UN75 Regional Dialogue for the Americas:

Toward Innovation and Renewal of Regional and Global Governance

Dialogue Summary

20 March–26 April 2020

Co-sponsored by: The Stimson Center, Organization of American States, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Global Challenges Foundation, Igarapé Institute, adelphi, Together First, UN2020.

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Overview of the Regional Dialogue

The *UN75 Regional Dialogue for the Americas: Toward Innovation and Renewal of Global and Regional Governance* (20 March–26 April 2020) was designed to bring diverse, multi-stakeholder, regional perspectives and actionable ideas into the final months of preparations for key global policy milestones of 2020, including the UN 75 Leaders Summit and its associated political declaration (to be finalized by June 2020), as well as the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture.

Originally planned for 19–21 March 2020 in Bogota, Colombia, the co-organizers (the Stimson Center, Organization of American States, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict [GPPAC], Global Challenges Foundation, Igarapé Institute, adelphi, Together First, and UN2020) decided to take this in-person conversation online, for the time being, due to the fast spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The dialogue serves as a platform to open the conversation around key issues and questions on the future of multilateralism and its impact at the global, regional, and national levels in the Americas. The inputs have been synthesized—*on a not-for-attribution-basis*—and consolidated in this summary report, with the following objectives:

(1) To shed light on the role of the United Nations in the Americas and its collaboration with regional organizations (such as the Organization of American States) on issue areas such as peace and security, sustainable development, climate governance, humanitarian action, justice, and human rights.

(2) To offer policy recommendations on how to build on successes and strengthen multilateralism through the United Nations, Organization of American States, and other regional actors that engage the UN system.

The online dialogue's "theory of change" is rooted in the conviction that greater results can be achieved when (1) individual states and non-state actors recognize that their priority issues or institutional reforms can benefit from a global systemic, coalition-supported effort; (2) greater opportunities arise for "deal-making" and exploiting linkages between innovative proposals across distinct sectors and institutional settings; and (3) momentum for reform is generated and sustained.

Balanced attention toward gaining the confidence of powerful "insiders," including the UN Secretary-General, and powerful "outsiders" from civil society, the media, and the business community, will be a hallmark of the development of new knowledge and advocacy networks utilizing the new Stimson Center-led, online [Platform on Global Security, Justice & Governance Reform](#) and the civil society-led [Together First](#) campaign and [UN 2020 Initiative](#). Each is critical to leveraging institutions and individuals to affect positive changes in global governance.

Format

The online dialogue was structured in four segments across four thematic issues areas (regional approaches to global governance; enhancing peacebuilding and security in the Americas; strengthening inclusive and sustainable development and climate governance; and promoting human rights, justice, and humanitarian action). Each segment started with a focused thematic webinar that brought together key experts on each thematic topic from the United Nations, civil society, regional organizations, and member states, who shared their reflections and opened the

conversation to questions from the participants. For both the online dialogue and webinars, individuals were encouraged to participate in either Spanish or English. Please find below the online dialogue and webinars schedule:

Segment	Moderators	Webinar
23-29 March *Regional Approaches to Global Governance*	**Yadira Soto** *Organization of American States* **Cristina Petcu** *Stimson Center*	**20 March (10:00-11:00 am New York)** *UN@75, an Opportunity for Strengthening Global and Regional Governance in the Americas Region*
30 March - 5 April *Enhancing Peacebuilding and Security in the Americas*	**Marina Kumskova** *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)* **Daria Ivleva** *adelphi*	**27 March (10:00-11:00am New York)** *Peacebuilding in the Americas: Strategic Operationalization of Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level (this will include a discussion on the links between security, peacebuilding and climate change)*
6-15 April *Strengthening Inclusive & Sustainable Development and Climate Governance*	**Magnus Jiborn** *Global Challenges Foundation* **Richard Ponzio** *Stimson Center*	**3 April (10:00-11:00am New York)** *Strengthening Inclusive & Sustainable Development and Climate Governance*
16-26 April *Promoting Human Rights, Justice, and Humanitarian Action*	**Adriana Abdenur** *Igarape Institute*	**16 April (10:00-11:00am New York)** *Promoting Human Rights, Justice, and Humanitarian Action*

Segment #1: Regional Approaches to Global Governance

Co-facilitators: Yadira Soto, Organization of American States and Cristina Petcu, The Stimson Center

Overview

As power diffuses toward a multipolar system of global governance, regional organizations are contributing political support, financial resources, and technical expertise to global problem-solving. H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, referred to UN cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations as a "cornerstone of the work of the United Nations." Diverse and numerous regional and sub-regional organizations worldwide are exerting influence and capabilities in helping, for example, to tackle the climate crisis, transnational and local conflicts, and obstacles to greater cross-border trade and investment. But while regional governance is both necessary and complementary to global governance structures, fragmentation between the two persists.

During this segment of the dialogue, participants discussed strategies for improving global governance through stronger relationships and better partnerships with regional organizations. This segment explored the nature of partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations in the Americas and proposed tools and responses needed for the international community to better address both old and new regional challenges.

Summary of discussion

1. *Both regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), and global organizations, such as the UN, have a well-established presence across the Americas, including through their Headquarters in North America and more than 20 different regional offices and agencies represented across Latin America. Looking back over the past decade (2010–2020), what is your perception and how would you assess the UN's role in the region? How does the UN complement the work undertaken by regional and sub-regional organizations in the Americas? What are the comparative advantages of each type of organization working in the region? What are their strengths and weaknesses?*

Both the UN and the OAS have generated, since their respective creations in 1945 and 1948, respectively, significant contributions to governance in the Americas. However, the revival of nationalism, populism, and skepticism regarding multilateralism (particularly among powerful countries) questions and places at risk the fulfillment of the important mandates of these global and regional organizations. Each is instrumental in delivering guidelines, policy recommendations, and technical assistance on the ground to support national governmental and non-governmental actors on matters of governance, development, and peace. Despite their shortcomings, they remain the best structural arrangements to ensure world order. In the case of

the Americas, the international community has played, for example, a critical role supporting the peace process in Colombia. The OAS and other, sub-regional organizations have been the lead multilateral institutions on critical issues such as election observation, human rights protection, democracy promotion, institutional strengthening, and working with key civil society stakeholders on issues of social and economic rights.

Perceived comparative advantages and weaknesses of each type of institution working in the Americas:

- *Global Organizations*: On the positive side, global organizations have firsthand information of and access to other regions, enabling the production of comparative knowledge combined with a global perspective, and they **have created state-of-the-art capacity building tools that can be shared with regional and local actors**. On the other hand, global organizations are insufficiently connected to local and grassroots actors, which limits their ability to respond to acute local needs; they often lack respect and appreciation for individuals operating at the local level; and such local realities are hard to reflect in complex discussions that use a cumbersome taxonomy understandable only by elite decision-makers, academics, and practitioners.

