

STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA
ITEM 10 – REPORT OF THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION, REPORT OF THE UN
SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE PEACEBUILDING FUNDED ON OCTOBER 09, 2008

Mr. President,

We appreciate the timely scheduling of today's joint debate on the Second Report of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Secretary-General's report on the Peacebuilding Fund. Let me begin by congratulating Japan for its work as Chair of PBC, in a tenure that has lasted somewhat longer than he might have expected at the outset! I also express our appreciation for the Chairs of the PBC's country-specific configurations and the Working Group on Lessons Learned. I must make special mention of the delegation of Norway, whose former PR chaired the configuration on Burundi with commitment. Let me also welcome the new Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, Ms. Jane Holl-Lute, and assure her of India's constructive support.

I also associate my delegation with the statement made by the distinguished PR of Jamaica, for the Non-aligned Movement. We appreciate Jamaica's work in coordinating the NAM within the PBC. I have only a few additional points to add, in the context of the reports of the PBC, and on the PBF. Our comments are based both on our abiding commitment to the objectives of the PBC, and our conviction that useful lessons may be drawn from our collective experience over the period that both bodies have been in existence.

Firstly, we need to guard ourselves against either excessive pessimism or premature celebrations regarding the relevance or efficacy of the PBC and the PBF thus far. On the positive side, the fact that we now have four countries on the Agenda of the PBC, all at their request, is undoubtedly a good sign. The finalization of integrated peacebuilding strategies for three of these, and the review of two of these strategies, are all signs of progress. It is no exaggeration that the PBC has indeed become an established player in the UN context.

However, while the steady consolidation of a role for the PBC within the lexicon of the international system is a good outcome, this is not a sufficient achievement, of itself, for all of us to take pride in. We need to continue to make the PBC relevant to the countries that it seeks to assist, by moving decisively towards a pragmatic, circumstance-specific approach. For too long have we in the Commission spent time in debates that veer from prescriptive solutions and a conditionality-based approach, to inflexible positions. As long as we have our positions predetermined before we objectively examine the situation in a country seeking assistance, we will not be able to provide truly dispassionate and situation-specific advice. This is also one reason why

we appear collectively unable to genuinely listen to what post-conflict countries actually want when they seek the PBC's assistance.

Second, to ensure that the advice that is provided by the PBC is relevant and useful, we must focus on two aspects. The first is to continue to expand our access to focussed, specific and objective information from the ground. Here the PBSO must play an important role, for without a clear and unbiased channel for inputs from the ground, listing key challenges and mapping gaps in the availability of resources to meet such challenges, the PBC cannot provide effective advice. Moreover, since there will inevitably be a disparity in information flow between those members who have representation on the ground and those who do not, this disparity could well prejudice the discourse within the PBC, to no-one's benefit. The second aspect is the need for effective two-way dialogue between countries on the Agenda of the PBC and the commission itself. This will be most meaningful if we can make the transition to ensuring that the PBC's advice is based on a "light-touch" approach. By this I mean that the PBC should not take on the task of advising States on post-conflict peace consolidation; instead it should help the State concerned identify and utilize genuine international expertise in addressing such sensitive issues.

The lightness of the PBC's touch also relates to the question of national ownership, which all of us endorse as a core principle of the PBC's involvement. This relates to the need to strengthen a representative and effective Government in the country concerned. Eventually, it is the Government of the country that is answerable if it is unable to deliver on peace consolidation strategies; and that answer must be given to the people it represents. It is also the Government of that country that will need to manage processes beyond the country's engagement with the PBC. It follows logically therefore that our primary focus must be upon enhancing the legitimacy, effectiveness and absorptive capacity of the administrative and governing system. Without this, we will never have the tools in place for our own efforts to assist in post-conflict peace building. So also for the PBSO. While there has been a welcome effort to include the PBSO on the ground in the countries where the PBC has an involvement, much more needs to be done. To begin with, the capacity of the PBSO needs to be expanded, but this must also be matched within the UN system by a willingness to genuinely include the PBSO, rather than to zealously guard turf.

Third, and this is a related point, we need to make greater efforts to energize the coordination aspect of the PBC's mandated role. Currently neither the PBC, nor the PBSO within the UN, have been able to leverage their unique and "cross-cutting" positions to perform this task. To those who argue that the PBC is not as yet ready for it, the counterpoint is that unless it is given that task, it can never be ready to coordinate international efforts. Furthermore, it also begs the question why major donor organizations sought to be part of the PBC if not to enhance its coordination role.

Fourth, while we have certainly done better in this past year in focusing attention and assisting in the marshalling of resources, much more can and must be done. Advice alone will not consolidate peace; certainly not if it isn't matched with either material or policy assistance. Mobilization of resources is the key vehicle by which post-conflict societies can set course upon the road to peace consolidation and development.

Mr President,

As a contributor to the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), and as a member of the PBC's organizational committee, we have welcomed the operationalization of the PBF, just as we welcome the idea of a renewed resource-mobilization drive towards the end of this year. We also welcome the improved synergy between the PBC and the PBF, although much more needs to be done to ensure that the objectives of the PBC's policy advice and the actual disbursement of funds to the State concerned are actually in consonance. There remains a troubling lag between the two, which needs to be dealt with when we consider a new mandate for the PBF. Unless the disbursement of funds improves, and unless the strategic link between the PBC and the PBF is better, neither body will achieve its full potential.

In this context, I must underline that we remain unconvinced that the three-window structure of drawing upon the PBF has been particularly useful to either the PBF or the PBC; in particular, Window II. Even the report on the PBF appears to suggest, in para 33, that the proactive strategy of identifying additional countries eligible for support for funds involved selection of countries receiving high-level visits from the UN, or those that approached the UN Secretariat directly, and in one case, as we know, one country which did not approach the UN directly, but was given funds to prolong the UN's presence in that country. This can hardly be called effective criteria for PBF funding. Indeed, since the entire process of Window-II consideration takes place without any inputs from either the member States or the PBC, it is hard to know what criteria actually apply. In fact, Window II does not rise to the level of even window-dressing! There is also a potential problem of blurring of monitoring lines, if a State begins to receive assistance under PBF Window-II, before eventually coming on to the PBC's Agenda. These and several other issues need to be resolved during the discussions on the PBF.

I would also like to reiterate in the context of the better utilization of PBF allocations, the point I made earlier about enhancing the mandate and the capacity of the PBSO. Without this, we will always be in a less than satisfactory position regarding the utilization of money allocated under the PBF. It is not enough to ascribe this problem to the weak absorptive capacity in the country concerned. It is precisely because absorptive and administrative capacities are weak that assistance has been sought. Therefore we need to ensure that the PBC and PBF jointly work together here in New York with the PBSO, to provide clear instructions, and that on the ground, there is a dedicated unit dealing with PBF funded projects.

Mr President,

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the mechanism of peace building is integrally-related to the larger question of a collective approach. If we continue to segregate ourselves within the PBC, but also between the PBC, the PBSO and the PBF, and between all three and the rest of the UN system, we will fail to provide a coherent and coordinated response to those who look to the UN to make a difference. That should not happen. I reiterate India's commitment to do whatever is in our power to ensure that this is never the case.

I thank you.

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