

The UN Peacebuilding Commission and Women: What Role for Norway?

On 1 January 2011, Norway will start its second term as a member of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), having served its first term during the formative years of the PBC from 2006 to 2008 as co-chair of the Commission and chair of the so-called ‘Burundi Configuration’. Under the auspices of the PBC, Burundi was the first country to develop a comprehensive strategy for post-conflict peacebuilding. Norway left a legacy of normative entrepreneurship and political commitment to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Although several years have now passed, the question of how the PBC’s political commitment has manifested itself in policymaking and operational activities is still unanswered. Research suggests that the PBC and UN member states still have a long way to go in terms of unravelling what it actually means and what it takes to include women and women’s concerns in peacebuilding efforts on the ground.

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What is the UN Peacebuilding Commission?

The PBC was formally established through resolutions adopted concurrently by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council in December 2005. It was born in an atmosphere of strong political tensions between Member States from the Global North and South and it was another six months before it became operational in June 2006. The tensions stemmed from disagreements over procedural matters and membership composition – disagreements that had a negative impact on just about any substantial issue under discussion by the PBC.

The mandate of the PBC is: to assist post-conflict countries in developing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding; to marshal resources for post-conflict recovery activities; to raise the international community's awareness to countries in a precarious post-conflict phase; and to improve coordination at the strategic level among all actors involved in peacebuilding activities.

The PBC comprises an Organizational Committee (OC), several country-specific committees (also referred to as country configurations) and a Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL). It has 31 members, representing key UN bodies and important groups of member-states (see box).

The PBC Membership

The Organisational Committee (OC) of the PBC has 31 members (serve for renewable terms of two years):

- Seven members selected by the Security Council
- Seven members elected by the Economic and Social Council
- Five of the top providers of assessed contributions to United Nations budgets and of voluntary contributions to the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, including a standing peacebuilding fund
- Five top providers of military personnel and civilian police to United Nations missions
- Seven members elected by the General Assembly.



Johan Løvald, former Norwegian ambassador to the UN. He served as Vice Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and Chair of the Burundi Configuration, from 2006-2008 (UN Photo).

In support of the work of the PBC, a Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) was established, located within the UN secretariat under the executive office of the Secretary-General. Supportive functions of the PBSO include the drafting of reports, conducting research and analysis, and handling communications and outreach activities for stakeholders. The PBSO also serves the UN Secretary-General in coordinating UN agencies engaged in peacebuilding activities.

A further important role of the PBSO is that of administering the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which was launched in 2006. The purpose of the PBF is to fill a gap in funding for countries in an immediate post-conflict phase but still not on a path towards sustainable development. This is a phase when other international funding mechanisms may not be available. The Fund 'seeks to minimize the risk of a relapse into conflict by addressing the most immediate challenges facing post-conflict countries'.

The PBC and Women

The UN peacebuilding architecture is a complex construction established to address what is perhaps an even more complex agenda, namely post-conflict peacebuilding. One might thus think that it would be difficult to

get women's issues on to the PBC agenda. The PBC, however, is the first UN body to have gender concerns explicitly built into its founding resolutions, and although no direct reference to Resolution 1325 is made in these resolutions, they contain several paragraphs on women and women's concerns. For instance, the contributions women's organizations make to peacebuilding efforts are recognized (para. 14). The resolutions also reaffirm the important role of women in peacebuilding (para. 15). The most important, however, is probably paragraph 20, which calls upon the Commission to integrate a gender perspective within all its work.

Similarly, language on women was integrated within the peacebuilding strategies developed for the first two countries on the PBC's agenda – Burundi and Sierra Leone. In the case of Burundi, in particular, the strategy caters well for 'women, peace and security' concerns in such important areas as capacity-building measures for the political, social and economic participation of women; the inclusion of women's civil society organizations in peacebuilding efforts; and the integration of women's legal and human rights in security sector reform. Furthermore, the Norwegian head of PBC field missions met with civil society organizations, including women's organiza-



An unidentified voter casts her ballot during the 4 July legislative elections in Cibitoke, Burundi, 4 July 2005 (UN Photo).

tions, and gender specialists were invited to give presentations at both formal and informal meetings of the Burundi country configuration. Lastly, on several occasions the Norwegian chair cooperated with the NGO community in New York in organizing thematic seminars or roundtables focusing on the challenges of mainstreaming gender into the Commission's work.

The head of the PBSO during the formative years, Carolyn McAskie, was a strong advocate of women's issues. She treated the 'women, peace and security' agenda as a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed into a broad variety of peacebuilding challenges, and, to assist in this, a gender advisor was seconded to the PBSO from UNIFEM. PBF funds were disbursed to projects and programmes of direct or indirect benefit to women. This included projects focused on raising awareness regarding resolution 1325, preparatory work on democratic dialogue, and rehabilitation of women's roles in community reconciliation and reconstruction processes.

Furthermore, a report by the PBC Working Group on Lessons Learned – published in June 2008 – stated that the integration of a gender perspective was a key principle and element of peacebuilding, and that resolution

1325 constituted a normative framework that enjoyed widespread acceptance among PBC members.

