict even in countries that it has not chosen to examine specifically.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office, and the Peacebuilding Fund respond to a real problem — the need to manage the transition from war to peace more effectively. The implementation of these reforms moves the U.N. closer to a more coherent solution to that problem. It will be critical for the U.S. and other Member States to provide leadership to ensure the new Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office are capable of fulfilling their mandate.