

A High-Level Roundtable for the 2024 Summit of the Future

Collective Security and the Universality of Conflict Prevention A new momentum for Geneva-based stakeholders?

Monday, 5 February 2024

The Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Maison de la Paix, Ch. Eugène Rigot 2D

Co-Sponsors: the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations and Other Organizations in Geneva, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, and Stimson Center



On 5 February 2024, Geneva-based Permanent Representatives, senior UN Mission officials, and experts from leading international organizations, think tanks, advocacy organizations, and universities in Geneva, Switzerland convened under the Chatham House Rule. The discussion aimed to further highlight the role of International Geneva in feeding into and following through on the Pact for the Future, the chief outcome to the [Summit of the Future](#), planned for 22-23 September 2024 in New York. This report draws together key issues discussed during the roundtable, and it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) or other participating governments and organizations.

Geo-political tensions and lack of coherence and institutional collaboration of the UN system in its approach to peace and security hinders the effective prevention of destructive conflict in a range of diverse societies worldwide. Reactive policies and actions are still prevalent despite being far costlier in terms of human suffering, as well as finance. Periodic calls for a change of emphasis towards preventive approaches, prevention of destructive conflict, and with it the integration of human rights in conflict prevention, have failed to yield the desired results.

As the UN Security Council remains divided and the expectations toward the UN Peacebuilding Architecture continue to grow, the need remains to explore the potential role of Geneva based institutions in a new-networked and inclusive multilateralism that effectively addresses the broader spectrum of international peace and security challenges. **In particular, the proposals laid out in the [New Agenda for Peace](#) on the *universalization of prevention* offer new momentum in this regard.**

The upcoming Summit of the Future will be a key milestone to galvanize such momentum. It will have “... an important role in reaffirming the Charter of the United Nations, reinvigorating multilateralism, boosting implementation of existing commitments, agreeing on concrete solutions to challenges and restoring trust among Member States” ([UNGA Resolution 76/307](#)). The summit’s priority areas, which will be reflected in the **Pact for the Future** outcome document are: (i) sustainable development and financing for development; (ii) **international peace and security**; (iii) science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation; (iv) youth and future generations; and (v) transforming global governance.

The intergovernmental negotiations process take place through the UN General Assembly level, and it would be unproductive and, in any event, futile to open parallel negotiations in other UN hubs on all the clusters of the Pact. However, there is merit in highlighting the key issues at stake for Geneva-based stakeholders, especially where Geneva-centric reform processes already exist, in order to advance their priorities through the Summit and – more importantly – prepare for the next phase of implementation.

The New Agenda for Peace (NA4P), introduced in a policy brief by Secretary-General António Guterres on 20 July 2023, outlines the United Nations' commitment to strengthen global peace and security by putting prevention first. Building on the Sustaining Peace agenda and other key developments, the New Agenda for Peace proposes a paradigm shift in conflict prevention and sustaining peace by anchoring it in a “more deliberate and explicitly universal approach to the prevention of conflict and violence,” under the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It will be integral to the Summit of the Future preparations and will substantiate its outcome document – in particular its Chapter 2 of the Pact on “International Peace and Security” and Chapter 5 on “Transforming Global Governance.” This convening sought to conceptualise and substantiate the role and impact for International Geneva in moving the needle forward on these critical advances for collective security and universalising conflict prevention.

At the outset of the discussion, participants emphasized the need for the international community to take a preventative approach to peacebuilding, while also acknowledging the prevailing distrust in governments and global institutions. Indeed, unlike the optimism surrounding the UN’s founding conference in San Francisco in 1945, the Summit of the Future occurs against the backdrop of geo-political tensions and

uncertainty, *inter alia*, due to elections taking place in over sixty countries globally, in 2024, potentially complicating the consensus building process toward the summit.

The questioning of the UN institutional, security, and peacebuilding architecture, both in terms of legitimacy and efficacy, also remains a major challenge. The participants further pointed out the importance of addressing security issues in a holistic manner, ensuring that due attention is paid to the human security dimension of conflict. Similarly, they underlined the significance of ownership in peacebuilding. Addressing these challenges, attendees stressed the importance of strategic foresight and early warning mechanisms as core tools for adopting a preventive approach to peace and security. They underscored the nexus between security and good governance, hence the importance of ensuring institutional accountability, respect for human rights, and judicial system trustworthiness. The discussion focused on two primary areas: (1) universalizing conflict prevention; and (2) building a stronger and more collective security architecture. Brief summaries of these considered topics are presented below.



