

Knowledge to lead

Seminar on

Peacebuilding: The Role of Diasporas

UN Headquarters, New York, 28-29 April 2009

Information Note

Background

The international community has acknowledged the precarious situation of post-conflict countries and the need for early recovery and development interventions to help societies avoid a relapse into conflict. Since 2005, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has aimed to assist countries emerging from conflict by bringing together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on integrated peacebuilding strategies. Building national and local capacities in conflict affected countries is an essential element of this endeavour, while identifying and coordinating with non-traditional partners is often one of the most difficult aspects. Many diaspora communities possess valuable skills, expertise, wealth and initiative. Yet, although their financial and other resources can help support families, rebuild institutions and revive the private sector, engaging them in formal peacebuilding processes remains a challenge for the international community.

Indeed, the role of diasporas as “peacemakers or peace-wreckers” remains contested. They have the potential to stabilize countries emerging from violent conflict, by creating wealth and fostering reconciliation. At the household level, financial contributions of diasporas in the form of remittances can be more reliable and sustainable than other financial flows. However, diaspora groups can also fuel tensions by funding conflicts in the home country and lending support to one particular group or faction. Forging national cohesion in conflict-affected states, including with the diaspora, is a major challenge. So is ensuring the sustainability of interventions by diaspora actors and the international community. Existing efforts for outreach and institutional support of diaspora initiatives remain often ad-hoc and short-term.

This seminar will discuss challenges and opportunities in engaging diaspora communities in formal peacebuilding processes. It will look at the various forms in which diaspora actors can and do contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the areas of reconstruction, institutional capacity-building and reconciliation. Emphasis will be placed on the capacities needed within the diaspora and on the ground to most positively affect peace and development in post-conflict situations. In addition, potential interfaces between intergovernmental mechanisms, notably the PBC, and diaspora actors will be the subject of discussion.



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Objectives

At the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

- Recognize challenges and opportunities involved in engaging diaspora communities in peacebuilding initiatives;
- Identify ways in which diasporas can contribute to reconstruction, institutional capacity-building and reconciliation in their conflict-affected home countries;
- Identify conducive attitudes and institutional mechanisms on the ground that allow for the inclusion of diaspora contributions in the national peacebuilding process;
- Sketch out potential institutional interfaces that could support diaspora engagement in the peacebuilding partnerships and multi-stakeholder cooperation forged by the PBC;
- Identify the expectations of diaspora organizations towards home country Governments and international actors such as the PBC.

Participants

The seminar is designed for members of Permanent Missions responsible for the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, and for the Peacebuilding Commission. UN staff and interested representatives of civil society and the private sector are also welcome to attend. Participants are requested to regard their registration as a firm commitment.

Date and Venue

The seminar will take place at United Nations headquarters in Conference Room 8 on:
Tuesday, 28 April, from 10:00 a.m. to 1p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and
Wednesday, 29 April, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Registration

If you wish to participate in this panel, please register online at www.unitarny.org/en/diasporasinpb.html, or complete the attached nomination form and return it to the following address:

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