



## 2006 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations



ECOSOC Chamber  
13 - 14 November 2006

*“Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building:  
Reinforcing the Key Role of the United Nations”*

### Rapporteurs’ Summary

#### SESSION I

#### **Progress report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict**

*Ms. Elisabeth Rehn (Finland), Rapporteur*

The recurrent theme throughout the discussions was the need for peace-building efforts to move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention, as emphasized in the United Nations Secretary-General’s report on the prevention of armed conflict.

Another core message of the report was that much remained to be done on the ground. If only a fraction of the 18 billion dollars spent over the last five years on peacekeeping had been spent on conflict prevention, countless lives could have been saved.

The Meeting heard one example of how dialogue and mediation can be used to successfully resolve disputes. It concerned the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. The case had been brought before the International Court of Justice and resolved through the peaceful method of arbitration.

One major challenge consisted of tackling the sources of stress and tension in conflict-prone countries. This could be done by holding regular, participatory elections, pursuing the development agenda generally, and addressing specific vulnerabilities caused, for example, by trading in weapons, narcotics or conflict diamonds, or by trafficking in human beings.

The repression of trafficking in small arms - an issue that the IPU had addressed in Nairobi - was pivotal to the success of any peacebuilding efforts. Legal and illegal weapons needed to be controlled.

Nuclear weapons also fomented tension in certain regions, and parliaments should press for an international consensus on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation.

A conflict-free environment was built on other pillars of stability, such as good trade relations, a healthy environment, the absence of debt and respect for human rights, including freedom of expression.

As the direct representatives of the peoples referred to in the opening words of the United Nations Charter, members of parliament have a pivotal role to play in hearing the voices of all people in society, ensuring that conflicts are resolved through dialogue, and bringing their views to the negotiating table. The outcome document of the Heads of State made some significant pledges, but there was a gap between rhetoric and on-the-ground realities, which parliamentarians were ideally placed to bridge.

Women should no longer be sidelined in decisions relating to peacebuilding. United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 should be complied with unreservedly. The resolution included provisions for providing training to military forces in gender issues for. Women should also be present in sufficient numbers in peacekeeping forces, the police and other security personnel. This was vitally important in cases where women were abused systematically to achieve political objectives. Parliamentarians should also press their governments to adopt action plans to ensure the implementation of resolution 1325.

Women parliamentarians should be particularly vigilant in exercising oversight of gender-related peacebuilding issues.

On the question of abuses committed against the local population by peacekeeping personnel, the United Nations practised zero tolerance in cases concerning civilian staffers. Where peacekeeping troops were involved, the justice systems of the contributing countries played the leading role, of which they sometimes they fell short. Again, parliament needed to take action to make sure that laws and rules were in place to ensure that perpetrators were brought to justice. Impunity in that area had to end.

A culture of prevention should also be accompanied by a culture of implementation. That meant implementing United Nations resolutions. Palestine was a case in point – many of the United Nations resolutions on that conflict had never been implemented.

The importance of involving regional organizations in peacebuilding efforts could not be overstated. The international community should give more support to regional cooperation. The Great Lakes area was a compelling example.

Multilateralism should not become an excuse for failing to take action where necessary. “Soft” activities were well and good, but in cases such as Darfur, hard ones were necessary too. In that crisis, the African Union could not do the job on its own. It was necessary for the international community to react quickly and effectively.

The capacity for immediate intervention was sometimes lacking. A mandate from the Security Council meant that resources could be released immediately, but many countries fell shy of bringing their cases to the Security Council.

Perhaps the single most useful tool in conflict prevention was education. If the values of peace were taught to schoolchildren from an early age, a large share of human suffering could be avoided.

## **SESSION II**

### **The new United Nations Peacebuilding Commission – challenges and expectations**

*Ambassador Gaspar Martins (Angola, Chairman of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission), Rapporteur*

The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was a major outcome of the World Summit that coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. It was expected that the Commission would adopt a holistic approach by enlisting the support of all concerned parties, including civil society; that it would get down to business as soon as possible - the start of two country programmes was therefore encouraging; that it would offer strategic advice but avoid micromanagement of field operations; and that concerned parties would coordinate their involvement, as in the case of the cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom in Sierra Leone.

The incorporation of regional and sub regional dimensions was also welcome and seen as crucial to the work of the Commission. Restricted representation on the PBC was considered by some as regrettable, as was the prominent role given to the United Nations Security Council. The role of the EU was described as ambiguous, as it had not been institutionally invited as a donor, although the European Commission was present at country-specific meetings.

In discussing the PBC, participants repeatedly stressed the need for adequate funding of the Peacebuilding Fund, which had so far received contributions amounting to US\$ 140 million. That was commendable, but still insufficient. The PBC was consequently working on limited staff strength, and parliaments should do all they could to help secure a sound basis of funding for the Fund.

Security should not be narrowly defined. The Alliance of Civilizations, an initiative launched by the leaders of Spain and Turkey, was a laudable instrument designed to defuse tension at the roots.

Water, energy, food and human security were also part of the paradigm. In Japan, a pilot project had been launched in conjunction with other countries in the region to train

personnel for peacebuilding projects. Experts were being prepared to cope with natural and human disasters.

The presence of women in certain aspects of conflict prevention had to be increased. The United Nations could do more to implement resolution 1325.

