Maintaining peace and security has been the primary purpose of the UN since it was founded in 1945. For over 70 years, the UN Security Council has addressed security threats in accordance with Chapters VI and VII, passing resolutions on particular conflicts and authorizing the use of military force and/or the establishment of UN peacekeeping forces to resolve those conflicts. Despite these efforts, every year from 1945 to the present, there has been at least one interstate or civil war. In 2014, there were 40 armed conflicts, a 15 percent increase from 2013. Most on these conflicts are occurring in places with a history of prior conflict with many the site of previous or ongoing UN peacekeeping operations.

Looking back on more than seven decades of collective security and peacekeeping operations, it is clear that efforts to get one state to reverse its invasion of another, to stop a state from attacking groups within its territory, and to separate warring parties once they have agreed to seek peace have largely failed to lay the seeds of lasting peace. Although they may be necessary to obtain peace, they are not sufficient to ensure that a country remains at peace. This is easily seen by the fact that the single most powerful predictor of whether a country will experience a war next year is whether it is at war today. According to political scientist Barbara Walter, this is not because of unresolved grievances. Instead it reflects [the] current incentives individual citizens have to rejoin a rebel group. Civil wars will have little chance to get off the ground unless individual farmers, shopkeepers, and potential workers choose to enlist in the rebel armies that are necessary to pursue a war, and enlistment is only likely to be attractive when two conditions hold. The first is a situation of individual hardship or severe dissatisfaction with one's current situation. The second is the absence of any nonviolent means for change. An analysis of all civil wars ending between 1945 and 1996 suggests that a higher quality of life and greater access to political participation have a significant negative effect on the likelihood of renewed

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1 This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, Kedra Hildebrand, and Nicholas Potratz, with contributions from William Selph (2008). Copyright 2015 by Karen Adams, Kedra Hildebrand, and Nicholas Potratz.


war. Countries that provide higher levels of economic well-being to their citizenry and create an open political system are less likely to experience multiple civil wars regardless of what happened in a previous conflict.\textsuperscript{4}

As a result of this realization, in recent years the UN General Assembly (GA) and Security Council have developed a more multi-faceted approach to peace. These efforts fall under the category of “peacebuilding.” In 2005, the GA and Council authorized the creation of a new UN office called the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Today, the question is, how effective has the PBC been? Can reform make it more effective? What more can the PBC do to ensure that states remain at peace and, when they experience war, are able to return to a lasting peace?

\textit{History and Current Events}

To understand this issue, it is important to consider the concept of peacebuilding and how it differs from traditional UN peacekeeping efforts. It is also important to understand the history of UN peacebuilding and the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as suggested reforms to improve the Commission’s performance.

The Concept of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding (also known as post-conflict reconstruction) efforts are distinct from peacekeeping. Peacekeeping missions have short-term objectives, including negotiating cease-fires, separating opposing forces, promoting law and order, and providing humanitarian aid. Peacebuilding efforts, in contrast, typically occur after peace has been established. Peacebuilding efforts help countries “strengthen and preserve” peace over the long term.\textsuperscript{5} The specific objectives of peacebuilding operations are as varied as the countries and people they are trying to help. Historically, they have included organizing and monitoring elections, monitoring human rights violations, rebuilding the judiciary, providing interim civil administration, rebuilding and training police forces, repatriating refugees, overseeing the release of political prisoners, reestablishing infrastructure, providing support for traumatized victims, and overseeing the transition from UN or other international oversight to local political authority.\textsuperscript{6}


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Four factors contribute to the success of peacebuilding. First, successful peacebuilding depends on the desire for peace of the parties involved. If conflicting factions within a country want to continue fighting, there is little peacebuilding efforts can do to ensure peace. Second, peacebuilding depends on UN Member States and other international donors to make the necessary resources available. Peacebuilding missions are long-term; they require a significant contribution of financial and other resources. Third, successful peacebuilding requires people who are trained in election monitoring and political, judicial, and economic reform. Finally, peacebuilding requires the ability to turn warring parties into political parties, which includes the demobilization of militias and gangs. This requirement is extremely difficult and requires that all parties feel that they are being treated fairly and trust that the new system will be unbiased. It also requires finding alternative employment for individuals who have previously been fighting or trying to secure themselves and their families. The wide variety of tasks and resourced needed makes peacebuilding one of the greatest challenges faced by the UN.

