

Conductive Space for Peace Input to the Review of the Future of All Forms of UN Peace Operations

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Conductive Space for Peace (CSP) works with local and global actors to make peace processes more inclusive, equitable, and driven by those closest to the relevant context. We welcome the Review's focus on the future of all forms of UN peace operations and believe that special political missions, envoys, and other non-peacekeeping presences hold particular potential to open space for local leadership and context-driven solutions. Our input builds on our global engagement including the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) input, [Charting Tomorrow: Recommendations for a United Nations Embracing the Future \(March 2025\)](#).

1. What are the main challenges confronting peace operations today and what challenges are expected to be faced by peace operations in the future?

- **Demand for local legitimacy:** Peace efforts succeed where they are grounded in trusted local institutions and leadership, not only in national level political agreements.
- **Civic space under pressure:** Shrinking space for civil society in fragile and conflict-affected settings undermines inclusive peace and requires proactive protection and resourcing through UN missions.

2. How could United Nations peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges?

- **Centre local leadership in peacebuilding:** Missions should move beyond conducting consultations with local civil society to engage in a more genuinely locally led manner where spaces of engagement, agendas, and modes of collaboration are co-created, and the perspectives of local civil society are integrated at all levels of the operation.
- **Strengthen civic infrastructures for peace:** Strengthen long-term capacity of local organisations and networks to address causes of conflict and to manage conflicts at relevant levels and in a timely manner for example through community mediation bodies. Help build translocal linkages that allow communities to support one another in sustaining peace beyond mission drawdown.
- **Safeguard and expand civic space:** Actively defend the right of communities to organise, advocate, and participate in public life as a core peace objective. Challenge governments that pass laws and put in place regulations that limit civic sovereignty, and find ways to ensure that funds reach civic actors and organisations even when constraints are put in place to limit their activities.
- **Review of Mediation Support Unit and Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers:** Review of Mission ways of working including approaches that include flying in and out of conflict settings; embedding more long-term and accompanying engagement approaches; and placing greater decision-making and expertise in national actors and experts, long-term committed staff, long-term secured funding, and other modalities of collaboration with civic actors.
- **Review Peace and Development Adviser capacity needs and resourcing:** The Joint UNDP–DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention has demonstrated the value of PDAs in making UN country teams more conflict sensitive and in supporting national prevention strategies. The Review should assess what capacities and ways of working PDAs need to better connect political analysis with locally led peacebuilding, and to work in genuine partnership with civil society, including exploring how to diversify recruitment to bring in advisers with grounded local networks and lived experience, as well as the ability to facilitate multi-actor coalitions.

3. *What could United Nations peace operations be expected and mandated to do in the future?*

- **Civil society interfaces:** Resource the establishment of spaces for structured engagement with local actors, organisations, and networks at community and translocal levels.
- **Integrate people-powered early warning & response:** Support existing local monitoring networks that can feed into mission analysis and rapid response, increasing both accuracy and legitimacy.
- **Mobilise the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) for civic engagement:** Increase the amount of funding from the PBF in support of local civil society, and when funding is granted for UN agencies ensure that they work with and through local actors. Ensure that the conditions of funding are relevant, including longer term funding than one to two years.

4. *What could be the role of partnerships, with regional organizations, international financial institutions, or other actors, in future United Nations peace operations?*

- **Invest in and give space to self-sustaining local governance and mediation mechanisms:** Ensure these are resourced and recognised before mission departure.
- **Facilitate and otherwise support translocal and regional civil society networks:** These networks can sustain solidarity, advocacy, and problem-solving beyond the life of a mission.

5. *Please share any additional observations that may benefit the Review*

Peace Operations innovation and reform should also be considered in the context of broader multilateral system reforms that shape their legitimacy, mandate scope and their relationship to the people they serve. CSP would like to highlight three longer-term perspectives on approaches to meaningfully realign the UN beyond the immediate remit of operational reform, to create the political conditions for more legitimate, people-centred peace and security solutions. These three perspectives toward reimagining the UN toward a new era are highlighted below and elaborated in the attached report *Charting Tomorrow: Recommendations for a United Nations Embracing the Future* (See full report attached).

- **Democratising the United Nations through a Global Citizens' Assembly:** Establishing a standing, representative assembly of global citizens could give voice to those most affected by conflict and create a direct channel for civic input into peace operation mandates and oversight. Members could be selected through equitable, random and deliberative processes to ensure diversity across geography, age, gender and socio-economic status. This diversity would make the assembly uniquely positioned to articulate the concerns of ordinary citizens and marginalised communities, and evidence from citizen deliberation processes shows it can generate more sustainable solutions with broader, long-term perspectives.
- **Reforming the UN Security Council (UNSC) to unlock more equal representation:** Expanding representation and reforming decision-making in the Council would reduce the geopolitical gridlock that often limits operational mandates, enabling missions to act with clearer, more inclusive political backing. Expanding the council to include permanent seats for historically marginalised regions and granting more significant roles to countries in the majority world as well as exploring more robust avenues for grassroots civil society input into decision-making would better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Doing so would also bolster trust in the institution and ensure that a broader spectrum of perspectives shapes global peace and security policies
- **Invoking Article 109 – Convening a General Charter Review Conference:** Opening a Charter review process would provide the opportunity to enshrine the principles of local leadership, civic participation, and prevention as foundational elements of the UN's peace and security architecture. Invoking and activating Article 109 offers a unique opportunity to address the systemic and structural limitations of the UN system, allowing member states to address various interconnected issues hindering UN effectiveness. Such a process would enable the modernisation of UN decision-making frameworks to better reflect the multipolar world of today, along with the diverse needs of its global constituency.

