22 December 2022

Our Common Agenda - New Agenda for Peace
Portugal's written input

In "Our Common Agenda" (OCA), the Secretary-General sets out a clear analysis of the emerging risks threatening our collective peace.

Portugal subscribes the proposals included in the six core areas of the OCA chapter on a "New Agenda for Peace" and takes this opportunity to present some recommendations to flesh out those priorities.

The thematic debates on OCA – particularly the third session, which included discussions on the New Agenda for Peace – showed that, to some Member States, the report did not sufficiently consider the issues of terrorism and peacekeeping. Portugal will lay out its vision on these topics, as they could indeed be included in a New Agenda for Peace.

Introductory remark: a New Agenda for Peace and the Security Council

Before detailing our suggestions on the six priority areas for a New Agenda for Peace, we would point out that, although they are not included in the chapter on the New Agenda for Peace, there are some references in OCA to the **reform of the Security Council**. These include making it more representative, ensuring the Security Council systematically consults with a broader range of actors, including regional organizations, or considering public commitments to exercise restraint in the use of the veto.

Broadening the scope of representation in the Council, as well as increasing the consultation with stakeholders, including regional organizations, would contribute to advancing several of the priorities of the New Agenda for Peace, especially regional prevention, investing in peacebuilding (as having more countries directly involved in the Council would widen the pool of States willing to contribute to that effort), and strengthening foresight (more voices and perspectives around the table increase the capacity to anticipate risks).

But there should be no doubt that a New Agenda for Peace would greatly benefit from a **renewed approach to the veto**. When some of the members of the body with the primary responsibility for ensuring international peace and security are able to single-handedly prevent it from acting, that means those members can effectively perturb peace while evading the Council's action to reinstate it. This reality, which is not new, has been recently highlighted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its subsequent vetoes against Security Council resolutions on the matter.

To date, 104 UN Member States (and 2 Observers) have signed the Franco-Mexican Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocities, and 124 Member States (and 2 Observers) have signed the ACT Code of Conduct on the use of the veto. In addition, last April the General Assembly approved, by consensus, Resolution 76/262, which set out a standing mandate for the Assembly to be convened when a veto is cast.

This demonstrates the growing consensus on the need to restrict – and ensure greater scrutiny of – the use of the veto. A New Agenda for Peace should recognise this and call on permanent members to refrain from using the veto.

The United Nations will not be able to live up to their mandate of ensuring peace while some countries wield the power to simultaneously disrupt it and block any credible steps to restore it. It may not be feasible, especially in the short term, to end that power, but it may at least be possible to reiterate – in a New Agenda for Peace – the boundaries outside of which it should not be used.

1. Reducing strategic risks

The first priority area set out in OCA for a New Agenda for Peace relates to the reduction of strategic risks. While Portugal agrees that the issues included in this chapter – such as the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, conventional weapons and new weapons and technology – are undoubtedly strategic risks that need to be addressed, a New Agenda for Peace should also incorporate climate change in this category.

The Secretary-General's report on "Peacebuilding and sustaining peace" recognises, in no uncertain terms, that **climate change** can have a multiplier effect on the risk of violent conflicts. It is an existential threat with impact on global peace and security. The effects of climate change – such as droughts, water and food scarcity, or rising sea levels – increase the vulnerability of societies and **exacerbate the potential for conflicts**.

The **nexus between climate and security** should become an essential part of a New Agenda for Peace. It has been gaining prominence in the global agenda. Several countries raised the climate-security nexus in their statements at COP26 in Glasgow, notably African countries to which the exposure to the consequences of climate change is particularly acute, with the concern also being heightened in Sharm el-Sheikh. In addition, this will probably be the last "Agenda for Peace" before 2030 and the final push to limit the rise in temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. It should therefore send a robust signal regarding the consequences that noncompliance with the Paris agreement may bring to peace.

To reduce risk factors for conflict and help establish, in the long term, conditions for international peace and security, a New Agenda for Peace must set as a priority the need to make infrastructures and populations more resilient to the adverse effects of climate change, through **adaptation and mitigation measures**.

These can and should be interlinked with peacebuilding. As highlighted by the Secretary-General during last year's Security Council open debate on Climate and Security (September 23rd), **adaptation and peacebuilding can be mutually reinforcing**. Secretary-General Guterres exemplified by the case of Lake Chad, where the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) supported local natural resources management platforms in reforestation efforts.

