



In Search of Sustaining Peace:

A Case-Study of Peacebuilding
in South Caucasus

February 2020



About this paper

This paper presents the key findings from the GPPAC South Caucasus Regional Meeting¹ with the focus on the perception of local peacebuilders on the ways to build strong and operational partnerships in South Caucasus.

The paper is prepared by the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN).²



¹ The regional meeting took place on November 25–26, 2019 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates attended by the members of GPPAC–South Caucasus members, including ICCN, Armenian National Committee of Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Azerbaijani National Committee of Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Women Information Center, ARSMIRA, Association of IDP Women–Consent, Research Union of Women Problems, Helsinki Initiative–92, Kutaisi Information Center.

² ICCN serves and promotes peace in Georgia and South Caucasus through South Caucasian Networking Partnership covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia alongside with the 3 secessionist regions – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh. Since 2004, ICCN has been acting as a Regional Secretariat of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC).

Introduction:

Overview of the Context and Regional Engagement

The protracted and/or frozen conflicts in South Caucasus are still waiting for their fair resolution. Any violation of ceasefire between conflicting parties would foster destabilisation of the entire South Caucasus region. Meaningful partnership with international and regional multilateral partners can support building regional, national and local capacities to engage in peace dialogue regarding the situations in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia as well as the conflict between Georgia and Russia. Even a brief overview of existing peace efforts of multilateral partners evidently demonstrates the correlation between the declining influence of multilateral partners, as well as, limited mandates and opportunities for sustaining peace in the region.

The Conflict Between Georgia and Russia

While several initiatives have been developed to build peace between Georgia and Russia, all of them have either vanished or have remained largely ineffective. Since its establishment in 1993, the presence of *the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)* served a preventive function for all the parties, including the verification of parties' compliance with the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities.³ After the Georgian-Russian conflict, the UNOMIG withdrew from Georgia in 2009 because Russia vetoed its mandate renewal in the United Nations Security Council, citing the change in the political landscape. *The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Georgia* established in 1992 to promote negotiations between the conflicting parties in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was similarly closed in December 2008 following the expiration of its mandate.⁴ As such, Georgia was deprived of two of the most important peacebuilding and prevention actors and platforms, UNOMIG and OSCE Mission, which provided much needed international presence, conflict monitoring, reporting and mediation.

Currently, the *European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM)* and its consequent formats of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), **co-facilitated by the EUMM, the OSCE (in Ergneti) and Chaired by the UN (in Gali)**, form the only existing and essential platforms to strengthen security on the ground and to address the needs of the conflict-affected population through a humanitarian and human security perspective. The EUMM is the sole mission that monitors and reports about the relevant developments, while the IPRMs serve as platforms to identify potential risks, follow-up on incidents, and exchange information on the problems affecting the communities on a daily basis. However, because the EUMM mandate is constrained to monitoring and communicating findings only in and around conflict zones they

³ See UNOMIG's mission page maintained by the Peace and Security Section of the Department of Public Information: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unomig/index.html>

⁴ See OSCE's Georgia Mission page: <https://www.osce.org/georgia-closed>

have access to, they are essentially barred from doing their work in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As such, the EUMM is only partially capable of coping with problems existing in the conflict zones. Thus, frequent abductions of Georgian residents by the Ossetian militia and Russian border guards along the administrative boundary line (ABL) continue, as well as the permanent shift of the supposed “state border” of the self-proclaimed state of South Ossetia within the Georgia-controlled territory by Russian military. It is examples like these that create the risk of conflict relapse should they persist.

The negotiation format of *Geneva International Discussions (GID)*, **led by the EU with the United Nations and the OSCE as the co-chairs**, was launched in 2009 and remains the only international platform in which selected interested parties can participate to seek conflict resolution.⁵ GID focuses on security-related issues and humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population with little peacebuilding focus. Even so, some recent positive developments within GID include the appointment of H.E. Ayshe Cihan Sultanoglu as the United Nations Representative to GID in 2018. Ms. Sultanoglu seeks to engage local women peacebuilders in the dialogue on a more regular basis. In order to reinforce women’s meaningful participation, she suggested the idea of creating a consultative group of women peace practitioners at the OSCE-organised workshop on Promoting Inclusive Approaches to Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus in Vienna, Austria on 13 – 15 November 2019, as one example. GID has not shown any tangible progress for 11 years, raising legitimate questions about expediency and validity of the current format of GID. **One of the major problems GID faces** is that the Russian government refuses to acknowledge itself as a party to the conflict and tries to position itself as a mediator instead. GID, therefore, remains locked in a standstill and raises well-founded concerns and grievances within the affected communities. **Another significant problem** is the lack of participation and engagement of local peacebuilders in GID. Despite the fact that GID has been convened in an “informal setting” – where participants are present in their personal capacity with no official designations – GID is still distanced from the communities. It is considered to be a “closed” and “elite” platform as there is no information in regard to the agenda of GID’s meetings, and no opportunity to submit recommendations from local peacebuilders and broader community actors.

