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**What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field**

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## Kyrgyzstan 2010-17

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## Introduction

In June 2010, Kyrgyzstan experienced its worst crisis since its declaration of independence in 1991. What began as a fist-fight between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth quickly escalated into large-scale ethnic violence, which spread from Osh to Jalalabad, Bazar-Korgon, and other towns and cities in southern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>1</sup> These initial clashes were marked by inter-ethnic confrontations, violence and killings. Fuelled by fast-spreading rumours of murders, atrocities and sexual violence, Kyrgyz ‘gangs’ – outraged by the killings and violence – then descended on Uzbek neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch concluded these attacks followed a consistent pattern:<sup>3</sup> individuals in camouflage uniforms on armoured military vehicles entered Uzbek neighbourhoods, removing the makeshift barricades that residents had erected; armed men then followed, shooting and chasing away remaining residents, clearing the way for looters.<sup>4</sup> Security forces either failed to intervene, or appeared to ‘take sides’, focusing their resources on “addressing the danger presented by Uzbeks, but not by Kyrgyz.”<sup>5</sup> Throughout 11-15 June, mass killings, rape and destruction took place in at least fourteen areas of the city of Osh and in four other towns. The violence resulted in the death of at least 470 people – with around 2,244 seriously injured<sup>6</sup> – and the displacement of 400,000 people, of whom 75,000 fled temporarily to Uzbekistan.<sup>7</sup>

The crisis took place against the backdrop of extensive political turmoil that begun earlier that year: large protests against rising energy prices and elite-level corruption took place in the city of Talas in February 2010, spreading to Bishkek on April 10, where riot police fired live ammunition into the crowd, killing 86 protestors.<sup>8</sup> Two days later, President Bakiyev fled the capital<sup>9</sup> and a provisional government (PG), headed by former foreign minister, Roza Otunbayeva, took power. Tensions began to rise during this period of uncertainty as a result of ethnically-charged narratives, often instigated by nationalists, extremists and criminal groups. An independent investigation into the June violence – the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), chaired by Dr. Kimmo Kiljunen<sup>10</sup> – unequivocally tied the events in Osh to the “under-representation of ethnic Uzbeks in public life and the rising force of ethno-nationalism” and the “power vacuum” following Bakiyev’s departure.<sup>11</sup> Framing the violence in Osh as “crimes against humanity”, the KIC also blamed the PG for having failed to foresee the violence and to develop a contingency plan to contain it.<sup>12</sup> The report, perceived by the PG as biased, was largely rejected, and Kiljunen was declared “persona non grata.”

The KIC report inadvertently created a confrontation between the international community and the Government of Kyrgyzstan at the very time when they needed to be working in concert towards the shared goals of peace and stability. Just as the UN was rallying behind the report and its recommendations, the Government used its response to the KIC to underscore the fact that “it had not received any assistance from the international community during the

clashes, despite the main task of international organizations being to react to such problems”.<sup>13</sup> And yet, contrary to these claims, the UN took meaningful action to respond to the escalating crisis behind the scenes in 2010, and, from 2011 onwards, played an important role in preventing a recurrence of conflict and in accompanying Kyrgyzstan on its pivotal peacebuilding initiatives.

On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017, President Sooronbai Jeenbekov was inaugurated as Kyrgyzstan’s fifth President, marking the first transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another<sup>14</sup> – a sign of how far the country has come since the tumultuous events seven years prior. This case study seeks to elucidate what role the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) specifically and UN Country Team (UNCT) more broadly played in this transition, and what steps the RC took to help prevent the onset, escalation, continuation and/or recurrence of conflict and instability in Kyrgyzstan at a period in the country’s trajectory when a collapse of the PG, for example, could have easily triggered a very different outcome. What strategies did the RC pursue in order to position the UNCT as a trusted – and long-term – partner during turbulent times?

Following a brief overview of the underlying conflict risk factors and medium-term political dynamics, this case study will argue that the RC played a critical role in 2010 in responding to the crisis and that, shortcomings of the UN’s approach notwithstanding, his swift actions contributed to a prevention of an escalation of the crisis. The RC then went on to support Kyrgyzstan in the development of a medium-to long-term peacebuilding approach, through access to resources from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) – creating entry-points for addressing issues which have long been considered ‘too political’ or even ‘taboo’, including the marginalisation of minorities, relationships between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, cross-border relations with Tajikistan, and preventing violent extremism.

## 1. Country Context

### Underlying conflict risk factors

A landlocked mountainous state, Kyrgyzstan gained independence after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. While market-based economic reforms and the semblance of inclusive politics won Kyrgyzstan relatively swift branding amongst the international community as an “island of democracy”<sup>15</sup>, post-independence stability was short-lived. Indeed, rather than a single episode of conflict, the crisis in June 2010 was part of a cycle of violence and instability that had lasted more than two decades, including in Uzgen in 1990, Batken in 1999-2000, Aksy in 2002 and Jalalabad in 2005,<sup>16</sup> often accompanied by significant political upheaval.

Under Askar Akayev’s rule as Kyrgyzstan’s first president, political elites largely subverted attempts to reform the political system and co-opted economic reforms. His time in office was characterised by endemic levels of bribery and

corruption, and a progressive de-legitimization of the regime. Repressive politics began to dominate the political landscape in the early 2000s: when Akayev refused to step down at the end of his second term, "prominent opposition leaders were jailed, the President's relatives began acquiring control over major media outlets, and protests intensified."<sup>17</sup> Kyrgyzstan's stability began to unravel when, in response to parliamentary elections perceived as fraudulent, civil unrest began to take hold. During the so-called 'Tulip Revolution' that followed in 2005, Akayev was finally forced from power, and fled the country.

His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, hailing from the Jalalabad region in the country's south (unlike Akayev who was a Northerner),<sup>18</sup> tipped the balance in favour of a different set of 'clients' but remained otherwise true to the precedent set by his predecessor. Corruption, nepotism and bribery continued and these new power dynamics intensified ethnic competition between the southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.<sup>19</sup> Whereas Akayev had a slight orientation towards "a civic mode of nationhood"<sup>20</sup> – albeit a cover for predatory politics – which saw ethnic Uzbeks represented in local authorities in southern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev quickly replaced them with southern Kyrgyz 'allies'. This change in the ethnic 'make-up' of the political landscape of Southern Kyrgyzstan led to a deterioration of inter-ethnic relations and the build-up of resentment and fear, which can be directly tied to the violence that later erupted in Osh.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, when a second revolution brought down Bakiyev's Government in April 2010, many southern Kyrgyz rightfully feared they may lose their newly acquired privileged position<sup>22</sup> in whatever power constellation would emerge as a result of the PG.