Also key to assuring peace in countries is to promote economic development. According to academic researchers, most civil wars have one factor in common: poverty. Thus achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other efforts to improve standards of living, has been vital for peace and security. According to the World Bank, people experience “extreme poverty” when they live on less than $1.25 per day. In 2011 just over one billion people (14 percent of the world’s population) were living in this condition. Due largely to gains in China, this was down from 1.9 billion in 1981.

A Short History of Peacebuilding and the Peacebuilding Commission

Some early examples of peacebuilding are found in the reconstruction of Europe and Japan following World War II. Significant amounts of money were given by the US through the Marshall Plan to help both Axis and Allied countries rebuild and reestablish their governments, infrastructures, and economies. The UN's involvement in peacebuilding began after the Cold War. In 2008, researcher Margaret P. Karns remarked that of “the forty-eight peacekeeping operations the UN has undertaken since 1988, twenty-nine have involved tasks now associated with the concept of post-conflict peacebuilding.”

One of the first missions involving peacebuilding activities was in the former German colony of Namibia. In 1989, the UN Transition Assistance Group to Namibia (UNTAG) was

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8 Kalyvas and Kenny, “Civil Wars.”


formed with “the most ambitious and diverse mandate of any UN mission to that time.”\textsuperscript{11} The goal of the mission was to supervise a cease-fire between South African troops, which administered the country after German defeat in World War I, and the military forces of the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO), which sought independence. When South Africa finally agreed to allow Namibia to become independent, UNTAG was formed to ensure that it did so peacefully. UNTAG included peacebuilding tasks such as supervising civil police, securing the repeal of discriminatory and restrictive legislation, arranging the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles, and securing fair and free elections. The experience in Namibia was, for the most part, a success. It showed the UN that both military and civilian personnel needed to be involved in peacebuilding. Today, Namibia “is still regarded as one of the UN’s most successful peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.”\textsuperscript{12}

Although there are other examples of successful peacebuilding missions – including Nicaragua, Cambodia, and El Salvador – UN efforts have not always generated positive results on the first try. For example, in Liberia in 1997, the disarmament and demobilization program conducted by the UN was so flawed and hasty that it led to elections that were neither free nor fair. In fact, despite UN presence monitoring the election process in Liberia, the warlord Charles Taylor was able to intimidate the electorate into placing him in power. Thus the civil war resumed shortly after the election.\textsuperscript{13}

Peacebuilding efforts can be especially difficult in conflicts that occur along ethnic lines (such as the genocide in Rwanda) or religious lines (such as the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan), and that involve opposing factions fighting over lucrative products such as oil, timber, and minerals.\textsuperscript{14} Diamonds played a major role in the war in Sierra Leone. Diamonds have also fueled conflict in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Fighting over diamonds and other resources is not new. For example, in medieval times, diamonds were a main source of conflict among Indian kingdoms.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Mingst and Karns, The United Nations in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, pp. 103-104.
\textsuperscript{12} Karns, “The Roots of UN Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,” pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{14} Mingst and Karns, \textit{The United Nations in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century}, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{15} Charmian Gooch, “Rough trade in diamonds; primary resources, from fish and forests to minerals, have been source of struggles throughout human history,” \textit{OECD Observer}, 2002: 52(2), available at \url{http://www.oecдобserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/722/Rough_trade_in_diamonds.html}.  

