

Outcome report: Nairobi consultation of civil society peacebuilding organizations on the New Agenda for Peace

Submission prepared as an input to the New Agenda for Peace process

March 2023

Summary

1. Civic space around the world [is being shut down](#). Governments are [using](#) draconian legislation to crack down on civil society organizations (CSOs) promoting political and human rights, equality and accountability. Stifling public debate in this way undermines efforts to build peace. There is a wealth of [evidence](#) to show that sustainable peace is founded on civic engagement and participation. Moreover, the UN needs to collaborate with CSOs to deliver on its mandate. The New Agenda for Peace must include strategies to safeguard and expand civic space in local, national and global spheres.
 2. The increasing [securitization](#) of responses to conflict is another critical threat to peace. The spread of aggressive narratives, alongside repressive policies and legislation, militarized interventions and partnerships – often under the mantle of ‘[countering terrorism](#)’ – contribute to the squeezing of civic space while also fanning the flames of violence. The New Agenda for Peace must push back against the securitization of multilateral structures and frameworks for peacebuilding.
 3. Fewer resources are being allocated to peacebuilding globally. Furthermore, while the need for peacebuilding to be led by local actors and for investment in local capacities is increasingly acknowledged, there has so far been little reorientation of investment. Multilateral organizations, such as the UN and the World Bank, need to massively upscale not just the quantity but also the quality of their support for local peacebuilding organizations.
 4. The escalating reality of climate change poses a multifaceted threat to peacebuilding. The New Agenda for Peace must consider the context-specific impacts of climate variability and extreme weather events on natural resource availability, livelihoods and migration – all of which interact with conflict drivers. Resources should be dedicated for both climate-sensitive peacebuilding and for conflict-sensitive environmental programming in order to mitigate against insecurity and violence.
 5. If the UN’s New Agenda for Peace is to have any resonance beyond the international policy community, and if it is to gain traction in the many areas of the world directly affected by violence, conflict and insecurity, it must be founded on inclusive and meaningful local ownership. Trust cannot be generated through exclusive consultation processes; solidarity requires listening and responding to the concerns of all stakeholders, and universality cannot be achieved if only certain voices are heard and represented.
-

Overview

6. From 14–15 March 2023, 30 representatives from CSOs spanning 16 countries across Africa and Asia came together in Nairobi, Kenya. The purpose was to develop a shared set of peacebuilding priorities to inform the UN Secretary-General’s New Agenda for Peace. Participants included representatives of community-based, national and international peacebuilding organizations. This submission is a summary of the discussions and recommendations from that consultation.

Cross-cutting priorities for action: civic space, climate impacts and securitization

7. A vibrant and active civil society is essential for achieving the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. As noted in the UN's 'Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space', civic space is a threshold issue for the successful implementation of all three pillars of the UN. However, around the world, Member States are taking a [wide range of measures to shut down the space](#) for civil society to exist and operate. This directly impacts the ability of peacebuilding organizations to prevent violence, transform conflict and help build lasting peace.
8. Numerous states are repurposing existing legislation or passing new [legislation to limit the space](#) for CSOs. Tactics include the [imposition of crippling](#) financial regulations, endlessly protracted registration processes, onerous inspection regimes, and the requirement of state approval of all outputs. In some cases, CSOs are [branded](#) as enemies of the state and agents of [malign](#) foreign influence. The New Agenda for Peace must include clear recommendations for protecting and safeguarding civic space if it hopes to harness local capacities, knowledge and commitment to peacebuilding.
9. It is well-known that the impacts of a changing climate [exacerbate the risks](#) of violent conflict – either as a consequence of intensified competition for diminishing natural resources, food, and livelihood insecurity, or due to new patterns of migration. This is not a new phenomenon, and many communities have [adapted to these challenges](#) over the years. However, the escalation of climate variability and shocks in the past decade, with rises in average temperatures around the world and greater frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, are a clear indication that this issue must be at the heart of the New Agenda for Peace.
10. Due care must be taken to develop nuanced analysis of the impacts of climate on conflict drivers in each context. Narrow or formulaic framing that [reduces conflict to a climate-induced problem will obscure other key drivers](#), such as failing governance, economic inequality and socio-cultural divisions. The New Agenda for Peace should work with a range of local actors to analyze how climate change intersects with other conflict drivers and to develop [multifaceted, context-specific responses](#).
11. The securitization of responses to conflict both perpetuates violence and undermines peacebuilding efforts. Despite [increasing evidence of their ineffectiveness](#), state authorities continue to tackle perceived threats to stability through hard security policies, and militarized interventions and partnerships. Investment in military campaigns and policy frameworks – such as the countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) agenda – is manifestly [not delivering peace and security](#) for communities in the worst-affected contexts, like [Somalia](#), Mali and Nigeria. Blurring the lines between counter-terrorism and peacebuilding is [neither desirable nor useful](#) for efforts to reduce violence and build sustainable peace.
12. The [narrow framing of much counter-terrorism and C/PVE](#) work leads to short-term and exclusionary responses that at best put a halt to symptomatic violence, but which fail to address and transform the underlying structural causes of conflict. This approach prevents the UN from deploying the full range of its capacities and expertise as part of a coordinated developmental approach to addressing violent extremism, while casting doubt on its impartiality. [It damages the UN's role and credibility as a peacemaking body](#).

Getting the process right: local ownership, financing and inclusion

13. An effective New Agenda for Peace depends as much on getting the system and mechanisms right as on identifying the priority areas for action. There is abundant evidence that building sustainable peace depends on [local ownership](#), resource [flexibility](#) and a long-term vision. The vast majority of resources for humanitarian assistance as a whole, including for peacebuilding, remain inaccessible to national and local CSOs. Instead, the bulk of funding is allocated to UN agencies and, to a lesser extent, international NGOs. Despite a series of international agreements

and commitments in recent years, the proportion of international humanitarian funding allocated to national and local organizations [amounts to less than 4 per cent of total assistance](#) – well below the pledges of 25 per cent. International donors need to [evolve their systems](#) to facilitate financing for national and local CSOs, including upwards as well as downwards accountability mechanisms.

