The Right to Participation and Community Engagement: Strengthening Civic Space from the Perspective of Local Peacebuilders

A submission by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) to the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) for the 2022 Report of the Special Rapporteur on Civic Space.

GPPAC

A Network of People
Building Peace

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This document has been developed as a compilation of input from GPPAC members to inform relevant stakeholders of the best practices and challenges in accessing civic space as experienced by local peacebuilders.

ABOUT GPPAC:

As a global network of local peacebuilders, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) works to support the realisation of the right of local actors to meaningful and intentional participation in the decisions that affect them. We do so by supporting locally-led analysis of root causes of conflict and meaningful and intentional inclusion of local peacebuilders in the development, implementation and monitoring of all initiatives aimed at advancing sustainable peace and preventing conflict.

INTRODUCTION: Where do the Human Rights of Local Peacebuilders Currently Stand?

Peace globally will only be sustainable if human rights of local peacebuilders are guaranteed and they can take meaningful roles in the decisions that affect them through the institutionalised channels of systematic engagement at all stages of relevant policy and programming.

Faced with the imminent risk of conflict, fragility and shrinking civic space, local peacebuilders advance human rights, build community resilience and facilitate dialogue, including in most hard-to-reach areas. As such, they effectively contribute to peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention.

> *The Peace Champions project in Uganda*[1] highlights the benefits that come from local peacebuilders being meaningfully in the lead of the project's design and implementation. The project, led by local peacebuilders of the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), empowers young adults who have previously been engaged in violence to get involved in peacebuilding and income generating activities at the community level. In this, the project builds youth peacebuilders' peacebuilding skills, while also training them to become entrepreneurs and preventing youth unemployment and other factors that trigger their engagement in violent activities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international community has embraced the notion of 'local resilience' as one of the central elements of the agenda to 'build back better', acknowledging that to create more inclusive and resilient societies, post-pandemic recovery should be designed and led by local actors.[2] As such, COVID-19 offers a unique opportunity to seek out and invest in skills, capacities, resources, tools, and institutions for transformative resilience that are embedded in communities and societies dealing with multidimensional crises. This opportunity must be firmly seized.

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[1] Read more about the Peace Champions Project in Uganda at: https://www.gppac.net/peace-champions-uganda
[2] United Nations Secretary-General, *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World* (July 2020), accessed at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

Ensuring local peacebuilders benefit from the full scope of human rights requires guaranteeing their full protection, participation and an enabling environment for their work.

The following three factors enable meaningful and international inclusion of local peacebuilders in peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention:

1. **Participation of local peacebuilders** is critical to achieve sustainable peace. In this, the participation of local peacebuilders must be inclusive and diverse, as well as institutionalised and systematic, incorporated into all stages of the peacebuilding process, and provide local peacebuilders with an equal opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them.

2. **Protection of local peacebuilders** must be ensured. Protection of local peacebuilders requires extending existing international legal protections and empowerment efforts that include a holistic "package of services" that enable capacity and opportunity for local peacebuilders to adjust to the situation on the ground.

3. **An enabling environment** must support local peacebuilding work. An enabling environment for local peacebuilders includes fostering an open civic space where people can exercise their Right to Political Participation and access to information, ensuring quality[3] and quantity[4] of financing for their work, and strengthening accountability mechanisms for the UN and Member States to uphold existing commitments to support local peacebuilders.

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[3] GPPAC, *Investing Smarter: Assessing structural transformation in financing for impactful peacebuilding* (26 May 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/Investing%20Smarter_Meeting%20Note_10%20June%202021.pdf
[4] Ibid.

PARTICIPATION

Within the internationally recognised human rights documents, the right to participation is enshrined not in just one place but rather it intersects and connects in multiple areas of rights, demonstrating how crucial the right to participation is.[5] It becomes truly meaningful when it is exercised at all levels of society, especially at the local level. Local peacebuilders are the closest to the issues and challenges that the society is facing. In post-conflict societies that are moving toward prevention and peacebuilding, the right to participation, when exercised meaningfully and free of discrimination and other constraints, is crucial for building social cohesion and building a sustainable peace.

THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS UNIQUE TO LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS:
- First, local peacebuilders – including women, youth, traditional leaders and so on – **retain the best knowledge of local communities,** are capable of identifying early signs of violence and are aware of the best approaches required to create meaningful change and build sustainable peace.
- Second, due to their flexibility and close relations with diverse grassroots constituencies, local peacebuilders are often **able to reach out to places and actors where government officials or international actors do not have access**.
- Third, through networks and coalitions, local peacebuilders can **engage broader groups into peacebuilding** and raise awareness about global policy agendas and their importance for sustaining peace.

THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION[6]

1. **The participation of local peacebuilders must be inclusive and diverse.** Engaging with diverse parties, including not just women and youth but also indigenous communities, queer people, racialised groups, the elderly, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups, ensures that underrepresented needs are incorporated in policy and programming, thereby increasing their efficacy and sustainability. Relevant policy and programming must boldly address the persistent power imbalances within communities and ensure that these imbalances are

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[5] Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees the right to participation, while articles 19, 21 and 22 guarantee the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association respectively. Applied together, equally and universally, these rights guarantee the existence of a vibrant and effective civic space and a true and meaningful exercise of the right to participation. *See* UN, *Draft Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs* (20 June 2018), accessed at: https://undocs.org/A/HRC/39/28
[6] The following points are based on the compilation of input from the GPPAC network.

addressed to achieve sustainable peace. *See below an example from the Philippines Peace Process.*[7]

2. **The participation of diverse local actors must be incorporated into all stages of peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention, with a guaranteed feedback loop.** From an efficacy perspective, diverse groups of peacebuilders must be meaningfully engaged and have a say in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes with guaranteed feedback loops to reflect on progress. Such an approach can significantly improve the relevance, legitimacy, sustainability and impact of both policy and programming. *See below an example from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)'s engagement with civil society.*[8]