Underpinning these episodes of violence and political instability were pervasive economic, social and geo-political conflict drivers, of both a national and regional nature. The rapid privatisation of the agricultural sector – traditionally at the core of the Kyrgyz economy – in line with the free market reform programmes of the 1990s, has been particularly damaging for Kyrgyzstan. The move "dismembered the large collective farms and at the same time destroyed the vital support services that they provided."<sup>23</sup> High unemployment in the countryside has led to increasing levels of rural to urban (and foreign) migration where, upon arrival, the majority fail to find jobs; historically speaking, Uzbeks have also dominated the business sector in the Ferghana Valley for generations, which has accentuated a sense of resentment among many ethnic Kyrgyz. Significant progress in poverty reduction from 2000 onwards threatened to be undone by the 2008 financial crisis, which led to a decline in GDP of around 10% from 2008 to 2010.<sup>24</sup> As of 2018, 38% of the population still lived under the poverty line.

Kyrgyzstan has struggled to develop a cohesive national identity since its separation from the USSR. According to the 2009 census data, the Kyrgyz are the country's largest ethnic group (70.9%), followed by Uzbeks (14.3%), Russians (6.2%), and a wide range of other minorities,<sup>25</sup> although

it should be noted that Russians do not experience their minority status in the same manner as the Uzbeks. Despite efforts to unite citizens around the Kyrgyz language and other potential symbols of national unity, such steps – especially post-2010 – have only served to entrench divisions, and to heighten awareness of the low socio-political representation of minorities. Uzbeks especially, who are often labelled as having been the aggressors in the 2010 ethnic conflict,<sup>26</sup> have been systematically marginalised from power. Lack of trust, particularly between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, therefore, has contributed to social divisions and segregation, exacerbated by the absence of a formal reconciliation process.

From a geo-political perspective, Kyrgyzstan is wedged between China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Together with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is the source of the majority of the region's water resources, via high mountain glaciers – scarce resources that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan especially depend upon. From a regional perspective, water management is a consistent source of tension and plans to build hydro-electric dams provoke frequent protests from neighbours, and often lead to threats to cut off supplies of both natural gas and water.<sup>27</sup> These dynamics are compounded by ongoing territorial disputes which also lead to occasional cross-border skirmishes of varying intensity. Despite these tensions, it should be noted that Uzbekistan played an instrumental role in stopping the 2010 violence from escalating;<sup>28</sup> it could easily have exploited the situation to its own advantage but, instead, provided vital humanitarian assistance to refugees, and condemned cross-border 'revenge raids', which could well have triggered an inter-state conflict.<sup>29</sup>

Kyrgyzstan is also situated along the so-called 'northern drug trafficking' route, and Osh has been described as the region's "drug capital".<sup>30</sup> Drugs being 'trafficked' from Afghanistan to both Russia and Europe pass through Tajikistan, before arriving in Osh and then onto Bishkek before being smuggled through Kazakhstan to Russia. Drug trafficking is facilitated by the extensive porous border with Tajikistan, and fuelled by criminal gangs – tied intimately to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and the relative ease with which vulnerable people can be recruited into the 'business'.<sup>31</sup> A UNODC report in 2012, furthermore, noted that drug trafficking and organized crime were sources of conflict in Kyrgyzstan, and that the "inter-ethnic clashes that occurred in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 have been used by ethnic Kyrgyz criminal groups to assume predominance over ethnic Uzbek criminal groups and to control the drug routes through this part of Kyrgyzstan."<sup>32</sup>

### Medium term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

Only a fortnight after the June 2010 clashes, the PG held a referendum to approve a new constitution, which established, for the first time, a parliamentary system and led to Roza Otunbayeva assuming the Presidency – a first

for a woman in Central Asia. Despite the ongoing instability at the time, the OSCE and other international bodies gave a positive assessment of these democratic processes.<sup>33</sup> Interviews with local counterparts, however, suggested that the “overwhelming majority of the voters did not understand what they were agreeing to, but were giving their assent in the hope that it would bring stability to the country.”<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the referendum and the new constitution brought the required legitimacy for the PG to proceed, and allowed for parliamentary elections in October 2010, followed by presidential and local council elections in 2011 and 2012 respectively. During the 2010 election, a political party with a nationalist – rather than ethnically-based – agenda got the plurality of votes, and formed an opposition to the coalition government. In theory, these developments created a conducive environment for the implementation of the constitution, but this was undermined by continued infighting and jockeying for positions among political elites, which created tensions. Overall, the period continued to be marked by human rights violations.

President Atambaev, who succeeded Otunbayeva in December 2011, managed to contain ethnic tensions and ushered in a period of peacebuilding, enabling Kyrgyzstan to come ‘back from the brink.’ In doing so, he built on his predecessor’s achievements during her short presidency, including the creation of new institutions. Violence subsided during Atambaev’s term in office, even if resentment remained and antagonisms continued to fester. However, after six years in office, Atambaev left a “legacy of stalled reforms [and] an economy still struggling to attract outside investment.”<sup>35</sup> Incoming President Sooronbai Jeenbekov has promised to “create a state where human rights are respected, on democratic principles”<sup>36</sup>, but this remains a work in progress.<sup>37</sup>

The ongoing marginalisation of minorities – and the resentment and conflict it breeds – has also created fertile recruiting ground for both criminal and extremist groups. Movements such as the Islamist Jihad Union, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahir have long been a cause for concern – to varying degrees - most notably in the Ferghana Valley area, and increasingly in the Andijan and Namagan provinces of Uzbekistan.<sup>38</sup> A 2016 ICG report on Islamic radicalization tied treatment by the state and ongoing feelings of injustice as a result of the events of June 2010 as key drivers of radicalisation in the region.<sup>39</sup> While the link between extremism and poverty is weak at best, a recent study for the UN found that a majority of those associated with extremist groups were of Uzbek ethnicity,<sup>40</sup> underscoring the relationship between radicalisation and marginalisation.

## 2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

### Historical role and perception of UNCT

Conflict prevention was not a priority for the RC or UNCT prior to the June 2010 crisis. The 2005-10 UNDAF focused

mainly on poverty alleviation and social services; democratic governance; and, HIV/AIDS. The UNDAF highlights the “continuing closed character of institutions of governance and pervasive corruption” as well as the marginalisation of both women and minorities as important issues, but none of these or any other factors are identified as conflict risks. According to one interviewee, the RC Office (RCO) at this time, quite simply was in “development mode”.<sup>41</sup>

While conflict prevention may not have been a priority for the RC or UNCT, it was not ignored entirely. UNDP undertook relatively extensive work in this area, providing technical support to a government-led ‘Peace and Development Analysis’ in early 2010. This process, envisioned as an extension of the then-UNDP Conflict-related Development Analysis (CDA) tool,<sup>42</sup> was designed to establish a “common picture of the conflict prevention priorities in Kyrgyzstan”<sup>43</sup>, thereby laying the foundations for the development of a national conflict prevention strategy. The Peace and Development Analysis process established a National Steering Board and Oblast Advisory Committees, put in place to both “legitimize the process and moreover address the priorities identified in the process.”<sup>44</sup>

In principle, this was a promising approach for identifying conflict drivers. In practice, however, the process fell short of its objectives: tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and the endemic marginalization of Uzbeks from political and economic processes did not emerge as a priority. There are multiple reasons for this: some believe there was reluctance to speak about this sensitive issue in the context of a government-led, national process; the Oblast-level platforms were also considered too ‘political’; and, the facilitators of the process were Kyrgyz, presumably leaving Uzbeks uncomfortable raising the issue. And, despite the significant time and effort invested by UNDP and partners in establishing the platform/network on conflict prevention, it seems it was not ‘activated’ as a conflict prevention mechanism during the period of April-June 2010 when inter-ethnic relations were deteriorating – despite clear signs that violence could be expected. During the relatively protracted crisis from April to June 2010 “why didn’t we, as the UN, appeal to these platforms to ask for advice?”<sup>45</sup> one UN interviewee asked. The Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) who was leading the process at the time was also not invited to UNCT meetings,<sup>46</sup> underscoring the manner in which conflict prevention was a UNDP-led but not UNCT-wide initiative it needed to be, undermining the potential for early warning signs to be translated into early action.