It was also suggested that there should be a programme under the PCB to address the illicit circulation of small arms, and another to study alternative employment opportunities for demobilized soldiers. A new high-level panel could perhaps be set up to cast the spotlight on the work of the PBC, and help to bolster support for the United Nations Secretary-General-designate.

Ultimately, the Commission was a forum for dialogue, but success would hinge on results and only domestic actors could truly achieve peace. It was commendable that the IPU was involved in the initial talks on Burundi, but the role of national parliaments was insufficiently understood. A democratically elected parliament should be at the center of democracy building in any country, and a parliamentary culture had to be nurtured. When peace was finally brokered, support to the embryonic parliament was often inadequate. Yet parliament was the first real democratic interlocutor, despite the fact that the executive in a conflict-torn country was often content to work with the international community and keep the legislature on the sidelines. Parliaments could also help bridge the divide between peacebuilding and development assistance.

Reconciliation was an area in which the IPU had worked with International Idea. Social reconciliation was vital, and rebuilding society meant rebuilding the institutions that could mediate, primarily parliament.

Meanwhile, parliaments and their members should not shirk the challenge of putting hard choices to their electors. Sending troops to trouble spots such as southern Afghanistan was not an easy decision to take, but it was nonetheless necessary. IPU Member Parliaments should take that message back to their respective parliaments.

The danger of relapse into conflict should not be ignored. This was one area in which the Commission could be a forerunner.. Constitution building was important in that respect since the process of drafting a constitution could be as important as the final text itself. It had to be an inclusive exercise that involved all sectors of society.

### **SESSION III**

#### **Good governance and the fight against corruption – key tools in peacebuilding and conflict prevention**

*Senator Rosario Green (Mexico), Rapporteur*

Corruption is not only morally wrong; it also costs money and can lead to violence and unrest. However, instances of conflict do not systematically involve an element of corruption. The IPU should promote more studies on the question.

Nevertheless, a clear link between corruption on the one hand and violence and potential conflict situations on the other can be made when the electoral process is directly affected. Suspicion of vote fraud divides the people and can lead to strife. It is important to change electoral systems that do not guarantee fair elections. Corruption related to drug trafficking is also a potential cause of conflict.

Corruption drains resources from development programmes aimed at benefiting the weakest in society. There is little to show for the billions of official development assistance (ODA) dollars spent over several decades. Almost everywhere, the political class will be tempted to pillage the State coffers unless there are strong instruments of accountability.

There is no universal formula and no single solution for fighting corruption; it requires a long-term approach and steadfast action. One should not fool oneself into thinking that by merely ratifying the recent United Nations Convention against Corruption the job is done. Indeed, implementation is the hard part. Sometimes small steps are more effective than broad anti-corruption campaigns, especially when a culture of corruption is deeply ingrained.

Not only government but civil society at large and the media need to be engaged in anti-corruption efforts. A free media is essential to help expose corruption.

Anti-corruption action needs checks and balances both within and outside government. These could include inter alia establishing independent bodies to monitor the activities of the public sector, setting up controls on tendering for public works, passing anti-nepotism legislation, increasing citizens' access to government information, and making recruitment to the public service more transparent. Decentralization is also key to these efforts as local communities are better able to check on local government than on a powerful federal entity.

The most effective way to reduce both the potential of conflict and corruption is through a constitution that promotes power sharing at every level by:

- Allowing as many parties as possible to be represented and defusing tensions through peaceful dialogue;
- Establishing an independent judiciary that is free to investigate corrupt practices;
- Subjecting the military to special controls to avoid practices that tend to align them with political factions instead of defending the whole country;
- Training of law enforcement agencies.

A strong parliament that holds the government to account is the key to accountability. Too often parliament is tainted by corruption. Strategies to develop parliamentary capacity include:

- Providing peer support for parliamentarians across boundaries (MPs who are isolated in their fight against government corruption need support from abroad or risk their lives if the government is particularly violent and repressive);
- Education and training of MPs in the ethics of the job and a code of conduct that eschews corruption;
- Redefining parliamentary immunity so that it helps protect parliamentarians' freedom of speech without affording them impunity for corrupt practices;
- Concerted efforts to open up the media where necessary;
- Encouraging donor agencies to report directly to parliament on money given to the government and its intended uses. Donors must apply more stringent conditions to governments and monitor the use of funds more carefully.

Internationally, the United Nations can take concrete action to fight corruption by putting pressure on corrupt leaders to leave power; helping integrate ex-combatants in a post-conflict situation; putting more checks on aid flows and technical assistance provided to countries; and monitoring all the anti-corruption experiments being conducted by countries around the world and developing baselines.

Anti-corruption measures serve the interests of good governance, but it is necessary to define what good governance means. Unless it is derived from a rights-based framework, too often the concept is imposed from the outside. It does not only entail reform of the public service; it also requires examining the role played by international capital flows. There are thus fundamental moral questions at stake.

Large monopolies can also be considered as factors of corruption, especially when they impose retail prices that are unrelated to production costs, as is the case of oil - a commodity vital to development and welfare.

In instances where the justice system hands down sentences, they should be commensurate with each case. Sentences should provide a strong deterrent against corrupt practices. Prevention is as important as cure.

A culture of honesty has to be allowed to take root. This implies education at every level, and setting an example at the highest levels. Good governance essentially means acting with honesty, integrity and ethics. The single strongest force against corruption is accountability. Members of parliament have to be part of the solution if they are not to become part of the problem.