

# Evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)

16 March 2020

Assignment No: IED-20-001



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organisation. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organisation;” (General Assembly [Resolution 48/218 B](#)).*

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## I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of DPPA conflict prevention work in, and in support to, non-mission settings, with a primary focus on the Department's regional divisions which have key responsibility for its conflict prevention mandate. The evaluation did not cover the Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights. The evaluation topic emerged from a scoping process described in the evaluation inception paper.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation was conducted in conformity with norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.<sup>2</sup>

2. OIOS sought the comments of DPPA management on the draft report and these were taken into account in the final report. The formal response is included in Annex I.

## II. Background

### *Mandate*

3. DPPA was founded in January 2019 as part of the United Nations peace and security reform, endorsed by General Assembly resolution A/RES/72/199. The Department combines the functions of the previous Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and shares its regional divisions with the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). The direction of the programme is provided through General Assembly resolutions and Security Council mandates.

4. The DPPA mandate is to be responsible "for all Secretariat matters related to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts at the global level."<sup>3</sup> It is the Organization's lead entity for "good offices, political analysis, mediation, electoral assistance, peacebuilding support and political guidance as they relate to...preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacebuilding and sustaining peace."<sup>4</sup>

5. DPPA manages and oversees 36 special political missions (SPMs), including three Regional Offices: UNOCA (Central Africa), UNOWAS (West Africa and the Sahel), and UNRCCA (Central Asia).

### *Leadership and resources*

6. DPPA is headed by an Under-Secretary-General and has four Assistant-Secretary-Generals, three of whom are shared with DPO for: Africa; Europe, Central Asia and Americas; and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. The fourth ASG heads PBSO.

7. DPPA falls under the Political Affairs programme budget (Part II, Section 3) of the United Nations regular budget (RB). The total resources for DPPA budget in 2019 was \$83,885.2 million, of which \$46,041.2 million were funded by assessed contributions (including \$3,376.9 million for PBSO) and \$37,884 were funded by voluntary contributions. While the funding for DP(P)A from the regular budget has slowly declined in the period covered by this evaluation (2014-2019), the Department has had to increasingly rely on extrabudgetary resources to carry out its mandates.

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<sup>1</sup> Inception Paper for Evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, IED-19-011, 3 July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Proposed programme budget 2020 A/74/6 Sect 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

8. Through the Multi-Year Appeal, DPA received \$35.6 million in 2018 in funding from 30 donors to support United Nations capacities and partners at Headquarters and in the field through the deployment of short-term staff and technical expertise. The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), managed by PBSO, also mobilizes donor funding and raised and allocated to 54 countries \$928 million since its creation in 2006. In 2018, the Fund supported 96 projects in 40 countries with \$183 million for the purpose of sustaining peace.<sup>5</sup>

9. In 2018-19, DPPA had 339 posts at headquarters, 59 funded through extrabudgetary resources. In addition to Headquarters posts, over 4,000 staff work in political and peacebuilding missions, worldwide.

### *Conflict prevention*

10. Conflict prevention encompasses a wide range of activities to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. Such efforts to sustain peace also include addressing underlying conditions that contribute to conflict. In this evaluation, OIOS-IED assessed the Department's work in conflict prevention within this broad context.

11. The Department's conflict prevention work was defined in this evaluation as comprising:

- *analysis, early warning and advice*: sustained monitoring and analysis of political developments across the globe, detecting potential crises early on and advising the Secretary-General who may subsequently bring them to the attention of the Security Council;
- *preventive diplomacy*: engagements under the good offices of the Secretary-General to avert disputes from arising between parties, to stop those disputes from escalating into violence, and to limit their spread when they do; and
- *mediation*: advice on mediation and experts deployed to mediation initiatives globally and support to local mediation processes.

12. While supporting all the Sustainable Development Goals, the Department contributes to SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies) through its work on inclusive constitutional processes, national dialogues, and peaceful elections, and to SDG 5 (gender equality) by increasing support for the inclusion of women in peacemaking, conflict prevention and political participation.