While these local networks were not activated, reports and interviews of those involved at the time<sup>47</sup> indicate that UN staff were instrumental in communicating to UN headquarters their alarm about the increasing tensions on the ground: “From the very early days of the constitutional crisis, UN staff kept the office of the SG apprised of the escalating violence and the South-North divisions in the country.”<sup>48</sup> According to one report,<sup>49</sup> Lynn Pascoe, the then-Under-Secretary-

General for Political Affairs, urged Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to offer interim President Otunbayeva assistance in coordinating regional responses. Subsequently, in April 2010, Ban "dispatched veteran Central Asia diplomat Jan Kubiš, head of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, as Special Envoy to assess the situation and scope for the reestablishment of legitimate political authority."<sup>50</sup>

During this time, in close consultation with Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Miroslav Jenča, who headed the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) at the time, undertook efforts to provide good offices and facilitate dialogue among the political actors in Kyrgyzstan. These efforts were supported by the RC and UNCT, and coordinated with both the OSCE and EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, in the form of a coordination mechanism known as 'The Troika.'<sup>51</sup> The Troika conducted five joint missions to the country between 2010 and 2011, and helped facilitate the relatively peaceful departure of the former President in April 2010.<sup>52</sup> At the request of SRSG Jenča, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) also deployed a Senior Reconciliation Advisor through its Mediation Support Unit to promote dialogue and reconciliation,<sup>53</sup> along with other experts of DPA's Standby Team of Mediation Experts and UNRCCA deployed a National Political Officer to Bishkek in August 2010 to backstop its efforts on the ground, as well as to provide support to the RC/UNCT.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these 'behind the scenes' efforts, the violence in June ultimately ended without any significant involvement by the UN.<sup>55</sup> However, timely, coordinated and concerted support proved helpful during this period. Jenča, for example, provided the PG with advice on minimizing political violence and human rights violations; as a Troika 'member', he was also well-positioned to coordinate efforts with the EU and the OSCE both during and after the crisis.<sup>56</sup> And, following a request of the Kyrgyz Interim Government, the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) of the DPA, in coordination with UNDP, deployed several international advisors and an EAD desk officer to provide support, both for the June constitutional referendum and October parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan. Unlike the OSCE and the EU, the UN was perceived to represent the entire 'international community' (including governments from the region, and Russia), and was therefore able to play a more prominent role in these events.<sup>57</sup> During this time, the SRSG provided critical support to the RC on how to coordinate UN efforts with respects to the PG.

### **RC-led situation analysis, strategy and coordination**

When the crisis erupted in the Spring of 2010, Resident Coordinator Neal Walker<sup>58</sup> had already been in-country for almost five years, and had a wealth of country-specific knowledge and contacts he could draw upon. He had previously held other senior positions in both UNDP and the Organization of American States (OAS), and therefore

had strong knowledge of both the UN and the international system he could bring to bear. The conflict evidently had humanitarian, development and political dimensions and wearing both the hats of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator he had a responsibility to respond to each of them. While UNRCCA was leading on the most urgent political elements of the crisis, RC Walker was focusing on the UNCT's response, including measures to ensure safety and security of UN staff on the ground.

In the immediate aftermath of the June violence, RC Walker relied upon his own extensive knowledge of the country and, while he consulted extensively with the UNCT, many of the heads of agencies were relatively new and, consequently, less acquainted with the country context. He also depended significantly on his Senior Policy Advisor, a national staff member who had been working in the RCO for many years. While a great source of knowledge and contacts, the advisor had previously served as a Kyrgyz government official – which came with both advantages and disadvantages in terms of his vantage points and contacts with a diversity of individuals.

The RC, however, initially drew less upon the advice of the UNRCCA National Political Officer deployed to Bishkek. UNRCCA had explicitly requested that this officer be part of the UNCT, advising on prevention-related issues. Joining in August 2010, directly after the outbreak of violence, the staff person in question – who had no prior UN experience – received no on-boarding, no training and no orientation, was excluded from UNCT meetings, denied a working area, obliged to rent his own office space in the city, and operated largely as an 'outsider' for the first 8-12 months of his posting.<sup>59</sup> His efforts to undertake political analysis were further frustrated by limited information-sharing on the part of the PDA (who, due to his complex Terms of Reference, served more as a resource person for UNDP than for the UNCT)<sup>60</sup>, just as his efforts to share political analysis were impeded by a perception of 'competition' between the UNCT and UNRCCA – a dynamic that arose, to a certain extent, during the UN response to the crisis over the summer, undermining the effectiveness of UN efforts.

These dynamics, however, did not prevent the RC from seeking opportunities for the UN presence on the ground to engage in peacebuilding efforts. An important opening for the RC's engagement appeared when, in recognition of the risk of repeated violence, interim President Otunbayeva requested the UN in the summer of 2010 to assist with reconstruction and reconciliation in Osh and Jalalabad cities and oblasts, referring specifically to the implementation of "political measures on strengthening stability and peace, promotion of the economic development and creation of employment, improvement of administrative management on the local level, restoration of houses, medical and cultural institutions, schools as well as infrastructure – roads, telecommunication system, electricity lines and substations, water supply facilities."<sup>61</sup>

Being able to respond to this request in a positive and meaningful manner required the fast availability of resources. In this context, Walker efficiently drew upon the UN's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), one of the few UN mechanisms that allows for quick access to funds to underpin RC-led prevention efforts on the ground. Building on Walker's prior contacts with the Fund, and in consultation with the PBF's Chief and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support – as early as October 2010 – the UNCT was able to access USD 3 million through the Fund's Immediate Response Facility (IRF). The Fund's investments supported projects related to youth reconciliation (led by UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR); women's empowerment (led by UNIFEM/UN Women); and, water management and conflict resolution (led by FAO and WFP).