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The idea of a Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) first emerged in "High Level Panel on Threats Challenges and Change," which the Secretary-General held in December 2004.\textsuperscript{16} Following the High Level Panel then Secretary-General Kofi Annan considered the proposal in a report to the General Assembly entitled "In Larger Freedom." In it, Annan noted that "[r]oughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years," and that the UN needed a mechanism to establish peace and prevent states from falling back into conflict. He thus encouraged the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission as a solution to these problems.\textsuperscript{17}

At the 2005 Millennium+5 Summit, UN Member States established the PBC, and decided that it should begin full operations by December 31, 2005. The mandate of the Peacebuilding Commission is:

1. To bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on the proposed integrated strategies for post conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
2. To help ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and sustained financial investment over the medium to long-term;
3. To develop best practices on issues in collaboration with political, security, humanitarian and development actors.\textsuperscript{18}

According to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, “by establishing the Commission, Member States of the United Nations have created an important new structure to support fragile societies recovering from the devastation of war.”\textsuperscript{19} The Commission is made-up of seven UN member states selected from the Security Council, seven members from the Economic and Social Council, five of the top five providers of assessed contributions to the UN budget, five of the top military providers to UN missions, and seven members elected by the GA.\textsuperscript{20}

States did not, however, resolve all of the issues related to the PBC’s operations, leaving many details of the organization to further discussions. For instance, in the 60th Session of the GA, states debated whether the organization should report to the GA, the Security


Council or ECOSOC. The GA eventually decided that the PBC would report to both the GA and Security Council, though the GA would have control over the PBC’s work. It also decided that Member States would fund the PBC with voluntary contributions.  

In addition to the Peacebuilding Commission itself, the GA created the Peacebuilding Fund to finance the PBC’s operations, as well as the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). The PBSO’s mandate is to provide the Peacebuilding Commission "with strategic advice and policy guidance…staffed by qualified experts to assist and support the Commission," oversee and administer the Peacebuilding Fund, and help the UN Secretary-General coordinate UN organizations (such as the UNDP or UNICEF) in their peacebuilding operations.

The PBC’s main work is to bring together participants, especially UN organizations, the countries in need of peacebuilding, providers of financial and personnel assistance, and neighboring countries, into Country-Specific Configurations to assist the country in building lasting peace. As of September 2015, the PBC has had (and continues to have) Country-Specific Configurations established for Burundi, Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Suggested Strategies and Reforms for the PBC

Despite the steps taken to improve the organization, some aspects of the organization's operations remained ill-defined and less effective than the 2005 goals expected. As a result, many have called for reforms to solve several problems with the PBC’s structure, as well as suggested improved strategies for how the PBC can implement peacebuilding operations. First, some have argued that Member States established the PBC with "unrealistic expectations" about how the organization would work. Observers who argue from this perspective note that the Peacebuilding Commission has too vague and broad of a mandate, which does little to inform the Commission how to specifically implement strategies for peacebuilding. In addition, they argue that the delegates who serve on the Commission have “almost no post-conflict experience or country-specific knowledge,” making it difficult for them to organize and prioritize the activities of the numerous organizations that are relevant to peacebuilding.

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21 Global Policy Forum, "The Peacebuilding Commission."


24 Global Policy Forum, "The Peacebuilding Commission."

According to Gearoid Millar, the PBC’s lack of experience contributes to negative experiences for local populations. In the case of Sierra Leone, for instance, because the individuals who manage peacebuilding operations work from a theoretical perspective – as opposed to using their experience to understand the specific needs of countries –, they implemented strategies that obfuscated the functions of Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Sierra Leone’s TRC had the sole purpose of providing a forum for victims and offenders from the civil war to openly discuss events of the war and overcome their differences. In essence, the TRC encouraged this discussion so that victims could "forgive and forget" and use "restorative justice" to prevent future resentment and conflict within the country. In contrast to the TRC approach, actors such as the UN PBC implemented competing strategies, such as the UN-sponsored Special Court for Sierra Leone, which implemented "retributive justice" by trying and punishing perpetrators for their actions. This often led people to believe that the TRC had the same purpose, and undermined its credibility when Sierra Leone’s TRC failed to deliver on people’s expectations.26

