



# **Parliaments' Role in Linking Good Security Sector Governance to SDG16 amid COVID-19**

***Webinar Report***



## About the event

This session focused on the crucial role of parliaments in promoting the nexus between peace and sustainable development envisaged under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. Through their role as one of the most prominent oversight bodies of the state, parliaments hold governments accountable for their commitments under the 2030 Agenda, and ensure that national security sectors operate within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights - thereby contributing to peace, justice and security. This oversight function is especially critical during times of crisis, as we are facing today with the challenges posed by COVID-19.

In this session, member of Parliaments (MPs) from Colombia, the Gambia, Georgia and Nepal shared experiences, good practices and mechanisms as to how parliaments can contribute to realizing the good governance ambitions of SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda, and how these same principles are essential in the response to COVID-19.

## Time and Date

22 May 2020

## Speakers

**Hon. Sen. Rodrigo Lara Restrepo**, Senator, Congress of the Republic of Colombia

**Hon. Dawda Jawara**, Member of the National Assembly, National Assembly of the Gambia

**Ms. Sophie Kiladze**, Member of Parliament, Parliament of Georgia

**Hon. Dr. Deepak Prakash Bhatt**, Member of Parliament, Federal Parliament of Nepal

### *Introduction*

**Mr. William McDermott**, Project Coordinator, DCAF

### *Moderator*

**Dr. Hans Born**, Head of the Policy and Research Division, DCAF

**Watch the webinar online at: <https://youtu.be/4fVoAURxHIA>**

## Linking SSG/R and SDG16

Speaking from four different countries across four continents, panelists underscored the importance of exerting oversight of the security sector for the realization of SDG16. At the same time, the variety of insights and examples they provided shows how oversight manifests in different ways, as it is shaped by local context.

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*“SDG16 strives to create effective, accountable and transparent institutions. These good governance principles ensure that laws function as they are designed, and that the security sector remains beholden to population it is responsible to protect.”*

- Mr William McDermott

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Senator Rodrigo Lara Restrepo from Colombia spoke about how the Senate is actively involved in overseeing security providers, such as prisons and police. However, he acknowledged that parliamentary committees lack certain powers, such as compelling individuals to appear before them, which undermines the effectiveness of oversight efforts and weakens political control.

Meanwhile, Honourable Dawda Jawara of the Gambia spoke of efforts to realize SDG target 16.6 which calls for the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions. In particular, he shared his experience in reconstituting the Gambia’s parliamentary security and defence committee, as the committee had ceased activity in part due to the 22 years rule under a dictatorship. In this endeavour, Honourable Jawara pointed to the dual task of both reinvigorating parliamentary oversight, while at the same time

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*“We now have to work very hard to instill in these security sector actors this sense of civilian authority.”* - Hon Dawda Jawara

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## About DCAF

DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to making states and people safer through more effective and accountable security and justice. Since 2000, the Centre has facilitated, driven and shaped security sector reform (SSR) policy and programming around the world.

Good security sector governance (SSG), based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, is a cornerstone of development and security. DCAF assists partner states in developing laws, institutions, policies and practices to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms based on international norms and good practices. In everything we do, DCAF adheres to the principles of impartiality, local ownership, inclusive participation and gender equality. DCAF also advises governments and international organizations in designing and implementing their own programmes for supporting states in developing their security sector governance.

## About the SSR & SDG16 Project

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 aims to develop peaceful and just societies by building strong institutions, through targets 16.6 and 16.7, which focus on good governance and accountability of public institutions. To achieve the ambitions envisaged under this goal, all states will need to redouble their efforts to ensure that their national security sector is both effective and accountable, and operates within a framework of democratic civilian oversight, rule of law and respect of human rights. However, there is currently limited guidance on how SSG/R policies can contribute to achieving SDG16, and in particular targets 16.6 and 16.7 which are crucial for legitimate stability, especially in fragile contexts.

This project focuses on three different oversight actors of the security sector and covers the role of parliaments, civil society and independent oversight institutions in promoting SSG/R and SDG16. Best practices and lessons learnt from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, are examined and discussed with the aim to provide SDG16-specific guidance that supports states in implementing SSR in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

This project is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

sensitizing security sector actors to the importance of and necessity for democratic civilian control of the security sector.