In June 2011, in response to an official request from the government together with the acting RC (Walker had left his position in early 2011), Secretary-General Ban declared Kyrgyzstan eligible to access additional funding from the PBF, and an additional package of US\$ 7 million was approved (known as IRF 2) for a set of six different peacebuilding projects related to administration of justice and building "infrastructures for peace." By all accounts, funds were released and the projects implemented in a speedy manner, leading to a meaningful prevention impact on the ground. An evaluation of the IRF packages (1 and 2) conducted in 2012<sup>62</sup> found that the engagements: helped "create stability and a sense of normalcy"; reduced critical drivers of conflict – especially those related to youth; built important capacity with youth and women's organizations, and within government ministries; and, "assisted communities' re-engagement in independent, self-sustaining economic activities."<sup>63</sup> Most importantly, the evaluation found that "momentum [was] created to address some of the key structural causes of conflict, namely those groups excluded from political and economic spheres in Kyrgyzstan."<sup>64</sup>

That said, according to a number of observers, these projects likely fell short of their full potential as an opportunity was missed to ground them in a broader conflict prevention strategy embedded in a solid conflict analysis. Indeed, no systematic conflict analysis had been undertaken to guide the work in the immediate aftermath of conflict and the conflict analyses that did exist were outdated and insufficient: for example, the UNDP Conflict and Development Analysis, initiated in 2007, did not take into account (the manipulation of) "ethnicity as a contributing factor to instability"<sup>65</sup>, and was not fully finalised until 2011 – after the release of funds for IRF1. This fundamental gap in analysis was compounded by the absence of a risk analysis, which may have highlighted the dangers of being insensitive, for example, to the ethnic profile of staff, which proved to be a significant challenge during project implementation. In the absence of a systematic conflict assessment, the IRF1 was designed and implemented on the basis of a humanitarian needs assessment, and therefore – in line with humanitarian principles – first targeted the communities most affected by the violence, who were largely

Uzbek. Kyrgyz communities were angered by an international response that reached them significantly later than those they perceived as being the instigators of the violence in the first place<sup>66</sup> – generating significant resentment, both towards the Uzbeks and towards the UN.

After these missteps, attributable at least in part due to the immense pressure the RC and UNCT were under in the midst of the June violence, there was evidence of significant 'learning' on the part of UNCT as it began to incrementally shift into conflict prevention 'mode' with the elaboration of IRF2. This was facilitated by an increasing receptiveness – initially on the part of RC Walker and then on the part of the RC a.i. – to receive inputs from the UNRCCA officer who, as a result of his persistent efforts to gain the trust of the RC, was eventually invited to provide the UNCT with regular political briefings. The PDA was also brought further into the UNCT 'fore' and, to a certain although insufficient degree, out of his UNDP-focused role. Overcoming their initial reluctance to work together, the UNRCCA officer and the PDA eventually 'joined forces' and cooperated well on their shared tasks, including the elaboration of IRF2. Indeed, the evaluation notes that IRF2 (instigated under the leadership of Walker in March 2011, elaborated after his departure and approved in June 2011, just before the arrival of the new RC), "illustrates a better understanding of the causes of the conflict and willingness to allocate resources and encourage the government to engage in deeper structural reforms."<sup>67</sup> Most importantly, it was underpinned by a collective conflict analysis undertaken at the UNCT level. The diminishing tensions and the emergence from the immediate humanitarian crisis also gave the UNCT more time and space to dedicate to assessment, planning, government engagement and broader consultation.

When Alexander Avanesov assumed his position as Resident Coordinator in July 2011, the UNCT had begun 'transitioning' into a prevention posture, but much work remained to be done. He focused significant attention on integrating the UNRCCA political officer into the work of the RCO, reorienting the PDA's TORs towards a UNCT-wide role, and further strengthening relationships with UNRCCA and UNHQ.<sup>68</sup> He also encouraged UNCT members to work outside of their mandated 'siloes', steering them to work collectively on peacebuilding issues. Pushing towards a unified approach, he also strongly discouraged individual UNCT entities from approaching the Government independently of one another, especially on joint projects which related to conflict prevention.<sup>69</sup>

A Russian national with solid understanding of the country context, relevant language skills and extensive regional knowledge, Avanesov was also well positioned to building relationships with different layers of Government and other stakeholders, in which he invested significant effort during his first year in office, laying the groundwork for subsequent UN peacebuilding engagements.<sup>70</sup> There were four key, pre-existing entry points which facilitated his work during these first few months, and which were partly owed to the UN's

longer-term track record and relationships of trust that had been built over the years: first, the willingness on the part of local authorities in Osh and Jalalabad, and other areas deeply affected by the conflict, to work with the UN on peacebuilding issues; second, the political will on the part of the President's office to explore how best it could collaborate with the UN; third, the strong desire on the part of non-governmental organizations to work with the UN across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding issues; and, fourth, the fact that the UNCT had internalized the lessons from its initial experiences of working with the PBF.

RC Avanesov then set about implementing a medium- to long-term strategy, working closely with SRSJ Jenča and Secretary-General Ban, to elaborate a peacebuilding and prevention-oriented approach underpinned, once more, by PBF support. While ultimately effective, the strategy was initially met with some degree of resistance on several fronts. One of the initial challenges was the need to overcome the Government's desire to focus on immediate humanitarian and development needs; as underscored by Avanesov, "it took some work to help them take a longer-term, more strategic perspective."<sup>71</sup> The Government was also concerned that accepting PBF funding would mean Kyrgyzstan would be perceived as a 'crisis country' in need of being on the agenda of the NY-based Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which was widely perceived among UN member states as a forum tending to failed states. Avanesov dedicated significant efforts to explain that the mandate of the PBF allowed it to provide funding to countries not experiencing violent conflict and that acceptance of such funds would not indicate that the country was in crisis, but rather that it was averting it.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, a linguistic misunderstanding almost entirely undid efforts to elaborate a peacebuilding package when the Government was made to understand that 'infrastructures for peace' – a term used to express a set of formal and informal domestic institutions elaborated to prevent conflict and promote peace – would not lead to the establishment of much needed roads, bridges, communication and sewage systems as the President had expected.<sup>73</sup>

These challenges were ultimately overcome with a combination of dialogue, advocacy and sometimes persuasion, facilitated by the relationship of trust established between the RC and the highest echelons of Government. Consequently, in the fall of 2012, Secretary-General Ban supported the request by the President for further assistance from the UN to address longer-term peacebuilding priorities, including assistance in the areas of rule of law and human rights, mechanisms for promoting dialogue at national and community levels, and implementation of a policy aiming at enhancing national unity and inter-ethnic relations. Fulfilling a UN requirement to access funding under the Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF) of the PBF, the President established an inclusive Joint Steering Committee (JSC) – involving all key stakeholders – to provide strategic guidance to plan further peacebuilding interventions.<sup>74</sup>

Based upon this decision and working closely with the Government, the RC then set about putting the 'wheels in motion' for the elaboration of Kyrgyzstan's first Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP). Having learnt the lessons of IRF1 and in line with the principles of conflict-sensitive programming, the development of the PPP was underpinned by extensive analysis and comparative insights. A context analysis – called "Peacebuilding Needs and Priorities Assessment" – was undertaken in the Spring of 2013 to ensure the PPP and related projects responded to conflict dynamics and peacebuilding challenges. Led by the RC with support from the Swiss-based NGO PeaceNexus, which has been a key partner for the UN in Kyrgyzstan (see 'resources' section below for more information), the elaboration of the needs assessment was highly participatory – involving national counterparts, civil society and other development partners.