3. **Intentional and meaningful participation of local peacebuilders ensures equal opportunity to have an impact on policy and programming in line with other stakeholders.** International partners should not only provide opportunities for local peacebuilders to identify their needs, but also support the operationalisation of their recommendations. Impactful participation ensures that local peacebuilders can engage based on their experience and expertise that enables them to speak for themselves, rather than be spoken for. *See below an example of the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus.*[9]

4. **The participation of local peacebuilders must be systematic and institutionalised.** This requires all parties to realistically assess their capacities, resources and mutuality of goals to make a decision on partnerships. If this decision is made, partners should plan together a systematic long-term engagement with regular assessment processes to ensure that the partnerships continue to be meaningful and equal.[10] *See below an example of the joint UN-Civil Society Working Group on the Community Engagement Guidelines (CEG).*

GOOD PRACTICES: REALISING THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

Without broad participation of all relevant actors, the Philippines Peace Processes would not bring sustainable results. In the Philippines, broadening participation in the peace

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[7] GPPAC, *Strengthening Inclusive Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps) in the Era of COVID-19 Towards Resilient Locally-Informed Solutions for Sustainable Peace* (25 October 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2022-01/Geneva%20Peace%20Week%20Summary%20Note.pdf

[8] GPPAC, *Operationalising the Peace-Development-Humanitarian Nexus through the Boe Declaration in the Pacific* (2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/resources/operationalising-peace-development-humanitarian-nexus-through-boe-declaration-pacific

[9] GPPAC and ICCN, *In Search of Sustaining Peace: A Case-Study of Peacebuilding in South Caucasus* (2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/search-sustaining-peace-case-study-peacebuilding-south-caucasus

[10] GPPAC, *An Opportunity for Stronger and Equal Partnerships: The UN System-Wide Community-Engagement Guideline (CEG) on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*, (2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-01/GPPAC%20Community%20Engagement%20Guidelines_V4.pdf

process was instrumental in passing a legislation that guided the implementation of a peace agreement in the Philippines.[11] When negotiating the legislation in 2014, more citizens started expressing their interests in the agreement, and undeniably had a claim for being part of the process. To ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible, Moro National Liberation Front worked to include everyone, primarily through an insider mediation group consisting of representatives from a range of ethnicities, genders, and religious affiliations. This format allowed for this diverse group of people to express their opinions and ultimately come to a consensus on a range of key issues. The discussion space created by the group proved to be instrumental in finally passing the peace agreement and translating it into legislation that provides a framework for the implementation of the peace agreement.

Systematic inclusion of local peacebuilders in all stages of different policy processes by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) ensured both operational and policy coherence. A series of collaborative consultative processes between the UN, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Member States and local peacebuilders resulted in the adoption of the regional Human Security Framework, Conflict Prevention Framework, Regional Framework for Security Sector Governance, the Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Women, Peace and Security and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. This partnership further underpinned the practice of the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster that, during the pandemic, worked to ensure that response in the Pacific countries is informed with gender, age, disability and location disaggregated data.[12] Such joint and inclusive solutions help build social cohesion and community resilience, as well as legitimise peacebuilding, humanitarian and development action.

Locally-led mediators' networks serve to support the dialogue between people across conflict divides, as well as to build local capacities for peace through providing local ownership and an opportunity to exchange. Women peacebuilders from across the South Caucasus, for example, came together and established the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus.[13] The Network involves and strengthens women as national mediators in peace processes before, during and after conflicts in order to contribute to sustaining peace in the region. The creation and development of such a network as a key learning and action platform in the South Caucasus has already stimulated the involvement of and dialogue between Abkhazian, Ossetian, Karabakhi, Armenian and Azerbaijani women. This is a type of engagement that Track 1 negotiation processes cannot ensure access to.

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[11] GPPAC, *Strengthening Inclusive Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps) in the Era of COVID-19 Towards Resilient Locally-Informed Solutions for Sustainable Peace* (25 October 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2022-01/Geneva%20Peace%20Week%20Summary%20Note.pdf

[12] GPPAC, *Operationalising the Peace-Development-Humanitarian Nexus through the Boe Declaration in the Pacific* (2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/resources/operationalising-peace-development-humanitarian-nexus-through-boe-declaration-pacific

[13] GPPAC and ICCN, *In Search of Sustaining Peace: A Case-Study of Peacebuilding in South Caucasus* (2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/search-sustaining-peace-case-study-peacebuilding-south-caucasus

The joint UN-Civil Society Working Group on the Community Engagement Guidelines (CEG) fostered the participation of civil society in a systematic and institutionalised manner. The setup of the joint Civil-Society-UN Working Group – where three civil society organisations have been an institutional part of the Working Group – is an innovative undertaking that allowed for unprecedented avenues for civil society inclusion in the development of an internal UN document. Civil society representatives worked to systematically engage local peacebuilders in informing the document and ensure that it remains useful and reflective of the realities faced by and the needs of local peacebuilders. Developed from a long process of establishing relationships and trust, the creation of the Working Group and its work to develop the Guidelines represents a good practice in ensuring an inclusive, impartial and representative process and greater support of and greater collaboration between a broader range of peacebuilding actors.

THE KEY CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

Decisions over policy and programming are often made top-down, without taking into account the lived experiences of local communities. Popular assumptions that the engagement with local peacebuilders is "risky" and that they are not capacitated enough to equally engage in action with international partners, limit their opportunities for realising their right to participation and have impact on the prospects for peace in their communities. This false presumption leads to complex systems of engagement with local peacebuilders. Donor requirements are specifically designed to minimise the perceived risks of incapacity, continuing the practice of implementing initiatives that policy-makers and donors – rather than local actors – think are worthy of pursuing. In addition, the lack of inclusive governance means that risks of conflict and fragility tend to increase and be disproportionately borne by groups that are already vulnerable to conflict but excluded from the debates.[14]

- *Through in-depth research and interviews with the donor community, the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation (DHF) and GPPAC were unable to identify significant evidence of corruption and misappropriation of funds by local organisations.[15] Further, the presumption of incapacity relies on the standards of conduct and analysis that are defined through the perception of the institutional headquarters that are, more often than not, located in the Global North and separated from the realities on the ground.*