⁵ See (9 October 2019) the Press Communique of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions following the 49th round of the GID: <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/435188>

The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict

In the absence of meaningful involvement of regional organisations, the platforms for dialogue have shown little tangible success in brokering peace. The *Minsk Group* is the main negotiating forum for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, working at the Track 1 level.⁶ But with the absence of local peacebuilders and activists from the discussions and without peacebuilding expertise and operational support from the international community, the Group misses key components that a more inclusive expert-level dialogue would offer with regard to the development of elaborated options and jointly agreed decisions. Therefore, the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning Nagorno-Karabakh remains tense and violence sporadically escalates on both sides of the conflict; Almost every day there is news about rockets being fired and soldiers being killed.⁷

In addition to the absence of a strong forum for dialogue, political dynamics also have a significant influence on the trajectories of the conflict. First, political situations inside both countries do not lean towards finding compromises to solve the initial problem. The growing separation between people within the states leads to an environment conducive to violence. More importantly, **the ongoing militarisation of conflict limits opportunities for peace.**⁸ The Russian government supplies military equipment to both parties and maintains a military base in Armenia, postponing a peaceful resolution of conflict. Although Russia is officially a mediator in resolving the conflict within the Minsk Group, they do not allow other members and co-chairs, France and the United States, to come up with any meaningful or sustainable plans to resolve the conflict partially, even going so far as to use various political and diplomatic leverages to block new members, such as Germany, from joining the Minsk Group. Such a closed and tense political environment prioritises national and regional security concerns above the security of local populations and negatively influences civic space, impacts confidence building measures and shapes the rhetoric of policies and decisions. Finally, **sporadic participation of local peacebuilders in occasional events does not exert any meaningful influence** on the process and does not place local ownership at the heart of peacebuilding.

⁶ See OSCE's Minsk Group's Mandate and Key Resources: <https://www.osce.org/mg>

⁷ See (February 2020) news reporting in Armenia and Azerbaijan:

<https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1003331.html>; <https://www.azernews.az/aggression/161436.html>

⁸ See (2019) Jamestown Foundation's article titled, "Russia's Arms Sales: A Foreign Policy Tool in Relations With Azerbaijan and Armenia": <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-arms-sales-foreign-policy-tool-relations-azerbaijan-armenia/>

This climate of instability and exclusion overshadows the region. Conflicts in South Caucasus were mentioned in the 12 areas of concern defined by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres in his 16 January 2018 remarks at the informal meeting of the General Assembly.⁹ He said that “resolving these situations requires pushing back the dangerous tide of nationalism and revitalising the relevant mediation initiatives”. However, such aspirational statements did not translate into any tangible actions due to political dynamics, traditional security approaches and the lack of meaningful inclusion. This has led local peacebuilders to believe that the region has been delegated to the “backyards” of the international peace agenda. It lacks visibility and needed attention from the regional and international multilateral partners to support the spirit of sustaining peace in the region.

Recommendations:

- The United Nations should invest in adequate conflict analysis informed by local experiences and data collected on the ground;
- Regional Offices of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs should conduct mapping of relevant peacebuilding actors in the region and support capacity building for those best positioned to respond to root causes and early signs of instability;
- The United Nations should support relevant actors in creating new and flexible platforms for inclusive and open dialogue, where relevant parties concerned for peace can work together to develop inclusive solutions;
- All multilateral partners in the region should systematise and institutionalise their engagement with local peacebuilders, such as *the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus (NWMSC)*.

The Action of the United Nations:

What Has Been Done?