The findings of the needs assessment were, furthermore, informed by a UN Technical Expert Group in Kyrgyzstan that brought subject experts of various agencies together to inform the UNCT's engagement in the PBF process,<sup>75</sup> and benefitted from close collaboration with the UNRCCA. To avoid duplication, the analysis was also informed by an extensive mapping of the activities of other entities, including the EU, World Bank, OSCE, etc. which all provided information on their long-term plans and strategies. Furthermore, the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in New York, which manages the PBF, put the RCO and members of the JSC Secretariat in touch with key actors involved in the PBF process in Nepal, which allowed useful sharing of relevant experience, informing the design of the PPP in Kyrgyzstan. PBSO also funded trainings of key UNCT staff in areas such as conflict assessment and conflict sensitivity, which improved their skills to design and implement the PPP.

As a result of the work of the UNCT and the JSC – and facilitated by the RC – three key priorities were elaborated on the basis of the needs assessment, and formed the centrepiece of the PPP: (1) implementation of critical laws, policies, and reforms to improve the rule of law, access to justice and human rights; (2) the establishment of local self-government bodies to reduce local tensions; and, (3) development of policies and initiatives that promote a common civic identity, multilingual education and respect for diversity and minority rights.<sup>76</sup> According to many UNCT members active during this period, the PPP was "fully owned by the Government and responded fully to their needs,"<sup>77</sup> although the ownership, according to UN staff involved at the time, seems to have been more genuinely felt with respect to development issues than those related to human rights.

The task now remained to develop appropriate projects that would adequately address the identified priorities. That exercise was complicated by the fact that many UNCT members saw the promise of PBF funding as a convenient way of compensating for looming budget and staff cuts, with several agencies inclined to simply rebrand pre-existing programmes as peacebuilding, a practice facilitated by the

very broad understanding at the UN of what peacebuilding entails. As a result, more projects were proposed than could be accepted under the PPP, and for which PBF funding was available. The RC, therefore, proposed, and the UNCT agreed, that projects would be selected through a competitive process, an approach first piloted in Nepal and encouraged by PBF's donors; each project, moreover, could have no more than two or three participating entities.

In theory, putting in place a competitive process seemed like a good practice and it was enacted in a transparent and rigorous manner. Projects were assessed according to criteria jointly decided upon by the UNCT; project proposals were assessed first by the UN Technical Experts Group, then by the JSC and an independent expert, Dan Smith (former chair of the PBF advisory group), was deployed to help review projects. A representative from the President's Office was – thanks to the efforts of the RC – closely involved throughout both the formulation of the PPP and the selection process. In light of the inevitably competitive dynamics that emerged, the RC also established a relatively innovative (in the context of PBF-funded projects) 'independent evaluation committee', made up of representatives from other international organisations who were requested to assess the projects critically against the pre-established list of criteria and their individual merits.

That said, while the logic of the competitive process was "sound"<sup>78</sup> – and in some respects, creative – and led to the selection of projects which were, on their individual merits, well-designed and in line with the priorities identified by the PPP,<sup>79</sup> the result was, according to several UN officials, "a bit of a mess."<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the 10 projects eventually approved by the JSC had little relationship to one another, missed vital opportunities to be catalytic, and prevented the 'whole from being more than the sum of its parts.' According to the evaluation of the PPP,<sup>81</sup> since the projects had been developed independently of one another, this process also contributed to: the duplication of project-level indicators each measuring their objectives within a PPP outcome but none measuring the impact of the PPP overall; a lack of coordination within site selection, "reducing possible strategic synergies among projects" and a duplication of similar activities from different projects in the same municipalities; duplication of implementing partners contracted for similar activities; concomitant high levels of administration costs across multiple agencies; and lack of a clear, and shared understanding amongst implementing partners regarding overarching PPP objectives. As underscored by one UNCT member, "in the end, we had a lot of interventions in a lot of different places, but not many places where we had many interventions; we were not aligned, we weren't integrated... it simply wasn't one initiative, but many, under the banner of the PPP."<sup>82</sup>

The 'disconnect' between the PPP as a government-owned strategy and as a UN-designed project led to other missed opportunities. The majority of PPP projects by-passed the Government since they were guided by the UNCT and

implemented by local non-government partners. While this contributed to increased capacity for local NGOs, a more effective strategy would have strengthened both the institutions of government and the relationship between government entities and local partners. This would have required more capacities and significantly more time than was accorded by the PBF timeframes. As outlined by one interviewee, "the UNCT was tasked through the PBF to deliver specific outcomes, not to build the capacity of the government to deliver such outcomes"<sup>83</sup> – another unfortunate missed opportunity.

Despite, or perhaps because of these structural problems, efforts were made on the part of the RC during implementation to ensure coordination with national and international development actors in-country. The JSC itself was highly collaborative, involving the Government, the RC, the UNCT, and key partners such as the OSCE and the EU, and civil society actors. With the RC representing the UNCT, a Development Partners Coordination Council was convened once a month, and every three months it met with the Prime Minister for a dialogue on development aid;<sup>84</sup> a National Coordination Council on cooperation with development partners also took place, chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the RC (with USAID as alternate co-chair).<sup>85</sup> An aid platform registering all ongoing development projects in the country was also developed. And, quite exceptionally, the World Bank representative became a full-fledged member of the UNCT in 2015, "an unequivocal recognition of the high regard for and the added-value of the work of the UNCT"<sup>86</sup>, and undoubtedly a step in the right direction to ensure better coordination between these two UN System entities.

These measures went some way to addressing the challenges associated with the PPP project design which could – to some degree – be 'ironed out' during the course of implementation, but the competitive UNCT dynamics unleashed by the process were longer-lasting,<sup>87</sup> somewhat undermining the RC's efforts to foster collaborative and participatory methods of working. These efforts suffered further from the fact that the UNCT was without a PDA for more than two years as a result of predominantly bureaucratic hurdles, at a critical time in the PPP lifespan and Kyrgyzstan's peacebuilding trajectory – leaving the UNCT without a key prevention asset.

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, there are indications that the PPP made a contribution to conflict prevention: there was a significant increase in the number of disputes addressed by local institutions; the reported number of violent disputes declined significantly; there were small increases in the reported trust and social equity in local-level state bodies; youth and women's mobilization increased; and, perhaps most importantly, there was a "significant increase in percentage of respondents who reported positive changes to ethnic relations compared to the baseline."<sup>88</sup> The evaluation of the PPP praised in particular the "creation of networks [and] collaborative spaces at the national level" that facilitated further work on and funding of peacebuilding work, including



at the local level.<sup>89</sup> And, according to the evaluation, the most cited effects of individual projects “pertained to the spontaneous adoption of certain activities of practice by other local government authorities in areas beyond the target areas of a project and without PPP funding support”<sup>90</sup> – indicating the positive ‘spill-over’ effects of PBF support.

In 2016, on the basis of recommendations from the PPP evaluation and as a result of extensive efforts by Avanesov, the UNCT and government embarked on a second PPP process, this time focused on preventing violent extremism (discussed below in greater detail) and a more collaborative process guided by the principle of ‘a coalition of the most willing.’<sup>91</sup> The second PPP process also overlapped with a highly innovative PBF-funded project on cross-border cooperation for sustainable peace and development (also discussed below in greater detail). When Mr. Avanesov completed his time as RC in mid-2017, the UNCT was flooded by letters of appreciation for his efforts and many staff lamented the ‘loss’ of a highly capable diplomat and leader.