A digital gap is one of the reasons for limited participation of diverse local peacebuilders. As the result of COVID-19, the increase in virtual engagement presented an opportunity for improved coordination. It has however threatened to leave behind actors who do not have access to technology and electricity or lack opportunity and skills to benefit from virtual engagement. While around sixty percent of the world's population is now online, in less-

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[14] Nayifa Nihad and Adriana Erthal Abdenur, *At the Forefront of Climate Action: Local Approaches to Climate- Sensitive Conflict and Prevention* (September 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-09/Adriana%20Mapping%20Paper.pdf

[15] DHF and GPPAC, *Designing Efficient Financing for Peacebuilding: Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders* (2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/financing-mechanisms-support-local-peacebuilders

developed countries, only one in five people have access to the internet.[16] In the context of COVID-19, these groups could not easily access critical information. As a result, they often became victims of misinformation and radicalisation.[17] Local peacebuilders played a critical role in countering this trend through community sensitisation efforts.

Weak or missing Local Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps)[18] create a lack of institutionalised and systematised engagement that limits the participation of local peacebuilders. One critical example of such an Infrastructure for Peace are Early Warning and Early Response Systems (EWERs). Within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) for instance, through the GPPAC Southern Africa representative body, CEWS are being enhanced with support from the African Union Peace and Security Commission with conflict reporters in all 16 Member States.[19] However, these types of systems are largely an exception than a rule as many regions still lack similar avenues to report early signs of conflict instability due to the lack of political will and appropriate legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS' PARTICIPATION

- **The international community, including Member States, the UN and donor community, among others, should acknowledge the diversity of local peacebuilders and commit to inclusive processes that identify and engage diverse representatives of society.[20]** This entails investing in adequate mapping of activities on the ground, supporting conflict-sensitive analysis of the data collected by local monitors on the ground, mapping relevant peacebuilding actors at the country level, and meaningfully supporting those best positioned to respond to root causes and early signs of instability. Further, it is important to improve the visibility of local peacebuilders who face difficulties accessing peace and security debate, including already existing youth, women and feminist networks at the regional and national levels (i.e., the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus and the MENA Coalition of YPS) and capacitate more diverse local peacebuilders to take up roles in relevant processes.

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[16] UNCTAD, *Digital Economy Report* (2019), accessed at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/der2019_en.pdf

[17] GPPAC, *Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19: The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia* Expert Dialogue Summary Note (16 February 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-04/ENG%20GPPAC-UNDP%20consultation-Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia-Feb%2016%202021-Dialogue%20Summary.pdf

[18] I4Ps represent a dynamic network of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions that support the integrated approach to peacebuilding and sustaining peace rooted in the development priorities. See GPPAC, *Building Peace Locally Amidst a Global Pandemic: Infrastructures for Peace in the Era of COVID-19* Issue Brief (June 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Building%20Peace%20Locally%20Amidst%20A%20Global%20Pandemic_0.pdf

[19] GPPAC, *Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19: The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Africa* Expert Dialogue Summary Note (9 December 2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-02/GPPAC-UNDP%20consultation-Africa-Dec%209%202020-Dialogue%20Summary.pdf

[20] GPPAC, *Building Peace Locally Amidst a Global Pandemic: Infrastructures for Peace in the Era of COVID-19* Issue Brief (June 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Building%20Peace%20Locally%20Amidst%20A%20Global%20Pandemic_0.pdf

- **Building Local Infrastructures for Peace (LI4Ps) should be a prerequisite of peacebuilding action at the country level.** Capacities to advance peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention need to be context-specific and anchored within local communities because local ownership builds trust and resilience within communities. National governments can contribute to creating an enabling environment for I4Ps by putting in place appropriate legal and policy frameworks that ensure an enabling environment for local peacebuilders,[21] while the UN and the donor community can provide technical and financial capacities to support the establishment of local peace committees, community monitors for EWERs, and other forms of LI4Ps.

- **The UN field presences should fully operationalise the UN Secretary-General's calls made under the UN System-Wide Community Engagement (CEG)[22] and the Civic Space Initiative[23] and provide transparent reporting on the progress.** Adhering to the CEG enables the UN field presences to develop localised and context-specific engagement strategies based on comparative advantages and objectives of all actors, as well as put in place measures to assess the operationalisation of such partnerships. The Guidance Note on Civic Space is a resource for the UN field presences to build capacities to strengthen civic space engagement, taking into consideration the role, capacities and programming approach of different UN field actors.[24] These steps often involve working closer to the local civil society groups, recognising the need for their participation so that the UN initiatives succeed on the ground.[25]

- **The international community, including Member States, the UN and donor community, among others, should meaningfully and intentionally engage with local peacebuilders in the design, implementation and evaluation of relevant policies and programmes**. One way of ensuring systematic and institutionalised participation can be through the establishment of working or advisory groups or dedicated positions of civil society liaisons, among other avenues, with defined terms of reference (i.e., Civil Society Advisory Committee for UNDP in Burundi; the European Youth Advocacy Team).[26] Such a form of engagement ensures that the

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[21] *See* the Section of this Paper on an Enabling Environment below.
[22] *See* UN, *Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace* (August 2020), accessed at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/un_community-engagement_guidelines.august_2020.pdf
[23] *See* UN, *Guidance Note: Protection and Promotion of Civic Space* (September 2020), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. p. 7, 12.
[26] *See* GPPAC, *Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19: The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia* Expert Dialogue Summary

relationships are sustained beyond staff turnover and clarifies to all parties that meaningful and intentional engagement requires sufficient time and resources. Engaging with local peacebuilding networks is an efficient method to systematise partnerships because these networks often have agreed and inclusive priorities for joint action and are generally representative of various needs within the community. The Do No Harm approach should also underpin the engagement.

- **The UN Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should create a task force to address the digital gap.** This task force can identify stakeholders that are not currently included in discussions, review virtual engagement models, and adopt a common conceptual framework for digital inclusion. In this, local peacebuilders can support the formulation of online outreach strategies with a goal to reconcile people separated by conflict who either have very little knowledge of one another or have mostly negative perceptions.

