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Four reasons why the New Agenda for Peace should focus on nationally led violence prevention strategies

About the Author –

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Over the past few years, the prevention of violence has gained new momentum at the United Nations (UN).¹ However, the UN still lacks a comprehensive strategy to transform these commitments into action. The UN Charter mostly focuses on the prevention of international conflicts, while lethal violence is nowadays mostly concentrated within countries.² Both member states and the UN have increasingly acknowledged the need to use a different approach to prevention, including through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) and the UN-World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace*. However, the operationalization of this approach remains unclear. The New Agenda for Peace is an opportunity for the UN to clarify its approach to the prevention of violence within a country (violent crime, violent extremism, and non-international armed conflict).

This is made even more urgent as the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine—e.g., rising inequalities, shocks on food prices, and negative impact on social cohesion—increase pre-existing social fractures and the risk of violence worldwide.³ Building peaceful societies is by definition a sovereign act and requires an integrated approach that addresses the many root causes of violence. This policy brief highlights four reasons why the New Agenda for Peace is an opportunity to advance the prevention agenda by focusing on **nationally led prevention strategies**.

¹ Adoption of the 2016 twin resolutions on sustaining peace (General Assembly resolution 70/262 and Security Council resolution 2282(2016)); SDG 16.1. The secretary-general has also promoted the prevention agenda through his reports on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and Our Common Agenda, which gives an importance place to prevention. In addition, his reforms of the UN system now provide new opportunities for prevention. Other examples include the Regional Monthly Reviews (RMR), guidance's notes on conflict sensitivity, and the expansion of the UNDP-DPPA Joint Program with the work of the Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs)

² United Nations, "A New Era of Conflict and Violence," United Nations (United Nations), accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>.

³ Richard Gowan, "Priorities for the UN's New Agenda for Peace," Crisis Group, August 11, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/priorities-uns-new-agenda-peace>.

What nationally led prevention approaches can do... and cannot do

This policy brief focuses on upstream nationally led prevention strategies. Such strategies are not applicable to all contexts. For instance, they would be ill-suited in the case of predatory governments or when civil society space is too constrained, and would be insufficient in the case of an on-going armed conflict. This approach of prevention is also more relevant to prevent internal violence (e.g., violent crime, violent extremism, non-international armed conflict), although they can also contribute to closing social fractures and preventing external actors from exploiting them (e.g., proxy wars, internationalized armed conflict).

1. There is political space at the United Nations

There is a vast array of interpretations of what prevention means among member states.⁴ Some of these trigger concerns and pushbacks, particularly when prevention efforts are perceived as meddling into internal affairs or stigmatizing.⁵ Both the Peacebuilding Architecture Review negotiations⁶ and thematic consultations on *Our Common Agenda*⁷ have shown, however, that there is **important support for upstream, nationally led prevention strategies**. These can be defined as strategies to strengthen the social contract based on diagnoses of risk and resilience factors, with the support—when needed—of the UN to build capacity.

Nationally led prevention strategies can assuage member states' main concerns about the prevention agenda. First, national strategies strengthen **sovereignty** because they foster peaceful coexistence, national unity, and hence the capacity of the state to administer its territory and to prevent foreign interference.⁸ When governments develop prevention strategies, they also set their own priorities and can steer international actors to support these more easily. These strategies clearly de-link prevention from the sole purview of the Security Council to focus on building capacity at the country level, moving away from an interventionist approach to empower national actors. Second, nationally led prevention strategies **are not stigmatizing, nor an agenda solely for the Global South**. These strategies are relevant for all countries (universal), as no society is immune to violence. Indeed, countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany have adopted national strategies to prevent violence,⁹ which shows that Global North countries also see the benefits of addressing the root causes of violence in their societies.

2. It makes sense technically

Given that the objective of this form of prevention is to strengthen the social contract, the UN cannot “do” prevention, it can only support national actors¹⁰—

⁴ Paige Arthur and Céline Monnier, “Unpacking Prevention: Member State Perspectives,” Center on International Cooperation, April 2019, <https://cic.nyu.edu/publications/unpacking-prevention-member-state-perspectives>.