Local peacebuilders, including women and youth groups, highlighted the following initiatives that the United Nations put forth in recent years to strengthen the peacebuilding process in the South Caucasus:

The UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention supports a team of three national Peace and Development Advisors in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as well as the Regional Peace and Development Advisor. The team provides

⁹ See (16 January 2018) Secretary-General's remarks at the informal meeting of the General Assembly: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-01-16/secretary-generals-remarks-informal-meeting-general-assembly>

support for the three UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in the South Caucasus in terms of political analysis, conflict-related crisis preparedness and peacebuilding programming support.¹⁰ In terms of peacebuilding programming, the team has been working specifically on identifying entry points for sub-regional peacebuilding initiatives, engaging local peacebuilders and civil society networks in a South Caucasus-wide dialogue on sub-regional challenges and priorities, and building support among key international partners and donors for new peace and development initiatives. From the perspective of local peacebuilders, the projects implemented within these initiatives have contributed to the confidence building and community engagement. However, the impact of these initiatives leaves room for improvement, particularly when it comes to the role of Peace and Development Advisors in supporting conflict analysis, capacity building and knowledge development.

Another good practice example is *the Confidence-Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM)* set up in May 2010 to address the set of problems that erupted among Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian hostilities in 1990s, with three completed phases during 2010-2018 and the recently launched fourth phase in May 2019 by *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Georgia* and supported by the *European Union*.¹¹ This is purely an apolitical program with measurable, tangible results as well as meaningful engagement of the civil sector and local peacebuilders. The program supported several result-oriented targeted initiatives of local peacebuilders seeking to have an impact on confidence building within and across conflict divided communities. A project by the Studio Re, for example, created a set of thematic broadcasts, including talk-shows and documentaries, to rebuild confidence between the communities separated by war. However, in many cases grant recipients of COBERM do not know much about the activities of each other and are, therefore, unable to build on existing work, create synergies and avoid duplication of resources.

Another promising prospect for sustaining peace in the region is the appointment of the *national coordinators for Sustainable Development* in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. They support periodic roundtable meetings with local activists and experts on sustainable development issues to assess the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in the region. However, the lack of information and understanding of the Sustainable Development Agenda itself and its relevance at the local level remains an issue of concern and significantly challenges the progress. This is also linked to the lack of awareness, ownership, oversight, demand and related policy input by the broader public.

Despite the work done by the United Nations in the region, the population of the South Caucasian states is not fully informed and does not understand the role of the United Nations in addressing conflicts in the region. This further translates **into the decision-making and**

¹⁰ See UNDP's Supporting Peace & Development in the South Caucasus' Summary Page: <https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/projects/peace-and-development.html>

¹¹ See UNDP's COBERM Project Page:

<https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/projects/coberm.html>

peacebuilding discourse, as misinformation and the scarcity of information create a fertile ground for various allegations capable of diminishing the leadership of the United Nations.

Peacebuilding in the region would be more sustainable if the United Nations' actors, funds and programmes engage better with local populations and enable local action to address the root causes of conflict and instability. Using its influence and leverage, the United Nations can make a greater contribution to sustaining peace in the region by enabling confidence building based on local ownership and by supporting the inclusive processes of development of regional norms, policies and initiatives across various pillars, including peace and security, development and human rights.

Recommendations:

- The United Nations should increase the capacity of Member States in the region to engage in confidence building, gender-responsive peacebuilding and conflict prevention;
- The UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme should support Peace and Development advisors in the development of clear locally-sensitive frameworks for conflict analysis that prioritise conflict sensitivity and includes mechanisms to integrate different streams of information and analysis;
- The United Nations Regional Office in the South Caucasus should support confidence building by facilitating an open and transparent dialogue within and between divided communities at all levels;
- All United Nations funds and programmes should improve awareness of its work in the region, including by sharing opportunities for local peacebuilders and strengthening their capacity to engage in relevant initiatives;
- The UN Regional Office should organise inclusive periodic forums to assess the implementation of relevant UN agendas in the region and foster the development of relevant regional norms;
- The United Nations Development Programme and other major donors in the region should encourage information sharing, non-repetition and complementarity among grant recipients.

Local Ownership in the Region: Building bridges

For peacebuilding efforts to be sustained, they must take root in local communities. Conflicts have local and regional dimensions that can only be effectively addressed when local expertise and analysis are linked to regional and global norms, mechanisms and capacities.

Local peacebuilding networks play a unique role by contributing to the articulation of a 'people-centred – bottom-up' perspective that is often missing in state-centric security analysis. This perspective includes important expertise, grassroots knowledge and localised contexts that play a key role in the analysis of conflict dynamics, power relations, actors and effective early warning and response. Due to the flexibility of their structures and their close relations with diverse grassroots constituencies, local peacebuilders are often able to reach out to places and actors that official government officials or international actors cannot.