Note (16 February 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-04/ENG%20GPPAC-UNDP%20consultation-Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia-Feb%2016%202021-Dialogue%20Summary.pdf;
See also GPPAC, *Building Peace Locally Amidst a Global Pandemic: Infrastructures for Peace in the Era of COVID-19* Issue Brief (June 2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-11/Building%20Peace%20Locally%20Amidst%20A%20Global%20Pandemic_0.pdf; *See also* Civil Society- UN Prevention Platform, *Advancing Prevention Across UN Sectors and Institutions: Collective Pathways for Effective Prevention: Key Findings from the 2020 Discussion Series on Prevention* (August 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-09/CS-UN%20Prevention%20Platform_Prevention%20Report.pdf

PROTECTION

Local peacebuilders face a complex matrix of risks and targeted threats to their health and safety.[27] At the same time, there are no explicit protection mechanisms for local peacebuilders beyond the protections of human rights defenders (HRDs),[28] and their security needs are not acknowledged or guaranteed in peacebuilding programming and financing.

THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS[29]

1. **Legal protections at the international and national levels must be offered to local peacebuilders to ensure their sufficient protection.** Peacebuilders and human rights defenders share a dedication to the protection of people. In fact, a lot of peacebuilders are also human rights defenders, and vice versa. Both are often at risk because of the work that they do.[30] However, where human rights defenders have some specific protection in international law, not all local peacebuilding work is covered through these protection mechanisms. Peacebuilders do act to address any human rights; however, they do so on a more technical level, through capacity building, influencing policy and enabling collaboration. In this, local peacebuilders are often only able to attend meetings if Chatham House rules[31] are applied to ensure their safety and mitigate pressure from the political establishment. As a result, some peacebuilders remain excluded, invisible and unprotected by the international community due to the nature of their work. *See below an example of the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.*[32]

2. **Being part of a network of local peacebuilders provides members with a holistic package of services, including monetary, technical and other resources, that is essential to protecting their work.** It is crucial that all peacebuilding programmes include specific resources available for local peacebuilders to ensure their protection. However, this is not the only attribute of the donor-recipient relationships conducive to adequate protection. Supporting local ownership

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[27] ICAN, *Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace* (2020), accessed at: https://icanpeacework.org/2020/10/21/protecting-women-peacebuilders-the-front-lines-of-sustainable-peace/

[28] *See the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders* at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/srhrdefenders/pages/declaration.aspx

[29] The following points are based on the compilation of input from the GPPAC network.

[30] Kateryna Gabak and Mairna Kumskova, *International Protection for Local Peacebuilder* (4 June 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/news/international-protection-local-peacebuilders

[31] When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

[32] UN, *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (8 March 1999), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf

ultimately entails moving away from seeing local peacebuilders as implementing actors and moving towards strategic partners based on the recognition of each other's needs and contexts in which they operate.[33] This includes developing a "package" of flexible financial, technical and networking support that can enhance local peacebuilders' organisational capacities to ensure their protection. *See below an example of GPPAC's Youth-By-Youth Approach.*[34]

GOOD PRACTICES: ENSURING PROTECTION OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS

Local peacebuilders benefit from the international recognition of the right to their protection. The existing international frameworks to protect human rights defenders and civic space provide some degree of protection to local peacebuilders. The 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders[35] highlights the importance of the realisation of the universal human rights principles enshrined in legally binding treaties of the UN to support the work done at the local level. Further, the specially created mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders[36] strives to further promote and observe implementation of the 1998 UN Declaration.

Emergency rapid response funds increase the protection of local peacebuilders. The GPPAC Emergency Fund, for example, provides both financial grants, advocacy advice and access to key stakeholders through the GPPAC Global Secretariat, further increasing the protection of local peacebuilders.[37] The recipients of this Fund benefit from simple reporting procedures which allow local peacebuilders to exclusively focus on the emergency at hand.

GPPAC's Youth-By-Youth approach[38] offers a package of services that enable local organisations to advance their own protections. To circumnavigate the barriers for youth organisations to access long-term support, GPPAC established sustainable, strategic partnerships with youth-led organisations, going beyond merely the donor-recipient relationships to ensure a holistic provision of support. This includes providing a "package" of technical and networking support that can enhance their organisational capacities as well as providing access to key policy spaces without forcing them to operate as "adult" organisations. Funds coupled with joint advocacy engagement can amplify and provide

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[33] Amanda Huits and Talia White, *For Youth and By Youth: Re-Imagining Financing for Peacebuilding* Manual (9 December 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/youth-and-youth-re-imagining-financing-peacebuilding
[34] Ibid.
[35] UN, *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (8 March 1999), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf
[36] Read more about the position of *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders* at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/SRHRDefendersIndex.aspx
[37] ICAN, *Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace* Report (21 October 2020), accessed at: https://icanpeacework.org/2020/10/21/protecting-women-peacebuilders-the-front-lines-of-sustainable-peace/
[38] Amanda Huits and Talia White, *For Youth and By Youth: Re-Imagining Financing for Peacebuilding* Manual (9 December 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/youth-and-youth-re-imagining-financing-peacebuilding

space for multi-stakeholder learning, exchange and action, especially where such an action at the national level is not possible or not effective.

CHALLENGES IN NAVIGATING PROTECTION

The exclusion of the specific needs of local peacebuilders in international and national protection guidelines places them at continuous risk. These protections are needed because of the multi-stakeholder engagement that local peacebuilders partake in and widespread lack of democracy in many countries that threatens their work. Local peacebuilders' use of dialogue and engagement with different parties defines their work and serves as the bridge to peace; however, the informality and trust-building nature of their work can put them at security risks. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the national governments have launched a number of tools for social control and repressive mechanisms, expanded executive powers, tightened censorship in the context of COVID-19.[39] While these tools formally aim to confront the pandemic, they run the risk of being instrumentalised to advance political agendas that predate the pandemic, contributing to the corrosion and further shrinking civic space.