⁵ Paige Arthur and Céline Monnier, “The Prevention Agenda: Mapping Out Member States’ Concerns” (New York: Center on International Cooperation, July 2, 2019), <https://cic.nyu.edu/publications/The-Prevention-Agenda-Mapping-Out-Member-States-Concerns>.

⁶ Céline Monnier, “Finding the Common Denominator: Member States and the Prevention Agenda in the 2020 Negotiations for the Peacebuilding Architecture Review | Center on International Cooperation,” Center on International Cooperation, *Center on International Cooperation Blogs* (blog), February 2, 2021, <https://cic.nyu.edu/blog/finding-common-denominator-member-states-and-prevention-agenda-2020-negotiations-peacebuilding>.

⁷ Member States, “Our Common Agenda Thematic Discussions Cluster 3: Frameworks for a Peaceful World- Promoting Peace, International Law and Digital Cooperation.” (New York, February 21, 2022).

⁸ “In this sense, prevention enhances sovereignty, empowering each country to be in control of its own destiny and the state to build positive relationships with its citizens.” United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1162-3>. (pp. 6-7)

⁹ the *Serious Violence Strategy* in the United Kingdom, the *National Crime Prevention Strategy* in Canada, and the *German Federal Government’s Strategy on Preventing Extremism and Promoting Democracy*

¹⁰ “National actors” here should be understood as domestic actor, as ‘non-international.’ It includes local actors.

The importance of local approaches

Violence dynamics vary across a territory and tend to cluster in hot spots. Risk factors for violence are very context specific and can even be different within a city. Consequently, local approaches are a key component of nationally led prevention strategies. Root causes should be identified by local actors in local contexts. However, not all root causes can be addressed at the local level, as some of them require the intervention of national actors (e.g., to modify a law). Having a national framework facilitates the dialogue between local and national levels to address the risk factors for violence.

all segments of society, as acknowledged in the 2016 sustaining peace resolution—in doing so. Starting with a diagnosis at country level rather than deciding at international level to focus on certain risk factors—e.g., climate change, the control of small arms—is also a more effective way to ensure that all the relevant risk factors are taken into consideration and that they are given the adequate weight depending on the context. Violence prevention strategies—when well implemented and context specific—**have been shown to be effective**. For instance, the 2011 Ghana National Peace Council Act is considered to have helped the country navigate peacefully a transition from one political party to another and prevent election-related violence.¹¹ In South Africa, the infrastructure for peace created in the early 1990s have been considered a successful model to help build a new social contract.¹² The United Kingdom was able to evaluate that they saved GBP 3.16 to every GBP 1 spent on their 2018 Serious Violence Strategy.¹³

Research shows that **effective violence prevention approaches engage multiple stakeholders in integrated responses**.¹⁴ The root causes of violence are multiple and a broad array of actors needs to be involved to address them both within the government (e.g., different ministries, local governments) and through the broader society (e.g., civil society actors, universities, the private sector, the media).¹⁵ In the words of the Malawi National Peace Policy, prevention strategies are important because they “integrate the country’s peacebuilding initiatives and conflict prevention [...] by various stakeholders into **a cohesive whole**.”¹⁶ Addressing root causes is also a **long-term endeavor** that may require decades of efforts. The adoption of state strategies is, hence, most likely to achieve change than projects tied to electoral cycles or UN short-term initiatives and funding.

