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# WHAT DOES “SUSTAINING PEACE” MEAN?

On 27 April 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council adopted substantively identical resolutions on peacebuilding (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 (2016), respectively), concluding the 2015 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture. These resolutions are the most comprehensive and far-reaching resolutions on this issue. This ground breaking achievement outlines a new ambitious agenda and approach for peacebuilding. Member States demonstrated their commitment to strengthening the United Nations’ ability to prevent the “outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of [violent] conflict,” address the root causes and assist parties to conflict to end hostilities in order to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” as stated in the opening sentence of the UN Charter.

The resolutions introduce the term “sustaining peace,” which, rather than redefining peacebuilding, provides for more clarity and an expanded scope. During the 1990s, peacebuilding was mostly understood in the UN as post-conflict peacebuilding. However, that position changed in the 2000s with the adoption of Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2001/15 and the following 2007 Policy Committee decision that defined peacebuilding as aiming to prevent the outbreak, the recurrence or the continuation of armed conflict. This position was reaffirmed in the new resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 in the preamble, when it states that “sustaining peace encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.” Sustaining peace should in practical terms not be distinguished from peacebuilding. It does not imply any redefinition of respective roles, responsibilities or mandates of UN entities. Both sustaining peace and peacebuilding are ultimately intended to reduce the risk of lapse or relapse into violent conflict. It can be seen as an aspirational goal, aiming at fostering the ability and capacity to look beyond crisis management and the immediate resolution of conflicts. The resolutions offer an opportunity to increase the focus of the UN system to preventing conflicts, so that not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of conflicts are addressed. Hence, the concept aims at tackling issues that may otherwise fuel new cycles of conflict.

The new resolutions stress that sustaining peace is a shared task that should flow through all three pillars of the UN system’s engagements at all stages of the conflict, and in all its dimensions. The resolutions offer an opportunity to increase the focus and capacity of the UN system to prevent violent conflicts, and Member States, civil society organizations and the UN system need to seize the opportunity presented by the resolutions. Sustaining peace should not be viewed as rebranding existing work but rather as a more practice-oriented comprehensive concept to prevent violent conflict, by addressing drivers of conflict, patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and underlying root causes of conflict, including different kinds of exclusion, systemic discrimination and marginalization with renewed vigour, based on joint analysis of conflict dynamics and joined-up strategic planning.

The resolutions are reinforced by other agreements and reports, including the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) and the Secretary-General’s follow up to the report, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Humanitarian Summit, which all emphasize the importance of preventing violent conflicts.

## 2 / SUSTAINING PEACE: THE “WHAT”

The concept of “sustaining peace” should, according to the resolutions, be broadly understood as:

- **A GOAL AND A PROCESS**; [PP 8]
- Activities aimed at **PREVENTING THE OUTBREAK, CONTINUATION, ESCALATION AND RECURRENCE OF VIOLENT CONFLICT**; addressing root causes; assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities; ensuring national reconciliation; and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development; [PP 8]  
Inherently a political process as addressing root causes and ending hostilities requires finding
- political solutions; [PP 13] and
- requires a **COMPREHENSIVE, COORDINATED AND COHERENT APPROACH**, which could include:

1. **POLITICAL PROCESSES**, including elections; inclusive dialogue; reconciliation; and conflict-management capacity at national and subnational levels;
2. **SAFETY AND SECURITY**, including mine action; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and security sector reform;
3. **RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS**, including access to justice; transitional justice (including mechanisms for truth-seeking, accountability, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence); promotion and protection of human rights; gender equality; protection of civilians, including compliance with and accountability for applicable international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law; and voluntary, safe and durable solutions for internally displaced persons and refugees;
4. **SOCIAL SERVICES**, such as water and sanitation, health and education, including to the most vulnerable, such as victims of violence, internally displaced persons and refugees;
5. **CORE GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS**, in particular basic public administration and public financial management, at the national, subnational and local levels, including transparency, accountability and anti-corruption; and
6. **ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION AND LIVELIHOODS**, including employment, livelihoods and infrastructure.

- All programmes and activities should be conflict sensitive and “do no harm” guided by a conflict analysis. Broadly, depending on the theory of change based on an analysis of the causes and drivers of conflict, they could be clustered in two groups:
  - a) Activities **THAT ARE DESIGNED AND DIRECTLY AIMED AT** sustaining peace; and
  - b) Activities that, while not explicitly designed to sustain peace, can **CONTRIBUTE TO** sustaining peace.