Addressing post-conflict mental health needs within peacebuilding infrastructure is not yet regarded by practitioners as fundamental to sustainable peace. There is a lack of recognition that beyond the fact peacebuilders work to address conflict, they also do live in conflict, as such face severe trauma that often jeopardises their capacity to function in the long-term. When not addressed properly, this trauma can result in serious threats to people's physical and mental health, as well as the right to life. Further, a return of the conflict is often very likely to occur in post-conflict countries where people have witnessed and experienced large-scale violence, destruction, displacement and personal loss, and where these traumatic memories have not been addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENSURE PROTECTION OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS

- **The UN Human Rights Council should consider launching the process for further investigation of the specific needs of local peacebuilders with a view to develop an international framework for the protection of local peacebuilders.[40]** This could include the establishment of the position of a special rapporteur or special representative to examine the issues faced by local peacebuilders and formulate recommendations to the UN system on how to better support local peacebuilding

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[39] Andrei Serbin Pont and Constanza Boettger, *Reduction of Civic Spaces in Latin America and the Caribbean: The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Risk Accelerator,* (March 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DTMVA-ReductionCivicSpacesLatinAmerica-Caribbean-COVID-19RiskAccelerator-321-2.pdf
[40] CSSPS, TAP Network and GPPAC, *Towards a People-Centered Approach to Sustaining Peace through Operational and Policy Coherence: Recommendations on operational and policy coherence for the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review,* (May 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/towards-people-centered-approach-sustaining-peace-through-operational-and-policy

efforts. The principles of international law must be updated to reflect the unique situation of local peacebuilders. The international human rights community should consider the development of a global legal framework for the protection of online and offline spaces and ensuring the autonomy and security of local peacebuilding work.

- **The donor community should further utilise emergency response funds, as well as ensure that there are protection allocations included in every grant to address urgent and unforeseeable protection needs of local peacebuilders.** As such, all peacebuilding program budgets should include a contingency line to respond to emerging security threats. This line should amount to no less than 2% of the total project budget and should allow the recipient complete flexibility on how the funds are used.[41] Should any of the funds not be needed for immediate protection needs, local peacebuilders should be able to use them to increase resilience and support self-protection mechanisms, for example by providing training on cyber-protection or supporting community-based early warning mechanisms.[42]

- **The UN, regional organisations and the donor community, in the process of the development of partnership with local peacebuilders, should consider ensuring a holistic package of services that denounces a top-down approach and builds local peacebuilders' organisational capacity and provides monetary resources for their protection needs.** While financial resources are crucial to advance projects, no programmatic action can demonstrate meaningful results if local peacebuilders cannot modify their activities in line with overriding threats to their security. Authentic partnerships, in this vein, can enable reciprocal sharing of information and non-financial resources[43] that can inform prevention needs of local peacebuilders.

- **The UN peacebuilding and development partners should capitalise on ensuring trauma healing for peacebuilders themselves, as well for communities at large.** This will protect local peacebuilders from having the conflict chase them long after the fact. Mental health and psychological support should be provided for persons who have been directly (or indirectly) impacted by conflicts, especially refugees and displaced persons. Such support can be provided by building local capacities, including community-based psychological interventions, to meet the unique psychosocial needs of the post conflict community in a conflict-sensitive manner.

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[41] GNWP, GPPAC, ICAN, Kvinna till Kvinna, MADRE, and WILPF, *FUND US LIKE YOU WANT US TO WIN: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding* Policy Brief (November 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Fund%20us%20like%20you%20want%20us%20to%20win.pdf

[42] Ibid.

[43] Riva Kantowitz, Mariska van Beijnum, Sigrid Gruener, Marie-Laure Poiré, *Designing Effective Financing for Peacebuilding: Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders* Working Paper (July 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-10/Working-paper-Financing-Mechanism-Rapport-v1%5B37%5D.pdf

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Local peacebuilding can only thrive in the presence of an enabling environment for action.[44] The presence of robust, diverse and active civil society is a strong indicator for a society's capacity for building and sustaining peace. It is essential that free and open space is maintained to allow for the flourishing of a vibrant civil society, as recognised in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.[45]

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF ENABLING ENVIRONMENT[46]

1. **Open civic space is an environment where people can freely exercise their right to participation in public affairs and have adequate access to information.** Protecting the work of local peacebuilders and fulfilling the right to participation in public affairs, freedom of speech, assembly and association is also essential to providing unbiased information that informs local peacebuilders' work. In order to promote access to information, all national, regional and international processes that affect peoples' lives should be guided by international human rights law.[47] These rights need to be supported not only by national laws and accountability mechanisms, but also by capacity building efforts to implement these laws and operationalise the mechanisms in practice. Currently and, to a large extent, as a result of COVID-19, civic space is under threat due to repressive laws and increased restrictions on the work of local peacebuilders.[48] *See below an example of the Development of National Peacebuilding Frameworks.[49]*

2. **Ensuring quality and quantity financing is provided to local peacebuilders is key to supporting their work**. Despite the recognition of local actors as key contributors to peacebuilding, adequate funding is not allocated to support their roles. Funding for peacebuilding is traditionally scarce, with local peacebuilders bearing the most

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[44] GPPAC, *Building Peace Locally Amidst a Global Pandemic: Infrastructures for Peace in the Era of COVID-19* Issue Brief (June 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Building%20Peace%20Locally%20Amidst%20A%20Global%20Pandemic_0.pdf

[45] *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, Paras.34, 67, (25 June 1993), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Vienna.aspx

[46] The following points are based on the compilation of input from the GPPAC network.

[47] UN, *Guidance Note: Protecting and Promoting Civic Space* (2020), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf

[48] UN, *The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights* (2020), accessed at: https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Asperation_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf

[49] GPPAC, *SDG+ 16 in Uganda* Policy Brief (7 December 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/policy-brief-sdg-16-uganda

burden in accessing funds.[50] Reallocation of funding due to COVID-19 has reduced overall funding in the medium term which has put peacebuilders in a vulnerable position, especially when combined with repressive state measures and operational limitations.[51] Further, the funding that does reach local peacebuilders is short-term, project-specific and comes with unrealistic reporting requirements. The donor community does work to ensure that the global commitments to the inclusion of local peacebuilders becomes a reality; however, there are a variety of barriers faced by the donors to ensure that the commitments can be materialised. *See* good practices outlined in the report *Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders*[52] for more examples and details.

