

NEW YORK MONITOR

International Service for Human Rights



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NEW YORK UPDATE

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The Peacebuilding Commission and the Participation of Civil Society

The Organisational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission (the 'PBC') adopted the 'Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society in Meetings of the Peacebuilding Commission' ('the Guidelines') on 6 June 2007. The Guidelines are intended to guide the involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the PBC's work, and were the product of months of negotiation in the PBC's Ad-hoc Working Group on Pending Issues. The Provisional Guidelines (PBC/1/OC/12) can be found in Annex 1.

The Guidelines are broken down into three sections: General principles, Modalities of attendance and participation, and Review. In the General Principles section, the PBC recognizes the contribution of civil society to all stages of peacebuilding efforts, and calls for the process in organising meetings to be "transparent, flexible and inclusive of all relevant parties."

In the second section on modalities of attendance, the PBC outlines some rules for civil society participation in two types of meetings at UN headquarters: formal and informal. In formal meetings, civil society organisations that are "actively engaged in peacebuilding activities" can make oral statements and provide information "on specific matters within the scope of their activities". More onerous rules are applied to the formal meetings than informal, in particular in regard to the PBC's selection process of civil society organisations and NGOs' reporting requirements, contained in the annexes to the Guidelines. In informal meetings not related to specific countries, relevant actors are encouraged to provide input to technical level informal discussions. In informal meetings related to a particular country, the text states that the PBC will convene public informal meetings both before and after the formal meetings to exchange views with civil society. The Review section details that the present guidelines are subject to review and evaluation six months from the date of their adoption.

Unfortunately, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were not consulted in the development of the Guidelines, though their participation is crucial to making the PBC's work meaningful and effective. During the lead up to the 6 June adoption of the Guidelines, several international NGOs based in New York met and communicated with Government missions and the UN Peace Building Support Office¹ their serious concerns

¹ The Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) is placed in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and supports the PBC by providing information and analysis and by ensuring that the recommendations emanating from the Commission's deliberations are translated into concrete action at the country level. The Secretary-General envisaged the PBSO as the link between the UN system

about the lack of a transparent and inclusive process in the creation of the Guidelines, and highlighted the potential negative impact on the future involvement of civil society in the PBC, should the Guidelines remain unaltered. Those concerns included:

- That the PBC should take a dual track approach to the vetting process for civil society participation: where ECOSOC accreditation has been granted, NGOs should not be subject to further vetting, and all alternative methods of vetting non-ECOSOC NGOs must be fair and transparent. In addition, any objection made by a PBC member to a civil society organisation should be expressed in an open meeting, and the civil society organisation must be given a right of reply (as contained in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31²);
- That the reporting requirements outlined in the Draft Guidelines are too restrictive and would be a barrier to the participation of many NGOs, in particular the requirement that NGOs, 'operate in accordance with the laws regulating the activities of civil society in the countries of origin and in the country under consideration where appropriate', potentially excluding many NGOs, and particularly human rights organisations;
- That the requirement of notification of a minimum of one week's notice for NGO participation in meetings provides inadequate time for practicalities such as obtaining visas, flights, etc., particularly where the NGOs are located in isolated areas;

However, despite civil society calls for amendments to the text, Governments judged the Guidelines to be a "workable compromise", and adopted the text.

For more details of NGOs' concerns please see a letter sent on 29 May 2007 by NGOs to Governments and the UN Peace Building Office in Annex 2.

Background Information

The UN has often been involved in many different parts of the process of building peace in post-conflict situations, but so far there has been no single or directly responsible entity overseeing this process and ensuring its coherence. Too often, the attention of the international community has been too short-lived in post-conflict countries and there has been no coherent and comprehensive approach to building sustainable peace. Perhaps as a result, peace agreements have failed, most notoriously in Rwanda and Angola, with approximately half the countries emerging from conflict lapsing back within five years. To address this gap, Governments decided to create the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

The PBC is an inter-governmental advisory body set up by the Security Council (Security Council Resolution 1645, 20 December 2005)³ and the General Assembly (General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/180, 20 December 2005)⁴ that focuses on the transition of States from conflict to sustainable and lasting peace. According to Security Council Resolution 1645, the main purposes of the PBC are:

1. To bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
2. To focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development;
3. To provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery.

and the PBC, strengthening coordination between UN bodies, between UN bodies and the PBC and between the UN and the countries examined.