A particularly evident, but growing, effect of climate change is **migration** and **forced displacement**. Albeit a multicausal phenomenon, the adverse impact of climate change, environmental degradation, disasters due to natural hazards, the dwindling of resources and overall food insecurity are causing increasing numbers of persons to move.

A New Agenda for Peace must, therefore, recognise that, as a prerequisite for long term peace and stability, it is vital to promote orderly, safe, responsible and regular international migration, while ensuring that all migrants and displaced persons are protected and assisted.

It would also be important that a New Agenda for Peace made clear that no one should be faced with the need to move in the first place. That is why solid measures of risk reduction and climate change adaptation are necessary to strengthen most at-risk communities. As the Secretary-General has been calling for, the Climate and Security Mechanism must be made more robust and its work should inform systematically the decisions taken by the Security Council.

Food insecurity, in particular, is caused by the over-exploitation of natural resources in already fragile ecosystems, population growth, increased grazing, depletion of water resources, but also – as we have seen most recently in Russia's aggression against Ukraine – by damage wilfully inflicted on storage infrastructures and agricultural processing facilities, and the blockade of ports.

Therefore, a New Agenda for Peace should underline the need to put in place the necessary resources to provide short term relief – through food assistance and humanitarian aid –, but also more structural measures, such as support to food production, especially to drought resistant cultures, the rehabilitation of inarable lands and the promotion of sustainable cattle raising. This helps increase food security but also restores environmental balance in the long term.

The report on "Peacebuilding and sustaining peace" underlines the role of peacekeeping operations, special political missions and the PBF in managing the risks associated with climate change. As a member of the Group of Friends on Leading on Environmental Management in the Field, Portugal believes that missions also have work to do to lessen their **environmental footprint**. A New Agenda for Peace should fully take into account the lessons learned through the implementation of the Environment Strategy for Field Missions 2017-2023.

One of the main lessons is the need to not only reduce missions' emissions, but also leave a **positive legacy** in host countries. Portugal would also argue that missions should identify areas where the cost of their environmental footprint is disproportionately borne by women, so that transition efforts may be shaped to ensure a **gender-responsive** approach.

We believe that the defense of responsible multilateralism recommends reinforcing the international architecture of **disarmament and non-proliferation**, one of the main pillars of the rules-based world order.

The crisis initiated with Russia's aggression against Ukraine has created additional obstacles for the effective functioning and decision-making processes of disarmament and non-proliferation regimes. It has also reinforced more general geopolitical trends, which are moving away from multilateral cooperation and the universalization of disarmament and non-proliferation norms.

Although the objectives of peace and security are shared by the international community at large, Nuclear Weapon States have a particular responsibility in this regard. Convergence among those states is crucial to tackle some of the most important challenges we face today, such as those arising from DPRK´s and Iran´s nuclear and ballistic programs, to bring these countries to full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has a central role in this regard.

While upholding and strengthening the international architecture of nuclear non-proliferation, we must pay close attention to the challenges emerging from the undeclared programs of **chemical and biological weapons** that some States, and their proxies, persist in developing. In this regard, we highlight the UNSG Mechanism for investigating the alleged use of chemical and biological weapons as the only international instrument available for this purpose. And we recall the responsibility of the entire international community for countering the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and its means of delivery, and for preventing access to those weapons and means by non-state actors, in particular terrorist organizations.

In the current security environment, conventional weapons and exports control regimes are also facing broader challenges, since transfers between States are frequently used for *hybrid warfare* purposes, involving not only controlled items, but also equipment or components, most of them dual use items, related to other domains, such as cyber, *Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems* (LAWS), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Intangible Technology Transfers (ITT).

Considering the transversality of the cyber domain, as well as its disruptive role in the broader context of the *Security of Information and Communication Technologies*, we defend the applicability of international law to **cyberspace**, the relevance of developing a normative framework regarding responsible behavior and the importance of States' capacity building and training in this domain.

We support the peaceful use of our global commons, including outer space, and are committed to preventing an arms race and to reducing threats in space by exploring norms of responsible behavior and their respective monitoring.

The specific challenges and characteristics of maritime insecurity should also receive due attention in the New Agenda for Peace, both in support of regional efforts towards prevention and of the engagement with local communities to potentiate the blue economy as a way to provide alternatives to criminality at sea and to the impacts of environmental degradation.