3. **Accountability and oversight mechanisms for the UN and Member States are critical to support the work of local peacebuilders.** Every global policy agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals;[53] Women, Peace and Security;[54] Youth, Peace and Security;[55] and Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace;[56] Human Rights;[57] among others, express the commitment to meaningfully engage with civil society, including local peacebuilders. It is the responsibility of the entire international community to uphold this responsibility. *See below an example for the CEDAW Committee.*[58]

GOOD PRACTICES: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS

Channelling funding through embassies ensures quality financing and facilitates space for national government - civil society partnerships. Embassies of several bilateral donors already provide direct, flexible funding for women peacebuilders through a dedicated instrument. Direct relations between local organisations and embassies have contributed to

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[50] Riva Kantowitz, Mariska van Beijnum, Sigrid Gruener, Marie-Laure Poiré, *Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders* (27 October 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/financing-mechanisms-support-local-peacebuilders

[51] Andrei Serbin Pont and Constanza Boettger, *Reduction of Civic Spaces in Latin America and the Caribbean: The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Risk Accelerator* (March 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DTMVA-ReductionCivicSpacesLatinAmerica-Caribbean-COVID-19RiskAccelerator-321-2.pdf

[52] Riva Kantowitz, Mariska van Beijnum, Sigrid Gruener, Marie-Laure Poiré, *Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders* (27 October 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/financing-mechanisms-support-local-peacebuilders

[53] *See* UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (2015), para. 6 (25 September 2015), accessed at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

[54] *See* UN Security Council Resolution 2493 (29 October 2019), accessed at: https://undocs.org/S/RES/2493(2019)

[55] *See* UN Security Council Resolution 2535 (14 July 2020), accessed at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2535(2020)_e.pdf (OP 18)

[56] *See* UN Security Council Resolution 2558 (21 December 2020), accessed at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3895721?ln=en .

[57] *See* UN, *Guidance Note: Protection and Promotion of Civic Space* (September 2020), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf

[58] GPPAC, *Strengthening Inclusive Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps) in the Era of COVID-19 Towards Resilient Locally-Informed Solutions for Sustainable Peace* (25 October 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2022-01/Geneva%20Peace%20Week%20Summary%20Note.pdf

their increased societal credibility and access to other donors. Local organisations may be invited by embassies to submit project proposals, or they may do so proactively as open calls for proposals are rare. Often, local organisations and embassies jointly refine proposals in a process of co-creation through authentic partnerships resulting in the embassy assuming a role of support rather than control.[59]

Flexibility of the donor community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that more flexible approaches to funding are possible. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the activities of local peacebuilders – many of which are rooted in personal and informal interactions within the communities or with critical national stakeholders – have been jeopardised, requiring GPPAC to adjust the allocation of existing funding. In this, all donors of GPPAC have been extremely flexible in allowing to either extend the project or adjust the activities in a timely manner. Other civil society partners reported similar flexibility from their donors.[60]

The CEDAW Committee ensures accountability for the global commitments on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).[61] The CEDAW Committee created a framework for Member States to report on their implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS). General Recommendation 30[62] provided CEDAW with the mandate to require Member States to report on their efforts to protect women's human rights. This represents a bold step to bring the WPS Agenda into the space of human rights for accountability purposes. The CEDAW Committee then played an active role in ensuring that Member States develop new and further improve existing NAPs, by facilitating constructive dialogues with national governments and diverse networks of women peacebuilders.

The operationalisation of national peacebuilding frameworks presents an opportunity to adequately map the work done by diverse stakeholders at the national level and build inclusive partnerships to support national priorities.[63] Conducting stakeholder mapping increases the understanding of the linkages between policy priorities, actors and issues, and may bring to light previously unknown alliances and innovative peacebuilding approaches. The UN could facilitate a dialogue between national governments and diverse local peacebuilding experts to develop inclusive national peacebuilding frameworks and jointly

[59] Government of Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Useful Patchwork: Direct Funding of Local NGOs by Netherlands Embassies: 2006-2012*, (2014), accessed at: https://www.oecd.org/derec/netherlands/Useful-Patchwork-Direct-Funding-of-Local-NGOs.pdf

[60] GNWP, GPPAC, ICAN, Kvinna till Kvinna, MADRE, and WILPF, *FUND US LIKE YOU WANT US TO WIN: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding* Policy Brief (November 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Fund%20us%20like%20you%20want%20us%20to%20win.pdf

[61] GPPAC, *Strengthening Inclusive Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps) in the Era of COVID-19 Towards Resilient Locally-Informed Solutions for Sustainable Peace* (25 October 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2022-01/Geneva%20Peace%20Week%20Summary%20Note.pdf

[62] CEDAW, *General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations* (18 October 2013), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/gcomments/cedaw.c.cg.30.pdf

[63] GPPAC, *SDG+ 16 in Uganda* Policy Brief (7 December 2020), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/resources/policy-brief-sdg-16-uganda

develop response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises. When implemented successfully, national peacebuilding frameworks can ensure that local peacebuilders are connected to formal processes and are able to support higher-level decision-making with direct impact within communities.