Ms Sophie Kiladze of Georgia and Dr Deepak Bhatt of Nepal pointed to the importance of inclusivity in the context of the 2030 Agenda. In her role as chair of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee, Ms Kiladze noted the critical importance of ensuring the security of individuals, especially the most vulnerable groups, such as children, minorities and those in detention facilities. This also highlights that human security is an essential component for the realization of SDG16, and that security is not achieved only through the police or military. Dr Bhatt spoke of his role amidst Nepal's constitutional reform process to ensure that new laws and policies are enacted that create accountable and inclusive institutions that represent marginalized group. Both panelists also noted the importance of local governance. In particular, as Nepal recently became a federal state, Dr Bhatt pointed to the efforts of the current parliament which have focused on the role of the police both at the local and federal levels.

Therefore, all MPs underscored that parliamentary oversight is a key aspect of SDG16, which contributes to more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. At the same time, their insights and efforts towards realizing this goal shows that the type and focus of oversight can differ quite substantially.

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*“We have been working on the responsive, inclusive and participatory constitution which should be implemented. In that sense, we have been revising new bills to introduce the federal - or central - police to the provincial polices, which will help to make an inclusive and participatory police.”*

- Hon Dr Deepak Bhatt

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## Implications of COVID-19 for the SSG/R-SDG16 nexus

The challenges posed by COVID-19 have impacted the work of all parliamentarians quite severely, despite them hailing from four different continents. This reiterates how COVID-19 is a problem that has profound impacts on the entire world. The different experiences of the four MPs also reflect the variety of measures undertaken by legislatures across the world to tackle the pandemic: some parliaments have shifted onto fully virtual platforms (for example in

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*“We have a particular issue in Colombia, it’s that we have now a 100% remote Parliament, remote Congress – a virtual Congress. And as you know, when you spread the members of Congress all over the country, we lose the aptitude to make political control. The strength lies, surely, in the physical gathering of members of Parliament.”* – Senator Rodrigo Lara

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Colombia), new parliamentary committees have been created (such as in the Gambia and in Nepal), and in some contexts only issues considered essential are currently being addressed (the Gambia).

Nevertheless, a common problem shared by many of the MPs is how to ensure oversight, when their ability to move and work freely is quite limited. Senator Lara explained that COVID-19 has exposed

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*“The Georgian Parliament has remained very active with regards to COVID-19, the problem was of course, which was the case of all parliaments around the world, that we could not gather ourselves because of COVID-19, but this did not stop our oversight of the security sector.”* – Ms Sophie Kiladze

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## The Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development

Held annually, the Stockholm Forum is a dialogue-driven event that provides a neutral platform for interdisciplinary exchange among members of international communities in the development, humanitarian, peacebuilding and security spheres. The discussion-led roundtable sessions—which the Stockholm Forum is well-known for—are developed in collaboration with partner organizations and invite active participation from stakeholders at all levels.

Reflecting developments in the international policy agenda, each edition of the Stockholm Forum has had a different overarching theme, for 2020 the theme is ‘Sustaining Peace in the Time of COVID-19’.

The Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development has been jointly organized by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and SIPRI since 2014. DCAF has participated in the Forum as a formal partner since 2018.

pre-existing weaknesses in political control, due to the fact that the Colombian parliament currently operates entirely remotely. According to him, political strength lies in the physical gathering of MPs, which is impossible at the moment. Similarly, Ms Kiladze stated that, while oversight efforts continue in Georgia, one of the key strengths of the parliamentary mechanism is debating with the opposition, which is currently reduced.

Overall, COVID-19 has led to significant difficulties for parliamentarians to ensure the good governance of the security sector and for enhancing the implementation of SDG16. In many contexts, the pandemic has, if anything, reinforced many of the challenges that already existed, and slowed down the ability to realize SDG16.

## **Key takeaways**

1. Parliamentary oversight of the security sector is a key component of realizing SDG16 and can take many different forms, as it is dependent on national and local contexts.
2. Inclusivity and ensuring that no one is left behind are essential in achieving the good governance ambitions of SDG16 – especially in times of crisis.
3. COVID-19 is quite severely impacting all parliaments, enhancing pre-existing weaknesses of security sector oversight. Legislatures need to quickly develop plans to cope with these challenges and develop strategies to continue work in spite of them.
4. Even though COVID-19 has posed serious problems, MPs must not lose sight of their efforts before the pandemic arrived, and continue striving to create peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