Universalizing Conflict Prevention

Overview

Drawing inspiration from the international commitment to peace and security as exemplified by the UN Charter, while reflecting on the [zero draft of the Pact for the Future](#), participants underscored how the concept of universalizing conflict prevention faces both marked challenges and opportunities in the

present global context. Greater investments of time, political will, resources, and the application of both diplomatic skill and innovative operational tools in preventing deadly conflicts could reduce significantly the cost in human lives and material destruction, aligning with the UN Charter's aim to protect future “generations from the scourge of war” – a goal that many acknowledged that the international community is currently failing to meet.

Challenges

Participants noted the need to address systemic issues within existing international frameworks. Among the core challenges identified were:

- *Limitations to dialogue with armed groups.* The international peacebuilding and peacekeeping communities face difficulties in establishing stable dialogues with both state and non-state armed groups. This engagement is critical in peace processes, as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the conflict dynamics and the needs of all parties involved. Communications, therefore, must avoid being viewed as one-sided, thereby undermining efforts by the international community to manage and, over time, address effectively the root causes of a violent conflict.
- *Poor/weak commitment to tangible efforts to prevent violent conflicts.* There is a noticeable lack of strong commitment to prevention by many international actors, as manifested by inadequate resource allocation, a lack of political will, and insufficient follow-through on UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as statements by the Peacebuilding Commission.
- *Human rights integration hampered by, in particular, limited political will but also data gaps.* First and foremost, a lack of political will by a violent conflicts’ main protagonists (where governmental or non-state in character) can stymie human rights integration so central to effective preventive action. At the same time, existing data gaps and group marginalisation have further hindered the creation of tailored and effective responses to human rights violations. Specifically, the lack of reliable data makes it difficult to monitor progress, evaluate the efficacy of interventions, develop early warning mechanisms, and adapt strategies accordingly.

Key takeaways and recommendations

In light of these and other challenges, attendees underscored several priority areas for universalizing and operationalizing conflict prevention, including, for instance, the need to:

- *Establish trust and monitoring mechanisms.* Reinforcing trust in international, governmental, and organisational institutions is necessary to create robust support for states to meaningfully pursue prevention efforts. Increasingly, prevention needs to be spearheaded at the national level through national prevention strategies as proposed by the New Agenda for Peace.
- *Upgrade the Peacebuilding Commission into an empowered Council:* expand the PBC’s mandate to lead on prevention efforts, alongside peacebuilding policy development, coordination, and resource mobilization, in countries and regions not directly addressed by the Security Council. Learning from the Human Rights Commission’s (HRC) earlier upgrade into an empowered Council in Geneva, the new Peacebuilding Council would benefit from a “Peacebuilding Audit” tool, modeled on the HRC’s Universal Periodic Review, for tracking early warning indicators so as to facilitate early action toward preventing the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict.

- *Ensure an effective multistakeholder approach.* An inclusive peacebuilding community, which relies on insights from different actors, is key to achieving progress. The conflict prevention system will, thus, benefit from regular exchanges between Member States, International Civil Servants, Civil Society Organizations, marginalised groups, and private sector representatives.
- *Promote cooperation at different levels of governance.* Building on recommendations from the New Agenda for Peace, bolster coordination and capacity-building of regional bodies, especially the African Union, to support context-specific (but nevertheless *universal*) prevention efforts.

Building a Stronger and More Inclusive Collective Security Architecture

Overview

The pursuit of a stronger and more inclusive collective security architecture is essential in the face of evolving global challenges. This requires recognizing the need for a comprehensive and diverse approach to security, one that expands on traditional methods and includes a wider range of perspectives. Central to this vision is the integration of marginalised groups, ensuring that women, youth, and other underrepresented communities are not only heard but are active participants in shaping security policies. This requires a real (re-)consideration of asymmetric systems of power in the security architecture. The goal is to create a security architecture that is not only responsive, but also nimble, proactive, and capable of focusing on prevention and resolution.