Mediation: With the support of the *Council of Europe*, court mediators have been officially recognised in the region, but peace mediation is not yet formally recognised or legitimised. There is a lack of capacity and commitment to develop nationally-driven peace processes and infrastructures, such as the one in Colombia, Ghana, and South Africa. Instead of initiating a peace process through existing governmental and societal processes, only international peace mediation is applied in the region. But, as a consequence, the peace process is not considered an integral, societal one, which all stakeholders can contribute to and own equally. The absence of formal recognition and legitimation of peace mediation also diminishes national and regional resources for conflict prevention and sustaining peace, as well as the recognition of the local peacebuilders' mediation initiatives.

At the same time, around the world, the international community saw the tremendous impact of women-driven peace mediation led by women mediation networks. This prompted women peacebuilders from across the South Caucasus to come together and establish the *Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus*.¹² The Network involves and strengthens women as national mediators in peace processes before, during and after conflicts in order to contribute to sustaining peace in the region. The creation and development of such a network as a key learning and action resource in South Caucasus has already stimulated the involvement of and dialogue between Abkhazian, Ossetian, Karabakhi, Armenian and Azerbaijani women. But without continued financial and operational support from donors and other multilateral partners, the Network lacks the opportunity to become fully operational and legitimated to impact existing peace processes.

Peace Journalism: Peace journalism in the South Caucasus contributes to confidence building, and is an area of work where local peacebuilders can claim moderate success. In 2018, ICCN and its partners in Armenia and Azerbaijan successfully implemented a pilot project to

¹² See (12 October 2018) the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation's Initiative: http://iccn.ge/index.php?article_id=232&clang=1

establish a network of GPPAC freelance press officers throughout the region that encourage conflict prevention and advocate for the culture of peace.¹³ Press officers produced and disseminated a number of educational materials about peace, confidence building and conflict prevention. Through their outreach, press officers inspired alternative understandings of issues, countered hate speech and false information, helped overcome hostility and distrust between various actors and build an environment of mutual support and trust. Subsequently, there have been media, peace and security workshops conducted in the region to increase awareness of the role of the media in confidence building and encourage broader engagement of the media in spreading the messages of peace.

Informal Locally-Owned Peace Process: Local peacebuilders on both sides of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have long advocated for the establishment of the Track 2 independent civil society process to advocate for a more open and transparent negotiation method for both communities. Established in 2014, the Independent Civil Minsk Process conducts parallel official negotiation processes and consults directly with the co-chairs of the Minsk Group.¹⁴ Regrettably, with the lack of political support, the group has lost its influence.

The principle of local ownership, especially when supported through initiatives such as those discussed above, is the key for effective efforts to sustaining peace in the South Caucasus. Local peacebuilders can play a vital role in providing official negotiation processes with relevant perspectives, valuable expertise, input and feedback from the community level. Furthermore, in situations where official processes are politically sensitive or find themselves in a stalemate, continued community level dialogue organised by local peacebuilders can provide valuable alternatives. The role of local peacebuilders is also highly relevant once a peace agreement is reached at the official level, as they can be a driving force to prepare conflicting societies for reconciliation and future peaceful co-existence.

Recommendations:

- The United Nations funds and programmes should provide operational and financial support to enhance local ownership, including flexible grants that can be adapted to local root causes analysis, greater understanding and building of policies and programmes based on priorities of local communities, and an inclusive space for dialogue, joint analysis and coordination;
- The UN Country Teams should prioritise building capacity of Member States to commit resources and develop nationally- and regionally-driven peace processes, the development of peace architecture, and just and accountable institutions;

¹³ See (15 December 2018) ICCN's News Page on the Journalists for Peace:
http://iccn.ge/index.php?article_id=289&clang=0

¹⁴ See (3 November 2014) Commonsplace.eu's news report:
http://commonsplace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=3110

- The United Nations Country Teams must organise triangle consultations between governments, local peacebuilders and donors at the national level to better map the projects and actors deserving of support and ensure predictable funding;
- The UN Secretary-General should encourage all parts of the UN system, including the Peacebuilding Fund, to support locally-driven mechanisms and strategies to promote messages of peace, equality and non-violence.

The Role of Regional Economic Systems: Synergies between Peacebuilding and the Economy

Economic development is one of the preconditions for sustaining peace, as economic systems play a key role in stabilising and rebuilding societies from or in conflict. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282 recognised that sustaining peace includes “moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development” (PB. 31), and that “advancing economic development in conflict-affected countries” (PB. 64) should be part of an integrated and coherent approach for sustaining peace. Economic partnerships and systems at the regional level can therefore create an enabling environment for economic growth, foreign investment and job creation.