## 3/ SUSTAINING PEACE: "THE WHEN"

- Peacebuilding is no longer treated only as a post-conflict activity, but should be a priority **DURING ALL STAGES OF THE CONFLICT CYCLE – BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER**, implying that sustaining peace should take place simultaneously with peacekeeping, development and humanitarian activities. [PP 8]
- Sustaining peace requires a **LONG-TERM** perspective by national (state and non-state) counterparts and a long-term engagement by the UN system and international community in terms of **POLITICAL, TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT**. [OP 4, 8, 13]
- Violent conflicts are **RARELY LINEAR, SEQUENTIAL PROCESSES** (moving from development to violence to humanitarian assistance and from peacemaking to peacekeeping and peacebuilding, followed by sustainable peace and development). Instead, circular or vicious cycles are more typical, with conflicts escalating to various forms of social tensions, strife and violence, particularly with the changing nature of violent conflicts in recent years.

## 4/ SUSTAINING PEACE: "THE WHO"

- The primary responsibility for leading the process for sustaining peace rests with **NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS** and authorities, including sub-national and local authorities.
- **NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP** in peacebuilding are important, whereby the responsibility for sustaining peace is broadly shared with the entire society, including all national and local stakeholders. [PP 9, OP 3, 16]
- **INCLUSIVITY** is key to advancing national peacebuilding processes and objectives in order to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account. [OP 3] There are several strong paragraphs on the important role of **WOMEN, YOUTH AND CIVIL SOCIETY** in sustaining peace. [OP 4, 18, 21, 22, 23, 27] This should apply to all aspects of sustaining peace, its various stages and to various groups, such as opposition parties, displaced people and marginalized groups. The people themselves should be recognized as agents of peace and their local capacities must be enhanced.
- Effective peacebuilding must involve the **ENTIRE UN SYSTEM**, particularly through joint analysis and effective strategic planning across the UN system in its long term engagement in conflict-affected countries. We need to breakdown the silos, both at Headquarters and the field, across the UN system, in accordance with respective mandates, for a more coherent approach to sustaining peace. [OP 10, 13]
- In line with the UN Integrated Assessment and Planning policy, while humanitarian action may support sustaining peace, the main purpose of humanitarian action will remain to address life-saving needs and alleviate suffering. Analysis and planning for sustaining peace should include humanitarian actors to ensure coherence and complementarity with other actors. [OP 10]
- Sustaining peace requires coherence, sustained engagement and coordination among the **INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES** of the UN, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and ECOSOC. [OP 2, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16]

# 5 / SUSTAINING PEACE: THE "HOW"

Sustaining peace requires:

- a **CHANGE IN MINDSET**, moving from a reactive mode to a preventive approach and from short-term and output-based interventions to longer-term sustainable and collective outcomes;
- that the UN system adapts to this new agenda, not the other way around;
- **ACTIVELY BREAKING OUT OF SILOS**, eliminating fragmentation and contributing to a comprehensive, coordinated and coherent approach to sustaining peace; [PP 12, OP 10, 13, 14]
- **INTEGRATING SUSTAINING PEACE IN RELEVANT CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLANS, POLICIES AND TRAININGS**; analysis and assessments; planning processes; and programmes and activities; [OP 13]
- the UN to do **MORE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC JOINT MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONFLICT AND RISK ANALYSIS, JOINT IDENTIFICATION OF COLLECTIVE OUTCOMES, JOINED UP EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND JOINT MONITORING AND EVALUATION**, including the gender dimensions in each step; [OP 13]
- that interventions, initiatives, activities and programmes are based on a conflict analysis and address the drivers of violent conflict through the **FORMULATION OF A THEORY OF CHANGE**, specifying which action would lead to what peacebuilding outcome, for example, trust between the state and the population and among population groups through equitable access to justice or social services;
- effective, accountable and responsive **LEADERSHIP** in UN country operations bringing the UN system together around a common strategy for sustaining peace; [OP 14]
- adequate, predictable and sustained **FINANCING**; [OP 24-27] and
- **PARTNERSHIPS**, including with regional, sub-regional and international financial institutions, especially the African Union and the World Bank, and civil society organizations, women's groups, youth organizations and the private sector. [OP 4, 18, 21, 22, 23, 27]

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## IN SUM, THE FOLLOWING STEPS COULD BE IDENTIFIED:

1. **MINDSET:** Recognize that sustaining peace is a shared responsibility that needs to be integrated or mainstreamed in the work of the UN system throughout the life cycle of a conflict;
  2. **JOINT ANALYSIS:** Conduct joint analysis to arrive at a shared understanding of causes, drivers and triggers of conflict;
  3. **COLLECTIVE OUTCOMES:** Formulate a shared vision and collective outcomes for sustaining peace;
  4. **STRATEGIC PLANNING:** UN entities strategically plan together activities, interventions and programmes and who does what, where, how and when, within their mandates and with their comparative advantage, directly aimed at or contributing to sustaining peace;
  5. **ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES:** UN entities individually plan activities, interventions and programmes through their own processes;
  6. **PARTNERSHIPS AND FINANCING:** Develop partnerships and ensure predictable financing; and
  7. **EVALUATION:** Evaluate activities and programmes and learn and share lessons.
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- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustaining Peace Agenda are complementary and mutually reinforcing.
- The tenet of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind” and reach the furthest behind first implies a need to focus on sustaining peace. Sustaining peace also commits to ensuring that “the needs of all segments of society are taken into account.” [OP 3]
- There are several areas of overlap between sustaining peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  1. Both recognize that **EACH COUNTRY HAS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY** for implementing the 2030 Agenda and sustaining peace.
  2. Both are **PEOPLE-CENTRED** and are grounded in international human rights law, principles and standards.
  3. Both emphasize the importance of **PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT**.
  4. Both strongly stress the **INTERDEPENDENCE** of the issues we are confronting and the comprehensive approaches required to address them. Peace and security, development and human rights are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing.
  5. There are various **DRIVERS OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS** that sit squarely within the socio-economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, including economic, social and environmental inequalities, lack of jobs, poor natural resource management and climate change.
  6. **INCLUSIVE, TRANSPARENT, EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS** and the rule of law are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to sustaining peace.
  7. Agenda 2030 and the peacebuilding resolutions recognize that we need to work **COLLECTIVELY AS “ONE”** across the UN system to provide coherent support to Member States’ efforts to meet the ambitious targets they have set for themselves.

- The link between the two agendas **IS NOT ONLY ABOUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16**. Different aspects of peaceful, just and inclusive societies are included in several SDGs. The SDGs are universal, interlinked and integrated. SDG 16 is important in conflict-affected countries, but so are other Goals and Goal 16 is as important in other countries. As many as 36 targets across the 2030 Agenda are directly related to violence, justice or inclusivity, e.g.:
    - SDG 4 on education includes references to discrimination in education; education on human rights and gender equality; “promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence;” and “safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;”
    - SDG 5 on gender equality aims to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls, child and forced marriage, and discrimination against women and girls and ensure full and effective women’s participation;
    - SDG 8 on decent work aims to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour; protect labour rights; and achieve equal pay for work of equal value;
    - SDG 10 on inequalities aims to promote social, economic and political inclusion and safe migration; and
    - SDG 11 on cities includes references to inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements.
  
  - Moreover, there are several **SDGS THAT ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT IN OUR EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE DRIVERS AND ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT**, including SDG 10 on inequalities, SDG 8 on jobs, SDGs 12, 14 and 15 on the management of natural resources and SDG 13 on climate change.
  
  - Separating SDG 16 from the rest of the 2030 Agenda – e.g. by associating it with conflict-affected countries or equating it with peacebuilding or sustaining peace – undermines the political agreement underpinning the SDGs.
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## RELEVANT PARAGRAPHS FROM GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 70/262 AND SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2282 (2016) ON SUSTAINING PEACE

**“RECOGNIZING** that ‘sustaining peace’, as drawn from the Advisory Group of Experts report, should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and *emphasizing* that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three pillars of the United Nations’ engagement at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention and assistance, [PP 8]

**REAFFIRMING** the primary responsibility of national governments and authorities in identifying, driving and directing priorities, strategies and activities for sustaining peace, and in this regard, *emphasizing* that inclusivity is key to advancing national peacebuilding processes and objectives in order to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account, [PP 9]

**STRESSING** that civil society can play an important role in advancing efforts to sustain peace, [PP 10]

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**EMPHASIZING** the importance of a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace, particularly through the prevention of conflict and addressing its root causes, strengthening the rule of law at the international and national levels, and promoting sustained and sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development, national reconciliation and unity including through inclusive dialogue and mediation, access to justice and transitional justice, accountability, good governance, democracy, accountable institutions, gender equality and respect for, and protection of, human rights and fundamental freedoms, [PP 12]

...

**RECOGNIZING** that an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, security and developmental actors, within and outside of the United Nations system, consistent with their respective mandates, and the Charter of the United Nations, is critical to sustaining peace, and essential for improving respect for human rights, advancing gender equality, empowering women and youth, strengthening the rule of law, eradicating poverty, building institutions, and advancing economic development in conflict-affected countries,” [PP 13]