Other scholars have voiced positions similar to Millar regarding the PBC and peacebuilding processes generally. For instance, bio-resource engineering scholar Andrea Beck, in discussing the role of water in the PBC's operations, has noted that "decisions must be made on a country-by-country basis, taking into account peace-building priorities, local context and availability of donor support."27

Second, some have critiqued the peacebuilding mission for adhering to a sequential model of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, in which peacekeepers first establish order in a country, and peacebuilding organizations subsequently implement programs to sustain that peace. According to this critique, the UN and the PBC have seen peacebuilding as an "add-on" to peacekeeping that will come to fruition after peacekeeping, rather than realizing the complexities of conflict that often require an integration of these two approaches for restoring order.28

Results for integrating peacebuilding, via the PBC, into peacekeeping operations remained mixed. For instance, on the one hand, the PBC has operated in the Central African Republic, which, after violence that emerged in 2013, now has both peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations working simultaneously under the UN.29 In cases such as Haiti,

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however, the PBC has not operated alongside or developed coordinated operations with the Haiti peacekeeping mission (the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH), despite past calls from South American states to add Haiti to the list of countries that work with the PBC, as well as the emphasis in MINUSTAH’s mandate on "recovery, reconstruction and stability."

To be sure, there have been peacebuilding operations in Haiti, but these have excluded a role for the PBC. Thus, the lack of "top-down" approaches, which could provide the "shared strategic vision" for Haiti by coordinating local and international peacebuilding, has limited the benefits of "bottom-up" (grassroots) peacebuilding activities in the country, especially as they failed to legitimize the police from Haitians perspectives. Whereas emphasizing theory over practical experience led to less-than-effective peacebuilding practices in Sierra Leone, according to peacebuilding scholars Timothy Donais and Geoff Burt, the lack of an overarching strategic vision undermined peacebuilding efforts in Haiti. Today, even with peacebuilding support for Haiti’s security forces by donors such as the US, some observers still question whether Haiti’s police will be capable of maintaining order as the UN begins to reduce MINUSTAH forces in Haiti. Donais and Burt have thus called for "vertical integration" in peacebuilding, in which "a range of different actors" at varying levels work together to support peacebuilding operations.

Third, others have suggested changes to the organizational structure and affiliations of the PBC within and outside of the UN, particularly out of concern over the "fragmentation of the United Nations into separate silos." One reform would be to promote greater synergy between the PBC and Security Council. Because restoring and maintaining peace are often interdependent, coordination between the bodies would improve the UN’s work in both areas. Proponents of this reform note both the importance of peacebuilding during and after the UN’s peacekeeping operations, which the Security Council establishes, and overlapping

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membership between the organizations as factors that would facilitate the process of integrating the work of the two UN bodies.\textsuperscript{33}

One of the challenges to increasing PBC cooperation with the Security Council, according to a recent report regarding reforms of the PBC, is that the Security Council views coordination with the PBC as an effort by the General Assembly to encroach on its affairs.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, the GA will need to develop strategies or reforms that increase coordination between the UN bodies, while assuring the Security Council that the GA has no intention to limit its prerogative within the existing UN structure.

Some have called for the PBC to similarly develop greater cooperation with actors outside of the UN. This would include greater coordination and communication between the PBC and non-governmental organizations devoted to peacebuilding, as well as coordination between the PBC and regional organizations and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank. Regional organizations play an important role as actors that often have greater knowledge about the particular needs of a countries, while international financial institutions have access to funding that may help the PBC fill in funding gaps in their operations if similar programs between these organizations were to pool their funding.\textsuperscript{35}

Others have also critiqued the PBC (or more specifically, the Peacebuilding Fund) for relying on voluntary contributions, instead of making the PBC and Peacebuilding Fund a part of the UN’s regular, binding budget. Arguments in favor of this reform note that the PBC and Peacebuilding Fund often remain underfunded as a result of their dependence on voluntary donations rather than reliable and mandatory sources.\textsuperscript{36} Underfunding results in a situation in which the PBC and the countries with which it works have to "cherry pick" the recipients of these funds. The funds that are available often disproportionately go to certain states or issues over others. For instance, most peacebuilding funding has focused on Afghanistan and Iraq.