Nationally led prevention strategies are also an effective way for a country to **benefit from the most UN support**. The UN work on prevention is spread across the system (e.g., UN Department of Political Affairs, UNESCO, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, UN Development Programme, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UN Peacebuilding Support Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, World Health Organization, UNICEF, UN Women) and a cross-pillar approach is proving difficult to achieve. The UN

¹¹ Hans J. Giessmann, “Embedded Peace: Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned” (New York: Berghof Foundation; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; UNDP, 2016), https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Berghof-UNDP_EmbeddedPeaceI4P_2016.pdf.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ United Kingdom Home Office, “Violence Reduction Unit Year Ending March 2021 Evaluation Report,” GOV.UK, April 1, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-reduction-unit-year-ending-march-2021-evaluation-report/violence-reduction-unit-year-ending-march-2021-evaluation-report>.

¹⁴ Flávia Carbonari et al., “A Review of the Evidence and a Global Strategy for Violence Prevention” (Pathfinders, UKAid, Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, March 2020), https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2020-10/6c192f_f6036b2b1ecf4fd1a3d7687ff7098a46.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Government of Malawi, “Malawi National Peace Policy,” November 13, 2018, 10, <https://www.undp.org/malawi/publications/malawi-national-peace-policy>.

Why violence prevention?

In this policy brief, we use the term “violence” referring to violent crime, violent extremism, and armed conflict in line with SDG 16.1 to reduce all forms of violence.

Politically, violence prevention can be perceived as less stigmatizing because all societies experience some forms of violence.

From a **technical** perspective, talking about violence more broadly makes sense in upstream prevention. First, upstream prevention focuses on addressing risk factors for violence and many of them overlap across the different types of violence (e.g., lack of trust in institutions). In addition, the type of violence is not always easy to qualify, and it can transform over time. Finally, the approach to prevent these different types of violence is essentially the same: e.g., identifying the risk and resilience factors, setting up a coordination mechanism to address them, taking into consideration local dynamics.

approach to resourcing and capacity building in prevention is often fragmented. Having nationally led strategies provide a framework for UN’s work on prevention in country and enable the UN to support and build national capacity in different areas of expertise, while contributing to an overall approach to prevention, for instance through the Cooperation Framework.

3. There is an appetite from national actors

Nationally led violence prevention strategies are not new and they are universal, showing that there is a strong appetite from national actors for these strategies. Mexico, Malawi, the United Kingdom and many other countries have adopted such approaches.¹⁷ These nationally led prevention efforts can have **multiple forms and different names**, including infrastructures for peace, national action plans to prevent violent extremism, peacebuilding plans, social cohesion strategies, crime prevention strategies, or they can be integrated in the national development plan. In essence, these strategies are all trying to achieve the same result: addressing the psycho-socioeconomic structural causes to prevent violence from emerging through a coordinated approach.¹⁸

Governments all have—to some extent—at least part of a national violence prevention strategy. In many cases, efforts are disconnected and national actors might not identify them as part of the same approach. Putting nationally led prevention strategies at the center would not create something new, but it would be an opportunity to provide more support to efforts already underway to help national actors do what they are already doing more effectively.

Box 1: A nationally-led prevention approach in practice: the case of Kenya

In 2007-08, Kenya was shaken by electoral violence that lasted almost six months. The Commission of National Reconciliation and Dialogue—led by Kofi Annan—*identified multiple root causes* of the clashes. The Commission recommended a series of measures to address them, including constitutional reform; reform of the judiciary; reform of the police; reform of the civil service; land reform; addressing inequality and regional imbalances; addressing the unemployment of youth; consolidating national cohesion and unity; and promoting transparency and accountability. Furthermore, an Independent Review Commission led by Justice Johann Kriegler produced some specific recommendations on how to improve the conduct of elections.

¹⁷ “Serious Violence Strategy” (UK); General Law for the Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency (Mexico); National Peace Policy (Malawi)

¹⁸ Paige Arthur and Céline Monnier, “Nationally Led Prevention: Practical Examples of Approaches to Risk and Resilience” (New York: Center on International Cooperation, June 2019), <https://cic.nyu.edu/publications/nationally-led-prevention-practical-examples-approaches-risk-and-resilience>.

The United Nations, with its presence in country, its entry points at a high level, and its expertise on prevention can play an important role in clarifying the benefits of prevention and to provide technical assistance to a government in its specific context.