- *Regional and Sub-regional Organizations*: Regional and sub-regional actors have good command of the overall picture of the realities of their Member States, and with effective coordination and adaptation, they are often instrumental in applying and further developing the tools for better informed decision and policy-making, as well as for capacity building. **One major advantage of regional and sub-regional organizations is their capacity to serve as a bridge between global and local actors, and to disseminate critical information more easily in both directions**. They also engage actively with a wide array of actors to ensure sustainability and the lasting effects of technical assistance in the field. At the same time, regional and sub-regional organizations need to build up their capacity to share information on the results they are achieving to a broader public (non-specialized) audience; to strive to promote and enable the use of their resources by everyone interested in doing so; and to get closer to academia to use such channels to enrich their information, data, and analysis while building greater trust with a range of important regional and local stakeholders.

- *National Organizations*: **National actors are able to nationalize international norms and are best placed to put in practice global and regional initiatives specifically designed to address challenges at national and local levels.** They are the organizations and bodies (governmental and non-governmental) that are most familiar with national realities and know how to better adapt efforts into specific conditions with the purpose of ensuring effectiveness and sustainability. On the other hand, some weaknesses associated with national-level actors are their oftentimes limited institutional capacities (including among governments), or weak civic spaces in which non-governmental organizations can operate, among other specific constraints. In these instances, national organizations can be complemented and their shortcomings overcome with the support of regional and global organizations.

Given this backdrop, the United Nations needs to build closer working relations with the OAS and relevant sub-regional organizations in the Americas, **in order to jointly define action plans and channel much-needed resources to achieve the monumental task of**

implementing various complex global agendas (i.e. The Paris Climate Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, etc.).

2. *What are the current challenges and factors impeding progress on enhanced cooperation between regional institutions and the UN to advance peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, justice, and humanitarian action in the Americas? What are the lessons learned from the past? What has worked and what has not, and why?*

The work of the UN in the region has greatly contributed to publicizing, assessing, and advancing progress in addressing pressing social, economic, and political challenges across the Americas. It has created a valuable structure upon which its Member States can rely to build their internal policies and to validate and legitimize decision-making throughout the hemisphere and beyond. Despite all this, the UN has fluctuated in its capacity to respond effectively to the violation of international norms by governments and other actors in the region. **Moreover, the United Nations could do far more in its efforts to bring regional, sub-regional, and local actors together to forge a unified front on, for instance, the protection of human rights, elimination of corruption, fight against all forms of discrimination and violence, and many other issues affecting the Americas.**

Three specific insights shaping regional-global governance cooperation, generated by several participants through the Webinar and subsequent e-discussion, were:

First, operational cooperation between the UN and regional organizations is challenging, and coordination in the field is not easy to carry out. **At all levels, there is a perception of a lack of coordination among stakeholders, which can generate duplication and inefficiencies on matters of implementation and technical assistance.** This is due to a lack of coordination platforms that facilitate an open conversation at the technical and political levels, which would allow for the identification of synergies and jointly agreed roadmaps towards the achievement of common goals within specific timeframes.

Second, difficulties to enhance cooperation between the OAS and the UN in the Americas are related to their functional structure and the values they prioritize. Regarding the functional structure, countries are represented in these institutions by their heads of state or ruling government and not by the diverse range of actors that comprise a nation's entire society (such as, for example, a country's parliament, unions, or social organizations), which brings into question the overall legitimacy of these international organizations. **In the case of the UN, the questionable, limited membership of the Security Council and its frequent inability to reach consensus among its members (in part, due to misuse of its permanent members' veto power) represent two added constraints.** It is essential, then, to increase the spaces for participation of various actors from each member country—beyond simply the representative or spokesperson of the head of state and/or the government.

Regarding the values that are promoted, **the OAS maintains a greater commitment to defend the model of representative democracy expressed in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.** Conversely, while it has an acknowledged commitment to uphold human rights and democracy, the UN seems to give greater emphasis to principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs. This difference might be explained by the fact that in recent decades, in the Americas, there has been significant progress in the development of (albeit

imperfect) democratic regimes, despite cases such as Cuba or the more recent slide back toward authoritarian models of governance witnessed in several Latin American countries. Similarly, the UN responds to a complexity of realities and contexts where a substantial number of its Member States are still autocracies or have slid back towards authoritarian models in recent years. The UN system, however, through its Agencies, Departments, and Office of the Secretary General, has been carrying out reforms aimed at defending democratic values and the rule of law, despite the impediments posed by some powerful authoritarian countries.

Third, at the regional and sub-regional level, various illiberal multilateral organizations have emerged in the last twenty years, eroding the principles and mechanisms articulated by the OAS on the protection of representative democracy. The creation of new organizations, such as PetroCaribe, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, Union of South American Nations, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States was promoted, which practically ignored the defense of democracy and its principles—such as the separation of powers, alternation of power, and pluralism—to the benefit of an authoritarian form of presidentialism. At present, many of these organizations have been abandoned, but the damage caused to democratic values has been enormous, under the pretext of promoting "sovereign" integration "far from US intervention." However, this showed that **one of the limitations of the Inter-American system is that it appears to be poorly adapted to react to unconventional internal threats to democratic systems, such as illiberal models of governance.** These are undermining democracy and liberal values, using electoral and endorsement mechanisms to concentrate power.

Other obstacles to effective collaboration between regional and global organizations are:

- The fear of divided responsibility. **The UN Security Council fears an erosion of its authority if it delegates responsibilities to regional organizations.** This fear can be explained by a concern that the delegation of authority to regional intergovernmental organizations (RIGOs) may strengthen the position of regional hegemons.

- Diversity in the objectives and mandate of RIGOs. **While some organizations are explicitly geared towards peace and security issues, others are oriented more towards economic integration.**

- **Cooperation between the UN and RIGOs on the one hand and CSOs on the other, is hampered by a number of obstacles.** First, CSOs are not always granted access to policy meetings dealing with peace and security issues within RIGOs or the UN. For CSOs to gain accreditation to a regional organization, for example, they are often required to be accredited with their own country government. Where this government is under the sway of an authoritarian regime this can be problematic. Second, CSOs do not always have the resources to establish the liaison offices at New York and Geneva that are so crucial for establishing the personal collaborative contacts with state officials and policy makers at the UN.

3. Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organizations has yet to reach its full potential. *How should the UN engage with regional organizations such as the OAS and others in the Americas and to strengthen cooperation and coordination in the field? What set of tools and normative and institutional reforms*

might be necessary to improve governance in the region? Taking into account what has already been adopted, which of these reforms, or any others, seem to be at the optimum intersection of both being useful/essential and feasible?

In the lead up to the UN's 75th anniversary, and as one of the priority areas for reform as outlined by the UN Secretary-General, **the UN must undertake efforts to strengthen further direct cooperation with regional organizations,** continue to build on lessons learned and good practices, discuss challenges, and build stronger cooperation networks in light of the social, economic, and political challenges faced by the Americas region. Policy dialogues are clearly useful and needed, but mechanisms for coordination on the ground are very important too.

The [Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD)](#), **a platform for dialogue on strengthening democracy worldwide initiated by International IDEA in 2010, is the only platform worldwide that gathers eight of the main regional organizations,** including the African Union, the Association for Southeast Asian States, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the OAS, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Pacific Islands Forum, and global organizations, including the United Nations, the Community of Democracies, the International Development Law Organizations, and the Interparliamentary Union.

This platform was created to convene, at the political and technical level, representatives from these organizations to discuss key issues related to democracy (such as gender equality, conflict prevention, and sustainable development), and **to enable collaboration and the identification of synergies that would facilitate coordination across the global and regional contexts.** Cases like Nicaragua and Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia and Ecuador, are evidence of the challenges the OAS has faced in safeguarding democracy in the western hemisphere. The IRDD can help to detect these threats and to provide strategies and early recommendations for strengthening, protecting, and restoring democratic systems. However, the platform requires more resources to serve as an enhanced mechanism for continuous engagement between the UN and regional organizations, as well as with other key stakeholders (*see the [IRDD Knowledge production in collaboration with Global and Regional Organizations](#)*).

On matters of peace and security, participants argued that, as a general rule, the most tactical and practical mediation and peacemaking roles should be assigned to those closer to the problem. The existence of different capacities to work in conflict prevention and peacebuilding are not always common knowledge within RIGOs or the UN at the regional level. The same can be said of CSOs, which are not always aware of the mandates, capacities, and roles of RIGOs or the UN regional offices. The creation of greater synergies and institutional channels of cooperation between RIGOs, the UN, and CSOs would be an important contribution to the global and regional peace and security architecture. International organizations could provide operational support and ensure that strategic international efforts are aligned to regional and local initiatives. **The role of regional organizations mediation, conflict prevention and resolution could be strengthened by creating a regular global inter-regional dialogue bringing together the UN, regional organizations, and civil society**. This would contribute to exchange experiences, develop trust, and exploit the comparative advantages of these actors to address today's complex security challenges.

4. *What pathways for advancing these reforms exist? How can actors (global, governmental, civil society, etc.) interested in reform support forward motion in the face of a global community with an increasing number of actors skeptical of global institutions? How can proactive actors be identified and supported? What can donors and other supporting member states do to promote greater synergy between the work of regional organizations and the UN system as a whole?*

When it comes to global and regional actors, as well as umbrella organizations for civil society engagement at the global level, a certain level of institutionalization is necessary for success. **Participants also articulated the need to identify conveners trusted by both global and regional actors, and local stakeholders too, to guarantee implementation and the achievement of goals at all levels of governance.** Such actors, including CSOs, think tanks, universities and research centers, among others, can provide valuable input to enhance and enable the sustainability of programs and policies (see example in Box 1). Particularly, relationships with two categories of actors should be improved: civil society organizations and donors.

Box 1: A Multistakeholder Partnership for Advancing SDG 16

In 2016, given the centrality of Goal 16 of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to promoting more inclusive governance underpinned by the rule of law, the Community of Democracies partnered with the United Nations Development Program to create a set of Voluntary Global Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16. The indicators were made available to all countries as a voluntary, non-prescriptive tool to use in national level monitoring, to assist states in adapting the official global indicators to their respective national level contexts.

To develop the indicators, the CoD convened a Global Group of Experts, which carried out several discussions/ workshops, determining the most comprehensive set of indicators for Goal 16. The work conducted to develop the supplemental indicators was a good example of enhanced cooperation to advance sustainable development between an intergovernmental body, development agencies, global civil society, and academia. Their expertise in matters of democracy assessment proved to be complimentary.

Firstly, **the relationship between CSOs and RIGOs must be built and enhanced through regular interactions.** It cannot be suddenly activated when a crisis emerges, but rather, it needs to be developed and consolidated before the escalation of conflicts. In this sense, the establishment of spaces that favor regular interaction, consultation, and joint analysis between CSOs and RIGOs must be encouraged and supported.

One of the main obstacles to build this relationship is the issue of trust. While it is difficult to argue against collaboration with civil society, the first step to articulate this cooperation is to acknowledge past tensions and problems. The relationship between government actors (including RIGOs) and CSOs has not always been easy. In fact, it often is characterized by mutual suspicion. In this sense, the development of cooperation mechanisms cannot start from a blank sheet but rather from an acknowledgement of these difficulties.

The first contacts and engagements between these actors should be seen more as confidence building opportunities than as output oriented working meetings.

Secondly, global and regional organizations are increasingly competing against one another to secure financial sustainability and increase their capacity to operate. **Regional and sub-regional organizations are, in effect, competing with UN agencies for the same**

donors and funds, which creates breaks in trust and systemic failures in collaboration. Instead, they should specialize, and focus on specific niches in which each organization has proven to excel. International and regional organizations tend to focus on each and every possible global issue. Oftentimes, their overlapping mandates and programming translates into duplication, poor performance, and declining trust at national and local levels.

In this sense, a new platform is needed to open a conversation on the identification of complementarities and niches, and to allow for strategic alignment of actions. **This could include a coordination effort where all the main donors are present and agreement can be reached on the importance of direct awards and grant allocation based on due diligence and performance.** Further, innovative ways are needed to allocate donor funds to organizations (global, regional and national) with the right expertise and capacity. This would enable collaboration and coordination, instead of continuous competition that weakens the capacity of the global governance system to address transnational challenges.

Segment #2: Peacebuilding in the Americas: Strategic Operationalization of Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level

Moderators: Marina Kumskova, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and Daria Ivleva, adelphi

Overview

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace is an evolutionary development that builds upon decades of progress in the understanding of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. In the adoption of the 2016 dual resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/RES/70/262; S/RES/2282), UN Member States collectively expressed that peacebuilding must no longer be understood as solely a post-conflict enterprise, but rather as a central tenet for international peace and security throughout the conflict continuum. Additionally, they noted that peacebuilding requires building strong and operational partnerships to address regional and cross-regional challenges and risks.

