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# What Can the Peacebuilding Commission Do to Support National Prevention Strategies?

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## **About the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at NYU**

The Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at [New York University](https://www.nyu.edu) (NYU) is a research center and think tank that, for over two decades, has been a leader in applied policy, connecting politics, security, justice, development, and humanitarian issues. Our mission is to inform and strengthen collaborative approaches and/or collaboration among national governments, international organizations, and the wider policy community to build trust, prevent and respond to crises—







the PBC could highlight to mobilize additional funding from the World Bank's

Over the past several years, **national prevention strategies have risen on the United Nations political agenda**. In his New Agenda for Peace, the UN secretary-general encouraged all member states to develop such strategies, and most recently, in the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, member states agreed to strengthen and implement existing NPS and to consider developing them where they do not exist. These changes represent a shift towards a more universal approach, recognizing that no country is immune from violence and that prevention is relevant for all. The Pact further specifies that to support this effort,



Member states have already started **discussing NPS at the PBC**. In March 2024, the PBC organized a meeting on “National Efforts for Prevention and Peacebuilding,” which covered the prevention of different forms of violence, and during the same month, Mauritania presented its own prevention efforts. Before that, the Commission reported, as a new initiative in 2023, considering support for the preparation of national strategies for conflict prevention and their implementation. Additionally, the recent open debates on Conflict Prevention at the UN Security Council, organized under the presidency of Japan in March 2024 and under the presidency of Sierra Leone in August 2024, foreshadow that member states will continue to use the PBC to discuss their NPS. **This report thus explores what the PBC can offer that is of added value for member states to strengthen their NPS.**

The first step in **identifying opportunities for the PBC to support NPS effectively** is to understand what makes NPS effective. Some key elements that such strategies should be anchored in strong political and social commitment, evidence-based,

so, **coordinated support** is paramount. This third section discusses how the PBC

## F e n g b n f e e n n

Developing a national prevention strategy is not a mere technical exercise. **Ownership from political actors and the wider society is the cornerstone on which the success of an NPS depends.** Indeed, given that violence is multicausal and that the root causes of violence are diverse (e.g., negative childhood experiences, access to land and land property rights,

prevention at the UN was thorny. While most member states would likely agree with the saying that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, member states have expressed concerns that the UN prevention agenda could be used to meddle in their internal affairs or that prevention efforts could be stigmatizing, as some observers might take them to signal that a country is at risk of falling into conflict.

To address these concerns, the secretary-general, in his New Agenda for Peace, has pushed for a more universal approach to prevention and insisted that these efforts be nationally led. In particular, the secretary-general emphasized that “instability, violence and the potential for conflict are not restricted to only a few States, as growing risks, while differentiated, exist in developed, middle income and developing States alike.” Member states have subsequently emphasized the importance of a universal approach to prevention through their statements at Security Council open debates. In the Pact for the Future, they also broadened the focus of NPS from conflict to violence, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 target to reduce all forms of violence. In the context of these efforts, the PBC can also play an important role and contribute to normalizing and destigmatizing prevention, which in turn would allow for more incentives to develop NPS and access to better support when relevant. The following sections discuss options for the PBC to be a forum to foster buy-in for prevention, both at the national and international levels.

## 2.1.1 Options for the PBC to foster buy-in for prevention

### BC

Some member states are using the PBC as part of their efforts to strengthen political and social support domestically, as well as to hold themselves accountable to international and regional actors—particularly ahead of a political transition. The mere fact that a member state decides to present their NPS in front of the PBC can have an impact by encouraging the government to take a position and discuss prevention issues in-country. Additionally, once a meeting takes place, it can be publicized at home. Timor-Leste, for instance, broadly communicated about their 2022 meeting at the PBC on local media outlets as well as social media in national and local languages, showcasing the importance of their prevention efforts to a



Peacebuilding”







Without unpacking the options for NPS, member states unfortunately might discard systems of efforts that address root causes of violence under different labeling.

Member states also report that **the level of discussion at the PBC is usually too general to be useful**. In particular, delegates—often not experts on NPS—may only be able to read pre-made statements rather than react to the presentations or participate in an active discussion. The focus on pre-prepared statements begs the question of intention: are member states really trying to exchange good practices or just engaging in inspiring storytelling? The PBC may remain a challenging place to exchange good practices on NPS. However, if member states decide to use the PBC this way, the section below elaborates on potential options to ensure a stronger and more evidence-based approach to exchanging lessons learned on NPS.