The various PBC initiatives represented something new in integrated efforts to include women and women's concerns in peacebuilding and brought high hopes for future change in UN policies towards more gender sensitivity. Two years later, however, things do not seem to have changed as much as one might perhaps have expected.

Women and Peacebuilding – Two Years On

The Secretary-General's progress report on peacebuilding of July 2010 hardly mentions women's issues, apart from a short paragraph referring to ongoing work on a separate report on the issue of women and peacebuilding. When the latter report was finalized there was strong disagreement among member states – as well as among senior UN officials – as to when and how it should be presented to the Security Council. Many diplomats and UN officials were of the opinion that it should not be presented and considered as part of the Security Council Open Debate on peacebuilding, but rather as part of the open debate on 'women, peace and security', i.e. a women's issue to be considered separately from the broader discussion on peacebuilding. In the

end, those favouring an integrated approach managed to convince sceptics that the 'women and peacebuilding' report should be considered as part of the general debate on peacebuilding. However, the report ended up not really being debated, but simply taken note of.

The 'women and peacebuilding' report points out that in many respects women's post-conflict needs resemble the five recurring priorities outlined by the Secretary-General in his 2009 report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict. These are: a) safety and security, b) confidence in the political process through inclusive dialogue and post-conflict elections, c) access to basic services such as water and education, d) a functioning public administration, and e) economic revitalization (notably employment creation). Still, these priorities and how they should be met are not discussed from a gendered perspective. The PBC Working Group statement on Lessons Learned from 2006, i.e. that the integration of a gender perspective is a key principle in peacebuilding, seems already to have been forgotten.

The 'women and peacebuilding' report also states that policymakers and others involved in programming and budgeting have failed to translate political commitments and guidance materials into concrete gender-sensitive projects. Only a very low percentage of budgets are allocated to addressing women's needs or the advancement of women. The Secretary-General admits that efforts to engage women and address women's issues in the context of peace processes must be accelerated and commitments be made more concrete. This message was also conveyed in the review report of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, released in July 2010, advising that the PBC should be at the forefront in moving the women's role in peacebuilding from a niche concern to the mainstream.

Although strong political commitments and targeted efforts at improving policy development seem to speak to the contrary, women and gender concerns are still not being effectively integrated into peacebuilding activities in the field. The idea that women and women's issues are something separate from the generic activities – and something that can be added later – is still prominent. The UN system simply needs to unravel what 'women's

inclusion' is all about. Why and how is it relevant? What can it add to daily activities that will improve or make peacebuilding efforts qualitatively different?

Concluding Remarks

For the past decade, women's rights groups and organizations, together with a relatively small group of female academics, have been strongly advocating the importance and relevance of including women in peacebuilding processes. It is a rights issue (women have a right to be heard and to be part of decision-making), but it is also an issue about more effectively achieving sustainable peace. Women are crucial to economic recovery, social cohesion and the political legitimacy of any new government. Women's rights activists have undoubtedly played an influential role in changing mindsets and strengthening awareness among politicians and senior diplomats to the 'women, peace and security agenda'. Still, they have not been equally successful in being listened to and taken seriously by those who translate policy into actual projects and make decisions on budget allocations.

Women still seem to have a long way to go in terms of being acknowledged in think tank environments and academic circles where the concept of peacebuilding is discussed, criticized and refined. Ten years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, male academics and 'think tankers' still dominate the discourse on peacebuilding and inform theory development and policymaking both at the UN and in member states. Only a very few of these scholars have given much attention to women's issues or to the highly gendered aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding in their publications. In effect, the challenges of peacebuilding seem to have been treated as gender neutral. In some cases where gendered dimensions are indeed acknowledged, they

appear to be discussed as issues separate from what is regarded as the more pressing peacebuilding challenges – such as power sharing and security sector reform.

Policy Recommendations – What Role for Norway?

- Norway has a strong legacy as advocate and norm entrepreneur on gender issues. This should continue to inform Norway's second term as member of the PBC.
- Norway's platform for membership in the PBC should be based on lessons learned from the first term – including lessons learned on how to integrate women and women's issues creatively in the work of the PBC.
- Extra efforts must be made at early-on integration of women and women's concerns into the general as well as country-specific discussions and policy planning processes on peacebuilding.
- In order to strengthen coherence in approach, members of the Peacebuilding Commission should give priority to the 7 action points identified by the UN Secretary-General in his report on Women and Peacebuilding (see box).
- As one of the main contributors to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, Norway has a particular responsibility for following up on the recommendation of the Secretary-General on earmarking 15% of PBF funds for women-specific projects.
- The reappointment of a fulltime gender advisor within the PBSO should be reconsidered.

Women and Peacebuilding – 7 Action Points

1. Efforts at engaging women and addressing women's issues in the context of peace processes must be accelerated and commitments made more concrete.
2. Post-conflict planning processes must be made more systematically gender-responsive.
3. Financing for gender equality and women's empowerment must be increased.
4. The proportion of women civilians deployed to post-conflict environments must be increased.
5. The proportion of women decision makers in post-conflict governance institutions must be increased.
6. Rule of law institutions in post-conflict countries must be made more gender responsive.
7. Women must play a greater role in economic recovery of post-conflict countries, both as participants and beneficiaries of local development, employment creation, front-line service delivery and DD&R programmes.

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THE PROJECT

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