

Building a world community



**Special Election Section
September 2015**

United Nations Peacebuilding in the Twenty-First Century

**Carolyn McAskie, O.C.,
Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support 2006-2008**

At the 2005 United Nations Reform Summit, member states launched an unprecedented set of institutions referred to as the Peacebuilding Architecture -- the Peacebuilding Commission, along with a special Fund and a support unit inside the UN Secretariat.

The 2004 [“High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change”](#) had recommended a new United Nations structure to support transitions from conflict to post-conflict, particularly in “marshalling and sustaining” international support “over whatever period may be necessary”. The Secretary General’s 2005 response, “In Larger Freedom”, therefore, proposed the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission along with a voluntary fund to finance urgent interventions.

Peacebuilding per se goes back several decades; however, its UN roots are in the Secretary General’s 1992 “Agenda for Peace.” But it was after 2000, with the international community’s focus on refining the tools of mediation, peacekeeping, development, human rights and humanitarian action and coordination, that the concept of peacebuilding evolved substantially. It became more and more evident, from academic and practical work on the link between conflict and development, that longer term efforts were required to ensure the sustainability of peace in post conflict countries. Populations in war-affected countries need to see the benefits of peace, and governments need support in rebuilding institutions if countries are to avoid relapse into conflict. In addition, it became possible to identify trends in fragile states that could lead to conflict, thereby providing potential avenues for prevention of conflict.

The body of institutions referred to as the **Peacebuilding Architecture** comprise the [Peacebuilding Commission \(PBC\)](#), a 31 member intergovernmental advisory body; a [Peacebuilding Fund \(PBF\)](#), a multi-year standing fund to launch immediate activities for post-conflict peacebuilding; and a small [Peacebuilding Support Office \(PBSO\)](#) to assist and support the Commission. The Fund and the Support Office would come under the supervision of the Secretary General. The PBC’s mandate is to support countries emerging from conflict by: extending the period of political attention; bringing together all relevant actors; marshalling resources; advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post conflict peacebuilding and

recovery; and laying the foundation for sustainable development. The architecture was hailed as an innovative mechanism to close the gap in the UN's response to sustainable peace. In its first years the PBC has taken on strategic reviews of peacebuilding requirements in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, Liberia and Guinea-Conakry, in all cases at the request of the countries themselves. In addition, 32 countries have received support from the Peacebuilding Fund.

After ten years of operation, the Peacebuilding Commission is still finding its feet. The first stage of a mandated 10-year evaluation has been completed with the recent publication of, "The Challenge of Sustaining Peace, Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture." This report makes clear what many of us knew, i.e. that a member state body, with an inadequately funded support system and a small fund, would not be able to solve all the problems with which countries coming out of conflict are faced. Much has been accomplished with support given to peace processes and critical interventions, both political and through the Peacebuilding Fund. But the Report goes much further to say that Peacebuilding must be everyone's responsibility and advocates an ambitious system-wide UN approach to "sustaining peace."

The report argues that UN leadership must now inculcate a culture of peace into all of the UN's work and that management systems should be put in place to counteract the fragmentation of the United Nations varied institutions in this regard. Donors too must start to implement their endless agreements to work together with developing country partners, supporting local efforts and not competing with each other. Attention must be paid to better leadership on the ground, both for the international community, but also in supporting leadership in post-conflict countries **and** in countries at risk of falling into conflict.

The need for a dynamic change of approach is made more urgent by a worrying tendency, which shows, after two decades of a global reduction in conflict, that the number and intensity of major conflicts are now increasing and, as the report points out, they are "more complex, increasingly fragmented and intractable." It is now obvious that there are two very different classes of conflict. There are the ongoing crises (and potential crises) in neglected and fragile states, many in Africa which are still, if not ignored, then not the subject of sufficient political and developmental attention. These include South Sudan, Central African Republic and Somalia, with Burundi and Guinea Bissau and others at risk of relapse. But the ever more complicated emergencies in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Syria and now ISIS will always be beyond the remit of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The ambitious goals outlined in the Report of the Advisory Group of Experts must be seen in the context of the original goals set for the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005. The Report rightly challenges member states to see sustaining peace as the core task set for the UN by its Charter, with a high priority to be given to resources, capacities and organizational hierarchy. Further it calls for sustainable methods of funding, a strengthened field presence and headquarters capacity, mandated coordination among UN operational entities and better cooperation among key member state bodies including the Security Council, the General Assembly and ECOSOC.

Member states will now review the recommendations and decide on action to be taken. It is important to note, however, that the original goals for the PBC, seen as ambitious in 2005, are considerably more modest than those outlined by the Advisory Group of Experts, but nevertheless have not been met. This does not augur well for the review. The PBC has been largely ignored by the Security Council, and the Peacebuilding Support Office has never been in a position to mandate actions by other parts of the UN system. But the most egregious failure of the Commission is that, over and above the work of the Peacebuilding Fund, there has been little in the way of serious funding for sustainable peacebuilding in the countries on the PBC's agenda. Canada spent five years as the Chair of the Commission's sub-committee on Sierra Leone without making a single financial contribution to that country. Nor have there been efforts from many other donors for re-building health and education, justice and good governance and other critical sectors. Is it possible that the effects of the Ebola crisis would have been mitigated if UN member states, both donors and responsible governments, had invested the kind of massive resources envisaged in the health sectors of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the years in which these countries have been on the Commission's agenda? Would Burundi be suffering its current political crisis if similar investments had been made in the justice sector, and in education and employment over the last ten years? These countries have just not had the massive increase in donor attention promised by the mandate of the PBC and therefore remain far behind in their own peacebuilding goals.

The recommendations of the [Advisory Group of Experts on the Peacebuilding Architecture](#) present a major challenge to member states, including Canada. To implement these recommendations will not only require substantial funding, but will require a substantial review of how the organs of the United Nations carry out their business in pursuit of peace. It remains to be seen the extent to which member states will share the admirable and ambitious goals of the Advisory Group and whether they, along with the senior management of the UN, will be prepared to revamp and finance the workings of the system, well beyond the confines of the Peacebuilding Architecture, to work towards global sustainable peace.

This will present a major challenge for the Canadian government in the post-election period.