CHALLENGES TO ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

A severe lack of political will to engage with and enable the work of local peacebuilders significantly limits an open civic space. Legislation that represses the rights of peacebuilders to organise, demonstrate, and mobilise has appeared in Nicaragua, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and El Salvador among other states.[64] These laws limit democratic functions by tampering with elections, restricting the formation of political parties and removing accountability mechanisms from the judicial system. Many countries have also adopted controversial laws that allow governments to impose legal and regulatory barriers to the registration of civil society organisations that receive international funds.[65]

Criminalisation of the right to protest reduces open civic space and government accountability.[66] Through the last decade, the shrinking of civil space became evident in many parts of the world and foreshadowed the ongoing deterioration of human rights.[67] Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) alone present strong evidence of such a development. As a result, in 2018, in Venezuela the demonstrations that erupted after a contested election led to hundreds of violent arrests and overall suppression of the right to peaceful assembly. [68] In the neighbouring Colombia, since 2012, more than a dozen legislative proposals have been advanced aiming to curtail freedom of opinion and expression, intimidate, and attack journalists.[69] Freedom of opinion an expression is under attack in El Salvador where between June 2019 to November 2020, over a 100 violations of freedom of expression were documented,[70] with 84 violations recorded between March and

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64 Andrei Serbin Pont and Constanza Boettger, *Reduction of Civic Spaces in Latin America and the Caribbean: The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Risk Accelerator,* (March 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DTMVA-ReductionCivicSpacesLatinAmerica-Caribbean-COVID-19RiskAccelerator-321-2.pdf
65 GPPAC, *Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19: The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Latin America and the Caribbean* Expert Dialogue Summary Note (4 December 2020), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-02/GPPAC-UNDP%20consultation-LAC-Dec%204%202020_Dialogue%20%20Summary.pdf)
66 Such laws include Colombia's 2011 Law of Citizen Safety, Venezuela's Ruling No. 276 and Resolution 8610 and Ecuador's Executive Decree No. 193.
67 António Guterres, *The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights* (2020), accessed at: https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Asperation_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf
68 Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, *Informe Conflictividad Social en Venezuela* (2019), accessed at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/tendencias-de-la-conflictividad/conflictividad-social-en-venezuela-enero-2019
69 Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), *Informe Anual 2019* (2019), accessed at: https://flip.org.co/index.php/es/capitulo-9.
70 Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, *Retrocesos en el acceso a la información pública y restricciones al ejercicio periodístico en El Salvador* (2020), accessed at: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2021_ElSalvador-EN.pdf

April 2020.[71] In Nicaragua, constitutional reforms in 2014 deepened the concentration of power of the president allowing for the configuration of a government model where all state powers, public forces, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Office of the Public Human Rights Defender, and even the public universities act in coordination with each other.[72] The trend of the legislative reaching into the civic space and purposefully shrinking it by legislatively curtailing exercise of universal human rights is worrisome. When governments are proactive in punishing the exercise of human rights, local peacebuilders, as those who work to protect those rights, are facing an existential challenge and have hardly any accountability mechanisms or remedies available to them.

The lack of quality financing manifests in short-term and project-specific funding, coupled with unrealistic reporting requirements. When local peacebuilders are forced to rely solely on funds dedicated to specific programmes, they cannot respond to changing needs on the ground. Peacebuilding is a long-term process, subject to reversals. Potential points of failure are numerous. The focus on short-term outputs over long-term transformation leads to the 'projectisation' of peacebuilding work and creates unreasonably high expectations for short-term results. Competition for limited funds, coupled with the need to regularly report outcomes using standardised indicators, incentivises the inflation of reported results. Core funding and operational support, which would allow organisations to better respond and adapt to situations and develop long-term approaches, is especially rare. Then, core funding is also often not sufficiently flexible, making it difficult for peacebuilders to generate and sustain impact. Donors also want to fund as many organisations as possible, leading to fragmentation, instead of providing core funding to coalitions and networks.[73]

The UN remains inaccessible for local peacebuilders in situations where they have not previously engaged with the UN. There remains the lack of awareness of the international frameworks on peacebuilding at the local level. It impacts the perception of the UN relevance in many contexts. The normative differences between the language used by local peacebuilders and the UN actors create constraints for building strong and operational partnerships and finding common ground.[74]

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[71] Apolonio Tobar, *Special Report for the Supreme Court of Justice from the Office of the Human Rights Defense Attorney* (2020), accessed at: https://cispes.org/section/special-report-human-rights-violations-abound-el-salvador-president-bukele-responds-covid-19

[72] Marlin Sierra, *Closure of Civic Spaces in Nicaragua* (June 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DPMVA-ClosureofCivicSpaces-Nicaragua-Sierra-321%20%282%29.pdf

[73] GNWP, GPPAC, ICAN, Kvinna till Kvinna, MADRE, and WILPF, *FUND US LIKE YOU WANT US TO WIN: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding* Policy Brief (November 2021), accessed at: https://www.gppac.net/files/2021-11/Fund%20us%20like%20you%20want%20us%20to%20win.pdf

[74] GPPAC, *No Sustainable Peace Without Us: Local Perspectives on Peacebuilding in Middle East and North Africa* (June 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2020-06/No%20Sustainable%20Peace%20Without%20Us%20-%20MENA%20report%202020.pdf

Recommendations to Foster Enabling Environment

- **The UN should work with national governments to increase their capacity to provide an open civic space and guarantee the freedoms of participation in public affairs, speech, assembly, and association.** This can be done by supporting national governments in implementing legal and operational mechanisms to guarantee relevant rights both *de jure* and *de facto*.[75] These include the development and strengthening of relevant national laws, ensuring independent reporting, and guaranteeing accountability for all. One such legal framework could be an organic law on civil society that generates a regulatory framework based on constitutional and international principles, respectful of the broad and self-regulated rights of such organisations to associate, assemble, and participate.[76] The international community could further develop incentives for the governments to establish accountability mechanisms, including by presenting them not as a source of 'punishment' but as a source of 'championship' and potential avenues for political and financial support.

- **The UN and, on some occasions, embassies could also play the roles of a facilitator to bring the national government and local peacebuilders together in a risk-informed manner and encourage the creation of partnerships aimed at the common goals of peace.** The creation of spaces and platforms that allow for dialogue, joint analysis and the advancement of partnerships between national government and civil society serve as a useful model that can be utilised in the context, where such partnerships cannot be otherwise established. One way of seamlessly connecting partners could be around the creation of national peacebuilding strategies and frameworks, with a strong participation and meaningful input of diverse local peacebuilders.