2. **Strengthening international foresight and capacities to identify and adapt to new peace and security risks**

Portugal agrees with the recommendations made by the Secretary-General regarding a **Strategic Foresight and Global Risk Report** (SFGRR) and an **Emergency Platform** (EP). While these will be crucial across the board, they will have an invaluable role to play in a New Agenda for Peace.

The "Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group", of which Portugal is a member, has on several occasions proposed that a New Agenda for Peace includes a call for a more pronounced conflict prevention perspective in the work of the **Security Council**, through **"horizon scanning" meetings** aimed at identifying potential risks and devising early action.

To ensure a risk does not materialize, it is of course necessary to anticipate it. The SFGRR and EP will be instrumental to this goal, as would "horizon scanning" meetings in the Security Council. However, it will not always be possible to prevent a threat from coming to pass. When that happens, we must have tools at our disposal to **quickly respond and adapt to the consequences**.

That is why a New Agenda for Peace should also build on the recent, and encouraging, experience of the **UN Global Crisis Response Group**, which the Secretary-General launched in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the ensuing food security crisis. The Group has been crucial not only to address food supply disruptions and spiking energy prices, but also to ensure that measures to bring immediate relief do not undermine long-term stability.

3. **Reshaping our responses to all forms of violence**

OCA rightly points out that several forms of violence are usually a harbinger of large-scale conflict. A New Agenda for Peace centred on prevention must therefore include guidance on the need to respond to all forms of violence.

But even when prevention fails, and the UN needs to intervene through a peacekeeping operation, violence is one of the major challenges missions are faced with. A New Agenda for Peace should therefore set out recommendations on how to respond to **urban violence and other types of attacks on peacekeepers**.

In line with the priorities laid-out in "Action for Peacekeeping" (A4P), this must include robust processes to investigate and prosecute crimes against peacekeepers, with a view to ensure **accountability to peacekeepers**, but also to deter further aggression by potential perpetrators.

A New Agenda for Peace should encompass combating **international terrorism** through effective multilateral responses that address all the converging threats to peace. It would be of utmost importance to develop inclusive and integrated responses at the international, national and local level to prevent terrorism, violent extremism, and the radicalization of local populations, especially when new technologies amplify the terrorist threat.

The focus should be on international efforts in the fight against terrorism that are based on prevention rather than reaction. We should remain focussed on preventive measures through the adoption of social inclusion policies, internet monitoring and dialogue with local communities and religious leaders.

4. Investing in prevention and peacebuilding

Prevention is the cornerstone of the Secretary-General's proposed approach for a "New Agenda for Peace". It is the right priority to ensure long-lasting peace. Although it makes for less compelling headlines, preventing a conflict from erupting spares more lives and suffering than ending one. It is also more efficient and much less costly to address the root causes of conflict than to respond to its consequences.

We support the **expansion of the Peacebuilding Commission's role**. The PBC should be given the power and tools to address the multiple threats to peace and security and to support national peacebuilding priorities in a coherent, cross-cutting and preventive manner. It should use its convening role to ensure all stakeholders in conflict settings (including regional organizations, local authorities and communities) are brought together to address the underlying causes of conflict.

Cooperation between the PBC and the Security Council should be increased, as it would contribute to the goal of conflict prevention.

It is also crucial to ensure adequate, predictable and sustained **financing** for peacebuilding, namely by establishing **assessed contributions** as part of the financing of the Peacebuilding Fund. A New Agenda for Peace should include this goal.

It is clear that peacekeeping remains an important tool to defend peace and stability. Nonetheless sustaining peace also requires the fulfilment of the **Sustainable Development Goals**. Poverty, inequality and climate change must be tackled, considering that (as we state above) they are among the main underlying causes of conflict. Fulfilling the SDGs would lessen inequalities and exclusion, which would in turn contribute to a more peaceful and secure world.

A New Agenda for Peace should thus take into account that military, law enforcement and intelligence approaches must be complemented with measures to tackle climate change, build institutions, promote employment and an inclusive economy in countries at risk of, or undergoing, conflict.

Human rights violations and abuses are not only a consequence, but also an underlying cause of conflict. A New Agenda for Peace should recognise this and call for closer articulation between the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. It would advance the fulfilment of both bodies' preventive mandate.