CHARTING TOMORROW

Recommendations for a United Nations
Embracing the Future



Brief



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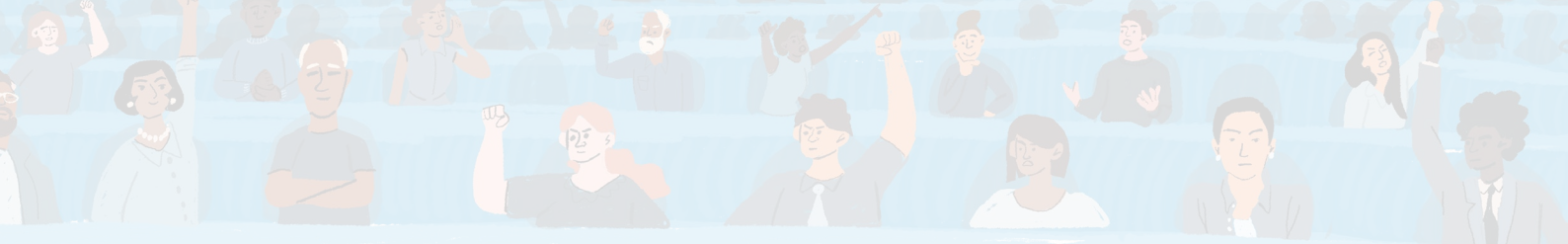
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This briefing note is the CSP contribution to the ongoing process of review and reform, inspired by the collective wisdom of the many actors with whom we have worked. It is crafted with an acute awareness of the ambitious reform agenda set forth in the UN secretary-general's New Agenda for Peace and the commitments made by UN member states in the Pact for the Future. These documents signal a renewed push to modernise multilateralism, strengthen global governance and ensure peacebuilding efforts are suitable for the complex world of today. It is clear, however, that commitments on paper must translate into concrete actions. It is now up to the UN and UN member states to uphold their promises and take decisive steps toward a more equitable and inclusive UN architecture.

To support this process, this two-part briefing note first addresses the need to reform the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, proposing five actionable recommendations that respond to the urgent need for change, while bearing in mind the pragmatic realities of political feasibility. Second, it presents three perspectives focused on bold transformational changes that are based on reimagining the UN for a new era, over the long term. Above all, this briefing note emphasises the need for a UN system that reflects the perspectives, needs and agency of those most affected by conflict and violence.

The choices made now will shape the future of global collaboration for peace. We hope these recommendations will contribute meaningfully to discussions on UN renewal and reform, building a more inclusive, equitable and impactful system for peace in the years to come.





Reforming the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

In this era of intensified reconfiguration of the global order marked by complex and protracted conflicts, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) has a crucial role in promoting sustainable peace and saving lives in both the short and the long term. The global peacebuilding landscape is shaped by the intertwined challenges of political fragmentation, structural inequalities, climate change and the widening trust deficit between international institutions and local actors. At the same time, the urgent demands of conflict-affected communities for equitable, inclusive and sustainable solutions are putting unprecedented pressure on the UN system to evolve and adapt if it wants to remain a relevant force and partner for peace. Against this backdrop, reforming the PBA is not only a matter of improving efficiency. It is also a moral imperative to ensure that peacebuilding efforts are anchored in justice, equity and the lived realities of those most impacted by conflict and violence.

While offering a critical framework for conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery, the current peacebuilding system often falls short in addressing both the root causes of violence and creating a lasting impact. Centralised international decision-making, limited participation by local and marginalised actors, and short-term funding cycles constrain the ability of the PBA to deliver transformative outcomes. Moreover, the dominance of Global North actors in shaping peacebuilding agendas perpetuates a disconnect between global policy frameworks and the ground-level dynamics of conflicts.¹ These systemic issues are a disservice to the communities that bear the brunt of violence and instability. They also undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the UN as a global peacebuilding actor.

This moment offers a unique opportunity for substantial change. The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) that is currently underway, coupled with the broader discourse around reforming multilateral institutions, has created momentum to reimagine the PBA as one that genuinely embodies the principles of inclusivity, accountability and local ownership. Innovative approaches that decentralise power, strengthen civil society leadership and integrate diverse perspectives into decision-making processes can breathe new life into UN peacebuilding efforts. Similarly, addressing the colonial legacies embedded in international convening practices and funding priorities can pave the way for a more equitable and representative peacebuilding system.