- **The donor community should consider directly supporting local peacebuilders in a flexible and sustainable manner based on the principle of authentic partnerships.** In this, donors should review and ease their eligibility and reporting criteria and requirements to better balance their own fiduciary requirements with the realities of local peacebuilders and reduce the time and resources necessary to meet those requirements. Donors should test innovative approaches to support local peacebuilders, including through the creation or strengthening of pooled funds aimed at directly supporting them and providing funding directly through the embassies (in the situations of bilateral donors). When working through an intermediary model, donors should prioritise organisations that have existing local

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[75] Marlin Sierra, *Closure of Civic Spaces in Nicaragua* (June 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DPMVA-ClosureofCivicSpaces-Nicaragua-Sierra-321%20%282%29.pdf

[76] Alicia Arias Salgado, *The Closure of Civic Space in Ecuador and the Need to Build a Favorable Environment for the Development of a Democratic Society* (June 2021), accessed at: https://gppac.net/files/2021-06/DPMVA-ClosureofCivicSpace-Ecuador-Salgado-321-3%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf

networks and a strong track record of working with diverse local civil society organisations, including local women and youth.

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTICIPATION

- **The international community, including Member States, the UN and donor community, among others, should acknowledge the diversity of local peacebuilders and commit to inclusive processes that identify and engage diverse representatives of society.** This entails investing in adequate mapping of activities on the ground, supporting conflict-sensitive analysis of the data collected by local monitors on the ground, mapping relevant peacebuilding actors at the country level, and meaningfully supporting those best positioned to respond to root causes and early signs of instability. Further, it is important to improve the visibility of local peacebuilders who face difficulties accessing peace and security debate, including already existing youth, women and feminist networks at the regional and national levels (i.e., the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus and the MENA Coalition of YPS) and capacitate more diverse local peacebuilders to take up roles in relevant processes.

- **Building Local Infrastructures for Peace (LI4Ps) should be a prerequisite of peacebuilding action at the country level.** Capacities to advance peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention need to be context-specific and anchored within local communities because local ownership builds trust and resilience within communities. National governments can contribute to creating an enabling environment for I4Ps by putting in place appropriate legal and policy frameworks that ensure an enabling environment for local peacebuilders, while the UN and the donor community can provide technical and financial capacities to support the establishment of local peace committees, community monitors for EWERs, and other forms of LI4Ps.

- **The UN field presences should fully operationalise the UN Secretary-General's calls made under the UN System-Wide Community Engagement (CEG) and the Civic Space Initiative and provide transparent reporting on the progress.** Adhering to the CEG enables the UN field presences to develop localised and context-specific engagement strategies based on comparative advantages and objectives of all actors, as well as put in place measures to assess the operationalisation of such partnerships. The Guidance Note on Civic Space is a resource for the UN field presences to build capacities to strengthen civic space engagement, taking into consideration the role, capacities and programming approach of different UN field actors. These steps often involve working closer to the local civil society groups, recognising the need for their participation so that the UN initiatives succeed on the ground.

- **The international community, including Member States, the UN and donor community, among others, should meaningfully and intentionally engage with local peacebuilders in the design, implementation and evaluation of relevant policies and programmes**. One way of ensuring systematic and institutionalised participation can be through the establishment of working or advisory groups or dedicated positions of civil society liaisons, among other avenues, with defined terms of reference (i.e., Civil Society Advisory Committee for UNDP in Burundi; the European Youth Advocacy Team). Such a form of engagement ensures that the relationships are sustained beyond staff turnover and clarifies to all parties that meaningful and intentional engagement requires sufficient time and resources. Engaging with local peacebuilding networks is an efficient method to systematise partnerships because these networks often have agreed and inclusive priorities for joint action and are generally representative of various needs within the community. The Do No Harm approach should also underpin the engagement.

- **The UN Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should create a task force to address the digital gap.** This task force can identify stakeholders that are not currently included in discussions, review virtual engagement models, and adopt a common conceptual framework for digital inclusion. In this, local peacebuilders can support the formulation of online outreach strategies with a goal to reconcile people separated by conflict who either have very little knowledge of one another, or have mostly negative perceptions.

PROTECTION

- **The UN Human Rights Council should consider launching the process for further investigation of the specific needs of local peacebuilders with a view to develop an international framework for the protection of local peacebuilders.** This could include the establishment of the position of a special rapporteur or special representative to examine the issues faced by local peacebuilders and formulate recommendations to the UN system on how to better support local peacebuilding efforts. The principles of international law must be updated to reflect the unique situation of local peacebuilders. The international human rights community should consider the development of a global legal framework for the protection of online and offline spaces and ensuring the autonomy and security of local peacebuilding work.

- **The donor community should further utilise emergency response funds, as well as ensure that there are protection allocations included in every grant to address urgent and unforeseeable protection needs of local peacebuilders.** As such, all peacebuilding program budgets should include a contingency line to respond to emerging security threats. This line should amount to no less than 2% of the total project budget and should allow the recipient complete flexibility on how the funds are used. Should any of

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- **The UN and, on some occasions, embassies could also play the roles of a facilitator to bring the national government and local peacebuilders together in a risk-informed manner and encourage the creation of partnerships aimed at the common goals of peace.** The creation of spaces and platforms that allow for dialogue, joint analysis and the advancement of partnerships between national government and civil society serve as a useful model that can be utilised in the context, where such partnerships cannot be otherwise established. One way of seamlessly connecting partners could be around the creation of national peacebuilding strategies and frameworks, with a strong participation and meaningful input of diverse local peacebuilders.

- **The donor community should consider directly supporting local peacebuilders in a flexible and sustainable manner based on the principle of authentic partnerships.** In this, donors should review and ease their eligibility and reporting criteria and requirements to better balance their own fiduciary requirements with the realities of local peacebuilders and reduce the time and resources necessary to meet those requirements. Donors should test innovative approaches to support local peacebuilders, including through the creation or strengthening of pooled funds aimed at directly supporting them and providing funding directly through the embassies (in the situations of bilateral donors). When working through an intermediary model, donors should prioritise organisations that have existing local networks and a strong track record of working with diverse local civil society organisations, including local women and youth.

The Right to Participation and Community Engagement: Strengthening Civic Space from the Perspective of Local Peacebuilders

December 2021

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