The South Caucasus region has two competing regional economic systems: Russia-led *Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU)* and the *EU Association Agreement with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)*.¹⁵ Georgian and Armenian businesses and economic entities can significantly benefit from both DCFTA and EaEU. Specifically, to a certain extent DCFTA can be attractive to the businesses in the secessionist regions of Georgia because it contributes to their de-isolation.

But both systems have conflicting interests and, therefore, challenge the prospects for sustainable economic development in the region. For example, the political dynamics may challenge economic opportunities for Member States in the region. Recently, Azerbaijan has been recognised as a substantial oil and gas exporter to Europe along with an increased transit profile. At the same time, such a development has led to an opportunity for Georgia to take a greater role as a transit country. Any conflicting interests between the two economic systems can have far reaching effects on the economic development of the region, such as its impact on oil and gas transit throughout the region.

Economic Intergovernmental Commission established between Georgia and Armenia at the governmental level (EIC), on the other hand, can serve as a good practice example of governments’ efforts to address the economic problems arising periodically between the two countries.¹⁶ It has been particularly effective in securing complementarity and peaceful

¹⁵ See Eurasian Economic Union and DCFTA’s web pages, respectively: <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en>; <https://ec.europa.eu/chafea/agri/en/content/deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-areas-dcfta-eu-ukraine-association-agreement>

¹⁶ See the Government of Armenia’s official news: <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/9522/>

coexistence of different economic systems in the Caucasus, specifically the Association Agreement with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Georgia and the Eurasian Economic Union with Armenia, respectively.

Recommendations:

The protracted character of conflicts in the region, calls for increased attention and leadership of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and other international donors in supporting projects aimed at developing and improving economic connectivity and complementarity between the competing systems. This is urgently needed where possible to transform economic competition into mutually advantageous cooperation.

Discussion on Existing Challenges

Dialogue and meaningful partnerships are some of the primary instruments of peacebuilding. Safe and neutral spaces need to be provided for the parties to be able to impactfully engage with each other on politically sensitive issues related to a particular conflict. Regional spaces and platforms -which allow for dialogue, joint analysis and the advancement of regional norms, frameworks and actions with international, regional and local peacebuilding actors- serve as a bridge connecting actors ordinarily divided by conflicts, in order to develop a common understanding of the concerns, interests, and needs of each side. However, such inclusive dialogues do not take place in the South Caucasus and local peacebuilders, where present, are not seen as partners to the process and are relegated to Track 2, where the activities of national non-state actors are 'tolerated' but never legitimised.

In the region, peacebuilding work is politicised and seen as anti-state activism. The main issues local peacebuilders face when trying to build inclusive spaces for dialogue in the South Caucasus include *shrinking political space, political polarisation and divisions among the human rights defenders and peace activists.*

These are linked to *the absence of sufficient mechanisms to ensure people's access to human rights.* This is particularly relevant when it comes to supporting the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and mediation. Even making women peacebuilders visible in Track 2 processes has remained a challenge over the past 25 years, largely due to low levels of gender sensitivity among government officials as well as a lack of understanding of the importance of implementing the National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. Similarly, youth are demotivated from engaging in peacebuilding by the perceived impossibility of reintegrating secessionist regions by peaceful means and the growing climate of mutual mistrust.

Additionally, donors traditionally working in South Caucasus to support democratic development and local peacebuilding *have downsized their financial support.* Impact of peacebuilding is reduced due to ineffective distribution of funds, challenges to obtain funding for peacebuilding, and the restricted impact of local peacebuilders on the setting of policy

priorities. This has meant that many peacebuilders have only been able to undertake initiatives at their own expense, limiting the scope of their work and opportunities to grow. Donors are *less inclined to finance projects that have long-term goals* and look for immediate, shorter-term impact. In this climate, local peacebuilders find it even more difficult to compete for funds with international organisations that provide support in the region. The priorities of these international organisations often *do not correspond to the strategies of local peacebuilders* regarding conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

To make the peace process sustainable and integral, it is essential to make it inclusive. While peacebuilding in the South Caucasus faces great challenges, inclusive dialogue and meaningful partnerships can contribute to breaking down the silos across different expertise with the commitment of national governments and additional technical, political and financial support by the United Nations, regional organisations and relevant donors.