Challenges

Participants highlighted several inherent problems in the current state of international security, illustrating the need for reform. They pinpointed, in particular:

- *Concerns about Security Council effectiveness.* Several participants expressed worries over the Council's present poorly representative composition, pointing to how it fosters paralysis of action, especially due to the veto power assumed by the Council's five permanent members.
- *Imbalance of power.* Other participants acknowledged the inherent power imbalance within the UN's collective security architecture, beginning with the permanent status of five veto-wielding security council members but also the outsized influence of international peacekeeping and peacebuilding donors. Consequently, such entrenched disparities can lead to limited solutions that fail to foster effective prevention efforts or tackle effectively the root causes of recurring violence.
- *Lack of trust.* Fragmentation and power imbalances across the international system, combined with the present tense geopolitical climate and the lack of a dedicated body to hold actors accountable through even a limited audit tool, makes trust a rare commodity.

Key takeaways and recommendations

In light of these challenges, participants recognized the urgency of reforming our international collective security architecture. Distilled major takeaways from the roundtable discussion include:

- *Revisit the Security Council's composition and procedures.* Building on the [zero draft of the Pact for the Future](#), a reimagined makeup and working methods of the Security Council merits attention. Participants opined about increasing both the Council's permanent and non-permanent members. One floated the need to expand the number of non-permanent seats by six on the Council, and allowing the immediate re-election of non-permanent members, who are currently not allowed to serve consecutive terms, through a basic amendment of UN Charter Article 23.
- *Facilitate institutional reform.* There is a need for a shift from bloated, unrepresentative, and stagnated power systems that have long dominated the security sector, moving toward a more nimble, representative, and dynamic framework.
- *Address gender gaps.* This is necessary, not just in terms of access but in providing equal opportunities to address the root causes of conflict across economic, social, and political spheres, including patriarchal, top-down governance systems. This also entails promoting economic autonomy for women, a critical factor in building resilient and peaceful societies.
- *Geneva's role in promoting meaningful action.* Geneva can serve as a hub for humanitarian and peacekeeping discussions, with a focus on leveraging its capacity for facilitating the exchange of ideas, incubating multistakeholder discussions, and implementing best practices.
- *Address the root causes of violence and fragility.* An effective collective security system must identify and address the root causes of conflicts, with an emphasis on tapping local resources and solutions. National ownership and people-centered approaches are vital to ensuring that solutions are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of affected regions and communities.

Conclusion

The Summit of the Future presents a unique opportunity to universalize (and better operationalize) prevention principles while updating the world's collective security system. Participants underscored the key role International Geneva can play in both shaping the Summit's outcomes and contributing to its following-through, including in areas ranging from human rights and technology to trade, disarmament, and humanitarian action. Participants concluded by reaffirming the need to mobilize support around select, high-impact global governance changes with the potential to make a difference in people's lives.

PROGRAM

4:00 PM Arrival of Participants

4:30 - 4:40 PM Opening Remarks

Amb. Thomas Greminger, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)

Amb. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and other Organizations in Geneva

4:40 - 4:50 PM National perspective on the prevention of violent conflict

Amb. Gustavo Gallón, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations and other Organizations in Geneva

4:50 - 4:55 PM A Pact for the Future and New Agenda for Peace: New Threats, Financing, and the Collective Security Architecture

Dr. Richard Ponzio, Director, Global Governance, Justice & Security Program, Stimson Center

Ms. Nudhara Yusuf, Executive Coordinator, Global Governance Innovation Network, Stimson Center

4:55 - 5:05 PM A Pact for the Future and New Agenda for Peace: Contribution from Geneva

Ms. Francesca Marotta, the Chief of Methodology, Education and Training Section, at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Amb. Nathalie Chuard, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)

5:05 - 6:00 PM Moderated Dialogue with Roundtable Participants

Co moderation: Dr. Annyssa Bellal, Executive Director, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP) and Ms. Florence Foster, QUNO, member of the GPP

Discussant: Prof. Keith Krause, Director, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, The Geneva Graduate Institute

6:00 - 7:00 PM Reception

