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Nimble UN, global partners needed to build stability in post-conflict States – report



Jean-Marie Guéhenno

7 March 2011 – The United Nations needs to be more flexible, nimble and better able to muster international support to build the civilian capacities vital in post-conflict countries to avoid a relapse back into bloodshed, according to a UN-commissioned report released today.

The [report](#) of the Senior Advisory Group for the Review of International Civilian Capacities, appointed by [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon a year ago, calls for the UN to look beyond its own staff to draw on the full range of global capacities, working closely with Member States and civil society through a new mechanism for civilian partnerships to mobilize the skills needed for a whole range of tasks, from building the rule of law to creating jobs to providing basic services.

“The journey from war to sustainable peace is not possible in the absence of stronger civilian capacity,” Group Chairman Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, writes in a letter presenting the report to Mr. Ban. “Without this capacity, there may be breaks in the fighting, but resilient institutions will not take root and the risk of renewed violence will remain.”

The report’s recommendations can be of major importance in complex cases such as that of South Sudan, which in January voted for independence from Sudan in the culmination of a peace process that ended two decades of civil war in 2005, he adds.

Welcoming the Group's findings and passing the report on to the Security Council and General Assembly, Mr. Ban announced the creation of a Steering Group of the heads of relevant UN entities led by Under-Secretary-General for Field Support Susana Malcorra to coordinate follow-up action.

"As communities emerge from conflict, they often face a critical shortage of capacities needed to secure a sustainable peace – the core capacities to run a government, to re-establish institutions of justice, to reintegrate demobilizing fighters, to revitalize the economy, to restore basic health and education, and many more," the Group writes, distilling its recommendations in the acronym OPEN embracing four key principles: ownership, partnership, expertise and nimbleness.

The first calls for strengthening national ownership of peace processes, by supporting core Government functions, nurturing national capacities and improving the economic impact of international support, with international capacity the mechanism of last resort. Wages should be adjusted to prevent a brain drain and UN procurement procedures should be adjusted to enable more local procurement, thus supporting local economic recovery.

On partnership, the report notes that much of the capacity needed in countries emerging from conflict is best found outside the UN. "Rather than relying only on in-house capacity, the United Nations will better serve conflict-affected countries by acting as a platform for qualified expertise," it says, proposing a Civilian Partnerships Cell to offer external providers of capacity a simple and effective mechanism for cooperation.

Turning to expertise, the Group recommends a clearer definition of roles and stronger accountability of results. UN leaders in the field need to listen better and respond to the needs of conflict-affected communities, for which they require better training.

"If the United Nations is to leave behind the minimum capacities for peace, it will have to be more nimble," the report says of the fourth plank. "Things change quickly as a community moves from war to peace, and the international actors present must be able to adjust accordingly. Yet the system is risk-averse and fragmented. This limits its ability to be responsive."

Here it calls for greater flexibility in authorizing UN missions to reallocate up to 20 per cent of resources in their budget line for civilian personnel, with ex post facto justification; allowing heads of mission to direct funds to actors outside a mission if they are better suited; and providing necessary funds to the civilian component of a mission if it can better implement a mandated task.

"This is essential to deliver meaningful peace dividends in the early window of opportunity," it adds, urging the General Assembly, building on existing successful examples, to expand this initiative.

While the UN has seen success in humanitarian operations and peacekeeping, built on a strong partnership with Member States, the international community has had less success in supporting and enabling the national capacities essential for enduring peace, the group notes.

“Faced with expanded civilian mandates in a growing number of crises, the United Nations struggles both to rapidly deploy the range of expertise required and to transfer skills and knowledge to national actors. This has increased the risk of relapse into conflict,” they write.

“Building these [civilian] capacities requires a United Nations that is more open, working in stronger partnership with the international community,” they conclude. “These, together, can help conflict-affected communities to build the stability and prosperity they seek.”

In a statement welcoming Mr. Ban’s support of the report, Mr. Guéhenno said: “We are proposing a fresh approach... a better way of working that will mean conflict-affected countries get the civilian support they need, when they need it.

“If we can harness both national and global capacities, and deploy them efficiently, then we can deliver better results, faster. In cases like South Sudan, where the challenges are huge and the need for specialized civilian expertise is great, our recommendations have the potential to make a real difference.”

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