Avanesov’s successor, Mr. Ozonia Ojielo, who took on his role as RC at the beginning of 2018 and who looks back at 30 years of experience in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, is by all accounts off to an excellent start, with interviewees expressing appreciation so far for his collaborative, non-hierarchical and inclusive style.<sup>92</sup> This is all the more encouraging as Mr. Ojielo will be facing a challenging agenda that includes, inter alia, advancing novel Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programming, promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation, supporting the resolution of remaining border issues and promoting regional cooperation and economic development in the Ferghana Valley.

### Specific interventions and initiatives

In the case of Kyrgyzstan there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies, in particular UNDP, aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific prevention objectives. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives and approaches in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context, that also hold particularly valuable lessons for RCs elsewhere.

*‘Cross border cooperation for sustainable peace and development’*

The Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) project was launched in 2015, funded by PBF and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Constituting the first cross-border initiative funded by PBF – which traditionally provides financing to national endeavours – the project brought together two RCs, two PDAs, and two UNCT configurations from both sides of the border. With a price tag of close to US\$6 million, the project was designed to address conflict drivers in unstable border areas by: strengthening

cooperation between security providers and communities; improving community infrastructure and natural resource management; increasing levels of inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding amongst youth; women’s active involvement in design and implementation of cross-border initiatives; conflict monitoring; and, community dialogue platforms.<sup>93</sup>

Working in cross-border areas is an extremely sensitive undertaking, especially when it concerns issues related to scarce natural resources (such as arable land and water), and potentially controversial infrastructure projects. These sensitivities were compounded by the ongoing absence of border demarcation/delimitation, and a history of tensions and border violence between communities and border guards; in this context, “local conflicts can easily escalate up to higher levels of violence and lead to deterioration in the political climate between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>94</sup> Consequently, both governments were initially reluctant to engage in a project of this nature, fearing it would require compromises on political issues they were not willing or prepared to negotiate on and/or create the perception of a willingness to concede sovereignty to international entities.<sup>95</sup>

Gaining the support of both governments required concerted efforts on the part of the UN and high levels of patience. The RCs on both sides of the border undertook extensive consultations with national officials to explain the rationale and benefits of the project, using trust built up over previous years. These efforts were assisted by the efforts of the UNRCCA, which used regional platforms as opportunities to lobby for the initiative. Similarly, representatives of the relevant funds and agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and UN-Women) at Headquarters also leveraged their relationships with the Permanent Missions of both countries to underscore the advantages of the project.<sup>96</sup> The two RCs were also instrumental in getting all involved agencies and programmes to agree to work together on a relatively complex project. Much of the difficult and time-consuming behind-the-scenes ‘leg-work’ was conducted by the two PDAs, working in unison to develop a project document with scope, substance and terminology that was acceptable to two RCs, ten agencies, and – most importantly – two governments with tense relations and a history of violence between them. A task which involved, amongst other things, addressing hundreds of comments provided by both governments on a 40-page project document.<sup>97</sup>

Once these initial challenges and associated delays were overcome, the project showed promising results. According to the first evaluation of the project, for example, “the project has contributed quite significantly to reducing tensions over water resources, as well as issues related to border-crossing rules, and attitudes towards the ‘other’ have been positively impacted.”<sup>98</sup> The project successfully established a community-based conflict monitoring system (‘TRACTION’), the findings of which were discussed regularly with local authorities and leaders from both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in order to agree on joint responses. And the establishment of

small-scale natural resource management initiatives helped reduce tensions and facilitate border-crossing, with a key lesson being that “tensions were far more likely to be reduced by ensuring communities’ independent access to resources rather than encouraging shared use.”<sup>99</sup>

The project was an instructive learning experience for the UN, paving the way for similar initiatives to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Many challenges were encountered which, with greater planning and careful management, could be avoided in subsequent phases of the projects, or similar projects in other contexts. One of the most important lessons – underscored by interviewees and learned exercises – concerned the issue of ‘mirroring’: the RCs, PDAs and UNCT entities involved adopted a mirroring approach designed to ensure coherence and balance between the work on either side of the border. Due to “different peacebuilding opportunities, entry points and governance structures”<sup>100</sup> this approach was not always appropriate and undermined efforts to ensure strategies were in line with the context – including the particularities of the national focal points, culture, and sensitivities which needed to be taken into account when designing and implementing the project.

#### *Electoral risk management tool*

Following extensive discussions among political parties, civil society and state institutions, several amendments to the electoral legal framework were made between 2011 and 2015. In May 2013, a Presidential Decree “On Measures on the Improvement of the Electoral System of the Kyrgyz Republic”, mandated a massive introduction of innovative technologies as a measures of increasing the credibility of elections; the decree, for example, envisioned biometric voter registration, electronic voter identification, electronic voting and results management, etc.<sup>101</sup> These changes, so close to the elections, led UNDP, in its electoral risk assessment, to raise concerns that the election might be contested or trust in the process diminished: the new biometric voter registration system was used for the first time; the required electoral deposit for political parties (returned upon receiving more than 5 per cent of votes) was raised 10 times (from around US\$ 7,000 to US\$ 70,000), potentially preventing certain candidates from competing; and there was a new requirement that only voters who register with biometric data (photo and fingerprints) would be able to vote, rejecting other forms of ID that had been used in the past.<sup>102</sup> These changes, according to UNDP’s risk assessment, had contributed to increased levels of distrust in state-society relations and of negative attitudes towards the electoral process; there were concerns related to the disenfranchisement of Uzbeks.

Given the results of the risk assessment, the RC was concerned that these dynamics could undermine progress made on building relationships of trust, both horizontally and vertically within society, and fostering stability. More specifically, the rushed introduction of new technologies elevated public expectations of ICT as a panacea for improving confidence

which, combined with the unresolved root causes and grievances related to the 2010 unrest, all contributed to the charged political atmosphere and elevated risks of election-related violence.<sup>103</sup>

The RC was quick to use his relationship of trust established with the government and – after extensive discussions with the Prime Minister’s office – the Government accepted to work with the UN to address the issue through an inter-ministerial working group.<sup>104</sup> Working closely with the National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS), which sits under the Prime Minister’s Office – and in close partnership with PeaceNexus – an electoral risk management (ERM) tool was developed to monitor the various risks associated with the elections.

The electoral risk management tool was elaborated on the basis of 10 risk factors which were tracked using interactive maps able to assess the intensity of the risk factor, and how the risk factors evolved over time in different districts. Field monitors reported data to UNDP-trained NISS research offices who managed the database which was used to inform the ERM tool, and then coordinator compiled the analysis and reported to the governmental bodies and the office of the President.<sup>105</sup> The findings were discussed in closed roundtables with representatives of the government ministries and other relevant state institutions. Then appropriate actions were taken to reduce tensions.<sup>106</sup> This early warning system has been institutionalised by the NISS and is still operational today, demonstrating the sustainability of initiatives which are given strong government ownership from the outset.