The Americas are facing multiple social, economic, and environmental drivers of conflict and security challenges linked to corruption, trafficking, illicit flows of goods, gang violence, increasing land and resource tensions, and gender-based violence. The impacts of climate change only compound and increase these risks, particularly in fragile contexts, by putting additional pressure on government institutions and natural resources. These sources of instability require mobilization of all peacebuilding actors in the region, including Member States, regional organizations, the UN and other multilateral partners, as well as local peacebuilders and civil society to deliver holistic and coordinated approaches at the regional level.

Summary of discussion

1. *What are the most important, recent trends and changes in the conflict landscape?*
2. *What role does climate change play in exacerbating existing or creating new security risks?*

Among the major multidimensional challenges and risks in the Americas are:

- **Inequality & Political Polarization**

Participants highlighted historical inequalities that exist throughout the region and continue to inhibit peacebuilding and sustaining peace. **Lack of educational or economic opportunities, poor infrastructure, and other social, economic, and political elements continue to hinder progress in the region.** Participants noted that recent mass demonstrations in several states signal the need to mobilize action towards addressing high levels of inequality and political polarization within countries and the region as a whole. Examples included countries such as Nicaragua, Chile, and Bolivia, where persistent social inequalities and repression of civil society have sparked civil unrest.

Lack of inclusion, including in political life, coupled with the closures of civic space and increased economic inequalities in many countries, reduces trust in political institutions and affects social cohesion. Those who participated in the discussion feared that without coordinated efforts to promote political and social cohesion there could be serious backsliding and the return of authoritarian governance in many currently unstable democratic systems. **In order for peacebuilding and sustaining peace to succeed, Member States within the region must respect the rule of law, promote accountable and transparent political institutions, and adhere to fundamental principles of international law to ensure engaged and cohesive societies where an open and secure environment is safeguarded for all.**

- **Migration**

Cross-border instability and violence have created an additional source of insecurity — mass migration. Participants referenced the protracted conflict in Venezuela as an example. The escalating political, economic, and social crisis connected to the inability of the government to pursue a democratic form of governance also endangers peace regionally. More than four million Venezuelans (14 percent of the country's population) have left the country since 2014, most of them relocating within the region in neighboring countries like Colombia, Peru, or Ecuador. For example, in Colombia, mass migration from Venezuela creates additional pressure on the country at a time when they also experience a fragile peace process after a decades-long conflict. **Therefore, peacebuilding efforts in the Americas require a holistic analysis that factors in the regional dimension of mass migration in all peacebuilding efforts for holistic and coherent action.**

- **Climate Change and Environmental Instability**

Participants noted the potential of climate and environmental instability to compound the existing social, economic, and political issues in the region, particularly by destabilizing government institutions and exacerbating the situation in fragile contexts. The region is experiencing the impact of climate change, including the decrease of fertile land, reduction of rainfall, loss of biodiversity, and increase of vector-borne diseases. The current climate trends already endanger livelihoods by affecting food production, fishing stocks in coastal areas, and access to safe drinking water, especially for vulnerable and marginalized populations. **Both insecurity and deterioration of livelihoods due to environmental and climatic changes contribute to migration. People leave their homes in search of better opportunities, often additionally triggered by conflict-related shocks, moving from rural to urban areas and across national borders.** Climate security risks are especially pronounced in fragile contexts, such as Colombia, where the recurrence of violence can be influenced by the disputes over land (rights) and access to hydrological resources and rainforests.

The heavy reliance of regional economies on extractive industries makes addressing these risks even more challenging. Participants highlighted that poor and vulnerable people, whose livelihoods often directly depend on natural resources, are only one societal group that could be involved in environmental conflict. Of growing concerns are also transnational criminal networks throughout the region that increasingly use profits from natural resource exploitation to finance their operations, including through illegal mining and deforestation. Taken together, extractive industries, illicit networks, and growing insecurities intensify and aggravate the current economic and social pressures placed on the region's citizens. Marshalling appropriate response to these threats is too big for any one nation to take on alone. The region requires multilateral partners to

ensure that global actions and initiatives improve local resilience to climate risks, to explore and adapt alternative sources of energy, and to promote transition strategies to diversify the region's economies away from the dominance of extractive industries. **Addressing climate change and natural resource pressures is increasingly recognized as an important factor to sustain peace and should play a role across all efforts to tackle conflict in the Americas.**

- **Emergency Response: COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic played a prominent role in the discussion. Participants agreed that **the COVID-19 response requires conflict analysis to support peacebuilding and sustaining peace effectively in the region.** Participants pointed to some positive country level responses, such as Brazil's decision to include in its fiscal response a temporary income support for vulnerable households, expanding the Bolsa Familia program, and providing cash transfers to informal and unemployed workers.

At the same time, however, participants also warned against the many ways in which the virus can amplify existing structural inequalities and root causes of violence, further deteriorating social cohesion and spearheading socio-political instability, such as restrictions to civil liberties and the freedom of movement, as well as militarized responses to the pandemic (aka "war on the virus"). Many expressed concerns that such approaches can further legitimize anti-democratic policies and lay the groundwork for repressive regimes in a post-COVID-19 world. **Therefore, strengthening peacebuilding, human security, and regional cooperation, and creating innovative, responsive, inclusive, and multilateral conflict prevention strategies are more essential than ever. In a post-COVID world, maintaining and expanding social services to challenge inequalities will be key to ensuring systematic transformation and sustaining peace in the region over the long-term.**

3. *Who are the current key actors in peacebuilding in the region, and what actors should be involved more? What role does the UN play?*

Although the risk of open conflict in the region is far from non-existent, various peacebuilding and conflict prevention arrangements have proven to be highly successful in the prevention and peaceful resolution of violent conflict. **Each country in the Americas is unique in the way it approaches peacebuilding, and, as such, contributes to the creation of a very dynamic and complex peacebuilding architecture in the region.** All of the segments of the regional peacebuilding architecture in the Americas are essential to ensure "operational multilateralism" and to avoid fragmentation and overlap for peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Some of the key peacebuilding actors in the region include:

- **Local Peacebuilders**

Local peacebuilding networks play a unique role by contributing to the articulation of a people-centered perspective that is often missing in state-centric security analysis, particularly when it comes to the impact of climate change on communities. This perspective includes important expertise, grassroots knowledge, and localized contexts and representation that together play a key role in the analysis of conflict dynamics, power relations, actors, and enabling early warning and response. When local civil society actors are provided the appropriate platforms, their voices

can help shape meaningful policy decisions. **Governments could remain proactive by seeking out these actors and providing spaces which allow for the exchange of valuable information, analysis, and policy recommendations.**