These recommendations aim to capitalise on this pivotal moment by proposing actionable reforms to the PBA. While we have elsewhere² discussed the international peacebuilding system at country-level including the part related to the UN, we will here zoom in on key parts of the global PBA that were particularly up for discussion at the UN-CSO Dialogue on Peacebuilding in New York in December 2024. Other UN mechanisms related to the PBA, such as the Mediation Task Force, the Peace and Development advisors, the political arms of peace operations, etc., should be subject to similar reform efforts with local leadership at the forefront and shifting top-down international decision-making to locally-rooted and civil society centred peace efforts.

Our recommendations are grounded in the belief that facilitating the leadership of local actors, embracing participatory governance, and embedding equity and inclusivity into every aspect of peacebuilding are foundational to building sustainable peace. By undertaking these changes, the UN can position itself as much more than an international governance structure. It can also be a truly global facilitator of peace, and a resilient enabler of justice and equity in an increasingly interconnected and fragile world.

¹ See also Roesdahl, M., Peet-Martel, J., & Velpillay, S. (2021). *A global system in flux: Pursuing systems change for locally-led peacebuilding*. Conducive Space for Peace, and Conducive Space for Peace. (2023). *Challenges and opportunities in international support to local civil society: Evidence and recommendations from Myanmar, Colombia, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo*.

² Roesdahl, M. (2022). *Chain of Influence Framework for Systems Change: Shifting Power to Local Actors*. Conducive Space for Peace. And Conducive Space for Peace & Adapt Peacebuilding. (2023). *Challenges and opportunities in international support to local civil society: Evidence and recommendations from Myanmar, Colombia, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo*.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Strengthening the UN Peacebuilding Fund

To enhance the impact and inclusivity of the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), it is crucial to ensure that local civil society organisations (CSOs) in conflict-affected contexts have meaningful access to resources and decision-making. While the PBF is primarily designed to support national peace priorities—often in coordination with national governments and channelled through UN agencies—it is important to recognise the essential role of local CSOs in peacebuilding efforts. Strengthening their leadership and ensuring effective resource allocation requires a deliberate and structured approach.³ At the same time, in contexts where civil society is heavily repressed and unable to operate safely or legally, the UN's role in directly implementing projects remains critical, especially on sensitive issues such as human rights and protection.

- **Local Civil Society Support:** Ensure that a substantial proportion of PBF resources directly benefits local CSOs, including community-based organisations and grassroots movements. When funds continue to be channelled through UN agencies, establish a clear requirement that a significant share reaches local organisations, while setting a reasonable cap on administrative costs for intermediary agencies. In contexts where civil society is unable to formally exist or operate due to repression and restrictions, the direct role of the UN in addressing critical issues such as human rights and protection should be safeguarded, as it may be one of the few avenues through which these issues can still be addressed.
- **Collaborative and Inclusive Decision-Making:** Establish participatory funding mechanisms with local civil society as key stakeholders in determining funding priorities and allocations. Gradually transition from the current structure dominated by international and state actors. Instead, adopt a collaborative model that centres on the roles of local actors in shaping peacebuilding priorities and efforts.
- **Commitment to Long-Term Funding:** Address the limitations of short-term funding cycles by committing to predictable multi-year funding arrangements. Such an approach can provide local CSOs with the stability required to build institutional capacity and deliver sustainable outcomes. For short-term projects, create mechanisms to ensure seamless transition funding, avoiding disruptions that can jeopardise progress.
- **Funding Windows for Marginalised Groups:** Expand specialised funding streams—such as those targeting women, youth and human rights defenders—to amplify the voices of marginalised groups. In contexts where civil society faces repression, ensure that PBF funding mechanisms remain flexible enough to allow the UN to continue working on human rights and protection issues, even where local actors cannot safely do so. Simplify access to these funds where possible to reduce administrative burdens on local organisations, ensuring that those most affected by conflict can play a leading role in peacebuilding efforts.



³ See also Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). (2024). *Vision for the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR)*. GPPAC. Pp. 13-15.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Reforming the UN Peacebuilding Commission⁴

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has immense potential to serve as a critical actor in the UN system, bridging peacebuilding expertise with decision-making bodies such as the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly (GA). To fully realise its potential, the PBC requires significant reform in its modalities to increase both its relevance and inclusivity.