### 2.2.1 Options for the PBC to allow for the exchange of good practices on NPS

Member states have the opportunity to cultivate an evidence-based approach when discussing good practices on NPS at the PBC. In addition to presenting examples anchored in evidence, member states can also react to other member states who do not. Such reactions will probably disincentivize the most extreme forms of whitewashing, but they may not be enough to encourage evidence-based discussions. Expertise on NPS is not usually held by diplomats in New York—who answer to their country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs—but by their colleagues in capitals. To participate constructively in PBC meetings on good practices, diplomats in New York need to seek technical input from their capitals. However, acquiring this information might take time, particularly since NPS often involve multiple ministries. Unfortunately, PBC meetings are often scheduled too late to allow for extensive national consultations. To allow member states to play a greater





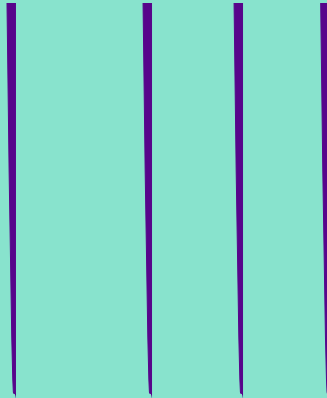


exchange good practices more effectively on universal challenges. Any parameters established for NPS should be flexible **to allow for context-specificity** and respect national ownership, and **they should be anchored in evidence** of what works for effective NPS. The PBC is not a think tank but a political body, and it should, therefore, draw upon outside expertise to develop preliminary proposals for presentation to PBC member states. Interviewees highlighted different opportunities to define these parameters, including relying on an external cross-regional group of violence prevention experts, drawing from UN knowledge, requesting a secretary-general report, and involving capitals. Some also suggested letting member states use the PBC to present what they understand as their NPS and, once a critical mass of information has been created, to use that information inductively to identify shared parameters. Member states could agree on the need to adopt such parameters through an intergovernmental process, such as the Peacebuilding Architecture Review. Member states could also request the secretary-general to develop evidence-based par

## B R PBC

Ambassador Ivan Šimonović, Permanent Representative of Croatia to the UN, and former Chair of the Commission, has suggested that member states could use the Commission to present their NPS, using a model akin to the VNR or the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Building on this idea, interviews with member states reveal that **a voluntary, nationally owned**



policies that address root causes of violence, but are not labeled as prevention (e.g., efforts to reduce marginalization of certain groups). This, in turn, could allow for the establishment of a coherent vision of a system of efforts to address diverse root causes and prevent violence. Member states could also use the guidance to assess their strategy's capacity to address the root causes of violence in the country and **strengthen their strategy when relevant**. This assessment could also allow member states to use the PBC to request concrete support for their NPS. Following up on the presentations in New York could also contribute to the continuity of efforts to strengthen and implement NPS. At the international level, it would help **maintain interest** in NPS, **support the normalization and destigmatization of prevention**, and **showcase its universality**. It could also allow for a more effective exchange of good practices.

### Potential drawbacks and challenges

This process does not come without drawbacks and challenges. First, reporting could be burdensome and expensive for countries. Member states may suffer from reporting fatigue or even fear of being monitored by the UN and may not have enough resources to engage in yet another reporting process. Second, given the voluntary nature of the guidelines, a reporting system could be used by some member states as a whitewashing exercise. Finally, the proposed reporting system could be duplicative of the existing VNR system, through which countries are reporting on SDG16 on Peaceful and Just Institutions and its 16.1 target on reducing all forms of violence.

### Options









addition to improving communication with PBC members. Establishing an enhanced internal PBC coordination system could also help improve the retention of knowledge of past practices by improving handovers between



experts to engage on specific topics, develop political and technical advice about how the Security Council can increase coherence with other areas of





could also explore more granularly what development efforts contribute to prevention. Additionally, given that understanding the root causes of violence is key for national actors to develop and strengthen NPS, the **ECOSOC could also explore opportunities to support member states through its Statistical Commission**. The Commission, which is responsible for setting statistical standards and the development of concepts and methods, including their implementation at the national level, could support national actors in developing systems to monitor the root causes of violence linked to development.