\textsuperscript{35} UN General Assembly and Security Council, Identical letters (A/69/968–S/2015/490).

and very little has gone to "key peacebuilding sectors," such as "legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services."  

A final solution from the reform perspective focuses on establishing a Peacebuilding Council to replace the Peacebuilding Commission (similar to the replacement of the former Human Rights Commission with the Human Rights Council. Under this option, the PBC would have "new policy development, coordination, and resource mobilization authorities" (i.e. greater independence from the GA and control over funding). It would also include a mandate to prevent conflict, rather than simply rebuild after conflict. This would include new tools such as "peacebuilding audits," based on country reporting, to identify potential conflict before they occur. 

Fourth, some have suggested that peacebuilding operations expand its purview to consider the regional impact of conflicts, not only due to the necessity of peacebuilding following interstate conflicts, but also because conflict in one country can have effects on neighboring countries, which may require their own peacebuilding operations. According to the UN Refugee agency, as refugees spend longer periods in exile, refugee-hosting states come to see the prolonged presence of refugees as a burden and a security concern; incorporating refugees into peacebuilding activities would provide support to these refugee-hosting states... [T]here is a growing recognition that unresolved refugee situations may undermine peacebuilding in neighbouring countries; incorporating refugees into peacebuilding activities could therefore further both humanitarian objectives and broader peacebuilding objectives. 

This issue has particular pertinence to how the PBC may need to help rebuild states currently experiencing civil war – such as Syria – in the future. The UN High Commissioner on Refugees reports that as of December 2014, nearly 4 million Syrians were refugees in neighboring countries and more than 7.6 million Syrians were internally-displaced-persons (i.e. refugees remaining within Syrian borders).
Previous Committee Work on This Topic

In January 1992, the Security Council held a summit to consider “the responsibility of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security.”\(^{41}\) Although peacekeeping was not specifically mentioned, the Council discussed taking on broader tasks including election monitoring, human rights, economic concerns, and social fields. On June 17, 1992 in the secretary-general’s report *An Agenda for Peace*,\(^{42}\) “post-conflict peace-building” was mentioned for the first time and became a topic of discussion within the UN.\(^{43}\)

In 2000, the Brahimi Report commissioned by Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for strengthening the planning and management of complex peace operations.\(^{44}\) In February 2001, the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

The Security Council recognizes that peace-building is aimed at preventing the outbreak, the recurrence or continuation of armed conflict and therefore encompasses a wide range of political, development, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms. This requires short and long-term actions tailored to address the particular needs of societies sliding into conflict or emerging from it. These actions should focus on fostering sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and inequalities, transparent and accountable governance, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law and the promotion of culture of peace and non-violence.\(^{45}\)

In September 2000, world leaders gathered at the Millennium Summit in New York to draft the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were intended to realize measurable progress towards reducing poverty and improving the well-being of individuals throughout the world by 2015.\(^{46}\) As 2015 has approached, Member States have begun to develop a new set of Sustainable Development Goals. In September 2015, the UN adopted


\(^{43}\) Quoted by Karns, “The Roots of UN Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,” p. 2.


the 17 SDGs based on 169 specific targets for the UN to achieve by 2030. Peacebuilding and the SDGs go hand-in-hand. As nations strive to achieve these goals, the chances for conflict have the potential to diminish while the continued presence of conflict can inhibit the ability of nations to effectively work towards these ends.

In 2009, the GA passed Resolution 63/282, which requested that the Secretary-General send annual reports regarding the funding and spending of the Peacebuilding Fund and decided to include the Peacebuilding Fund as an agenda item for the 64th Session. Beyond these actions, the resolution only served to make broad statements encouraging states to contribute to the fund and expressed appreciation to states that had already donated to the fund. Despite including the topic in the 64th Session, the UN has not passed a resolution related to the fund or its reform since the 2009 resolution.

