

## **Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform**

### **“Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda: Opportunities for Prevention?”**

A side-event to the President of the General Assembly's High Level Thematic Dialogue “Building Sustainable Peace for all: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace”  
*January 24, 2017*

The Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform held an informal, off the record lunch discussion to further explore avenues for strengthening prevention at the UN through leveraging synergies between Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda. The meeting sought to identify what opportunities exist for promoting civil society-UN cooperation in this area, and how to ensure that such efforts can have a direct impact on the populations in focus. To open the discussion, three civil society practitioners presented their perspectives and experiences. The civil society representatives provided concrete examples focusing on their experiences working locally and internationally on prevention, Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda. The meeting also sought input from the UN Secretariat who discussed more broadly how prevention is at the core of both Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda. UN experts, civil society actors, and member states participated in this meeting.

The discussion began by emphasizing that the aspirations of Sustaining Peace were reflected throughout the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and that they go beyond Goal 16. The participants highlighted that a wide parameter from structural prevention, systemic prevention and operational prevention (risks, stressors, and triggering points) were reflected across the 17 goals and their targets. It was acknowledged that much of the content in Sustaining Peace is not new but reflects previous UN agendas and processes, set forward in former Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*. However, the renewed momentum represents a normative shift. The challenge now was to move from the normative to the operational, including the importance of bringing Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development together. Two areas were highlighted that present both synergies and challenges:

- It was important to look across all the SDGs. While Goal 16 is important, focusing solely on Goal 16 is not politically, analytically nor operationally desirable.
- The pledge to leave no one behind is essential but particularly challenging in fragile and conflict affected countries.

The participants considered more broadly that prevention of violent conflict is understood to include addressing drivers and root causes of conflict. By bringing all three pillars of the UN together as the entry point for understanding these drivers of conflict and root causes, prevention of violent conflict can be better understood at the national level. The synergies between Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda, which are being embraced by the new Secretary-General, are an additional positive development within the UN. The discussion further identified and reflected on the realities facing international actors and civil society as they address the prevention and Sustaining Peace agendas:

- Civil society is a “new superpower” and the UN needs to think of practical ways to engage this diverse set of actors locally and internationally.
- Conflicts between major powers are re-emerging. How does the prevention agenda address and relate to such conflicts? What is the role of civil society?

- Growing evidence supports that locally led peacebuilding and prevention is more effective and less costly than both peacekeeping operations and large-scale internationally led peacebuilding interventions.
- Local peacebuilders face severe obstacles when seeking to engage with international actors and vice versa. It is imperative to build relationships at the local level and build local capacities to engage effectively.
- The UN's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) provides some funding, but there is a need to bring other major donors together to find an appropriate mechanism to make funding readily available to local actors.
- International actors should ensure their research contributes to building an evidence base to demonstrate the impact of local actors.

Some of the participants highlighted that the bureaucratic nature of the UN hindered civil society participation locally. Based on experiences from grassroots civil society work to set up a national action plan for the UN resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for instance, it was argued that the UN approach often resembles an urgency to complete the project in a very short period. This affects the possibility for a broad set of civil society actors to participate meaningfully as it assumes that the financial and organizational means, resources and capacities to participate are readily available to all civil society actors at any time.

At a policy/UNHQ level, bringing together the new thinking in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustaining Peace resolutions is still a work in progress. Continuing effort needs to go into affirming the political consensus that underpinned the new agreements, and for the UN system, national governments, donors, and IFIs to live up to the implications for their own planning and implementation. The UN faces a significant challenge in mainstreaming these new approaches across a wide range of mission and non-mission settings, and ensuring a consistent focus on the core issues of sustaining peace among different agencies.

#### Discussion Summary:

- There are hopeful signs that the new Secretary-General is embracing both Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda, and is promoting a necessary conversation around what it would take to put these visions into practice.
- However, tension remains around some key issues of the Sustaining Peace and prevention that must be addressed to ensure the desired results.
- If the UN, CSOs and Member States are serious about Sustaining Peace and the 2030 Agenda, it begs the question, what can we change and how can we better engage? This is also a particularly critical question for donor countries.
- There are deep structural reasons for the challenges around funding and cooperation with local actors that donors and UN system need to take responsibility to solve if we want these agendas to be implemented.
- Funding should reach local actors and also build the capacities of the national governments.
- Funding structures pose significant challenges not just to CSOs, but also to the donors. There is a need to explore practical ways of vetting and getting an overview of potential civil society partners and discussing the difficulties the UN as a highly centralized entity face in including and engaging diverse, decentralized, heterogeneous civil society actors.