Third, both the PBC and ECOSOC are able to engage with UN AFPs. The AFPs are particularly critical in the context of NPS because, within their mandate, they have the capacity to support national actors in addressing specific root causes of violence. Thus, the ECOSOC could **integrate prevention and peacebuilding in their “operational activities of the UN for international development cooperation”** segment or even hold a dedicated meeting during this segment on the linkages between development and prevention, or specifically NPS. Attention to these issues during the operational activities segment could help strengthen AFPs’ mandates in supporting NPS and addressing the root causes of violence. Going even further, the **ECOSOC could encourage the boards of the various AFPs to consider supporting NPS** and contributing prevention efforts in their country-level implementation.

Fourth, the PBC could also encourage the ECOSOC to **adopt an evidence-based resolution** describing elements for setting up effective NPS to support member states in their efforts on a voluntary basis. This was done in the past for crime prevention. Additionally, to ensure broader buy-in past the 54 ECOSOC members, the Council could suggest to the General Assembly's Second or Third Committees that the resolution be considered for GA adoption as a way of developing and promulgating a coordinated and more effective approach to supporting NPS across the UN system.

Partnerships between the PBC and regional and sub-regional organizations are also a potential area for ensuring complementarity and alignment while







climate disasters or other natural disasters can cause a big burden to a country. Member states could also use the PBC to report back on financing that they have received, how they have been able to address the root causes of violence and conflict, and where there are still gaps. This reporting could serve as an opportunity to make a case for additional funding where funding is insufficient.

One of the challenges of using the PBC to discuss exogenous root causes and conflict-sensitive responses to external shocks is that this is not part of the PBC's current mandate, and the PBC might not have the necessary capacity or funding to engage. Additionally, some topics have been notoriously difficult to discuss among member states, including the impact of climate change on violence. Some member states have also expressed concern about bringing controversial topics into the PBC—such as the impact of the war in Ukraine on food prices—which they fear could risk politicizing the Commission. While thematic conversations have been difficult to agree on, the national ownership of the PBC still allows member states to share the impact of the external shocks affecting them. The conversation can then expand if other member states in the room express similar concerns in their statements.









PBC members have undertaken visits to the IFIs in Washington, D.C., on various occasions to discuss specific country contexts, including the Central African Republic (CAR) and Liberia in 2020, and Sierra Leone and CAR in 2018. While none of these meetings have focused specifically on prevention, this model could be used for it.

### *Constraints on the PBC's engagement with IFIs*

Engagement between the PBC and IFIs has remained modest, and some reasons have been advanced to explain this. First, **there is a need to re-**



Using the example of the WBG, a country partnership framework is a document negotiated between the country and the Bank. Both sides agree on the priorities, and then the document is approved for funding by the Board. The principal interlocutors for this discussion are the Ministry of Finance on the government side and the country director on the Bank's side, while all specific sectoral projects are provided for within this strategic framework. Accordingly, a PBC discussion would not be able to translate to a funding decision if an NPS is not accommodated within the country partnership framework. What a PBC discussion does provide is a political signal about the extent to which the government is committed to its NPS.

Despite these constraints, the PBC still represents a very useful forum, and funding actors, including bilateral donors, IFIs, private and public foundations, and philanthropists, can draw value from it. It provides some opportunity to create greater political buy-in, build common understanding, and discuss the threshold for action. The PBC could strengthen collaboration between the UN, IFIs and MDBs, bilateral donors, and foundations by providing a space to: (a) provide the political reference that could support technical analysis for support; (b) build a common understanding of what prevention is and how to measure it; (c) highlight opportunities for complementarity of efforts; (d) sound the alarm when a country faces devastating shocks (e.g., climate-related disasters) or is facing structural challenges that undermine its stability (such as debt distress or massive

A PBC discussion would also help IFIs and MDBs make the case for support for a country to the institutions' boards when the technical threshold for support has not been met. This is particularly useful because there is an increasing realization that support provided further upstream may be more critical in preventing crisis. The PBC is one arena whereby member states could engage with the Bank about re-thinking its eligibility threshold,



understanding and create a reference document that could become a guide for all actors on these issues.

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The Pact for the Future highlighted that establishing a more systematic and strategic partnership between the Commission and IFIs would help to “mobilize financing for sustaining peace and to help align national development, peacebuilding, and prevention”)la



Countries need a platform where they can cry out rather than choke to death. The PBC could play that role: PBC deliberations could be used by the IMF as one source of evidence to determine what debt treatment approach to advise different countries to undertake. However, even more broadly, the current debt servicing crisis requires the multilateral system to bell the cat and call for a multilateral solution for debt relief that is appropriate for this context. Having heard many presentations by different countries on this, the

accessing the convening services offered by the PBC to countries on its agenda.