- **Regional Organizations**

Regional organizations also play a critical role in advancing peacebuilding and sustaining peace at the regional level. First, participants specifically noted the current efforts of the OAS, through its Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy (SSD), to strengthen democracy by managing successful special country-focused missions, with the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia and the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras as examples. These OAS missions promote dialogue, engage in mediation efforts, and facilitate compromise amongst political stakeholders. Second, the OAS supports capacity building of Member States regarding national institutional and legal frameworks that are fundamental to promoting democratic values, human rights, and a more sustainable, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Participants also highlighted the proliferation of regional organizations in the Americas and the "demonization" of some of them by their own Member States. This has led to the phenomenon of "forum shopping," where governments invest in their preferred regional organizations depending on where they see their interests as best served. This undermines the perception of legitimacy of each organization and limits opportunities for proper resourcing of effective action and collaboration among international organizations. **There should be a clear allocation of roles and leadership for peacebuilding and sustaining peace at the regional level in the Americas. Regional organizations, in particular, should promote sustainable peace at the country level by continuing to integrate peacebuilding and sustaining peace tools and actions into their policies and priorities, while sharing good practices and building their capacities for improved operationalization.**

- **Multi-Stakeholder Engagements**

The peacebuilding architecture in the Americas is further supported by multilateral arrangements such as the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy presented in Segment #1. Another good practice example is the Colombian peace process, which was based on a unified response from the international community (the UN, EU, OAS, and donor countries) to address the country's long-standing conflict, while further promoting the links between sustainable peace and development. **Moving forward, building on these examples of collaboration, multi-stakeholder partnerships at the regional level could be better-positioned to support earlier-warning response mechanisms and coordinated strategies for sustaining peace across the Americas.**

- **The Role of the United Nations**

The UN plays an important role in facilitating peacebuilding and sustaining peace at the regional level. **Participants acknowledged the recent reforms in the UN peace and security pillar, with increased convening power and financial capacities, as positive steps towards increasing and capitalizing on the role of the UN at the regional level.**

Starting in 2019, the UN Department of Peacebuilding and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), together with the OAS Political Secretariat, re-established "desk-to-desk dialogues" to address a wide range of topics, such as good governance, electoral reforms, civic engagement, the challenges confronting Colombia's peace processes, and the importance of international cooperation. The work of the UN Country Team in Colombia was consistently raised as a positive model of linking peacebuilding and development through the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, where around half of the UN system's resources are focused on the country's peacebuilding and transformation of risks and conflict pillar.

Moreover, the Regional Office of the UN Development Programme also studies the perceptions of democracy in the region, in order to identify some economic and social triggers of instability and to build development-peacebuilding linkages in analysis for prevention. Finally, participants reported that the UN Peacebuilding Fund has invested millions in the region over the last decade, in countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, and Guatemala, investing heavily in support for local action on sustainable development. Participants further noted the UN's active engagement in the region is a critical force to enable partnerships and facilitate joint analysis and action, including when it comes to the implementation of the global frameworks on climate change that are fairly under-developed in the region. **While UN capacities can vary greatly from context to context throughout the region, participants agreed that the UN should prioritize strengthening direct cooperation among and capacity-building for peacebuilding stakeholders at the regional level, including in support of the timely implementation of relevant international policy frameworks.**

4. *What are the key recommendations on strengthening regional peacebuilding architecture?*

A strong regional peacebuilding architecture (with an operational presence on the ground) in the Americas requires:

- **Building national capacities for democracy and good governance:**

Many root causes of instability in the region are based on historical inequalities, including in education, access to public institutions, and the distribution of land. Peacebuilding actors in the region, therefore, must continue to operationalize the basic principles of democracy and good governance, including through building capacities to localize and implement global agendas. **It was recommended the UN lead the coordination of efforts that enable capacity-building at the national level, including those aimed at curbing corruption, ensuring a more balanced distribution of resources, and improving the rule of law.** An emerging new opportunity to spearhead change involves capitalizing on economic and social reforms adopted by national governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring the demilitarization of communities and respect for human rights.

- **Ensuring a people-centered approach to peacebuilding:**

A people-centered approach to peacebuilding is critical for sustainable peace in its recognition of the social, economic, and political grievances that are often the root causes of conflict and violence. It recognizes the security needs of people and communities, as opposed to the security of states. **Such an approach helps, for example, to identify the linkages between climate change and migration in the region and promote inclusion of these issues in**

peace and security programming. All actors in the region must strengthen capacities for a people-centered approach to peacebuilding, to better articulate the social, economic, and political root causes of instability, and to support relevant actors in advancing social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

- **Ensuring sustainable and adequate financing for peacebuilding:**

Effective financing for peacebuilding in the region requires coherence and broadening financial partnerships. **Participants emphasized the need for coherence in financing, where funding needs to be coordinated to ensure that different streams or pillars of work can effectively contribute to the common goal of sustaining peace in the region.** This will help avoid situations where, for example, the need for immediate response to the pandemic interrupts funding for peacebuilding, thereby halting many activities that are also essential to peace and wellbeing. Dialogues with the donor community need to be targeted at diversifying and engaging new funders, including from the private sector.

- **Ensuring policy coherence:**

Local networks, regional and sub-regional organizations, and Member States all play vital and varied roles at the regional level. **A more coordinated partnership framework will systematize and organize experiences and diverse cooperation with different actors in order to prevent duplication, build stronger synergies, allow for a more effective and targeted use of financial resources.** In general, participants suggested that the UN can assume this coordinating role to ensure that global frameworks on climate change, for example, are effectively implemented through existing mechanisms to support peacebuilding activities in the region, including those focused on the re-distribution of land, sustainable production, and preservation of natural resources.

- **Strengthening local ownership:**

Increasing the capacities and opportunities of local peacebuilders — including women and youth, academia, the private sector, and indigenous populations — to inform and meaningfully engage in peacebuilding at the regional level are important for advancing action toward a more durable and just peace. **Within the Americas, this means redesigning strategies to overcome some of the existing power imbalances in decision-making.** The relationship between local peacebuilders and governmental and inter-governmental partners must be built and nurtured through regular interactions, consultations and joint analysis, so that when faced with a climate or public health crisis, partnerships with local peacebuilders are easily activated.

