

The Role of Civil Society in Post-conflict Peace-building

On 22 June, the Security Council held a day-long open debate on the role of civil society in post-conflict peace-building, with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan calling for a two-way dialogue between the United Nations and civil society. Noting that civil society can act as "bridge-builders, truth-finders, watchdogs, human rights defenders, and agents of social protection and economic revitalization," the Secretary-General said the time had come for the Council to "deepen its dialogue" with civil society and to place its relations with them on a "firmer footing."

Speaking before the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasized that civil society organizations (CSOs) should not be seen as peace-building partners only after the United Nations had arrived in a country with a mandate in its pocket. On the contrary, both local and international civil society groups had a role to play in the deliberative processes of the UN, including the Security Council, where civil conflict and complex emergencies had taken centre stage in recent years.

While the Council was a body of sovereign governments dealing with the most sensitive matters of war and peace, he said, it should view inputs by civil society not as attempts to usurp its role, but as a way to add quality and value to its decisions and ensure their effective implementation. In addition, civil society groups should seek to reduce the influence of forces promoting exclusionary policies or violence, he said. They could help reduce the appeal of those trying to reignite conflict, assist in building national consensus on the design of post-conflict structures and programmes, and prepare local communities to receive demobilized soldiers, refugees and internally displaced persons. Importantly, they could give a voice to the concerns of the marginalized.

Mr. Annan asked Council members to pay serious attention to the report released on 21 June by his Panel of Eminent Persons on UN/Civil Society Relations, entitled *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance* (see *NGLS Roundup 113*). "I am particularly pleased that the Panel has proposed a number of concrete measures to increase the participation of civil society representatives from developing countries," Mr. Annan said. "And the report offers many innovative ideas to strengthen the partnership with civil society in our humanitarian and development work."

Citing the unique position of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to interact and consult with CSOs, ECOSOC President Marjatta Rasi (Finland) said it was paying more attention to transition and development and regularly discussed recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction with the humanitarian and operative agencies. However, adequate assistance was required for post-conflict needs, including fostering civil society. Effective local capacity building should be supported across the sectors and communities and with a wide range of CSOs as well.

She pointed out that the Commission on the Status of Women had adopted conclusions on women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution, and in post-conflict peace-building (see *NGLS Roundup 111*). Dialogue with civil society

had been introduced to UN development activities as a basic principle.

In the first appearance of an NGO at a public Security Council meeting since 1994, representatives from CARE International and the International Center for Transitional Justice spoke before the Council.

Denis Caillaux, Secretary-General of CARE, pointed out that with the rise of internal armed conflicts and complex emergencies, there was an increasing need to work with societies buffeted between armed conflict and natural calamities, which ended up in geographical patchworks of technical peace, but actual insecurity. He said a "central lesson" of the last decade had been that half of all peace efforts falter from the outbreak of local conflicts. "To prevent this from undermining national peace agreements, peacekeeping mandates must reach beyond their traditional focus, on the national level, to the heart of local communities," he said. Mr. Caillaux named Afghanistan, Burundi, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone as places where CSOs had worked successfully with international partners toward peace-building.

Ian Martin, Vice-President of the International Center for Transitional Justice, pointed out that one of the most fundamental challenges of post-conflict peace-building was to confront the past, while building a just foundation for the future. Mr. Martin also noted that "the involvement of local and national civil society is not only helpful in designing more satisfactory approaches, it is irreplaceable if peace and justice are the goals." He said he also welcomed the report on UN/civil society relations and supported the Panel's insistence that civil groups have access to the Council "not only in New York, but whenever the Security Council goes on mission to post-conflict countries."

Both representatives asked the Security Council to adopt a presidential statement that would demonstrate its commitment to including civil society groups in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Security Council President Delia Domingo Albert, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, speaking in her national capacity, emphasized that the UN must have a clearer view of its relations with a civil society that had grown in size and numbers. "Clearly there is a consensus ... on the crucial role of civil society in global issues," she pointed out. Post-conflict reconciliation requires "a delicate but firm touch," guided by understanding of and sympathy with the affected population. "By its nature, civil society is gifted with such understand and sympathy," she said.