The country then **adopted a series of measures to address these root causes**. In 2008, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission was established to prevent discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. In 2010, Kenya passed a new constitution, which covered the management of election disputes. Based on this reform, a president election dispute was filed and adjudicated by the Supreme Court in 2013, which fostered population trust in the Judiciary. The independence of the Supreme Court was further confirmed in 2017, when it nullified the presidential results. The ruling also made progress on the freedom of information by making it easier for the general public to undertake their own independent tally.

While the country did not adopt a formal violence prevention strategy, these different mechanisms fulfill a preventive role by addressing the root causes of violence. The Kenya example highlights how many countries already undertake prevention activities, even when they do not call them prevention. (For more information, [see the full article here.](#))

4. The UN is well-placed to support member states to make progress on nationally led prevention strategies

Three challenges hinder progress on nationally led violence prevention strategies worldwide—the need for political leadership and acceptance, for technical expertise, and for resources. The United Nations, with its presence in country, its entry points at a high level, and its expertise on prevention can play an important role in clarifying the benefits of prevention and to provide technical assistance to a government in its specific context. The 2018 *Pathways for Peace* report already contains recommendations in this regard (see Box 2) and the New Agenda for Peace would be a good opportunity to underscore and give them new momentum.

4.1 The UN can support in increasing national leadership and political acceptance

To be effective, nationally led prevention approaches need to be anchored in political leadership and acceptance. When it is not the case, even the best designed strategy is unlikely to have an impact because it will not be prioritized, the funding will likely be not forthcoming, and the strategy will not be implemented. Political leadership and acceptance to develop and implement a violence prevention is sometimes lacking because national actors may not know what prevention actually *means* in practice or its benefits. Indeed, prevention is often mistaken for crisis management (reactive more than proactive) or a securitized approach, with little understanding of the benefits of social approaches to prevention. Additionally, there is also still a deep-seated fear of

stigma from member states when admitting they are actively undertaking efforts to prevent conflict on their territory.¹⁹

We must begin to create a culture of prevention. The prevention of deadly conflict must become a common place of daily life and part of a global cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation. Leaders must exemplify the culture of prevention.

Box 2: Giving new momentum to Pathways for Peace report

The UN and the World Bank have agreed on the importance of nationally led prevention strategies, arguing in their report *Pathways for Peace* that “[e]ffective preventive action must be grounded in national processes, be implemented when early risks are perceptible, and support initiatives, at various levels, to prevent the escalation of violence.” The report is also famous for presenting a business case for prevention, calculating that investing in prevention could save between USD 5 billion to USD 69 billion a year.

To achieve these results, the report states that national and international actors should **build a collective commitment to prevention**. Particularly, they should shift their policies and practices to develop a shared understanding of the root causes of tensions (grievances) that may give rise to violence and align incentives between development, and peace and security actors to *develop long terms strategies to address these root causes*. The report also stresses the importance of *building partnerships* at local, national, regional, and international levels to prevent violence by a combination of diplomatic efforts and a longer- term development approach. Finally, the report calls international actors to *provide financial and human resources support that is designed more appropriately for preventing crises than for responding to them*, particularly by strengthening support for national financing capacity for prevention. (pp. 283-287)

Through its 300 pages, the report makes extensive recommendations on how to make progress on prevention, acknowledging that “preventive strategies are most effective and can only be sustained when they come from within societies.” As 2023 will mark the fifth anniversary of the *Pathways for Peace* report, the New Agenda for Peace has the opportunity to build on the evidence gathered in this report and on the consensus built between the two organizations to make concrete progress towards the operationalization of this evidence-based vision on prevention.

The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict highlighted in its landmark 1997 report that “we must begin to create a culture of prevention. The prevention of deadly conflict must become a common place of daily life and part of a global cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation. Leaders must exemplify the culture of prevention.”²⁰ The United Nations has the opportunity to influence political leadership and acceptance, particularly

¹⁹ Arthur and Monnier, “The Prevention Agenda: Mapping Out Member States’ Concerns.”