Recommendations:

- The United Nations should strengthen the creation of inclusive spaces for dialogue, including with local peacebuilders, and promote stronger linkages between informal (Track 2) and formal (Track 1) negotiation processes;
- The UN Country Teams and Regional Offices should continue building capacity and support of Member States in providing an enabling environment for civil society organisations, including lifting all legal and regulatory barriers to the registration of civil society in obtaining peacebuilding funding;
- The United Nations funds and programmes should consider increasing the flexibility of its financial support for local peacebuilding in the region and, when needed, give financial support to individual peace and human rights activists in the forms of merit-based bonuses and awards;
- The United Nations should not provide political support to peace processes in which women and young groups are not meaningfully consulted;
- The UN Regional Offices should support the establishment of regional coalitions on youth, peace and security (YPS) and integrate the YPS Agenda in relevant strategies and programming.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The peacebuilding achievements of the international and regional actors in South Caucasus as well as the challenges identified by the members of GPPAC–South Caucasus reveal the need to revisit how United Nations and other relevant actors support peace and local ownership in the context of frozen and protracted conflicts.

Sustaining peace requires strengthened action to build *strategic and operational regional partnerships* with local peacebuilders, including women peacebuilders and youth groups, the United Nations, national actors and regional and sub-regional organisations.

Critical actions needed from the United Nations peacebuilding actors to operationalise the sustaining peace in South Caucasus include:

- **Regional Leadership:**

- The United Nations and other international organisations should **strengthen their mediation efforts in the context of protracted and frozen conflicts**.
- The chairs of relevant peace processes should ensure the creation of **inclusive spaces for dialogue**, including with local peacebuilders, and **stronger linkages between informal (Track 2) and formal (Track 1) negotiation processes**;
- The United Nations Regional and Country Offices, with the support of relevant programmes, should organise **inclusive periodic forums to assess the implementation** of relevant UN agendas in the region, and foster the development of relevant regional norms;
- The United Nations should **not provide political support to peace processes, in which women are not meaningfully consulted**;
- The UN Country teams should prioritise building capacity of Member States to commit resources and develop **nationally- and regionally-driven peace processes**, the development of peace architecture, and just and accountable institutions.

- **Operational Support:**

- The United Nations should increase capacity of Member States in the region to understand and engage in **confidence building, gender-responsive peacebuilding and conflict prevention**;
- The United Nations should **invest in adequate conflict analysis** informed by local experiences and data collected on the ground, **mapping** relevant peacebuilding actors in the region and **capacity building** for those best positioned to respond to root causes and early signs of instability needs to be prioritised in efforts to advance peace;
- The United Nations should improve **awareness of the UN work in the region**, its key agendas, opportunities for the local peacebuilders, and strengthen their capacity to engage in relevant initiatives;

- The UNDP–DPPA Joint Programme should support Peace and Development advisors in the development of locally-sensitive **clear frameworks for conflict analysis** that prioritises conflict sensitivity and includes mechanisms to integrate different streams of information and analysis;
 - The UN Secretary-General should encourage all parts of the UN system, including the Peacebuilding Fund, to support locally-driven mechanisms and strategies to **promote messages of peace, equality and non-violence**.
- **Partnerships for Peacebuilding:**
 - The UN Regional and Country Offices should conduct **mapping of activities and actors** that have the potential to strengthen peace, prevent conflicts and avoid replication of armed confrontation;
 - The United Nations should support relevant actors in **creating new and flexible platforms for inclusive and open dialogues**, where relevant parties concerned for peace can work together to develop inclusive solutions;
 - The United Nations should encourage the systematisation and institutionalisation of Member States’ **engagement with local peacebuilders** such as the Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus (NWMSC);
 - The United Nations Regional Offices should support **the establishment of regional coalitions on youth, peace and security (YPS)** and integrate the YPS Agenda into relevant strategies and programming;
 - The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and other international donors should support projects aimed at **developing and improving economic connectivity and complementarity** between the competing economic systems.
 - **Financing for Peacebuilding:**
 - The United Nations Country Teams must organise triangle consultations between governments, local peacebuilders and donors at the national level to **map the projects and actors deserving support and ensure predictable funding**;
 - The United Nations funds and programmes should consider increasing **the flexibility of its financial support** for local peacebuilding in the region and, when needed, give financial support to individual peace and human rights activists in the forms of merit-based bonuses and awards.
 - The United Nations Development Programme and other major donors in the region should **encourage information sharing, non-repetition and complementarity** among grant recipients.