#### *Preventing violent extremism (PVE)*

It is estimated that approximately 3,000 people from Central Asia have joined radical groups that are fighting in Syria and Iraq, and many of those are reported to be from Kyrgyzstan.<sup>107</sup> Violent extremism in the country is tied to weak governance and rule of law, human rights violations, endemic political and economic marginalisation of certain populations, and religious fragmentation. Despite mounting evidence in recent years that extremism and radicalisation is a challenge that must be addressed, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has – until very recently – demonstrated little interest in addressing the issue head on. Only in 2016 did it begin to elaborate a counter-terrorism programme and, as with many such programmes which are often based on law enforcement measures, there were concerns raised that such initiatives may exacerbate rather than help address the issue.

Capitalizing on an expression of interest by the PBF to continue its support to Kyrgyzstan, and encouraged by the recommendation of the final PPP evaluation in 2017 to catalyse government support for PVE, the RC played an instrumental role behind the scenes in encouraging the Government not only to accept the need to address extremism and radicalisation, but also to develop a preventive response to it. When the Secretary-General’s UN Plan of Action on PVE was launched in 2016, the RC was able to leverage this global

plan to encourage the Government to consider the benefits of taking a preventive and transparent approach to PVE, sensitizing it along the way to the risk of *mano dura* (iron-fist) counter-terrorism policies being counter-productive and exacerbating the problem.

As a result of these efforts, a new PPP was approved in December 2017 as part of a new PBF package, with a budget of US\$8,000,000 (the total value of the project is US\$20,138,000 and funding is being sought amongst other international partners). The PPP, elaborated in close consultation with the Government, and featuring a strong component on institutional strengthening, will focus on four key areas: inclusive governance and justice system for preventing violent extremism; support to the prevention of radicalization to violence in prisons and probation settings; and, communities resilient to violent ideologies. The “ultimate purpose” of the project is aimed at “curbing the number of Kyrgyz citizens leaving for Syria or other countries as Foreign Terrorist Fighters as well as reducing the number of extremism and terrorist cases overall through a strengthened state partnership with the public in general and religious communities in particular.”<sup>108</sup>

While this second PPP demonstrates widespread concern about the vulnerability of Central Asia to violent extremism, there is some unease within the UNCT that PVE is “eclipsing” other, equally important issues. While the first PPP made some impressive peacebuilding gains, the challenges it sought to address are far from being resolved. As underscored by one UNCT member, “PVE is an important issue, but it is not the only one”.<sup>109</sup> The UNCT, therefore, under the leadership of its new RC has an important opportunity to either address outstanding peacebuilding issues collectively outside of the PPP process, or to use the PPP work on PVE as entry-points to address other related challenges, not least since many drivers of conflict and drivers of PVE overlap and intertwine with one another. It will, however, be vital to ensure that donor interest in PVE does not divert the attention of the RC/UNCT from other pressing issues.

### Resourcing

Resources available to the RC increased significantly following the June 2010 crisis, which drew the eyes of the world – including UNHQ and donors – towards Kyrgyzstan. The RC was able to draw on a total of US\$10 million for activities covering the transition until the elections in November 2011 and, in September 2013, PBF approved a further \$15.1 million as part of the PPP. Since then, PBF has also provided an additional \$1.6 million for work on Gender Responsive Peacebuilding (in 2014) and \$3 million for the cross-border project with Tajikistan in 2015.<sup>110</sup>

PBF funding and UN-wide support also allowed the RC to double the size of the RCO compared to pre-crisis levels, including staff focused on conflict prevention, such as the UNRCCA officer, and a PDA (a post that unfortunately

remained vacant for two years from 2015-16). It should also be noted that due to a complicated TOR, the PDA was originally not part of the RCO (but sat within UNDP); however, following a PDA assessment mission in June 2015, it was recommended to move the PDA to sit under the RCO. Further staff assets were provided by PBSO in the form of five PBF missions, including to: provide guidance on M&E processes to improve the PPP results framework; develop an M&E plan; provide inputs on agencies’ project proposals; and, surge support to establish the JSC Secretariat prior to approving the overall PRF funds – which was vital for the successful completion of the PBF PRF process. The Secretariat itself also received US\$ 850,000 from the PRF funding to ensure project oversight, promote partnerships, build the capacities of national counterparts, and ensure completion of the PPP; PBF Secretariat support also came with additional human resources: an overall coordinator, two M&E specialists, and a gender specialist. UNV supported two of those. In addition, funds were granted for monitoring/data collection exercises, which helped encourage cooperative oversight as well as substantively improve the interventions to support prevention.<sup>111</sup>

The RC was also good at drawing on external assets, for instance by building on a partnership with the Swiss based NGO PeaceNexus, pointing to the importance of RCs looking beyond capacities within the UN system. However, questions arise whether the increase in RCO capacity is sustainable given that the post-crisis period has now passed and there may be an incremental shift back into ‘development mode’. However, the RC was able to raise significant new funds by successfully positioning the UNCT to undertake work on PVE, capitalizing on growing international interest in the PVE space, raising significant donors funds (US\$8 billion as part of a PBF package, and an additional \$12 billion is being sought from bilateral partners).

### 3. Overall Contribution of RC and UNCT to Prevention

The RC has made an important contribution to Kyrgyzstan’s peacebuilding trajectory. A credible argument can be made that the initial phase of post-crisis response led by RC Walker helped stabilise the country and mitigate a potential escalation of the conflict, in particular by attending to the needs of youth. However, the initial set of peacebuilding projects following the crisis also generated resentment among Kyrgyz communities, which might have been avoided had they been embedded in a proper conflict analysis and a more conflict-sensitive approach. However, there is an argument to be made that this outcome was unavoidable: the Government insisted that the ethnic Uzbeks were the perpetrators, but they were also the primary victims and the ones most in need of aid.<sup>112</sup>

The second phase of RC-led prevention efforts, under the auspices of RC Avanesov, successfully leveraged entry-points with the Government that helped foster at least six years of support from PBF for conflict prevention and

peacebuilding endeavours, arguably helping bring about a reduction in ethnic tensions and mitigation of other conflict drivers. As the UNCT now embarks on its second PPP, with its new RC, Ozonnia Ojielo, significant efforts will need to be made to balance the interests of donors in addressing PVE with the need to address the equally important, outstanding 'business' from the previous PPP – including the ongoing marginalisation of ethnic communities from political and economic life, and key regional relationships that can be leveraged for mutual political and economic gains.

#### 4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

**RCs should place inclusiveness and early warning at the center of their prevention agenda:** The case of Kyrgyzstan confirms the importance of horizontal inequality and deep-seated exclusion (in this case of an ethnic group). The UN's development-as-usual stance of the UNCT prior to the June 2010 violence confirms the tendency of RCs and UNCTs to downplay – at least until a major crisis breaks out – the issue of exclusion out of concern of offending the Government. This case study also highlights the importance, in settings affected by horizontal inequality, for RCs and UNCTs to show greater sensitivity to the UN's own ethnic staff profile, which often mirrors the exclusion prevalent in the host country.