### **III. Methodology**

13. The evaluation covered the time period of 2017 to 2019 and employed a mixed-method approach featuring the following qualitative and quantitative data sources:

- *Interviews*: 101 semi-structured interviews with DPPA staff and partners in field locations and headquarters;
- *Surveys*: a web-based survey of all Headquarters and key field DPPA staff<sup>6,7</sup> and a web-based survey of key internal and external partners, including other United Nations

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<sup>5</sup> PBF website.

<sup>6</sup> Excluding the Division for Palestinian Rights and Decolonization Unit.

<sup>7</sup> The staff survey was deployed 9-20 September 2019 and sent to 469 staff members; 184 responded, for a 39.2 per cent response rate.

entities, Resident Coordinators (RCs), regional organizations and civil society organizations;<sup>8</sup>

- *Case studies*: three country case studies entailing on-site data collection (Burundi, Jordan and Solomon Islands) and three entailing desk reviews (Burkina Faso, Honduras and Madagascar);
- *Direct observations*: of 11 meetings, including internal and cross-system meetings;
- *External expert assessment of 155 DPPA analytical outputs*;
- *Document reviews*: of After-Action Reviews, Lessons Learned, DPPA annual reports, workplans, job descriptions, knowledge management products and partnership documents;
- *Analysis of DPPA correspondence log data*;
- *Assessment of organizational culture*; and
- *Secondary analysis of DPPA programme data*.

14. The evaluation faced some limitations:

- The difficulty of measurement of conflict prevention outcomes and their attribution to DPPA or the United Nations system;<sup>9</sup> and
- The dynamic nature of ongoing reforms in the peace and security and development pillars.

OIOS-IED mitigated these limitations by examining DPPA's contribution to conflict prevention efforts, using case studies as illustrative examples, and assessing the early results of reform.

15. OIOS-IED wishes to thank DPPA for its cooperation throughout the evaluation.

#### **IV. Evaluation Results**

##### **A. The DPPA work programme was well-aligned with its conflict prevention mandate**

*The Department's workplans, activities and staff competencies were highly relevant to its conflict prevention objectives*

16. The 2016-2019 DPPA Strategic Plan clearly articulated a vision for meeting its conflict prevention mandate; this was defined as follows: "To promote the search for, and assist countries to reach, inclusive political solutions as the key to prevention or reduction of conflicts and political violence."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the plan's first Strategic Goal was "strengthening international peace and security through inclusive prevention, mediation and peacebuilding processes."<sup>11</sup>

17. Within the context of its Strategic Plan, DPPA workplans and activities were well-aligned to its conflict prevention mandate. An analysis of division workplans indicated several relevant activities, including: providing political analysis to senior management; providing technical assistance to Member States; and engaging in early warning activities, such as raising emerging crises with the

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<sup>8</sup> The partner survey was deployed 4-18 October 2019 and sent to 544 people; 178 responded, for a 32.7 per cent response rate.

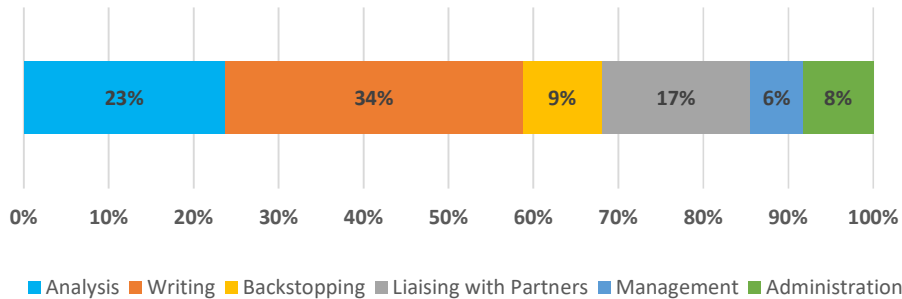
<sup>9</sup> The evaluation was also unable to assess discreet efforts or "quiet diplomacy" that took place during the assessment period.

<sup>10</sup> DPA 2016-2019 Strategic Plan. DPPA is developing a plan for 2020-2022.

<sup>11</sup> DPA Strategic Plan 2016-2019, page 4.