14. Changes in the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) are welcome, but more should be done to ensure that CSOs are able to access PBF resources. The UNPBF Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative is one of the only UN mechanisms that is currently able to channel resources to CSOs, but it received only [20 per cent of PBF funds in 2022](#), and over half of this [was granted to international NGOs](#). The UN needs to establish mechanisms for funding national and local organizations directly, rather than channeling funds through international NGOs to pass on to local partners. The benefits of PBF support are also constrained by unrealistically short timeframes. Developing sustainable peacebuilding approaches in complex and dynamic conflict contexts requires far longer than the current PBF 18-month grant periods allow.
15. Despite decades of advocacy on women's inclusion in peace processes and peacebuilding – notably through the landmark UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, as well as numerous national action plans – women continue to be underrepresented in such processes. [Evidence abounds](#) on the crucial roles women play in local peacebuilding; however, patriarchal norms and masculinized security spaces often prevent women, especially young women, from speaking out publicly and having access to decision-making. The New Agenda for Peace must promote and support inclusive local ownership and include both women and men in peacebuilding at all levels. The UN must also continue to [challenge and transform the gender norms](#) that drive violent conflict and gender-based violence.
16. Young people are another [key constituency for peace](#). However, around the world, states are failing to engage youth in peacebuilding or include them in peace processes. The groundbreaking UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security in 2018 – along with subsequent resolutions UNSCR 2419 and 2535 – represented a shift in policy, but this is yet to be widely operationalized. Moreover, despite new funding streams for young people in the PBF, there is overall a marked lack of investment in youth, peace and security. The New Agenda for Peace should support the [implementation](#) of UN Security Council resolutions promoting the inclusion of young people in peace processes and in humanitarian action, [as well as protecting their freedom to operate in civic and political spaces](#).

Recommendations

17. Civic space: the New Agenda for Peace should build on the UN Secretary General's [Sustaining Peace report](#), which elevates the role of civil society in peacebuilding, including the role of women and youth organizations. It should commit to promoting and protecting civic space as a fundamental priority for peace. This should be codified in the New Agenda for Peace with specific reference to the [UN Guidance Note on protecting and promoting civic space](#). The UN should, through the PBF and other sources, fund peacebuilding work that is specifically designed around expanding civic space. UN leadership should actively protect the ability of civil society to safely and meaningfully engage and participate in national and international processes. It should also strengthen its own mechanisms to empower and encourage the participation of civil society in decision-making within the UN system.
18. Securitization: peacebuilding and counter-terrorism efforts are not mutually exclusive, but in practice, counter-terrorism interventions have often been counterproductive for efforts to sustain peace. What is clear from the past two decades of failed military interventions is that [hard security responses exacerbate](#) the grievances that give rise to violent conflict. Therefore, the New Agenda for Peace should not incorporate a counter-terrorism focus as this is [inimical to building sustainable peace](#). A narrow, [militarized response to conflict](#) is not the UN's role and should – regardless of pressure from some states – be rejected as incompatible with the UN Charter.

19. Climate change: this is no longer a hypothetical ‘[threat multiplier](#)’ for conflict but a growing reality in conflict-affected contexts. To strengthen understanding of how it interacts with conflict, the New Agenda for Peace should promote the inclusion of a climate lens in all peacebuilding work. Equally, it should promote the importance of a [conflict-sensitive](#) approach in all climate change and environmental programming. It should call for greater investment in early response systems capable of forecasting climate shocks, so that peacebuilding resources and expertise can be rapidly mobilized and targeted to prevent the emergence of climate-related conflict.
20. Local ownership: the New Agenda for Peace should recognize the essential role that local actors play in building peace, and should promote locally led peacebuilding. This includes granting peacebuilding funds [directly to national and local CSOs](#), particularly those that work with communities experiencing and responding to conflict. Current funding mechanisms favor international NGOs, with local actors mostly receiving funds indirectly as the sub-grantee and ‘junior partner’ of an international NGO. Providing funds directly will support local organizations to [take the lead](#) in designing and implementing peacebuilding strategies.
21. Financing: the New Agenda for Peace should promote more long-term and flexible funding for peacebuilding. This should include longer grant periods (a minimum of 36 months), with flexible parameters to accommodate responsiveness to dynamic and fast-changing contexts. While the PBF is the central peacebuilding funding instrument within the UN, consideration should be given to introducing these principles into all relevant UN funding instruments.
22. Partnerships: partnerships with civil society are essential for the UN to effectively implement its mandate. However, CSOs should be seen as equal partners in the entire project cycle – from analysis and planning, to monitoring and evaluation of initiatives. The New Agenda for Peace should recommit to this practice and direct all UN funds, agencies and programmes to review its partnership strategies to assess where and how these relationships can be made more equal.
23. Inclusive engagement: the New Agenda for Peace should promote the participation of a diverse range of civil society actors – in particular, women and youth organizations – in all aspects of the UN’s work, both in-country and at the UN headquarters. To support this, the UN should establish dedicated focal points for civil society in each entity, in order to create space for civil society actors to engage constructively with, and contribute to, the UN’s New Agenda for Peace.

This submission was developed by Saferworld, Interpeace, and the Life & Peace Institute. It is based on the experiences and perspectives of 20 civil society organizations from Africa and Asia that were shared during a consultation held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 14–15 March 2023. The views expressed in this submission may not represent the positions of all those who attended the consultation.