The Permanent Mission of Portugal

to the United Nations

Another important component is **communication**. A New Agenda for Peace should be clear that missions must properly communicate with host governments, local communities, and other stakeholders. This is crucial to the fulfilment of missions' mandates, the protection of civilians and the safety and security of peacekeepers.

As set out in Security Council Resolution 2594 (2021) and the A4P Plus, to craft an adequate communication strategy, it is necessary to carry out a public information assessment, **prior to the launch of any field mission**, to identify the most effective ways of reaching the local population. Strategic communications must involve countering disinformation, misinformation and hate speech targeted at missions and peacekeepers.

5. Supporting regional prevention

One of the most effective ways to achieve regional prevention is to **cooperate with regional organizations**, such as the African Union. As the Security Council recognized in 2021, regional organizations bring with them a vast knowledge of the root causes of conflicts and help ensure local ownership by promoting trust and dialogue.

In any event, and as the Crisis Group[1] noted during last August's briefing on the implementation of OCA, some regions lack institutional partners with whom the United Nations can engage on a structural basis.

In those cases, regional prevention must entail interaction with **regional stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector and even academia**. This kind of engagement should be sought even in regions where the UN has longstanding and credible institutional partners. All these actors' views, expertise and input are crucial to identify rising threats, as well as to devise measures to tackle them.

Cooperation between the UN and regional organizations must be a common trend throughout the different priorities of the New Agenda for Peace. For instance, it should aim to address the link between climate change and peace. As the Regional Director for Africa of the International Committee of the Red Cross pointed out during the Security Council debate on climate and security in Africa, in October, there should be closer coordination between the Security Council and the African Union's Peace and Security Council to devise **climate-sensitive responses to armed conflicts**, by promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law, which also protects the natural environment.

A New Agenda for Peace should also be clear that **regional peacekeeping mechanisms** provide a global public good, and that the United Nations must step up efforts to help properly support them.

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[1] https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/priorities-uns-new-agenda-peace.

6. Putting women and girls at the centre of security policy

OCA rightly underlines that we must put women and girls at the centre of security policy. **This cannot be an afterthought**. If a New Agenda for Peace is – as we would argue – to be centred around women and girls, then the Agenda must be drafted in accordance with that priority. Both **the impact of conflicts in women and girls**, and **the role they play in preventing or ending** them must be put **at the heart of a New Agenda for Peace**. A "last but not least" approach will not suffice.

This was shown eloquently during a recent Security Council Debate on "Combatting Terrorism in Africa" (10 November). Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, laid out priorities to fight terrorism in Africa; her second recommendation, right after promoting prevention, was the need for **inclusion and a gender-sensitive approach**. Indeed, noting the complex links between terrorism, patriarchy, and gender violence, DSG Mohammed argued for a **greater participation and leadership of women in defining policies to address terrorism**. The role of women in stamping out this threat was put front and centre of the DSG's intervention. The New Agenda for Peace should do the same.

One of the surest ways to sustainably address the underlying causes of conflict is to implement the **Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda**. Women's organizations and networks, as well as youth-led organizations, play a crucial role in their communities. They are essential leaders in emergencies and indispensable to maintaining social cohesion and preventing conflict and instability.

A New Agenda for Peace must take this reality into account, defining as a priority an **increase in financial support to grassroot women's groups**, especially those mobilizing for peace and the promotion of human rights.

It should also recommend investing on the protection of human rights and on human rights education and communication, as well as on **women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making**. These steps are critical to the prevention of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls.

In the same vein, a New Agenda for Peace should urge the Security Council to **ensure a safe environment** where women can engage without fear of retaliation, including by inviting more women leaders to brief the Council while making sure their safety is maintained.

A New Agenda for Peace could also recommend that missions engage with women's groups and make suggestions for the implementation of Resolution 2594 (2021), including the embedment of comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise in all stages of planning, implementation and review of operations. This should entail as well including explicitly in missions' mandates the **protection of women peacebuilders**.

As for missions' communication, the Agenda could suggest that target audiences be differentiated by gender, and that certain communications be **addressed specifically to women**. Gender gaps in access to digital technologies should be considered and measures to lessen them laid out, such as organizing in-person events especially for women. In addition, messages should represent women and men equally in audio and visual materials, and avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes, which are part of the root causes of many recent political and ethnic conflicts.