Secretary-General’s Executive Committee, the Peacebuilding Commission or Security Council.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, regional division staff surveyed reported spending the majority of their time (at least 65 per cent) on primary conflict prevention activities, shown in Figure 2 below. This was an increase from 2006, when an OIOS evaluation found that desk officers devoted less than 45 per cent of their time to similar activities.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 2: DPPA regional division staff reported spending at least 65 per cent of their time on primary conflict prevention activities of analysis, writing and backstopping\***



Source: OIOS survey of DPPA staff

\* These include: **Analysis** (23%) – monitoring, collecting and analysing data from various sources; **Writing** (34%) - preparing and writing background notes, briefings, reports, talking points and memos; and **Backstopping** (9%) - supporting SPMs and field presences. **Liaising with partners** (17%) would also include some time related to conflict prevention.

18. DPPA staff also had the necessary skills and competencies to conduct these activities. DPPA job postings required political affairs officers to have a degree in a field related to conflict prevention and experience with conflict analysis or resolution, and DPPA job descriptions required staff to regularly collect, coordinate, and analyse political information. The overall good quality of DPPA conflict prevention analyses (discussed in Result C) showed that staff had clear understandings of complex contexts and were able to communicate these to users. Also, in internal meetings staff were observed to knowledgeably engage in complex conflict prevention discussions.

*However, DPPA lacked a more proactive and strategic approach to its conflict prevention work*

19. The need to address emerging conflict hot spots immediately meant that the Department was often more reactive than proactive. A more reactive approach has meant less time for monitoring and early warning (staff surveyed reported less than 12 per cent of their overall time on monitoring). Some partners who received conflict prevention analyses also indicated that these analyses were not at times sufficiently strategic. Further, less than half of DPPA job postings included “recommending solutions/possible action” as an expected responsibility, and many positions did not include “early warning” in the responsibilities section.

20. Furthermore, conflict prevention priorities were sometimes unclear. While division workplans were aligned with Department goals and targets, Division-specific priorities for contributing to these targets were not clear.

<sup>12</sup> This is the principal-level Executive Committee established to assist the Secretary-General in taking decisions on issues of strategic consequence requiring principal-level attention.

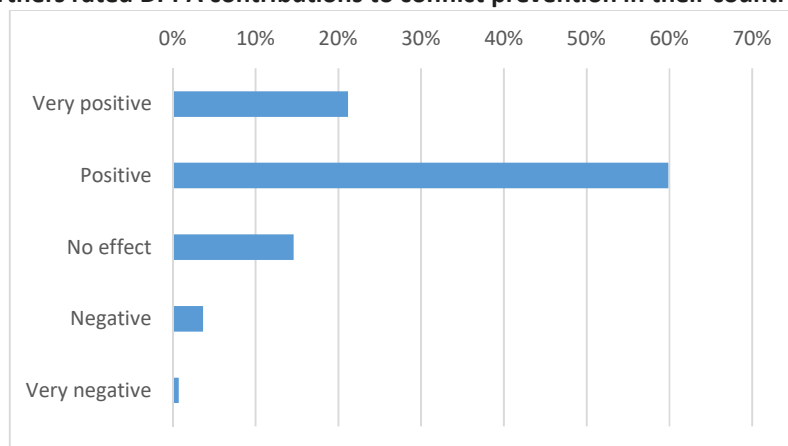
<sup>13</sup> E/AC.51/2006/4: Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on an in-depth evaluation of political affairs, 2006. These activities included monitoring, research and writing.

**B. DPPA effectively contributed to conflict prevention, particularly through mediation and preventive diplomacy, when key enabling factors such as strong political will, leadership and cohesive international support were in place**

*DPPA has contributed effectively to conflict prevention efforts overall*

21. Partners have assessed the Department’s overall conflict prevention work positively. Most partners surveyed (81 per cent) reported that DPPA had a positive impact on prevention in their respective countries (as shown in Figure 3), highlighting the Department’s effective contributions through its mediation support, convening power, and on-the-ground presence. Partners interviewed also had generally positive assessments of DPPA contributions to conflict prevention. Several noted the increasingly regional dimension of conflict, and that peace and security reform and the development of several regional strategies in 2018 and 2019 facilitated more cohesive regional approaches.

