



IPA Special Event on the Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change

Meeting Note

On December 9 and 10, 2004, the International Peace Academy held a series of four meetings with member state representatives in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the United Nations. The purpose of the meetings was to allow member state representatives to start an informal discussion on the recently released report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change and to learn more about the thinking behind the panel's recommendations. The four sessions were identical in set-up, but with different sets of participants. Each session featured a brief introduction from the panel's research director, Dr. Stephen Stedman, and additional commentary by two discussants from Permanent Missions, followed by a free exchange of views. These meeting notes aim to summarize the main themes emerging from this discussion.

At the outset of each meeting, Dr. Stedman emphasized the **core messages of the report**, which, in his view, were not adequately reflected in media coverage on the report. The central finding of the report is that, in today's world, **development is the front line of defense** against the full range of threats that the panel report identified. Only capable and sufficiently resourced states are able to address effectively and responsibly the interrelated threats of poverty, internal conflict, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and organized crime. Moreover, the report emphasized that poverty, infectious diseases, and environmental degradation are sources of insecurity in their own right, as they kill millions every year, undermine state capacity and are highly correlated with the occurrence of civil war.

A second fundamental finding of the report is that, in spite of diverging threat perceptions across different regions, **we live in a world of mutual vulnerability and interconnected threats**. Today, more than ever, a threat to one is indeed a threat to all. For instance, major terrorist attacks in any western city will have a huge impact on the developing world through global economic repercussions. And because of mass air travel, newly emerging infectious diseases can spread within weeks from anywhere in the world to dozens of countries, potentially killing millions. In today's world, no state can defend itself alone without cooperation from others. It is therefore in any state's interest to appreciate other countries' threat perceptions and address the full range of threats to international peace and security simultaneously and with equal vigour.

In the open discussion, almost all participants warmly welcomed the report. In particular the call for a **truly comprehensive framework** of collective security as well as the report's **focus on prevention** was universally greeted. The overwhelming majority of participants made clear that while they might not agree with every one of the specific recommendations, the report as a whole was an excellent basis from which to work in the coming year.

Many participants also shared the **sense of urgency** conveyed by the report, which argues that in most threat categories, we have not seen the worst to come. Some of the threats,

such as HIV/AIDS, have complex effects on states and societies that are difficult to envisage today. One ambassador characterized the report as a “wake-up call” to the international community to get serious about the threats identified in the report.

Some representatives, in particular from the global South, felt that **development themes** were not given adequate attention. Several participants lauded the analytical treatment of the threat of poverty in the report but complained that the report was a bit “thin on recommendations” in this area. In response, Dr. Stedman explained the panel’s thinking and pointed out that the report had to be seen as complementary to the forthcoming report of the Millennium Project, which will treat in detail questions about how to structure and deliver international development assistance to effectively alleviate poverty. The task of the High-level Panel report was to demonstrate the importance of taking poverty seriously as central to international peace and security and to show why addressing socio-economic security threats is in the self-interest of developed countries. Indeed, one ambassador from a major donor country said that the report provided the most compelling argument to push his own government for further increases in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA).

Dr. Stedman further explained that the panel saw a fundamental difference between the challenges of development and those of collective security on which the High-level Panel was mandated to report. Over the past four years the international community reached a remarkable degree of consensus on specific development goals and the respective responsibilities of donor and developing countries on how to achieve them. This consensus is enshrined in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the Monterrey and Johannesburg Consensus. The actual challenge today is to get individual countries to live up to those commitments and to provide the necessary resources to implement them. By contrast, on collective security — whether on terrorism, civil wars, state failure, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — no such policy consensus or agreed policy framework exists. The panel’s goal was to lay the basis for a new consensus in these areas.

The report’s treatment of **terrorism** received positive reactions, with strong support from various regions for a broad-based strategy. A participant from a small island state emphasized that from the perspective of a country with the political will yet lacking capacities to fight terrorism within its borders, the report’s emphasis on counter-terrorism capacity-building was extremely useful. Several member states praised the report’s proposed definition of terrorism, and suggested that this language could help the General Assembly to break the impasse that has prevented it from agreeing on a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention.

Some participants pointed to what they perceived to be an imbalance between the report’s detailed treatment of **Security Council reform** and its more general recommendations on **reform of the General Assembly**. Dr. Stedman explained that the report’s focus on the Security Council was grounded, first, in the fact that the United Nations Charter gives the Security Council and not the General Assembly prime responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. Second, Dr. Stedman explained the panel’s methodology, which started with a rigorous assessment of today’s threats and evaluation of how effectively collective security systems have addressed these threats in the past. Institutional change

was meant to follow from this evaluation of deficiencies in the system and was not addressed for its own sake. Third, Dr. Stedman pointed out that the panel explicitly reaffirmed the importance of the General Assembly by asking it to adopt a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention including a definition of terrorism, to endorse the norm of the Responsibility to Protect and to reaffirm long-standing rules on the use of force.

One participant from an Eastern European country expressed concern that reorganizing regional groups for the sake of electing members to the Security Council would disadvantage Eastern Europe. In response, Dr. Stedman pointed out that this was an area in which the panel did not reach consensus.

Many participants appreciated the rationale for universalising membership of the **Commission on Human Rights (CHR)** and welcomed the proposal, while also pointing out that this will require clarification of the relationship between the CHR, on the one hand, and ECOSOC, the 2nd Committee of the UN General Assembly and the sub-Commission of Human Rights on the other. Dr. Stedman elaborated on the panel's thinking. Universalization was seen as a way to counter the Commission's highly politicised election process, which has cast a shadow over the body. Also, universalization reminds Member States of their responsibility to live up to principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Dr. Stedman emphasized, however, that universalization will only work in the context of the panel's other recommendations on human rights, which need to be seen and implemented as a package.

Many participants welcomed the recommendation of establishing a **Peacebuilding Commission**, though some expressed the need to look more closely at the implications of locating this body under the Security Council.

Proposals on **Secretariat reforms** also received positive response from many participants. Some pointed out that they would have also liked to see recommendations about which parts of the system were no longer useful and might be cut. Some skepticism was voiced vis-à-vis a Deputy Secretary-General for peace and security, pointing to concern that this post might rather fragment the UN system's response where it is meant to integrate.

Turning to the **implementation process**, several participants underscored that the 2005 September summit should not be seen as the end point but as a critical element of a longer-term agenda of implementing meaningful reforms. Some emphasized that this summit, nonetheless, should go beyond declarations of intent and be ready to take political and practical decisions about collective security and reforms needed to effectively address a wide range of threats to international peace and security that matter to all Member States and their societies.

New York, 20 December 2004