

Bobst Center and WWS Engage the Challenges of UN Peacebuilding

A special joint initiative between the Bobst Center and the Woodrow Wilson School has helped make the Princeton campus a site for cooperation with the UN on peacebuilding. On January 30-31, with WWS assistance, the Bobst Center hosted a meeting to think about the future design of UN peacebuilding activities. UN officials, ambassadors, ministers, and scholars assembled at Palmer House to help prepare a report for the approval of the Secretary-General.

Jane Holl-Lute, former Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, noted: “There is a brief window of opportunity in the three years after a conflict ends. If leaders and international organizations miss that window, they miss the best chance to have an impact on the future stability and development of the country. The challenge is fundamentally political.” She explained, “first it is about what *the society* needs in order to convince people that they are safe and that it is possible to constitute a government to move things forward in a positive direction. Second, it is political because the behavior of the country’s neighbors, as well as the international community, will affect the opportunities and outcomes. Third, it is political because it is partly about how to enable a transitional political authority that is representative enough to be perceived as generally fair and legitimate. There may be tradeoffs between efficiency and inclusiveness in this phase.” The meeting focused on how best to organize the UN’s activities to help countries respond to the challenges in this period.

Participants included Atul Khare, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Timor-Leste; Youssef Mahmoud, Executive Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi; Ameerah Haq, Deputy Special Representative for Sudan; Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative in Liberia; former Liberian Minister of Finance Toga McIntosh, now at the World Bank; Sierra Leone’s Deputy Minister for Finance and Economic Development, Richard Konteh; Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping; and Gert Rosenthal, former negotiator and Foreign Minister, Guatemala, among others. Winnie Byanyima, once a rebel fighter and now Director of the United Nations Development Program’s Gender Team, spoke eloquently about the practical needs on the ground after the civil war in her country, Uganda. Sally Fegan-Wyles represented the U.N. Peacebuilding Support Office and led the discussions. The scholars who helped facilitate the conversations were Michael Doyle (Columbia University), Charles Call (American University), Jacob Shapiro (Assistant Professor of Politics & International Affairs, Princeton), Carles Boix (Professor of Politics & International Affairs), Wolfgang Danspeckgruber (Director, Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination), and Jennifer Widner. Salman Ahmed, Visiting Lecturer and a Visiting Research Scholar with the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination helped arrange the meeting. Ahmed is now special advisor to Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

On February 27 and 28, the Woodrow Wilson School National Security Project tapped Bobst Center Director Jennifer Widner and Program Manager Susan Newton-Dunn to join with the Century Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on “Coping with Overstretch: Realigning Capacities to Fit Peace and Security Challenges In a Time of Political Fatigue.” For more about this event, see the links to press reports.