**Figure 3: Partners rated DPPA contributions to conflict prevention in their countries positively**



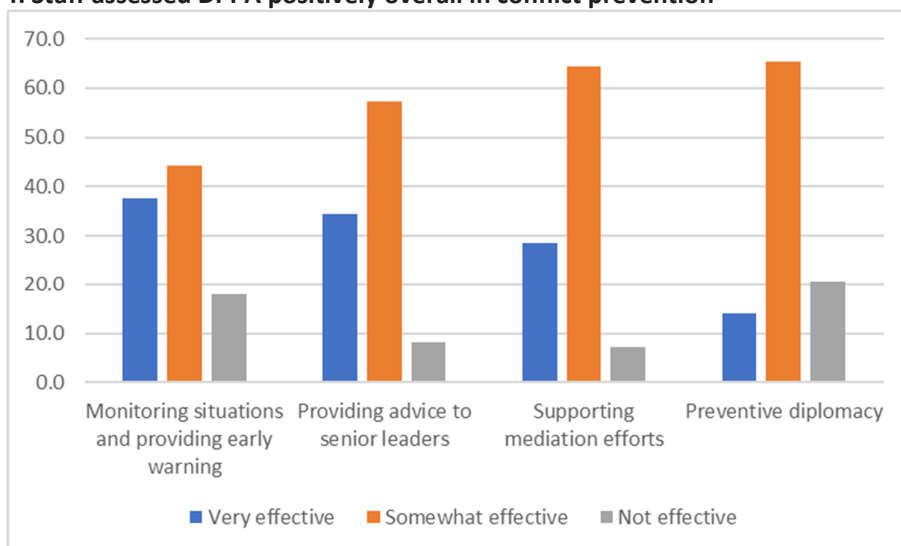
*Source: OIOS survey of DPPA partners*

22. Additionally, the majority of staff surveyed (69 per cent) rated the overall quality of the Department’s conflict prevention work as excellent or good. As shown in Figure 4, of all activities assessed, mediation was rated the highest.<sup>14</sup> Staff surveyed also volunteered engagement in 38 specific country situations – including 21 in West Africa – as positive examples of conflict prevention. They most frequently mentioned Madagascar, Gambia and Papua New Guinea as scenarios where Department engagement contributed to positive outcomes, corresponding to findings from external assessments noted below in para 28. Furthermore, most staff interviewed characterized the overall conflict prevention contributions of the Department positively.

<sup>14</sup> While staff reported spending less time on monitoring (noted in para 21) they nevertheless rated the effectiveness of this activity as generally positive.



**Figure 4: Staff assessed DPPA positively overall in conflict prevention**



Source: OIOS survey of DPPA staff

23. Intra-DPPA partnerships supported the regional divisions with specific technical capacities in conflict prevention. The regional divisions highlighted the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD) and the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) as the two entities they worked with most regularly on prevention. In the Honduras, Solomon Islands, and Madagascar case studies, PMD and EAD played key roles.

*In particular, the Department made effective use of its mediation and preventive diplomacy tools to convene conflict prevention actors in numerous contexts*

24. DPPA contributed effectively in conflict prevention contexts by facilitating dialogue between key conflict actors. In these situations DPPA played a key role in creating a safe and neutral space for different political and rival groups to come together who otherwise may not have done so. In some cases, its presence provided a secure environment within which to arbitrate political differences.

25. Four of the six country case studies demonstrated effective contributions to national dialogue processes and political transitions. In Honduras, DPPA supported the Resident Coordinator and deployed a member of the standby team of experts to facilitate a dialogue process between political parties in the wake of an electoral crisis, which ultimately led to reduced violence and a set of recommendations for future action. In Madagascar, the Special Advisor worked closely with the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) to engage political actors to diffuse an electoral crisis, resulting in national-led dialogue and peaceful presidential and legislative elections in 2019. In Solomon Islands, Peacebuilding Fund projects to support national dialogues brought together ethnic groups whose tensions had been exacerbated by land use disputes, and helped to bring marginalized groups, such as women and youth, into the peace process. Finally, in Burundi, DPPA supported a five-round dialogue process between the government and opposition parties, facilitated by the East African Community.

