



How to Strengthen Prevention in *Pre-War* Situations

Invitation for further discourse and dialogues about peacebuilding and prevention

The “*Global Action Agenda for the Prevention of Violent Conflict – People Building Peace*”, presented at the New York Conference “**From Reaction to Prevention: Civil Society Forging Partnerships to Prevent Violent Conflict and Build Peace**” of the “Global Partnership to prevent Armed Conflict/ GPPAC 19-21.7. 2005, contains many good proposals for prevention at civil society level. For the international, i.e. the UN level, the Agenda endorses, without further elaboration, the concept of a *Peacebuilding Commission* and a *Peace Support Unit*, proposed by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and reaffirmed in his reform programme “In Larger Freedom”. By adopting this approach, the Agenda accepts “relapse prevention” – in other words, preventing a reversion to war – in post-conflict societies, along with peacebuilding in failing states, as the overriding priorities of UN prevention.

Pro UNCOPAC does not deny the need for these activities and endorses the Global Action Agenda, which, in our view, is a milestone on our long road towards a shift in favour of prevention. However, Pro UNCOPAC's members and supporting institutions and NGOs prioritise concepts of ***Pre-war Prevention***, also at UN level. Many of the conflicts which took place in the 1990s occurred in regions – such as Europe – which had been free of collective violence for several decades. Early international action could have prevented armed conflicts by peaceful means. We therefore stress the need for further discussion of UN-coordinated non-military early responses to early warning. And since these dialogue-based means require a strong commitment from civil society, we should also discuss how civil society organisations' cooperation with the UN on pro-active crisis prevention could be institutionalised. The Discussion Paper “*United Nations, Civil Society & Preventing Armed Conflict: Institutional Reforms to Strengthen Operational Prevention*”¹ provides good starting points and recommendations for this process.

The proposal for a UN Commission on Peace and Crisis Prevention was developed on the basis of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's 2001 report, entitled “Prevention of Armed Conflict”, and aims to strengthen pro-active prevention before the outbreak of armed conflicts and wars. The probability that a Peacebuilding Commission will be established in line with the UN Secretary-General's proposal presents a welcome opportunity for us to rethink this first model for an institutionalisation of international prevention which involves civil society in a formal process.

Pro UNCOPAC therefore invites all NGOs, institutions and interested individuals to join us in a critical discourse about possible UN activities in the field of pro-active prevention, with the aim of developing a more transparent and coherent framework for the future. We propose to start with an e-mail discussion process in which various proposals on structures and mechanisms for pre-war prevention and their interaction with a post-war Peacebuilding Commission will be discussed in detail.

Please let us know whether you – and preferably your CSO – would be interested in participating in this process.

On behalf of Pro UNCOPAC and the Board of “Forum Crisis Prevention”

¹ Dr. Catherine Barnes ♦ 1 February 2005, cathbarnes@gn.apc.org