- **Advisory Role and Engagement with the UNSC:** Strengthen the PBC as a standing advisory body to the UNSC by establishing less ad hoc and more systematic briefings as a standardised UNSC procedure. To achieve this, the PBC must provide more targeted and actionable recommendations that address the root causes of conflict and propose comprehensive peacebuilding solutions. A formal process should be mandated whereby the PBC regularly reviews ongoing conflicts and delivers advisory reports to the UNSC prior to the adoption of significant resolutions. To avoid duplication of mandates, the PBC should be invited to brief the UNSC specifically on how the UN system can address the drivers and causes of conflict. While the UNSC primarily focuses on mitigating immediate crises—such as stopping violence and alleviating suffering—the PBC should concentrate on identifying and advocating for actions that prevent conflict recurrence in the months and years ahead. Additionally, the PBC should convene periodic joint sessions with both the UNSC and the GA to align peacebuilding strategies with broader UN priorities, reinforcing its indispensable expertise.
- **Proactive Peacebuilding Actor:** Strengthen PBC capacities to be a proactive peacebuilding actor. This should entail granting the commission greater authority to propose interventions. For this, the PBC must be more robustly integrated into PBC operations, enabling it to channel resources to preventative peacebuilding initiatives identified through its advisory role.
- **Inclusive and Accessible Modalities for Civil Society Engagement:** Ground approaches to inclusive peacebuilding in the perspectives of people directly impacted by conflicts. To this end, PBC consultation mechanisms with civil society, as outlined in its procedural rules (PBC/1/OC/3/REV.2), must be operationalised into structured, well-defined modalities. The PBC should establish standing forums for civil society participation, ensuring that grassroots organisations, women's groups, youth movements and other key local actors are both genuinely consulted and have opportunities to be active contributors to agenda-setting and decision-making. This can include creating a dedicated Civil Society Advisory Group that works in tandem with PBC country-specific configurations. The responsibility of civil society engagement can further be placed with one of the vice-chairs of the Commission.
- **Remove Barriers to Civil Society Participation:** Address barriers such as limited resources, procedural complexity and other systematic or structural constraints that hinder civil society engagement. Measures such as financial support for participation, simplified submission processes and digital platforms to ensure equitable representation from remote or inaccessible conflict-affected areas should be implemented. The PBC should also proactively include civil society in monitoring the implementation of its recommendations to foster accountability and continuous improvement.

⁴ See also de Coning, C., Brodtkorb, I. B., Iversen, T. O., & Lorentzen, J. (2024). *Improving the impact of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and enhancing the synergy of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Input paper for the 2025 (Twenty-year) review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture*. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Using National Prevention/Peacebuilding Strategies

The emergence of national prevention/peacebuilding strategies as a tool in the UN reflects growing recognition that sustainable peace requires locally led, inclusive approaches to conflict prevention. These strategies aim to strengthen national capacities for resilience, in alignment with global peacebuilding goals.

- **Strategies for All Member States:** Encourage Global North countries to develop prevention/peacebuilding strategies. While many countries in the Global South have developed such strategies, it is equally critical for Global North nations to do so, ensuring a shared commitment to conflict prevention and social cohesion. Reviewed by the PBC,⁵ the national prevention strategy developed in Norway serves as a strong example of how stable democracies can institutionalise proactive peacebuilding measures. Encouraging all member states to adopt these frameworks would enhance global efforts toward sustainable and inclusive peace.
- **Rooted in Local Contexts:** Prioritise the voices of those most affected by conflict. To be effective, national prevention/peacebuilding strategies should be deeply rooted in local contexts and designed through participatory processes. In particular, this means that women, youth, indigenous peoples and marginalised communities must be included.⁶ CSOs—often at the forefront of early warning, prevention and response—must be treated as essential partners in every stage of the process, from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Rather than tokenistic involvement, these actors must hold substantive leadership roles with adequate resources to exercise their agency effectively.
- **WPS and YPS:** Integrate the principles of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas. By placing gender equality and youth empowerment at the core, national prevention/peacebuilding strategies can address structural inequities and unlock the full potential of diverse communities as agents of peace. Ensuring the meaningful participation of civil society leaders in these frameworks strengthens their legitimacy, effectiveness and ability to address root causes of conflict.
- **Transformative Opportunity:** Use national prevention/peacebuilding strategies to reimagine and strengthen the PBA. National strategies foster locally owned, inclusive and sustainable approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. These strategies can also be platforms for shifting power toward communities, amplifying civil society leadership, and embedding the values of equity and inclusivity into peacebuilding processes. National strategies can also enhance efficiency and effectiveness, and build the trust and ownership necessary for lasting peace.
- **Commitment to Local Ownership:** Institutionalise inclusive and participatory approaches. The PBA must play a catalytic role in supporting member states to use such approaches in developing their national prevention/peacebuilding strategies. This should include providing technical expertise and capacity building to ensure that national strategies are aligned with global peacebuilding goals, while respecting the unique dynamics of local settings. Financial support should also be a priority. Rather than relying solely on ad hoc international assistance, innovative financing mechanisms such as community-driven funds, peace bonds and pooled global resources should be pursued, with CSOs having direct access to these resources.⁷ Accountability mechanisms for national strategies must also reflect a commitment to local ownership. Regular public reporting, participatory evaluations led by CSOs and open platforms for community feedback can ensure transparency and responsiveness. These mechanisms should encourage adaptability, enabling strategies to evolve as conditions change.

⁵ United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. (2024, March 22). *Chair's summary: Ambassadorial-level meeting on national efforts for prevention and peacebuilding in Kenya, Norway, and Timor-Leste*. United Nations.