² www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1996/eres1996-31.htm.

³ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/654/17/PDF/N0565417.pdf?OpenElement>. On the same day, the Security Council also adopted *Resolution 1646*, clarifying the membership of the Peacebuilding Commission.

⁴ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/498/40/PDF/N0549840.pdf?OpenElement>.

The PBC is not an operational body and does not have an enforcement mechanism. It will not undertake peacebuilding activities itself. Rather, its aim is to produce advice for the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and for all the actors involved in the peacebuilding process. The PBC intends to bring together the UN's different experiences, as well as the actors involved in a particular peacebuilding process to devise comprehensive strategies aimed at achieving sustainable peace and development. Its main focus is therefore on 'improving coordination and reducing duplication' among actors involved in a post-conflict country, including the Government, civil society, external development actors, donor countries and international financial institutions.

The PBC has strongly emphasised national ownership of the peacebuilding process, aiming to strengthen local process and enabling 'a country's own capacity to recover after conflict'⁵ rather than create a process at headquarters level. This explains why the countries examined are not only present during the country-specific sessions, but are expected to participate and contribute to the preparation of peacebuilding strategies. A country can even initiate its own examination by the PBC under a number of conditions. Similarly, the PBC has been created with an emphasis on working in close consultation with regional and sub-regional organisations.

The PBC has also sought wide participation within and outside the UN. Its recommendations are not aimed only at the Security Council or ECOSOC, but at all actors involved in the peacebuilding process. Similarly, country-specific meetings allow for the participation of a number of actors, unlike many other UN bodies.

Several provisions in official documents and resolutions describe the engagement of civil society and non-governmental organisations:

- Security Council *Resolution 1645* and General Assembly *Resolution A/RES/60/180* recognise the important contributions of civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to peacebuilding efforts. They further encourage the PBC to consult with civil society and NGOs engaged in peacebuilding activities;
- The PBC's provisional rules of procedure state that the Chairperson shall provide on a regular basis for consultations with representatives of civil society and NGOs engaged in peacebuilding. It also declares that the PBC will develop further modalities to ensure this. While PBC members have met to discuss the issue of NGO engagement, disagreement among States has meant that no further progress has been achieved in establishing official modalities for NGO participation;
- Both the founding resolutions and the PBC's provisional rules of procedure place a special emphasis on the participation of women's groups.
- One of the PBC's declared aims has been to improve coordination between Governments and civil society in post-conflict societies, therefore clearly highlighting a role for NGOs to play in the peacebuilding process.

The inaugural meeting of the PBC was held on 23 June 2006, and the first informal briefings on the first two country cases, Sierra Leone and Burundi, were held later that year.

For more information on the PBC, please see the ISHR guide at Annex 3 and <http://www.reformtheun.org/index.php/issues/1735?theme=alt4#developments>.

Conclusions and Future Steps

NGOs will continue to monitor the meetings of the PBC and analyse how the Guidelines are working in practice. Issues and concerns will be flagged and communicated to Governments in the lead up to and during the review of the Guidelines, which is set to take place in six months. However, there is apprehension among several NGOs that the next six months will only provide a few meetings on which to base the analysis and identify challenges. Because of this, some believe it may be better for the PBC to push back the review so it takes place in one year.

⁵ <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2006/issue1/0106p12.htm>.

This news update focuses on guidelines for civil society participation in meetings at UN headquarters in New York and the lack of consultation by the PBC with them in developing the Guidelines. The PBC is also in the process of working out the arrangements for civil society participation at the country-level, and it is important that the PBC also develop mechanisms for early, transparent and effective engagement at this level. To date, the success of civil society consultation in the two countries on the roster has been mixed. The relationship of the PBC and civil society at the country level will thus also remain a critical issue for NGOs to follow in months and years ahead.

Additional Information and How to Get Involved

For more up-to-date documents and detailed information on the PBC, including information on PBC's civil society Guidelines, you can sign up to a PBC information site run by New York-based World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy by sending an email to pb-info@yahoogroups.com.

Security Council Report website provides independent, timely, accurate and objective information and analysis on the activities of the Security Council, including the PBC. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/>

United Nations official site <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>

ReformtheUN.org provides up-to-date information and resources about UN reform <http://www.reformtheun.org/>

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict is an international network of civil society organisations working for conflict prevention and peacebuilding worldwide. <http://www.gppac.net/page.php?id=988>

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