In 2010, the GA passed Resolution 65/7. The Resolution noted the importance of observations in the 2010 report of the PBC, such as the need to integrate peacebuilding into peacekeeping efforts. The resolution requested "all relevant United Nations actors to take forward, within their mandates and as appropriate, the recommendations of the report."

In June 2015, the panel of experts tasked with the second review of the PBC completed their report on how to improve the work of the organization. The primary finding of the review was that peacebuilding remained "critically underrecognized, underprioritized and underresourced globally and within the United Nations system." In light of this observation, the report reiterates many of the suggested reforms to the architecture and operations of the PBC articulated above. For instance, it calls for states to reduce fragmentation in the UN by coordinating the PBC's operations with the Security Council and UN peacekeeping operations, recognize the complexity of conflict and integrate peacebuilding into existing peacekeeping operations, promote coordination and communication between the PBC and actors "on the ground," and secure more stable forms of financing for the PBC and Peacebuilding Fund (e.g. by working with global financial institutions). Many of these recommendations have, however, been discussed in past reports on the PBC's activities. Member States now have the task of ensuring that the PBC, and organizations such as the Security Council, implement these recommendations in their architecture and practices.


Conclusion

The Security Council and GA have defined peacebuilding as one of their central tasks for the 21st century. What should the General Assembly Plenary do to enhance the efforts of peacebuilding, and specifically of the PBC, within the UN system? In researching your country’s position on this issue, consider the following questions:

• Is your country receiving or in need of peacebuilding or peacekeeping? Why or why not? What kind of help is needed? Does it contribute funding or aid to peacebuilding or peacekeeping?

• From your country’s point of view, what countries in your region or elsewhere in the world are in need of peacebuilding? What kind of help has your country offered? What more could it do?

• Is your country a member of the Peacebuilding Commission? If so, what kind of initiatives has it supported? What kind of reforms would it support to bolster the PBC’s activities? For instance, should the UN replace the PBC with a Peacebuilding Council?

• What should be the priorities of peacebuilding? For example, should the UN focus on stopping conflicts before they start, addressing conflicts that are ongoing, or helping when a war is over? What kind of approaches should the UN use? How can the UN ensure that it meets the specific needs of countries for which it has peacebuilding operations? Consider all of the elements of peacebuilding, including political reconstruction, war crimes trials, social reconciliation, de-mining, economic development, and international aid.

• Should the Security Council become more involved in peacebuilding, or should it leave that role to the General Assembly? If the Security Council does become more involved, how might the PBC and Security Council better coordinate their efforts?

Recommended Reading


This page provides a brief summary of the origination of the PBC. It includes links to key documents from the UN regarding the organizations, as well as articles that analyze the effectiveness of the PBC’s work.


This article provides an overview of the need and history of UN peacebuilding in Africa.

This report from the UNHCR provides a succinct but extensive look at the positive and negative impacts of refugees in peacebuilding processes. It makes a cogent case for the need to consider regionally-oriented peacebuilding approaches, and offers suggestions for how peacebuilding organizations might incorporate refugees in their operations.


This article includes personal stories from the conflict in Sierra Leone and the peacebuilding operation established by the PBC there. It makes a case for the importance of peacebuilding in war-torn countries and the role of the PBC.


This report details the overlapping roles and membership of the PBC and Security Council. It discusses the interdependence of the two organizations' work, and suggests ways in which the two organizations can (and should) complement one another. You can also read recent Security Council documents regarding peacebuilding and the PBC at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/peacebuilding-including-the-pbc/.


This web site includes links to the Peacebuilding Commission mandate, as well as the Commission’s membership and country activities.


On this site, you can read about the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals. Focus on SDGs #1 (eradicating poverty), #2 (eliminating hunger), #16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), and #17 (partnerships for the goals).


Letters to the GA and the SC discussing the past five years of the PBC. It focuses on the challenges the PBC has met and suggests strategies for overcoming them.