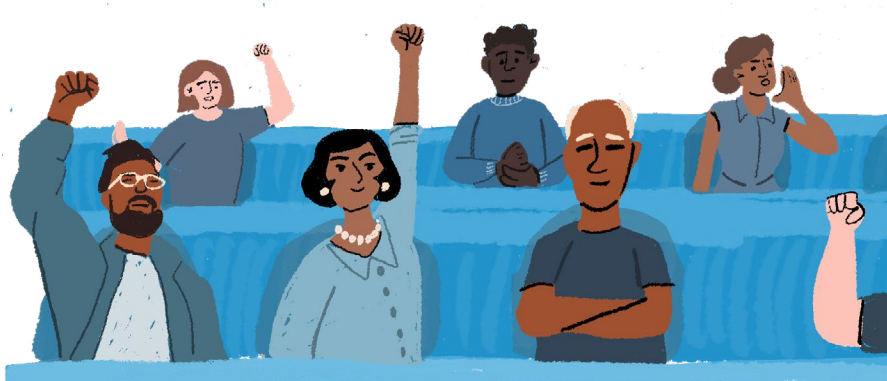
⁶ See also Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). (2024). *Vision for the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR)*. GPPAC. P. 7, and Center on International Cooperation (CIC). (2024, October). *Building on what exists: Demystifying national prevention strategies*. New York University. Pp. 6-7, and Center on International Cooperation (CIC). (2024, November). *What can the Peacebuilding Commission do to support national prevention strategies?* New York University. Pp. 9-10.

⁷ United Nations. (2024, June 17). *Towards a Stronger Peacebuilding Architecture*. Outcome Document from Thematic Consultation. P. 3.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Embedding Inclusive and Locally Owned Decision-Making

The PBA must embrace a transformative approach to decision-making that prioritises inclusivity, local leadership and accountability as core principles. This requires shifting from the current emphasis on consultations to a model that fundamentally integrates diverse stakeholders into peacebuilding processes at every stage, from design to implementation and evaluation. By embedding inclusive and collaborative decision-making into its core practices, the PBA can set a new standard for peacebuilding that recognises the interconnectedness of accountability, local agency and innovation.

- **Genuine Participation:** Institutionalise mechanisms for meaningful participation in decision-making. At the heart of the shift toward inclusive and locally owned decision-making lies the recognition that peacebuilding efforts are most effective and sustainable when driven by those closest to the challenges and opportunities on the ground. The PBA should adopt mechanisms that enable local actors, especially marginalised groups, to actively participate in decision-making processes.⁸ This goes beyond tokenistic inclusion to ensure that their voices carry weight in determining priorities, resource allocation and programme design.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms:** Embed multi-stakeholder platforms into peacebuilding funding and programming processes. The PBA can foster mutual trust, reduce redundancy and ensure alignment with local needs through these platforms. Such platforms should operate with precise principles of accountability and equity, enabling grassroots organisations, civil society actors and conflict-affected communities to contribute insights and leadership in identifying and implementing solutions.⁹ This approach has the potential to streamline efforts and create synergies between local, national and international actors, resulting in programmes that are relevant, impactful and resilient.
- **Tracking Participation:** Develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. An inclusive decision-making framework requires such mechanisms to track the effectiveness of participation. Metrics should focus both on the number of stakeholders involved (with close attention to inclusion and representation) and the extent to which their contributions influence outcomes.¹⁰ Evaluations should inform iterative improvements to peacebuilding strategies, ensuring they remain adaptive to changing realities and responsive to the needs of those most affected.



⁸ Gaston, E. (2024, December 14). *Revisiting the Peacebuilding Commission's 'Bridging' and Advisory Role*. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. Retrieved from <https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/revisiting-peacebuilding-commissions-bridging-and-advisory-role>

⁹ Interpeace. (2024, May 17). *Reshaping the UN's Peacebuilding Efforts with Civil Society's Call for Genuine Partnerships and Localised Decision-Making*. <https://www.interpeace.org/2024/05/reshaping-the-uns-peacebuilding-efforts-with-civil-societys-call-for-genuine-partnerships-and-localised-decision-making/>

¹⁰ GPPAC, 2024, p. 19

RECOMMENDATION 5: Decolonising the Art of Convening for Inclusive Global Peacebuilding¹¹

The UN, with the PBA, must fundamentally rethink the art of convening to create equitable spaces in which all local actors, especially from regions that are historically and currently marginalised and underrepresented, can meaningfully engage. Convening processes must be decolonised to shift away from the hierarchical top-down dynamics that perpetuate global power imbalances. Convenings are often dominated by Global North actors due to structural barriers such as visa issues, lack of funding for travel and limited access to technology for virtual participation, resulting in ongoing patterns of exclusive access. Reflecting the practice of tokenism, local actors are also frequently invited as symbolic representatives without substantial decision-making power. Those willing to speak up critically are perceived to be excluded from such opportunities or might have to fear risking their funding. By decolonising convening practices, the UN can enable more equitable participation, fostering solutions that are inclusive and rooted in the lived realities of those most affected by conflict and injustice. This approach reinforces UN commitments to multilateralism and the principles of dignity, diversity and equality.