26. Other recent internal and external assessments<sup>15</sup> highlighted effective DPPA mediation and preventive diplomacy engagement in Colombia, Papua New Guinea, El Salvador and the Gambia. For example, in Papua New Guinea, DPPA supported implementation of the Bougainville Peace

<sup>15</sup>These include: Annual reports and updates of the DPPA Multi-Year Appeal; 2019 Evaluation of the DPA Strategic Plan; and UN University studies of DPPA preventive diplomacy effort.

Agreement, and in the Gambia preventive diplomacy efforts facilitated a peaceful political transition. Staff surveyed also highlighted the UNOWAS SRSG role as an example of effective good offices.

*Conflict prevention efforts have been most effective when enabled by strong political will, strong leadership at the senior levels within the Department and the United Nations and cohesive international support*

27. The successes noted above have been enabled by several factors. These include the following external factors over which DPPA has less control:

- political will of host governments and other relevant national and regional actors; and
- cohesion of the Security Council (where applicable);

They also include the following internal factors over which DPPA has more control:

- strong leadership at the senior levels within the Department and United Nations; and
- strong partnerships within the United Nations system.

These factors were identified as critical in the country case studies, noted by many staff interviewed and surveyed and highlighted in DPPA Lessons Learned (LL) and After-Action Reviews (AAR).

28. There were more mixed outcomes to DPPA conflict prevention in more complex conflict prevention scenarios. The case studies of Burundi and Burkina Faso illustrated this point. In Burundi, the Special Envoy supported a dialogue process led by the East African Community (EAC) which resulted in five rounds of dialogue between the ruling party and exiled opposition parties. The process stalled when the ruling party did not participate in the fifth round and took steps to consolidate power. The Special Envoy and his Office had little further recourse due to the subsidiarity principle<sup>16</sup> and effectively lost access to the government. Stakeholders noted that the presence of the Office and keeping Burundi on the Security Council agenda helped mitigate the potential of future conflict. In Burkina Faso, a rise in violent extremism fuelled by foreign non-state groups escalated in 2019; DPPA worked to mobilize international community resources to support the government in curtailing escalation and to support social cohesion.

*Staff and partners identified further opportunities for strengthening the Department's conflict prevention work*

29. To improve the Department's conflict prevention work, staff most commonly pointed to the need to change an organizational culture defined by rigidity and excessive caution (discussed further in Result E). A key theme emphasized by many staff and partners was a need for bolder engagement with Member States and partners. A partner interviewed shared the view that the Organization could be bolder and more candid when analysing the interests of the regional and big powers and when addressing larger power dynamics. Finally, many partners and several staff interviewed and surveyed also suggested that greater engagement across pillars, and particularly with development actors, would better address structural drivers of conflict and permit more holistic and multi-pronged approaches to more challenging contexts; some also noted that increased work with human rights partners would strengthen early warning. In this regard, the Peacebuilding Fund did support several early warning projects in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger.

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<sup>16</sup> This principle states that sustainable peace is more likely if the conflict resolution process is led by actors "culturally, geographically, or strategically" close to the issue.  
([http://cmi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Principle\\_of\\_Subsidiarity\\_ECCAS\\_CMI\\_English.pdf](http://cmi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Principle_of_Subsidiarity_ECCAS_CMI_English.pdf))

**C. While DPPA political analyses, a core component of its conflict prevention work, have been generally timely and of good quality, their use in supporting decision-making around conflict prevention has been uneven**

