



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

AT

**THE FIRST SESSION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMITTEE OF THE PEACEBUILDING
COMMISSION**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
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Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary-General, Mr Minister, Distinguished Colleagues, Friends

Most of us have seen the despair in the eyes of women, men and children in war stricken countries. They have often had very little choice but to place their fate in the hands of us, the international community. But we have equally often failed them. When the TV cameras have left, so have we – far too often.

This week we are writing history in the United Nations. Last Monday, we opened the first meeting of the new Human Rights Council. Today, we are here to inaugurate the Peacebuilding Commission. The United Nations has been successful in ending wars. Building sustainable peace has proved much more difficult. Through this new intergovernmental body we have a chance to make a tangible difference for many people in the years to come.

Through the Peacebuilding Commission we have ensured that for countries emerging from conflict, post-conflict does not mean post-engagement of the international community. The recent events in Timor-Leste remind of the need for sustained attention. We have seen it earlier in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia.

Let us take a few steps back and see the evaluation of our thinking.

As we all know, we have struggled for many years to find ways of sustainably assisting States emerging from conflict towards durable peace and development. There has been an awareness of the gaps in the international community's response to countries in post-conflict situations. But donors have not found fully efficient ways of linking emergency relief

with reconstruction, institution-building, reconciliation and development. We are, in fact, not only talking about institutional gaps, but also about a financing gap and a gap in coordination between different actors, including within the United Nations.

The Peacebuilding Commission, first presented by the Secretary-General's High Level Panel - and later developed in the Secretary General's report "In Larger Freedom" - was an important contribution to the reform agenda of the United Nations. We commend the Secretary-General for his commitment to strengthen the United Nations capacity to assist countries in transition from war to durable peace. The United Nations has legitimacy and much experience to draw upon in the field of peacebuilding. To prevent States from sliding back into conflict, or to develop into failed states, must be one of the top priorities of the United Nations in the years to come.

You, the Member States, gave early and strong support to the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission at the World summit in September 2005.

Coupled with this decision was the decision to establish a Peacebuilding Support Office and a Peacebuilding Fund. I congratulate Carolyn McAskie to her appointment to head the Peacebuilding Support Office. Her wide experience will be of great benefit for the work of the Commission. We also look forward to receiving the report of the Secretary-General on the Peacebuilding Fund.

We are all aware of the arduous negotiations last fall leading up to the adoption of resolution 60/180 on 20 December 2005 and to the long-awaited election of the Members of the Organizational Committee in May this year.

But you were able to put your differences aside and prove that the General Assembly can take decisions which are meaningful for the people of the world.

I am encouraged by the careful preparations for this first meeting by the members of the Organizational Committee. I congratulate you, Mr Chair, on your election to lead the work of the Commission in its first crucial year of operation. I also want to congratulate the other members of the Organizational Committee – you have important work ahead of you. I understand that you later during this meeting will take a decision on the two first country-specific situations. This is most welcome. It is in the country-specific settings that the work of the Peacebuilding Commission ultimately will be judged.

The Peacebuilding Commission is a truly innovative body, a body for the 21st century, bringing together different actors in peacebuilding for strategic discussions on how to best assist countries on their difficult journey from conflict to peace and development. Let me, in conclusion, point at some aspects which I find particularly important for the future work of the Commission.

1. The active engagement and involvement of the concerned government is fundamental to successful and sustainable peacebuilding. Regional organizations also have an important role to play.

2. Many of the situations on the Peacebuilding Commission agenda will also be on the agenda of the Security Council. Close coordination between peace-keeping and peacebuilding is essential. Much work is already being done

through the integrated peacekeeping missions. I imagine that the Peacebuilding Commission in a few years time will deal with country situations in various stages of peacebuilding.

3. The Economic and Social Council will have a crucial role to play in keeping international attention on a country as it moves from transitional recovery towards development.

4. The annual debate in the General Assembly will give us an opportunity to discuss the role of the United Nations in peacebuilding in a broader perspective.

5. International Financial Institutions are key actors in peacebuilding. Let us hope that the Peacebuilding Commission can open a new chapter in the United Nations relations with the Bretton Woods Institutions.

6. Suitable arrangement should be made for the dialogue with civil society in the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, both in the field and at Headquarters.

Lastly, you have among you several Member States with valuable experience from post-conflict recovery. I hope that you take advantage of their experience as part of developing best practices for peacebuilding.

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The success of the Peacebuilding Commission will in the end depend on how we can translate the resolution into action on the ground. Let us prove that an efficient, flexible and field-oriented body is now being created.

You, the first members of the Peacebuilding Commission have a great responsibility towards all those whose lives and futures you can improve after debilitating conflicts. I am confident that you will accept this responsibility with determination and a serious sense of purpose.