²⁰ 9/12/2022 5:09:00 PM

How much money does prevention save?

Costing violence at country level can be helpful to make the case for prevention. In the US, one homicide has been calculated to cost between USD 1.1 million and 2.5 million depending on the city and an additional USD 1 to 2 million for losses in wages and tax. The United Kingdom evaluated that they saved more than three times what they invested in their strategy. Mercy Corps assessed that “Nigeria stands to gain up to USD 13.7 billion annually in total macroeconomic progress in a scenario of peace between farmers and pastoralists in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau alone.”

Sources: “The True Cost of Gun Violence,” in Andrew Blum, “The Costs of Political Violence in the United States: The Benefits of Investing in Communities” (Washington DC: Democracy Fund, February 2021), Home Office United Kingdom, “Violence Reduction Unit Year Ending March 2021 Evaluation Report,” Mercy Corps, “The Economic Costs of Conflict in Nigeria,” Mercy Corps, June 11, 2015, <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria>.

through two approaches: 1) setting the norm on nationally led prevention strategies at international level, 2) “marketing” prevention at field level.

The UN can set the norm at international level

The United Nations’ forums such as the UN General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), or the Summit of the Future **can be used** to destigmatize prevention, stressing its universality and normalizing difficult conversations at the national level about the root causes of violence. The request for a New Agenda for Peace is a good opportunity to put nationally led prevention strategies higher up on the agenda. Such strategies represent a concrete way to make progress on core focuses of the New Agenda that have already garnered strong support from member states, namely “investing in prevention and peacebuilding” and making progress on the Women²¹ and Youth²² Peace, and Security agendas (WPS and YPS). Nationally led prevention approaches also resonate with other parts of “*Our Common Agenda*,²³” (OCA) such as the need to leave no one behind, to strengthen the social contract, and the commitment to build trust in public institutions. At the OCA consultations, member states also requested further clarification on “reshaping responses to all forms of violence.” Focusing on nationally led approaches can be a way to clarify by shifting the focus from a specific type of violence to the overlapping risk factors across different types of violence so as to save resources, destigmatize prevention by highlighting its universal relevance, and increase coordination at country level (see the box on page 4 on violence prevention).

The proposed New Agenda for Peace could **encourage member states to adopt language on nationally led prevention strategies** in an inter-governmentally negotiated document, for instance in the Declaration on Future Generations, the Leaders’ Pact for the Future, and a General Assembly resolution. This could contribute to destigmatize and to normalize the adoption of such approaches, by highlighting their universal relevance, to increase interest from member states for the adoption of such strategies and to attract more funding. An intergovernmental process would also be opportunity to engage a conversation on this issue with capitals—beyond diplomats in New York—in the efforts to normalize prevention. The UN has played a normative role on prevention in the past.²⁴

²¹ “Putting women and girls at the center of security policy”

²² “Succeeding generations: shaping the future,” *Our Common Agenda*.

²³ A/75/982, Secretary General, “Our Common Agenda” (New York: United Nations, 2021), https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf.

²⁴ E.g., UN Secretary-General report on national action plans to prevent violent extremism (A/70/674), WHO resolution mentioning the need for Member States to adopt violence prevention strategies (Resolution of the Fifty-Sixth World Health Assembly WHA56.24), and ECOSOC resolution with the guidelines on crime prevention (2002/12).

Preventing violence at national level requires setting up a system. System thinking is complex and developing a prevention strategy can be overwhelming, even for a willing government.

