PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A TWO-WAY RELATIONSHIP

8th Session of the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

Position Paper and Policy Recommendations

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Policy recommendations:

- Education is key for both peace and sustainable development. Governments should encourage and support private schools and be open to private-public partnerships in education.
- In addition to any top-down intervention, conflicts must be resolved from the bottom, up.
- Grassroots organizations, as well as local authorities and civil-society representatives, should be the main actors in the bottom-up process.
- International donors should expand the funding available for local conflict resolution, and they should do so either by shifting their priorities away from counter-productive foci (such as an insistence of organizing rapid elections after the end of a civil war) or by increasing their aid budgets.
- In addition to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the sustainable development goals, a political dimension should not be neglected.
- Political institutions shape economic and social institutions. Domestic political institutions should be inclusive and represent all segments of the society in order to achieve sustainable development goals.
- Since climate change and other global environmental changes contribute to conflict, we can

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prevent violence by reducing our environmental impact.

- Given the rate of global environmental change today, localized adaptation is also important for preventing conflict.
- As different countries to grow economically, their ability to deal with environmental stress improves. However, we need to find ways to promote sustainable growth to avoid further environmental problems down the road.

Background:

The report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the "Prevention of Armed Conflict" (A/55/985–S/2001/574)[1] correctly states that conflict prevention and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing concepts. The relationship between these two concepts has been widely examined in various academic platforms. However, results of these studies and discussions have not been consistent with one another. Although it seems that eliminating the root causes of conflict such as economic and political discrimination could reduce the likelihood of conflict, in some cases the empowerment of previously discriminated group has led to the strengthening of the group militarily and may have given a hope of gaining power through violent or undemocratic way. Because of this anticipation, government in power may not necessarily wish to adopt inclusive economic policy that has been one of the cornerstones of sustainable development. Governments that are currently experiencing domestic conflicts have a huge dilemma: if they adopt inclusive economic, social and political policies and share national wealth with opposing and often violent groups, these groups may become more powerful in the future and impose a threat; but if these governments do not open the doors to political and economic participation of opposition groups, then it seems impossible to eliminate the root causes of these conflicts such as poverty and discrimination.

On the other hand, even though government promises to develop inclusive economic and political policies and open the door of the national wealth to the opposition, opposition has an incentive not to believe the government's promises because surrendering weapons and demobilizing its military will lead to the weakening of the opposition and potential complete annihilation. As a consequence, military opposition groups may not approach any peace deals with the government and believe that the government will implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed at the United Nations.

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[1] http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan005902.pdf

One of the crucial factors that lead to the successful peace process and development has been identified as an efficient enforcement of the negotiated settlement. Third party enforcement mechanism has been successful in many cases to solve the problem of credible commitment by both government and opposition. If neither side can credibly commit to not to renege on the settlement provisions, they cannot fully trust one another and begin working on further steps. Because of this mutual distrust, government cannot start implementing the SDGs, and the opposition will not agree to disarm itself and demobilize its members. United Nations and some regional intergovernmental organizations can be very effective in enforcing peace deals. When trust is achieved between the conflicting sides through the enforcement mechanism, reconciliation and peacebuilding process can start and implementation of the SDGs can be achieved successfully without any fear that one side will renege on its promises in the future. United Nations Peacekeeping and other regional organizations could be very implemental in ensuring the implementation of the SDGs which will eventually contribute to the durable peace.

Discussions during the consultation phase of the SDGs should include ideas and policy recommendations on this issue of peace and sustainable development. The panel organized during the 8th session of the OWG seeks to contribute to the dilemma some of the member states encounter and recommend specific steps that could be taken to ensure durable peace and sustainable development.

The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) co-organized a panel on the relationship between peace and sustainable development with the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the UN and Peace Islands Institute on February 7, 2014 at the United Nations (UN). The panelists discussed how peace is essential for sustainable development and how economic, social and environmental development is necessary for durable peace. Because these two concepts are interconnected, UN agencies and member states need to closely work on both concepts simultaneously and discuss how international or regional organizations can enforce peace agreements which is the first step in implementing policies to achieve sustainable development goals.

Mr. Huseyin Hurmali, Vice-President of the JWF emphasized and explained how civil initiatives inspired by scholar Fethullah Gulen have been contributing to both durable peace and sustainable development in about 160 countries around the world. Schools, universities and other educational institutions have been providing high quality science and mathematics education and also contributing to peace through becoming entities of "social mediation" in the regions of conflict.

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H.E. Ruben Armando Escalante Hasbun, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the UN, discussed the case of El Salvador and how structural adjustment programs of international institutions have been unsuccessful because of irrelevant policies. He stressed that UN entities such as the Peacebuilding Commission can be very implemental in sustaining peace through working in countries on case-by-case basis.

Professor Alastair Smith of New York University's Department of Politics presented findings of his research on foreign aid and development. He suggested that domestic institutions in recipient countries play a major role in transforming aid to development. In nations with more efficient and inclusive institutions, aid provided by countries or international organizations significantly increased economic growth while foreign aid to nations with unrepresentative institutions did not have any impact on growth.

Assistant Professor Séverine Autesserre of Barnard College, Columbia University, explained why the massive international efforts have failed to help the Congo achieve lasting peace and promote sustainable development. She suggested that the primary cause of the failure was the persistence of local conflicts which were neglected by international peacebuilding actors. A top-down approach to durable peace and sustainable development failed to consider local causes and therefore she argued that a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches must be adopted to be able to achieve both lasting peace and sustainable development.

Assistant Professor Johannes Urpelainen from Columbia University has discussed implications of his research on how significant the environmental impact of industrialized countries is on the conflict onsets in African continent. Even though researches conducted in the past years have been inconclusive, findings of new studies that use new data and methodologies suggest that the climate change is one of the factors affecting peace and triggering conflicts in many parts of the world.

Galymzhan Kirbassov, moderator, UN Representative of the JWF and Adjunct Lecturer at Columbia University, argued that the contributions of JWF and its affiliated institutions were the cases of the bottom-up approach to both peace and development. Without underestimating international and national efforts, NGOs must be considered as an essential part of the implementation and monitoring of the UN development goals due to their ability to work with the locals. Allocation of resources needs to be implemented efficiently without failing to include all essential stakeholders.

About the Organizations

The Journalists and Writers Foundation is an international non-governmental organization in General Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It has offices in many parts of the world including in Istanbul, Ankara, New York, Geneva, Vienna, and Addis Ababa. The JWF's main focus is peacebuilding, interethnic and interreligious dialogue, women's empowerment, media's role in peace and conflict resolution, and national economic and social policies.

Peace Islands Institute is a non-governmental organization based in New York with several branches in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Upstate New York. It focuses on issues such as conflict resolution, peacebuilding through education, youth empowerment, interfaith and intercultural dialogue. PII experts mainly work in academia, policymaking and civil society organizations.