- **Structural Inclusion:** Embed decision-making roles for local actors. Such roles should be embedded across the design, facilitation and outcomes of convenings to move beyond symbolic inclusion. This also entails the redistribution of resources so that dedicated funds are allocated for the participation of local actors, including for in-person (travel costs, visas, accommodation) and virtual access (with technological support). Hybrid and decentralised participation models should be developed. Technology should be leveraged to create hybrid models that combine in-person and virtual participation. This should also include developing regional hubs to host in-person sessions locally, thus reducing the need for international travel and minimising resource disparities.
- **Convening Formats:** Ensure cultural sensitivity. Convening formats should be adaptable to local cultural norms and languages. They should also not be overburdened with diplomatic etiquette and hierarchies when engaging with civil society actors. An effective way to ensure cultural sensitivity is to design and co-create convenings with local actors to reflect their priorities and ensure they have a say in setting agendas. This can include using participatory methods such as focus groups and collaborative planning.
- **Power Dynamics:** Equalise uneven and unbalanced power dynamics between UN actors and local actors. Language barriers, insufficient cultural sensitivity and a preference for Western convening and governance frameworks often marginalise Global South actors. These issues can be easily and effectively addressed through simple steps. It is essential to provide real-time interpretation in relevant languages and adapt meeting protocols to respect cultural traditions. In particular, professional facilitators trained in decolonial approaches should be employed to facilitate discussions, ensuring equal space for all voices. Rotating meeting locations to regions in the Global South can democratise physical access and signal UN commitment to inclusivity.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish transparent mechanisms to measure the quality of participation, including feedback loops through which local actors can evaluate their experiences and assess their levels of influence. Ensure that all CSOs can participate in convenings independently without requiring prior approval from their respective governments.

¹¹ See also Movement for Community-Led Development, CIVICUS, & Peace Direct (Eds.). (2024). *How to organise international events and convenings: A guidance note from local actors*.



Reimagining the United Nations for a New Era

The UN stands at a pivotal moment in history. As the world faces unprecedented interconnected challenges, the global governance architecture must adapt to meet these demands and surfacing realities. Recently agreed upon by UN member states, the Pact for the Future represents a renewed commitment to multilateralism and collective problem solving. It also exposes the need for far-reaching reforms that can address the root causes of institutional stagnation and reimagine the UN as an agile, inclusive and effective force in global governance.

A reimagined UN must confront the systemic shortcomings that hinder its capacity to address the evolving realities of the 21st century. In the future scenario report from the RESPACE initiative, we demonstrate the need for a fundamental reorientation of global governance to reflect the principles of equity, inclusivity and accountability. The report highlights how the existing system often struggles to navigate the complexity and interdependence of modern challenges. This vision of respacing global collaboration for peace aligns with the broader aspirations of the Pact for the Future: Both frameworks emphasise the importance of transcending outdated structures and fostering inclusivity and equity across all levels of decision-making.

At the core of the RESPACE process and its four scenarios lies the imperative to move beyond an institutional framework entirely dominated by state actors and foster a system that genuinely serves humanity as a whole. Equity demands the rebalancing of power and representation to amplify the voices of regions and peoples historically marginalised in global decision-making. Inclusivity calls for the meaningful integration of civil society, grassroots movements and ordinary citizens into the processes that shape our collective future. Accountability ensures that reforms are underpinned by transparency and effectiveness, fostering trust in the capacity of the UN to deliver on its promises.

These principles are not merely abstract ideals, but are essential for a UN system that aspires to remain relevant and capable of addressing the multifaceted global challenges that we face. The lessons of history demonstrate that institutions that fail to adapt to changing realities risk losing their legitimacy. At this critical juncture, the opportunity to transform the UN into a system that reflects and responds to the needs of the peoples of the world for peace and a liveable future must not be overlooked.

PERSPECTIVE 1:

Democratising the United Nations through a Global Citizens' Assembly¹²

The democratisation of the UN is critical to ensuring its legitimacy, accountability and relevance in a rapidly changing world. The UN was originally intended to be an architecture that serves as an anchor for global peace, while also sustainably fostering peace in areas and situations of conflict and violence. In this moment of an unravelling global order and increasing polarisation, it seems imperative to emphasise the original purpose of the UN rather than its current structure. Despite its founding commitment to represent 'We the Peoples', the UN remains state-centric, with limited opportunities for direct citizen engagement or substantive participation by civil society.

Establishing a Global Citizens Assembly would address this deficit by creating a formal mechanism for individuals and communities worldwide to have a voice in global governance, enabling the UN to align more closely with the aspirations and needs of the populations it serves. Moreover, many of the most pressing global challenges today, especially climate change, poverty and migration, are fundamentally asymmetric cooperation problems that existing supranational institutions struggle to solve. These issues require global coordination and solutions that do not fall prey to short-term national interests. A deliberative Global Citizens Assembly is uniquely suited to addressing these challenges by prioritising long-term collective global interests over immediate state-based concerns.