The UN can do evidence-based “marketing” on prevention at field level

Whether this political leadership and acceptance exist or not is influenced by the benefits that governments see in adopting such a strategy in their specific context. **The UN can play an important role in clarifying the benefits of prevention. And it does.** In many countries, Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) with the support of Resident Coordinators (RCs) have engaged with national actors often behind closed doors, relentlessly advocating the benefits that prevention would have. A United Nations University (UNU) research paper identified that successful RCs remained impartial and respected the parameters of nationally led prevention approaches.²⁵ Through meetings, trainings, scenarios building, facilitating peer-to-peer dialogues between governments interested in prevention, and leveraging of regional frameworks,²⁶ RCs and PDAs have contributed to clarifying the benefits of adopting nationally led prevention strategies. 64 percent of the 108 PDAs have supported peace architectures,²⁷ and in several contexts, their efforts have been fruitful in supporting the development of nationally led strategies. The secretary-general’s envoys have also played a role in advocating for nationally led prevention strategies to complement UN preventive diplomacy efforts. For instance, in Malawi, the secretary-general’s envoy contributed to de-escalating tensions by getting the government and civil society to engage in a national dialogue to address grievances. This dialogue paved the way for a consultative process to establish a National Peace Architecture.²⁸

The New Agenda for Peace is an opportunity to discuss how the United Nations could strengthen its role in “marketing” prevention at field level. It could serve as an opportunity to have a dialogue on how to ensure that RCOs have sufficient technical, political, and financial capacities to engage with governments effectively, and that member states understand the benefits of having such an engagement.

4.2 The UN can empower national actors to develop their violence prevention strategies by providing them with guidance

While political leadership is necessary for a nationally led prevention strategy to be effective, it is not always sufficient. Preventing violence is a complex endeavor. Because violence is multicausal and that these causes are

²⁵ Sebastian von Einsiede, “What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field” (United Nations University, 2018), <https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6547/RC-Project-Book-Upd-29JUN18.pdf>.

²⁶ “Heads of State and Government First Standing Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), Durban South Africa - Memorandum of Understanding on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa,” July 8, 2002. that call to “Establish by 2004, national institutions or mechanisms for prevention, management and resolution of conflicts at community and national levels with active involvement of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs).”

²⁷ Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, “Peace and Development Advisors - Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,” Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, accessed August 17, 2022, <https://dppa.un.org/en/peace-and-development-advisors-joint-undp-dppa-programme-building-national-capacities-conflict>.

²⁸ Laurie Nathan, “UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011-12)” (United Nations University, April 2018), <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2756/PD-Malawi.pdf>.

interconnected, no one project can address its causes. In other words, preventing violence at national level requires setting up a system. System thinking is complex and developing a prevention strategy can be overwhelming.²⁹ In addition, there is a need to avoid “peace-washing”—where all development interventions are classified as preventive—by identifying and addressing the actual risk factors for violence. Such prevention strategies can be complex to design and technical assistance difficult to access, which may leave even national governments eager to work on these issues struggling to adopt this approach.

To support national actors, the UN could **develop evidence-based guidelines** that identify elements for effective violence prevention strategies. While violence prevention is extremely context specific, research shows that there are some commonalities between effective strategies. A system for effective prevention strategies is usually focused on hot spots where violence is most likely to occur, on vulnerable groups, and on instances where tensions are heightened (such as during election periods); addresses multiple root causes of violence (e.g., the lack of clarity on land ownership, dehumanization of a group, and the presence of facilitators of violence such as small arms and light weapons³⁰) in a coordinated fashion and; involves a wide array of actors.³¹ Many other underlying principles exist that support effective nationally led prevention strategies. Developing an evidence-based guidance for willing national actors to set up their own violence prevention strategy could help them navigate the complexity of the undertaking, while leaving them the freedom to adapt to their own context.

The guidelines would complement and strengthen national efforts.

An important lesson learned is that most countries already have parts of a prevention strategy. The guidelines could help national actors identify what mechanisms are already in place in their country that can contribute to a prevention strategy and complement these efforts, when necessary. The guidance could also help member states understand how the different UN prevention frameworks can be integrated, to be part of a consistent whole such as the YPS and the WPS; the Prevention of Violent Extremism National Action Plan; crime prevention efforts; and so on. Implementing these frameworks separately can be burdensome for a country.