**RCs should ensure that peacebuilding programmes and projects are embedded in conflict analysis:** In Kyrgyzstan the funds for the first IRF1 were acquired rapidly and the projects implemented with equal speed, undoubtedly spurred by the dynamics of being in the midst of the emergency. While understandable, the absence of even a basic conflict analysis to underpin the initial set of peacebuilding projects arguably reduced the impact. A proper conflict analysis at the outset of the crisis might also have ensured a greater sensitivity to conflict dynamics in the context of humanitarian aid programming.

**Effective RC-led prevention requires ready access to funding for peacebuilding projects, with the PBF in particular constituting a critical resource:** Kyrgyzstan confirms the importance of the PBF as one of the few sources that RCs can draw upon to fund, on short notice, peacebuilding initiatives that other, more risk-averse donors, would shun. In Kyrgyzstan, the RC's effective use of the PBF has highlighted the ability of PBF to provide funds in relatively short timeframes, as well as the importance of building up relationships over time. Good relationships between the RC and the government enabled him to overcome the initial resistance of the President to accept such funding, which was fuelled by concerns it would stigmatize Kyrgyzstan as a conflict country.

**Pooled funding, such as that available through the PBF, is a key tool for the RC to foster inter-agency cooperation around prevention objectives:** Pooled funding effectively helps 'pull' agencies out of their siloed mandates into more collaborative ways of programming. Pooled funding is also likely to encourage common approaches to analysis,

programme design and implementation, leading to more efficient use of resources and less duplication in terms of programming, and programme monitoring and evaluation. Where competitive processes are established among the UNCT to select projects financed through pooled funding, RCs should devote special care to mitigate the risk of competitive dynamics undermining "one-UN" approaches.

**Building trust with the government can create important entry-points for RC-led prevention:** In Kyrgyzstan, the relationship of trust that RC Avanesov managed to build with the highest echelons of the Kyrgyz Government, including the President, created important entry-points for RC-led peacebuilding initiatives, by leading the government to explicitly request support even in sensitive areas such as conflict prevention that might previously have been no-go zones for the UN in the light of domestic sovereignty concerns. Of course, the success of this approach in Kyrgyzstan does not belie the fact that the imperative of building trust with the host government needs to be at times balanced with the imperative of standing up to the government in cases where government actions or policies are responsible for increasing conflict risk or human rights abuses. There is no template guidance on how to walk that tightrope and in any given case, requires judgement.

**In light of the limited prevention capacities at his/her disposal, RCs should ensure full use of and cooperation among all staff dedicated to prevention and fully integrate them into the RCO and UNCT deliberations:** In Kyrgyzstan, prevention assets at the disposal of the RC and UNCT, such as the PDA and a seconded political officer deployed from UNRCCA, could have been earlier and better incorporated into the deliberations of the RCO and UNCT. The subsequent full integration of these assets into the work of the RCO, strengthened the RC's ability to become a driver of UNCT-wide prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. Indeed, PDAs and political officers are critical resources for the RC and to reach their full potential, should be empowered by the RC and positioned as UNCT-wide assets if they are to be effective at supporting the RC in his/her prevention goals.

**Given the centrality of the PDA role, it is important to ensure that RCOs are not deprived of these assets for extended periods of time during critical peacebuilding periods:** In Kyrgyzstan, the RC's peacebuilding role was temporarily weakened by the two-year period during which the PDA position was vacant in 2015-16. Indeed, this arguably affected the quality of programmes and the RCO's ability to fundraise as the majority of RCs rely on such resources precisely for these purposes. When gaps are unavoidable, intermediary solutions for 'temporary PDA-like' assignments should be explored to avoid PDA-vacuum.

**RCs are most effective in ensuring 'whole of UNCT' responses – including on conflict prevention – when they encourage, as much as feasible and realistic, 'single-point' dialogue with the Government in the context of multi-**

**agency programmes, especially on sensitive topics.** The approach of RC Avanesov of having a 'single point' dialogue (on issues related to the PPP) with the Government rather than agencies independently contacting the Government helped ensure greater coherence and overcome siloes, thus maximising the chances of the prevention/peacebuilding strategy succeeding.

**Given the increasing relevance and popularity of PVE-related issues amongst donors, RCs must find ways to balance and/or leverage PVE work to address other equally important peacebuilding issues:** In Kyrgyzstan, the RC was able to optimise his close relationships with the government to encourage a preventive approach to violent extremism; the concerns of some UNCT members, however, that PVE is only one of many issues that needs to be addressed should not be easily dismissed. Given that many of the drivers of violent extremism and conflict overlap, there may be opportunities to address all concerns but this must be done in a highly strategic manner.

**In countries suffering from chronic instability in border areas, RCs can play an important role in driving cross-border prevention projects:** The joint regional project with Tajikistan shows the potential of RCs – when partnering with RCs in neighbouring countries – to drive the establishment of projects targeting cross-border drivers of instability. The Kyrgyzstan case shows that the success of such projects requires sound planning, support from other UNCT members as well as UNHQ, and proactive efforts on the part of both the RC and the PDA, as well as high degrees of persistence.

## Endnotes

Cover Image: Flickr/ Evgeni Zotov. Osh, Kyrgyzstan. 8 August 2010. Osh after riots in 2010. "I was there one and half month after riots. Most of city was in normal condition. But many buildings - cafes, shops, private houses - along main roads were burned and destroyed. It happened because marauders used trucks to carry robbed goods and could move only on enough space. Almost all the ruins I saw belonged to Uzbeks. People of burned houses lived in tents presented by UN and they were also given some food by UN. There was no any help from government."

\* This paper is based on secondary resources (listed in the bibliography) and 14 interviews with RCs, PDAs and other RCO staff, other UNCT staff, national interlocutors of RC/UNCT Tunisia, and, UNHQ staff. The lead writer/researcher would like to sincerely thanks all those who participated in this process, either in interviews or in the course of subsequent reviews of the paper, and a special thanks are due to RC Alexander Avanesov for participating in multiple interviews, and for providing comments on the draft. The author bears sole responsibility for any mistakes or omissions in this report, and the views expressed in this report are not necessarily shared by all the individuals who interviewed or reviewed the report.

1 It should be noted that the 'facts' about the events of 10-15 June are highly controversial and contested. This brief summary is based on a combination of UN reports, reports by Human Rights Watch and the work of the Helsinki Committee, which was commissioned to conduct an independent enquiry, as detailed shortly.

2 Human Right Watch notes that it is important to recognise that, during this violence, many ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Russians "saved the lives of their friends and neighbours of other ethnicities while the attacks were under way", in "Where is the justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath." Human Rights Watch. 2010, p.7.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Logvinenko, I. 'Conflict and Violence in Kyrgyzstan', Case study for United Nations–World Bank Flagship Study, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, World Bank, Washington, DC. (2017), p.1.

7 "Kyrgyzstan Revised and Extended Flash Appeal." Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. End Report June 2010-June 2011, p.1. By 28 June, 2010, almost all refugees had returned to Kyrgyzstan.

8 Logvinenko, I. 2017 p.1.

9 First to the Jalal Abab region and then to Belarus, where he remains in exile.

10 A Finnish parliamentarian and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative for Central Asia at the time.

11 "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010." Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission. 3 May 2011.

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