

The Fourth Conference on National Dialogues, 11—12 June 2019

The House of the Estates, Helsinki

## National Dialogues in Kenya as a Contribution to Violence Prevention and Sustaining Peace

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### Objective of the session

This session aims to present Kenya as a very interesting case for innovation in the National Dialogue arena. It is a case of an eco-system of multiple National Dialogue processes that take place in parallel, leading towards a joint overall objective of change; this allows various initiatives' ownership in the process, while it is not steered by any one coordinating entity. Kenya is also an interesting case of a National Dialogue process for the purpose of supporting cohesion, the prevention of violence and sustaining peace.

### Background

Since the mid-1990s, Kenya has experienced varying degrees of election-related violence every five years. This is a reoccurring feature despite an effective peace process, which was set up in response to the political crisis in 2007/2008, the most severe and violent political crisis Kenya has witnessed since independence. Subsequently, a national dialogue process resulted in that a new progressive constitution including the devolution of power was put in place in 2010. Violence has diminished, but still ethnic tensions still recur regularly during electoral cycles and the fear of renewed violence constitutes a permanent threat to Kenya's political stability and economic development. The root cause of the crisis is a threat for Kenya's main ethnic groups to be *excluded* from influence and power and thus from access to resources, as well as other groups' experiences of exclusion from decision-making. The 2017/2018-election crisis can be seen as a symptom of unresolved political conflict around exclusion and the failure to address key structural challenges in Kenyan society, as well as a general lack of national cohesion. However, the crisis has also presented an opportunity to bring about real change and reforms in order to make the current political system more effective. Various civil society and religious actors and the diplomatic community have thus called for an inclusive National Dialogue. In March 2018 the Building Bridges Initiative, a deal signed by President Uhuru Kenyatta and his main opposition counterpart, Mr. Raila Odinga, started a government led National Dialogue conversation. At the same time, different peacebuilding, human rights, womens and youth groups have started separate National Dialogue processes. Although there is a suitable overall political environment to engage in Dialogue and Violence Prevention work, there are many challenges along the way to the next elections in 2022.



### Key questions

- What are the key problems that the different dialogues intend to address? Why these initiatives?
- How are the various initiatives designed in order to achieve the two goals, i.e. preventing violence during the next election and sustaining peace in the longer term?
- How do the initiatives relate to each other, to the grassroots and to the international community?
- How do the initiatives address possible obstacles and resistance during the implementation phase?

### Composition of the session

The panel has been designed to include a balance of political and civil society voices, gender and other diversities.

#### Speakers:

- Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, Senior Advisor on Cohesion, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Office of the President
- Ms Florence Mpaayei, Kenyan Civil Society Leader, Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations
- Ms Roseline Odede, Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya FIDA and Advisor to the Dialogue Reference Group of the joint religious actors of Kenya
- Prof Adams Oloo, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, University of Nairobi, and Panel Member of the official BBI (Bridge Building Initiative)
- *Moderator: Dr Thania Paffenholz, Director, Inclusive Peace, Geneva and Project Leader, Kenya Dialogue Support Project of Inclusive Peace*