Once adopted, these guidelines would empower member states to develop their own prevention strategies, with or without the support of the United Nations or a regional organization. This is important for two reasons: one is that prevention is relevant in any context—even in the ones

²⁹ Arthur and Monnier, “Nationally Led Prevention: Practical Examples of Approaches to Risk and Resilience.”

³⁰ Arthur and Monnier, “Nationally Led Prevention: Practical Examples of Approaches to Risk and Resilience.”

³¹ Carbonari et al., “A Review of the Evidence and a Global Strategy for Violence Prevention.”

where there is no UN presence. The second is that it would help national actors start their own process, which would enable them to overcome the fear that the prevention agenda will be used to meddle in their internal affairs. Member states could lead the drafting of the guidelines, with the UN as a support if called upon. National actors could also request support from the UN for the implementation of the guidelines in country if needed. A coalition of member states³² has already asked for these guidelines during the consultations on Our Common Agenda.³³

4.3 The UN can advance the conversation on financing for prevention

A country might need financial support to initiate its strategy. The UN can play a critical role by advancing the conversation on effective financing for nationally led prevention strategies in the context of its broader dialogue on financing for peacebuilding. For instance, the Peacebuilding Fund has played an important role in funding such strategies but does not yet have a clear methodology to measure the impact of upstream prevention projects. Making progress in good financing for peacebuilding efforts is critical if the UN is to assist member states in their undertaking to develop and implement nationally led prevention strategies.

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5. Conclusion

The New Agenda for Peace is a key opportunity to give new momentum to nationally led prevention strategies. These strategies are fertile ground to make progress on the UN prevention agenda for four reasons. First, in the current divided geopolitical context, **nationally led prevention strategies benefit from strong support among member states across these divides.** By focusing on being destigmatizing and sovereignty supporting, such strategies assuage political concerns and open space for constructive discussions on prevention. Second, **from a technical perspective, they are essential to reduce internal violence:** they recognize that there is no one size fits all and that only national actors can strengthen their own social contract to prevent violence from erupting. As there are multiple and interconnected root causes for violence, national strategies create a system to address them in a coordinated way and achieve greater progress than individual and isolated projects. This in turn provides an opportunity for the UN to achieve greater coherence by supporting different parts of the strategy, as part of a cohesive whole, rather than adopting a siloed approach. Third, nationally led violence prevention strategies are not a new approach, but **build on efforts that already take**

³² Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Liberia, Panama, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Switzerland, and Uruguay.

³³ Member States, “Our Common Agenda Thematic Discussions Cluster 3: Frameworks for a Peaceful World- Promoting Peace, International Law and Digital Cooperation.”

place in all countries. Such a strategy strives to connect and strengthen rather than replace.

However, three challenges are hindering progress: national actors' lack of cognizance regarding the benefits of nationally led prevention strategies; the lack of technical expertise to navigate the complexity of setting up such a system; and the lack of funding to develop a strategy. Fourth, the New Agenda for Peace is a good opportunity to focus on the nationally-led prevention strategies because the **UN is well-placed to help member states to address the main challenges that hinder progress on such strategies,** namely national actors' lack of cognizance regarding the benefits of nationally led prevention strategies; the lack of technical expertise to navigate the complexity of setting up such a system; and the lack of funding to develop a strategy.

The UN can help increase political acceptance and leadership on this topic among its members by normalizing the use of such strategies—for all countries—at the international level by bringing this conversation to its forums, such as the General Assembly and the ECOSOC. The UN can also engage national actors behind closed doors to present the benefits of nationally led prevention strategies in their specific context. In addition, member states can call on the UN to help them develop evidence-based self-directed guidelines. Such guidelines would identify key elements that make nationally led violence prevention strategies effective to help willing member states set up a system that is relevant in their context. Finally, the UN can continue advancing the conversation on good peacebuilding financing, to help member states develop their own violence prevention strategies.

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