- **Monitoring progress on peacebuilding and sustaining peace:**

There must be adequate frameworks or mechanisms in place to assess the implementation of global policies at the regional level, and of regional policies at the national level, including around climate change, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. **This will support greater understanding of the real and potential drivers of instability, a better assessment of progress within the region, and strategic thinking on next steps and relevant priorities.**

Segment #3: Strengthening Inclusive & Sustainable Development and Climate Governance in the Americas

Moderators: Richard Ponzio, Senior Fellow and Director, the Stimson Center's Just Security 2020 program, and Magnus Jiborn, Global Challenges Foundation

Overview

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was, without doubt, one of the greatest triumphs of multilateralism in recent years, where UN Member States agreed on a common, comprehensive blueprint for eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequality, and protecting the climate of a rapidly globalizing world. Today, climate change presents the single biggest threat to sustainable development everywhere and its negative impacts disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable. Latin America remains one of the most uneven regions with regard to economic potential and distribution of wealth, with significant populations working in the informal economy. At the same time, the region relies heavily on extractive industries, compounding efforts to respond proactively to the climate crisis. As a result, the region lags badly in the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 13, namely, urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Current global economic governance capacity for dealing with the socio-economic impacts of stressors like COVID-19 is a relatively weak, decades-old structure with overlapping sets of rules and, not least, a demonstrated inability to address economic inequalities and perceived inequities. Notwithstanding recent trade-related disputes, the structure of today's global economy is characterized largely by the increasing openness and integration of markets and transnational flows of trade, capital, and labor (economic globalization), amplified by advances in communications and information technologies, including artificial intelligence. These advances create new opportunities but also new risks for global security and justice. The rules governing this sprawling economic architecture emerge from a hodgepodge of institutions, both formal and informal, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and other multilateral development banks, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Financial Stability Board established by the G20 in 2009, and G20 members. The architecture also includes important regional bodies, which in the Americas include, for example, the Inter-American Development Bank, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the OAS.

As the COVID-19 pandemic takes its toll, it will likely deepen longstanding economic problems and inequities, including those already being made worse by climate change. The region, therefore, must begin to focus on both mitigation and adaptation, while considering the possible "opportunities" to rethink and transform its governance and development models in the face of historic inequalities and contemporary crises. As the pandemic has shown, rapid transformational change is possible to deliver more sustainable peace and development to individuals, as well as the planet. If the region is to experience sustainable development, all actors within society must be engaged and play a role in promoting economic prosperity and growth, affording protection to both humanity and nature.

Summary of discussion

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a deep global economic crisis, and led to unprecedented governmental emergency packages to save jobs and businesses. The level of government intervention in the economy is likely to be substantial for a long time after the crisis. What can be done to ensure that economic subsidies are not used to keep outdated fossil industries alive, and instead facilitate the necessary transition to a sustainable economic order?

With the ongoing global pandemic crisis, participants noted how tightly interlinked the different risks and challenges facing humanity are. The pandemic is not only a serious health hazard, but has triggered an immense breakdown in the global economy, a substantial loss of jobs, and a sudden loss of the means of subsistence to many of the most vulnerable groups within the Americas region and across the globe. **As such, it could roll back years of efforts towards sustainable development and poverty alleviation, and provide excuses for increased authoritarianism and nationalism, damaging institutional support to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.**

Participants highlighted the increasingly important role of local governments and municipalities in delivering on sustainable development objectives. Local governments around the Americas are better positioned to launch policies and good practices, where federal leaders remain reactive and focused on defense and security. Priorities need to shift from defense to health and development, and participants increasingly questioned the utility and justification of large defense budgets of nations, such as the United States. **They further underscored the need to reframe security through the prism of public health and climate sensitivity.**

Specifically, Brazil was offered as an example of a powerful economic player within the region, but whose federal institutions are lacking when it comes to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals or a more sustainable economic policy. **In Brazil, which possesses roughly 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest and includes many indigenous and marginalized populations, local municipalities and nationwide networks of cities are attempting to fill the development gap and promote more sustainable long-term policy.** However, there are some positive international examples that Brazil's federal institutions can build upon. For example, the economic healthcare emergency packages that governments around the world are now launching could be designed to facilitate a transition to a new sustainable economic order, rather than propping up the old, fossil-based economy.

Participants also felt that COVID-19 demonstrates the true governance gaps in both international and domestic systems, which lack appropriate means to tackle such globe-spanning risks through joint and coordinated action. Thus, the pandemic may open a window of opportunity for improving global collaboration and empowering local governments.

As developed countries respond with huge domestic economic rescue and reconstruction packages, most low- and middle-income countries will require additional and substantial external economic support. In the coming months, key international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank will be called upon to propose cohesive and relevant economic responses to the

COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrates the need for global and regional coordination and solidarity. One positive example of current multilateral efforts within the region was found in the decisions of Colombia and Venezuela to cooperate with the Organización Panamericana de la Salud (PAHO) in their national responses to COVID-19.

But in general, the current situation requires new and better methods of working together, and signals the need for a comprehensive proposal or a new global governance initiative that includes redressing global inequality, green economic recovery plans, new levels of environmental protection, and appropriate tools to collaborate, manage, coordinate, and monitor the achievement of the seventeen, inter-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Specifically, participants noted that the pandemic offers new opportunities to better grapple with climate change. **As major governmental emergency packages are rolled out to save jobs and businesses, participants commented on the possible opportunity states have to tie assistance to pledges from big corporations and companies to move away from extractive ventures and toward green products and renewable forms of energy.** Another suggestion was to nationalize oil companies. At this time, the current global context is taking its toll on many countries' fossil fuel industries, making them much less expensive to purchase and take under public ownership. Therefore, governments may consider these new possibilities, among other options, in support of efforts to transition to a net-zero-emissions economy.

Local and regional civil society organizations were also cited as essential partners in creating appropriately informed and localized policy, as well as facilitating dialogue. High levels of engagement and collaboration with indigenous populations, land defenders, human rights activists, peacebuilders, civil society leaders, academia/universities, religious organizations, trade unions, and the private sector can have a critical impact on forging a sustainable environment and development in the region.

Overall, innovative and transformative change can benefit from a strong, sustainable, and inclusive regional approach to development in the Americas, and the COVID-19 pandemic offers a critical opportunity to reflect on some of the practices that can be institutionalized for better development results that are also environmentally sustainable. **The need for global, regional, and national coordination—that is multilateral in nature and inclusive to all civil society organizations, local communities, and municipalities—is more important than ever in the region, as well as globally.** Better-coordinated policies and actions can more effectively and rapidly address changing global health, environmental, and economic threats, while still facilitating economic development.

2. *To limit average global temperature increase to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, global emissions of greenhouse gases must be cut by half every ten years, starting today. The discourse on how to achieve this has so far mainly focused on cutting emissions from existing sources. At the same time, to achieve other sustainable development goals, the economies of many developing countries must have room to grow rapidly, which implies increased energy demand. How can development efforts and climate mitigation efforts be better aligned to ensure that economic development does not lead to developing countries being locked into dependence of fossil fuels? What opportunities for rapid*

growth of fossil free solutions exist in Latin America, and how can international institutions support scaling-up those solutions?

