

By Vina Nadjibulla
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The idea for the Peacebuilding Commission was first articulated in the Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. It was further modified by the Secretary-General in his report *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. A proposal for the Peacebuilding Commission has also been included in the draft outcome document being prepared for consideration by world leaders in September.

The High-level Panel's report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* argues that there is no institution within the UN system to assist states in the transition from armed conflict to peace. In order to strengthen the UN's capacity to build peace, the report recommended that the Security Council establish a Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) as its subsidiary body. The core functions of such a Peacebuilding Commission would be to identify countries at risk of sliding towards state collapse, partner with national governments to prevent such a collapse, and assist in the transition from conflict to post-conflict Peacebuilding. A More Secure World recommended that the membership of the PBC be small and include members of the Security Council, representatives of principal donor countries, international financial institutions and national representatives of the country under consideration.

In order to give the proposed PBC appropriate institutional support, the Panel recommended the creation of a Peacebuilding Support Office in the UN Secretariat. Immediately after the release of the Panel's report, many governments, although generally welcoming the idea for the Peacebuilding Commission, also cited a number of reservations. Disagreements emerged about the reporting lines, membership and mandate of the PBC.

In order to accommodate some of the concerns of governments, the Secretary-General made a number of modifications to the original proposal in his report *In Larger Freedom*. According to the SG, the PBC would perform the following functions "in the immediate aftermath of war":

1. Improve UN planning for sustained recovery by establishing necessary institutions.
2. Help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities.
3. Improve coordination of the UN post-conflict activities.
4. Provide an information-sharing forum for all actors involved in post-conflict recovery.
5. Periodically review progress towards mid-term recovery goals.
6. Extend the period of political attention to a country.

The SG's proposal limits the mandate of the PBC to post-conflict activities and does not include early warning and monitoring functions or other conflict prevention activities. However, he does recognize that "it would be valuable if Member States could at any stage make use of the Peacebuilding Commission's advice and could request assistance from a standing fund for Peacebuilding to build their domestic institutions for reducing conflict, including through strengthening the rule-of-law institutions." The SG also proposes a compromise on reporting lines for the PBC, taking into account the divergent views of Member States, by suggesting that the commission should report both to the SC and ECOSOC depending on the phase of the conflict.

The proposed core membership of the PBC would include: a sub-set of the SC members, an equal number of ECOSOC members, leading troop-contributing countries, and major donors. In its country-specific operations the Commission can draw on other relevant regional and national actors.

The SG further elaborated on his proposal for the Peacebuilding Commission in a background note, which was circulated, to Member States during the discussions on the draft outcome document for the September Summit. The draft outcome document for the Summit calls for the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission along the lines of the SG's proposal.

Although almost all governments have spoken favorably about the need to establish a Peacebuilding Commission, disagreements remain about its functions, composition and reporting lines. Several governments (including Tanzania, Denmark, and Portugal) have tried to address some of these disagreements in detailed proposals on the composition, reporting lines and mandate of the PBC. Many developing countries would like to see the PBC report to the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council while the Permanent Members of the SC would like to see the PBC report to the SC. Furthermore, many countries would like to limit the work of the Commission to only post-conflict situations and are opposed to the PBC having any early warning capabilities. There is also much debate around funding of the PBC. In his report the SG called for the establishment of a Peacebuilding Fund. Several governments have expressed reservation about creating another volunteer fund at the UN.

As the debate on the Peacebuilding Commission continues in the lead-up to the September Summit, civil society organizations have been advocating for the inclusion of civil society, especially grass-roots and women's groups in the core membership of the PBC. They have also argued that the PBC should look at the entire spectrum of conflict and that its mandate should not be limited to post-conflict situations. Civil society groups have also been calling for predictable funding for the work of the PBC.

At the General Assembly Informal Hearings with Civil Society Organizations on June 23-24 2005, many civil society representatives presented concrete recommendations on the Peacebuilding Commission.

Resources on the Peacebuilding Commission:

A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility

Report of the Secretary General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change

In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all

Report of the Secretary General

Secretary General's *Background Note on Peacebuilding Commission*

Position Paper on the Secretary General's Report

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security