The proposed assembly could comprise representatives selected through equitable, random and deliberative processes, for example. Other selection models can also be considered. These processes would ensure diversity across geography, age, gender and socio-economic status, creating a representative body. This diversity would make the assembly uniquely positioned to articulate the concerns of ordinary citizens and marginalised communities, ensuring that global policies are informed by those most affected by international decisions. Empirical evidence suggests that citizen deliberation fosters solutions that have broader long-term perspectives: For example, the World Wide Views on Climate and Energy initiative demonstrates that deliberating citizens consistently support stronger climate action than elected representatives.¹³ This suggests that a Global Citizens Assembly could provide more ambitious and cooperative policy recommendations than state-based negotiations alone. Acting as a consultative and advisory body, the proposed assembly could deliberate on pressing global challenges—from climate action to peacebuilding—and provide recommendations to existing UN structures such as the GA and the UNSC.



¹² See also Dryzek, J. S., Bächtiger, A., & Milewicz, K. (2011). *Toward a deliberative global citizens' assembly*. *Global Policy*, 2(1), 33–42, and Vlerick, M. (2020). *Towards global cooperation: The case for a deliberative global citizens' assembly*. *Global Policy*, 11(3), 305–316.

¹³ Jain, A., Vergne, A., & Kusch, C. (2017). *Bürgerdialog „World Wide Views on Climate and Energy“ im Vorfeld der COP 21 in Paris 2015* (Climate Change 03/2017). Umweltbundesamt.

Beyond its consultative role, the Global Citizens Assembly would also serve as a platform for fostering dialogue and global solidarity. Bringing together individuals from vastly different cultural and social contexts would promote mutual understanding and collaboration, which are vital for addressing transnational issues. This deliberative space would encourage solutions informed by both lived experience and expertise, enhancing the quality and legitimacy of its contributions. In contrast to elected representatives, who often face political pressure to prioritise national interests, citizen deliberation has been shown to reduce polarisation and encourage cooperative decision-making. By ensuring that discussions focus on global public goods rather than short-term political gains, the Global Citizens Assembly could help overcome some of the limitations currently faced by intergovernmental negotiations.

To further enrich its deliberations, the proposed assembly would institutionalise the participation of CSOs and grassroots movements. With their expertise and proximity to global challenges, CSOs could provide technical insights and amplify the voices of the communities they serve. These organisations would complement citizen-led discussions by ensuring that policy recommendations are both actionable and informed by practical realities.

The findings and recommendations of the Global Citizens Assembly could be formally integrated into UN decision-making processes. Mechanisms for channelling these insights could include dedicated sessions in the GA or mandated reporting to the UNSC. This integration would ensure that the work of the proposed assembly actively informs and enriches global policymaking.

Creating a Global Citizens Assembly would signal UN commitment to democratic principles and the inclusion of all voices in shaping the future of multilateral governance. It would be a significant step toward addressing the current democratic deficit in the UN and set a precedent for innovative, participatory global governance. By empowering individuals and communities worldwide, the proposed assembly would foster a deeper sense of ownership in the mission of the UN, and enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of its work.



PERSPECTIVE 2: Reforming the UN Security Council¹⁴

Reforming the UN Security Council (UNSC) has been a persistent demand among member states, CSOs and UN reform advocates, all of whom argue that its current structure is outdated and unrepresentative of the evolving global order. Established in 1945, the composition of the council and the mechanisms it uses mirror a post-World War II power structure that is increasingly disconnected from the multipolar and interconnected world of today. Addressing these discrepancies is crucial to enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness and ability of the UNSC to respond to global challenges.

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of equitable representation. There is strong advocacy, in particular from the Global South, to address the underrepresentation of Africa, Latin America and other regions with little or no voice in UNSC decision-making processes. Scholars and policymakers alike highlight this imbalance as a source of dissatisfaction with the UN system. Expanding the council to include permanent seats for historically marginalised regions and granting more significant roles to countries in the majority world would better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Doing so would also bolster trust in the institution and ensure that a broader spectrum of perspectives shapes global peace and security policies.

In addition to structural changes, there is an urgent need to incorporate perspectives beyond those of state actors.¹⁵ CSOs have increasingly become key players in addressing the root causes of conflict and building sustainable peace. Formalising their engagement with the UNSC—through consultative mechanisms such as public hearings, advisory groups and regular dialogues—could infuse UN decision-making with on-the-ground insights and diverse expertise. This would strengthen UNSC abilities to address complex, multidimensional crises and signal a commitment to inclusive global governance.

Collaboration with other UN agencies and specialised bodies is another key area for improvement. The PBC could play a more active advisory role to ensure that the UNSC benefits from its broader, long-term perspective on preventing conflicts. Similarly, agencies such as UNHCR, WHO and UNDP could contribute operational expertise to UNSC deliberations, making decisions more responsive to humanitarian and developmental challenges.

The veto power held by the five permanent members has long been contentious. While abolishing the veto altogether may be politically unfeasible, mechanisms to limit its use in cases of mass atrocities or severe humanitarian crises must be explored. Proposals such as requiring additional support from elected members to validate a veto or mandating an explanation to the GA could increase accountability and reduce the deadlock that often paralyses the UNSC.