While the pandemic is having devastating effects, humanity can take advantage of opportunities for climate action offered by the crisis, including through a focus on next-generation technologies, logistics, and capacity-building. Participants stressed that the window of opportunity we have for a timely and adequate climate action is extremely short, and how, collectively, the world (both developed and developing countries) is far from meeting the below 2 degrees Celsius target, as per the Paris Climate Accord. Alarmingly, recent science estimates indicate that, in fact, a 2 degrees Celsius global temperature rise is much more than the planet can handle, resulting in severe, irreversible environmental consequences.

As climate related issues were discussed, participants were also aware that they do not occur in a vacuum, and connections were made between the environment, pollution, health, and the COVID-19 response. **As the pandemic brings health-related issues to the fore, increased awareness of the relationships between air pollution, respiratory diseases, the private transportation industry, and consumption were highlighted.** As the world responds to the virus with physical distancing and a reduction in mobility, the moment may be ripe for cleaner forms of transportation and production, with an emphasis on public transportation that reduces air pollution and carbon emissions while benefiting public health.

With the above backdrop, participants reflected on **how development and climate mitigation efforts may be better informed and aligned to ensure that developing countries within the region do not become locked into fossil fuel dependence** for their sustainable economic growth. Many participants agreed that there are national, sub-regional, regional, and global opportunities and benefits for the Americas to lead on various kinds of climate action.

First, participants expressed the need to move past a "mitigation-centric mindset" throughout the region. Instead, increasing attention must be given to adapting to climate-induced change to seriously address the significant climate-related loss and damage that is already having a significant impact in many countries. **One way to move forward is to seek opportunities to simultaneously advance adaptation and mitigation, as well as climate-related disaster risk reduction.** Participants cited El Salvador framing its REDD+ strategy with adaptation as an entry point, thus making it one of the leading strategies taking an adaptation-based mitigation approach. The strategy focuses on the restoration of degraded agricultural landscapes for food, water, and livelihood security, as well as disaster risk reduction, while enhancing carbon sinks by expanding permanent vegetation cover and the adoption of practices that increase soil organic matter.

Second, participants underscored the immense renewable energy potential in the region. Further tapping into the region's vast natural resources in a renewable way, playing to the strengths of each country's geographical location and topography, and securing investment in diversified technologies connected to solar, wind, or green hydrogen energy in the Americas can push sustainable development and responsible energy consumption forward. **New viable, green technologies must be universalized and scaled up as quickly as possible, especially in developing countries that may need additional international support.** Participants articulated that appropriate mechanisms to share these new technologies and facilitate the transfer of technical and policy support to particular governments and economies are crucial.

Moreover, various methods must be systematically explored at the global level, providing another opportunity for multilateral exchange and public-private partnerships.

Finally, participants emphasized **the role that international institutions can play in supporting or scaling-up opportunities for advancing sustainable development across the region.**

On the policy side, **multilateral approaches were also called upon to develop stronger international and legal frameworks to hold accountable those countries and transnational corporations failing to meet their climate action commitments, in line with international best practice.** Although the scheduled UNFCCC COP 26 had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for the next COP, in the context of COVID-19 recovery, may present states within the region an opportunity to reshape their economies in a more green, clean, just, equitable, and resilient way.

Financially speaking, international financial institutions (IFIs) can also play a role in ensuring that **developing countries in The Americas do not become locked into dependence on fossil fuel, by linking some of their emergency relief and assistance loans and grants to those governments and institutions who pledge to transition from extractive industries to more sustainable forms of energy.** Global funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), could consider reallocating resources and capacities to explore new working methods, as part of their objectives to drive a paradigm shift in the global response to climate change. However, participants also brought attention to the fact that project development under the GCF guidelines can be extremely cumbersome and the amounts committed on a grant basis per project in most cases are too small to have a significant impact on climate action. While the GCF recently announced its commitment "to ensuring that the world that emerges from the pandemic is one that is more aligned on a climate smart path," it needs to mobilize significantly more resources and become more agile in its operating procedures.

The regional rules governing the regional economic architecture in the Americas come from a hodgepodge of institutions, including the IMF, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization (WTO) and G20. They also engage important regional bodies, which in the Americas Region includes, for example, the Inter-American Development Bank, CLAC, and the OAS. **This, however, might be a good time to contemplate new approaches to addressing economic inequality, which is so pernicious across The Americas and directly affects regional stability and health.**

In sum, **there are opportunities to advance transformational change towards global economic growth consistent with global environmental principles.** However, it requires thinking "outside the box," and rethinking national and multilateral governance to be better equipped to address today's enormous environmental and development challenges.

3. *To what degree is the current level of institutional coordination between the IFIs, UN, WTO, and G20 — alongside regional bodies in the Americas Region (e.g., IADB) — sufficient or insufficient to (1) avert or respond to future cross-border economic shocks on the scale of the 2008-9 global financial crisis or what we're currently witnessing due to the COVID-19 crisis, and (2) to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?*

Participants noted that often, **coordination efforts between international institutions, such as the IFIs, the UN, and the WTO, are generally based on thematic or specific project-based initiatives**. These initiatives support multilateral approaches in the region by mobilizing available resources to support those countries most in need. Some examples shared were the facilitation and effective integration of developing countries in the region into the global economy through the [Aid for Trade Initiative](#), which included the WTO, OECD, and regional organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and ECLAC, as well as the past [WTO-IADB-ITC joint program](#) to help Latin American countries participate more fully in the multilateral trading system, through capacity-building and technical assistance.

While these initiatives create substantial benefits, they often vary in effectiveness and end as finances dwindle. Since 2015 and the launch of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), these programs have been proven inadequate in advancing the SDGs. While certain individual countries have achieved some progress in implementation, regional frameworks and cooperation are lacking. Implementation challenges became even more visible in the wake of COVID-19. **Regional institutional coordination is ill-equipped for building capacities to overcome the severe economic fallout from the pandemic**. [Its far-reaching impact already includes](#) a reduction in international trade, falling commodity prices, lower demand for tourism services, and a drop in remittances sent home from workers abroad, each creating serious consequences across Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to a recent ECLAC report, "[Measuring the impact of COVID-19 with a view to reactivation,](#)" the effects of the virus are expected to cause the biggest recession the region has suffered in almost 100 years. **While individual countries are implementing important measures, the support of multilateral financial partners is essential in mitigating some of the medium- and longer-term effects.** In this regard, leaders of the G20 could alleviate some of the financial blowback by making loans available at favorable interest rates. The IFIs also have a role to play in providing flexible recovery support and additional debt servicing relief or forgiveness.

