



Photo: UN Photo/CCO

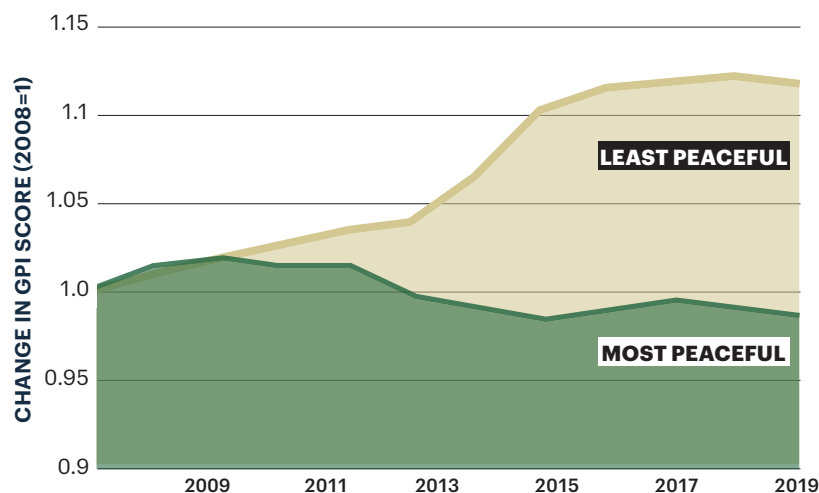
## Upgrading the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission into an empowered Council

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Create a strong UN Peacebuilding Council to replace the current Peacebuilding Commission. Similar to the transformation of the Human Rights Commission into a Council in 2006, it is time for the UN Peacebuilding Commission to be upgraded into a Council with enhanced powers and responsibilities, and mandated to lead on policy development, coordination, resource mobilization, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts not addressed directly by the Security Council.*

**Global Challenge Update:** Over the past ten years, the world has become less peaceful.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the gap between the most peaceful and least peaceful countries has increased between 2008-2019 (see figure below). Violent conflict is the main driver of humanitarian needs, with projections showing that, in 2019 alone, nearly 132 million people will require humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the average economic cost of violence for the ten countries most affected by violence was, in 2019, equivalent to 35 percent of their GDP, while the impact of violence on the global economy reached U.S. \$1.2 trillion in purchasing power.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2011, the UN Security Council's permanent members have cast thirteen vetoes to block action on the Syrian conflict. In contrast, the UN Peacebuilding Commission has made some important strides, including through innovating various engagements with countries emerging from conflict and a flexible and streamlined "integrated peacebuilding strategy" instrument that aims to better help host countries confront deadly conflict. However, given that it assumes only an advisory role to the Security Council and General Assembly, the time has come—since the PBC's creation at the UN60 Summit in 2005—for an important makeover.

**Innovation Proposal:** Facing difficulties in improving Security Council representativeness and effectiveness, an empowered Peacebuilding Council would allow a greater number of capable UN Member States to contribute directly to the UN's primary purpose of maintaining international peace and security. By replacing the all-but-defunct Trusteeship Council as one of the six major organs of the United Nations, the upgraded Council could, in effect, lead on system-wide policy development and coordination activities for so-called "second and third-order conflicts" of limited concern to the Security Council. Such an overhaul would enable it

**FIGURE 1: Trends in peace – 25 most and 25 least peaceful countries, 2008-2019**

SOURCE: Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Peace Index 2019", 27. June 2019. Accessed July 14, 2019.

to more effectively engender predictable and sustainable financing for peacebuilding too.

Moreover, the enhanced Peacebuilding Council should be entrusted with a conflict prevention mandate operationalized through a new "Peacebuilding Audit" tool, modeled on the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) instrument for assessing the human rights records of all UN Member States. This would be consistent with current efforts to track the ten targets and associated indicators of all countries' progress toward meeting their commitments to Sustainable Development Goal 16 on "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions". At the same time, the upgraded PBC would invest most of its time and resources in countries and regions

in non- (and especially "post-") peacekeeping environments, monitoring as well as marshalling collective action to avert the outbreak or recurrence of deadly conflict.

**Strategy for Reform on the Road to 2020 (UN75):** Even without the Charter reform required to replace the Trusteeship Council, an immediate interim goal, in time for the September 2020 Leaders Summit in New York, could be to expand the current Peacebuilding Commission's scope of operations to include prevention and mediation efforts. They would represent initial steps toward establishing the Peacebuilding Council as a principal UN organ—which would, undoubtedly, face initial resistance in some quarters, especially among P5 Member States who might view their authority as being challenged. From a budgetary perspective,

the new Peacebuilding Council could absorb all costs associated with the current Peacebuilding Commission and Trusteeship Council, making it cost-effective in relation to the current UN budget.

At the same time, the upcoming 2020 review of the peacebuilding architecture could serve as an opportunity to garner political support in the run-up to UN75 for the even more ambitious above proposed enhancements to the Peacebuilding Commission. Member States and the UN Secretariat are planning consultations with relevant non-governmental entities to review progress on the implementation of past peacebuilding architecture resolutions. The Security Council is further planning to review the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General's forthcoming comprehensive report and related stakeholder consultations.<sup>4</sup> If the modalities set for the review process are inclusive of external stakeholders (i.e., civil society groups, think tanks, academia, etc.), then the ambition of Member States might be increased to consider the PBC's upgrade into a Council with the authorities outlined above. These recommended changes could be announced initially when the UN75 Political Declaration is adopted, in September 2020 in New York, and be further developed over the course of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly (from September 2020 until September 2021).

## ENDNOTES

1. Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Peace Index 2019". 2. June 2019.
2. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Global Humanitarian Overview 2019." 2019, 5.
3. Ibidem, 3 and 58.
4. United Nations. General Assembly, Security Council. *Follow-up to the report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and sustaining peace*. A/RES/72/276-S/RES/2413. April 26, 2018, para. 4.