¹⁴ Further reading, Global Governance Forum. (2024). *Imagining a renewed United Nations: Proposals for a more effective, inclusive, and democratic UN*. Global Governance Forum, and Impact Coalition. (2024). *People's Pact for the Future*, and Hassler, S. (2016). *Reforming the UN Security Council membership: The illusion of representativeness*. Routledge.

¹⁵ RESPACE Initiative (2024). *Resourcing global collaboration for peace*. Scenarios for the Future 2024-2035.

PERSPECTIVE 3: Invoking Article 109¹⁶

At the heart of any comprehensive UN reform lies the United Nations Charter, the foundational document governing organisational structures and mandates. Article 109 provides a clear legal mechanism to convene a Charter Review Conference, yet this provision remains unused since the inception of the UN. Invoking and activating Article 109 offers a unique opportunity to address the systemic and structural limitations of the UN system, which are increasingly evident in the face of 21st century challenges.

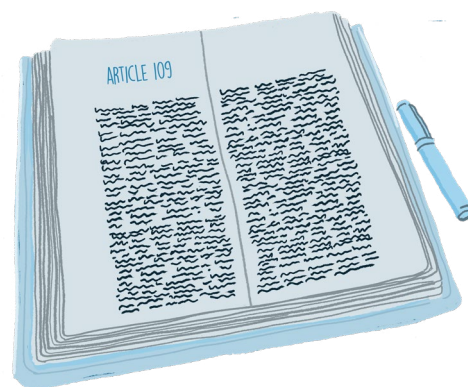
The primary value of invoking Article 109 lies in its capacity to facilitate a structured and legally mandated forum for comprehensive reform. A Charter Review Conference would allow member states to address various interconnected issues hindering UN effectiveness. Such a process would enable the modernisation of UN decision-making frameworks to better reflect the multipolar world of today, along with the diverse needs of its global constituency.

A Charter Review Conference could provide the platform to address long-standing grievances by redistributing decision-making power more fairly and equitably, reflecting global realities. It could also formalise processes to incorporate the voices of underrepresented groups, ensuring that the UN is a platform not only for governments, but also for the people they serve.

In addition to equity, a Charter Review Conference could embed principles of inclusivity and accountability into the foundational framework of the UN. This includes institutionalising the participation of civil society, grassroots movements and even mechanisms for direct citizen engagement. Drawing on the lessons of recent initiatives such as the Pact for the Future, the conference could integrate innovative solutions to make the UN more responsive and transparent, such as regular consultations with non-state actors and mechanisms for public reporting and feedback.

While the timing and prospect of initiating a charter review process are not without challenges, including political resistance from powerful member states and the complexity of global negotiations in a moment of increasing international polarisation, the potential benefits of convening a Charter Review Conference far outweigh the risks. By invoking Article 109, the UN can position itself as a leader in addressing global challenges rather than remaining constrained by the inertia of its mid-20th century design. Historical precedents demonstrate that bold institutional reforms often emerge in moments of crisis and transformation. As a lesson of that history, we should be encouraged to re-create the UN before another peak in global catastrophe and warfare—with the intention to prevent this.

A reformed UN charter would reinvigorate the legitimacy of the UN and provide the institutional flexibility needed to tackle emerging global challenges such as climate change, sustainable peace and economic inequality. It would reaffirm UN commitment to its founding ideals and make it a more dynamic, inclusive and effective force for peace and development in the decades ahead. By activating Article 109, member states would send a powerful message that they are ready to embrace the responsibilities and opportunities of a new era of global governance.



¹⁶ Further reading UN Charter Reform Coalition. (2024). *UN Reform: A second United Nations Charter*. Global Governance Forum, and Aly, H. (2025, January 20). *It's time for a new UN Charter*. Geneva Policy Outlook. <https://www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/its-time-for-a-new-un-charter/>.

Way Forward

The United Nations stands at a crossroads. It faces an urgent need for reform and a unique opportunity to reimagine its role in global peacebuilding. The Pact for the Future and the UN secretary-general's New Agenda for Peace signal a renewed commitment to multilateralism. Without concrete action, however, these commitments risk remaining empty promises. The challenge demands both improved structures and a fundamental reshaping of the PBA to reflect the realities, needs and leadership of those most affected by conflict.

The recommendations outlined in the briefing note create building blocks and pathways to facilitate this transformation. Grounded in the insights and experiences of diverse peacebuilders and civic actors, they emphasise deeper inclusion, structural changes in decision-making and long-term peacebuilding commitments that move beyond short-term crisis response. Achieving this transformation requires sustained political will, innovative approaches and a willingness to challenge entrenched power dynamics that have long shaped global peace efforts.

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review offers a pivotal moment to advance these reforms. It is crucial to ensure a more inclusive and effective UN peacebuilding system equipped to address the evolving nature of conflicts. The coming years must focus on translating dialogue into decisive action—building peace through locally led, globally supported and structurally embedded in UN processes.

CSP remains committed to these efforts, working with civil society, social movements, multilateral institutions and policymakers to foster a resilient, equitable and inclusive global peacebuilding system. The opportunity to shape a future-oriented UN is within reach. This demands collective action not merely to adapt but fundamentally transform the system.