As participants emphasized, today's unprecedented times call for exceptional multilateral and regional coordination to confront this crisis and to create real and sustainable progress. **Sufficient institutional coordination requires going beyond *ad-hoc* engagements and project-based financial capacities towards the institutionalized regional arrangements that are needed to support sustained development and prevention efforts in the region.**

4. *What practical, near-term global and regional governance reform measures (including the introduction of institutional innovations or new tools/mechanisms) can help to reduce perceived inequities, mitigate global catastrophic risks, and grapple with systemic/structural problems in the Americas and the wider global economy?*

The current state of economic governance for dealing with the socio-economic fallout from COVID-19 is insufficient. Therefore, **innovative and responsive reform measures — and the use of new tools and mechanisms as well as better coordination around existing tools to reduce inequities and mitigate global risks — are urgently required.**

The first action participants highlighted is the need for stronger assessment mechanisms that identify economic sectors and parts of society most in need of support at the national level. This assessment should then be reflected at the regional level, where additional and integral financial, technical, and human resource support can be mobilized. **In short, regional responses and integration may be the best option for confronting the challenges that nations are facing separately across the Americas.** To effectively address the crisis, the region's countries cannot continue operate in an isolated and protectionist matter.

This regional coordination mechanism could be launched by a Bretton Woods-like conference, where an inclusive range of actors come together to conduct joint assessments, identify those best positioned to respond to various root causes of instability and risks, mobilize joint action, and increase communication between the key stakeholders. **Participants also emphasized that countries in the region need more than ever to increase communication, coordination, and cooperation, at the regional level.** This would enable adequate frameworks and mechanisms to assess the implementation of global policies at the regional level, strengthen peacebuilding, human security, and regional cooperation, and promote innovative, responsive, inclusive, and multilateral conflict prevention strategies.

Segment #4: Promoting Human Rights, Justice, and Humanitarian Action

Facilitators: Adriana Abdenur, Senior Fellow at the Igarape Institute, and Sara Gill, UN75 International Coordinator, Together First, United Nations Association-UK

Overview

The UN system has long been present in Latin America and the Caribbean, not only through its programs, funds, and agencies, but also through regional organizations such as the OAS, ECLAC, the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS), and regional centers of excellence. In turn, states in the region have been influential within the UN since its founding, whether individually or through collective action.

With relation to human rights, IAHRS has become an innovative regional human rights system, tackling emerging challenges that range from environmental rights to forced disappearances. However, despite its longstanding presence, IAHRS (founded in 1959), alongside the UN system, has also faced challenges and even pushback in the region, where all countries but Haiti are middle income, as defined by the World Bank, and thus are less eligible for many kinds of critical international assistance.

The UN has also come under attack from nationalist populist politicians. In addition, with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, longstanding human rights issues are being magnified through unequal access to institutions and resources, including adequate health care and food. Homeless individuals, refugees, and others living below the poverty line are increasingly unable to protect themselves from the pandemic.

Summary of discussion

1. *What are the main challenges faced by the region in relation to human rights? How is the global pandemic exacerbating these challenges, and what mechanisms are needed for the UN to strengthen its presence in the region through collaboration with IAHRS?*

If civil society is rendered disabled or ill-prepared to respond to human rights issues that arise because of the pandemic and poor government performance, authoritarian policies and actions could increase. Across the region, there has been a steady decline in human rights protection the past few years. **As such, multilateral organizations are important because they provide critical support to civil society and pressure governments constructively to fulfill their obligations to their citizens.** Members of NGOs, human rights defenders, and disadvantaged groups are at great risk across the region. There is an existing human rights architecture, but it is not implemented properly. Civil rights have been attacked and severely reduced in many countries, such as Venezuela. A major weakness in the region's human rights protections systems is compliance and enforceability at the national level. Human rights institutions also lack capacity due to limited resources. Access to information and protection mechanisms is also lacking, especially for disadvantaged groups.

Many countries are failing to consider seriously a "before" and "after" with the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of national agenda setting. In addition, influence, political mobilization, and funding (from both domestic and international sources) for national recovery efforts will be informed by the severity of the economic effects from the pandemic. The Americas region will have to deal as well with the social consequences from COVID-19. Extreme poverty and inequality are anticipated to intensify. Unequal access to resources will continue the vicious cycle of poverty, which may also contribute to violence. **There is also a nested crisis within the COVID-19 crisis:** *the displacement of people.* The OAS is monitoring three major migratory systems within the Americas, each are typically caused or exacerbated by instability and violence, and now all three systems are made worse by the pandemic.

The UN and other multilateral organizations are critical for the monitoring and reporting of sensitive human rights-related information, as well as its dissemination to international mass media. This process of "naming and shaming" is highly effective at pressuring governments and empowering marginalized groups, including youth, women, minorities, and those living in extreme poverty.

2. *How can the UN work better with civil society and the private sector to defend and uphold human rights in the region? Are there any global governance reform processes to address regional gaps in human rights?*

The UN should initiate a series of public awareness-raising workshops to demonstrate that human rights development is beneficial to the countries and peoples of the region, because it improves quality of life, democratic practice, and reputations of governments and their leaders. Importantly, human rights protection is good for business, increasing business opportunities and exports. The Americas region should act together to reduce human rights violations and inequality. Justice reforms should be made more transparent. Speed and efficiency should be prioritized to take advantage of innovative solutions and incorporate knowledge from academia, think thanks, and local communities.

The UN should work to strengthen partnerships, align strategies, and increase coordination of resources with regional human rights institutions across the Americas. New collaborative mechanisms for the effective exchange of information and best practices are also needed to improve the delivery of human rights. The UN also plays a key role in strengthening peoples' understanding and promoting of democracy as an effective governance system. **The creation of a streamlined UN early warning mechanism (including specific preventative measures) that enables the detection of threats to human rights defenders can help increase institutional capacities to safeguard human rights protection systems.** The UN further needs to promote reviews of national legal frameworks, and to encourage constitutional reforms that privilege stricter human rights protections mechanisms, especially in support of human right defenders. This should be done in close collaboration with civil society and private companies to ensure a more democratic approach that accommodates citizen's needs. The UN should also encourage the establishment of a new International Commission Against Corruption, to design innovative measures and global and regional institutional reforms to better address the underlying causes and consequences of endemic corruption found in many countries today, as another major threat to safeguarding human rights worldwide.

Other important contributions from participants tackled the close, growing interplay of climate change, conflict, and human rights systems across the Americas. As national environmental, development, and political agendas in the region become increasingly intertwined, it is important to consider the causal impacts of climate change on migration, violence, the dispensation of justice by state courts, access to information, and the exacerbation of poverty.

List of Participants

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