The PBC and the PBF may share a backstopping office in the form of the Peacebuilding Support Office, but since the PBC is a member state organization, and the PBF is under the leadership of the secretary-general, navigating the relationship between the two bodies has required effort. The PBC and the PBF have gradually built up a set of interlinkages, including regular PBF briefings to the PBC, but more could be done to strengthen the relationship.

Strengthening this relationship is especially important because, while the PBC and PBF possess synergies, they also share similar challenges. Both bodies and the broader peacebuilding infrastructure at the UN suffer from





of the PBF Advisory Group to PBC meetings, and remaining updated on PBF activities. These synergies could be enhanced and tailored to support NPS. For example, the PBC could convene a dedicated annual meeting on financing for NPS,

## **T an e al challenge**

### **3.1.1 The impact of universality**

The secretary-general's *New Agenda for Peace* proposed a paradigm shift that acknowledges the universality of prevention and recommends the development of NPS to address drivers and enablers of violence and conflict for all countries. On this

Finally, the information discussed during PBC meetings is available to non



Various challenges affect continuity at the PBC. First, the Commission is moving

them with support upon request. Member states have raised the importance of the issue in Security Council Open Debates and at PBC meetings and they recently committed in the Pact for the Future to strengthening and implementing existing NPS and considering developing them where they do not exist. The Pact also highlights that member states should receive UN support for their prevention efforts, including through the PBC.

For member states to discuss prevention at the PBC, **the mandate of the Commission does not need to be modified**. Given that the Commission's work is anchored in national ownership, member states can bring their prevention

national actors in developing and implementing evidence-based strategies. An evidence-based approach is key because, without it, a strategy might not be effective, eroding trust in prevention. The first step in supporting evidence-based efforts is to clarify the parameters for effective national violence prevention strategies (see section 2.2.1c, [\*Developing a shared understanding on conditions for success\*](#)). In this, it is essential to develop a





length of different interventions. The format is also very anchored in traditional UN mindset and ways of working. Member states and PBSO could explore other formats to allow for more engaging conversations. For instance, the PBC could consider convening more expert-level meetings, enabling more virtual participation to allow colleagues from capitals or IFI country directors to join, or holding more open meetings to invite external experts. Finally, opportunities should be explored to schedule the meetings

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Here, "whitewashing" refers to calling prevention, efforts that actually do not contribute to preventing violence.

The Peacebuilding Hub was launched in December 2023 with the goal to provide evidence on what works on peacebuilding and prevention so that interventions are informed by evidence. For more information about the Hub, check their website: "Peacebuilding Impact Hub," UN Peacebuilding, accessed October 29, 2024, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/impact-hub>.

During our interviews, one delegate mentioned the Panels of Experts advising the various Security Council Sanctions Committees.

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) has made more specific suggestions in this regard: "[...] the PBSO, with direction from the Peacebuilding Commission, can establish a global research advisory panel [...]" "To ensure that the Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Architecture has a network of experts available that it can call on for information and analysis as needed, the PBSO can establish a peacebuilding research and knowledge network and database as





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launched in 2019 the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding and Partnership (HDPP) Facility to provide small grants for joint activities. The World Bank Group and the UN already partner in almost 50 countries. See: "United Nations-World Bank Partnership in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations," *United Nations Peacebuilding*, accessed October 25, 2024, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/partnerships/un-worldbank-partnership>.

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"9. Decides that representatives from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other institutional donors shall be invited to participate in all meetings of the Commission in a manner suitable to their governing arrangements." From: United Nations, Resolution 1645 (2005), [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1645\(2005\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1645(2005)).

For example, the DRC. According to the World Bank, "DRC meets PRA eligibility criteria for support to countries at risk of escalation into high-intensity conflict or large-scale violence. DRC meets the qualitative (adoption of the National Strategy for Conflict Prevention, Stabilization and Community Resilience Building) and quantitative (the close to 5,800 conflict related 2020 deaths translate into 6.63 fatalities per 100,000 people<sup>16</sup>, which is within the 2-10 conflict related deaths per 100,000 people) requirements for eligibility to the PRA." From: The World Bank Group, "Country Partnership Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo for the Period FY 22-26. Report No. 168084-ZR," January 24, 2022, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/214221646062568502/pdf/Congo-Democratic-Republic->

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