*DPPA produced analyses that were generally timely and responsive to user needs*

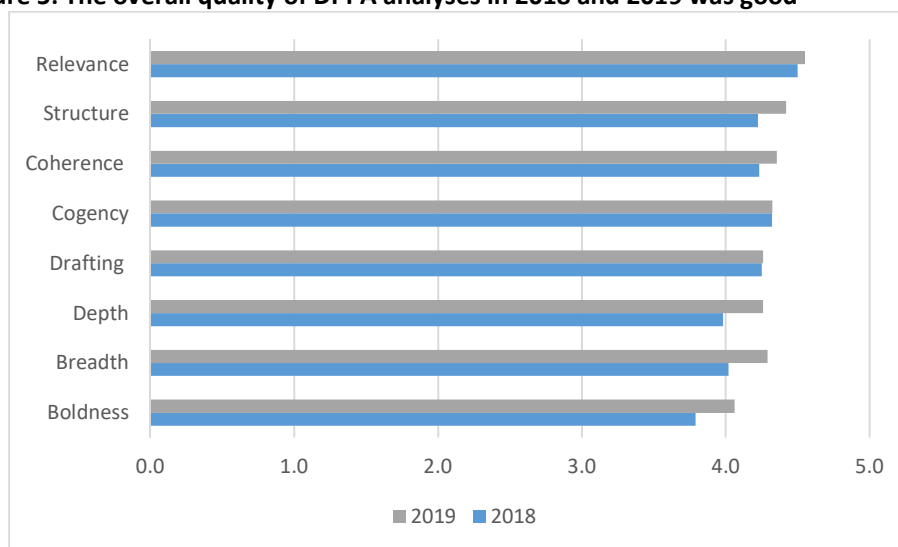
30. DPPA analyses were produced in a timely manner, often in response to requests or for planned meetings. Partners surveyed rated timeliness of analysis highly, with 75 per cent saying it was good or excellent. Many partners and most staff interviewed also believed that timeliness was adequate.

31. Analyses were also largely perceived to be responsive to user needs. Twenty-three per cent of partners surveyed responded that their needs were met to a great extent and 52 per cent said needs were met to some extent. An analysis of DPPA correspondence log data also showed high responsiveness – 50 per cent of requests were tasked immediately, and 90 per cent were tasked within five minutes. The median time to close or complete requests was 4.6 days.

*DPPA produced good quality analyses that demonstrated a clear understanding of country and regional level contexts*

32. An external expert assessment of a sample of DPPA analysis documents from 2018 and 2019 showed that the Department produced good quality products overall, with an average rating of four on a five-point scale. Figure 5 shows the average rating for each of eight assessment criteria. Quality has also improved slightly since the pre-reform period in 2018.

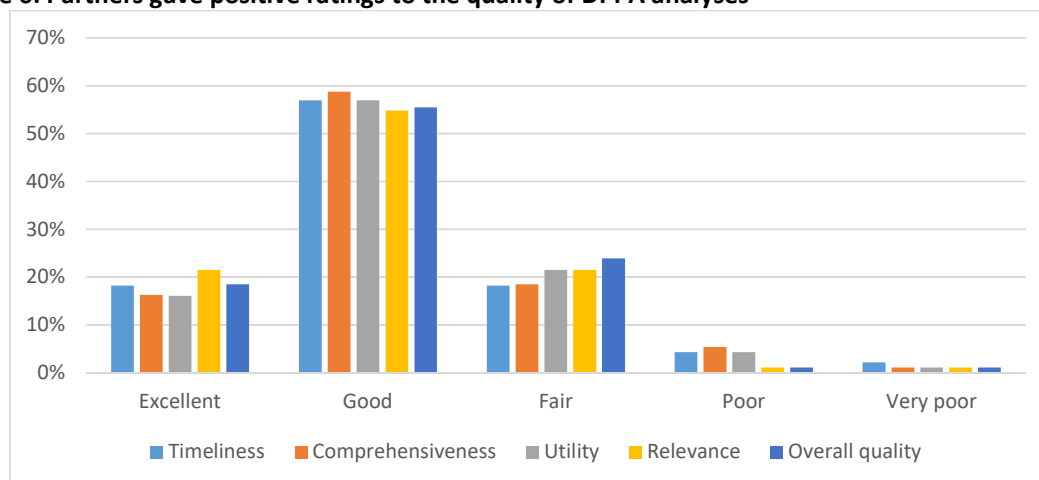
**Figure 5: The overall quality of DPPA analyses in 2018 and 2019 was good**



Source: OIOS analysis and assessment of conflict prevention document sample

33. Staff and partner assessments of analysis quality were also largely positive. Seventy-four per cent of partners (as shown in Figure 6) and 73 per cent of staff surveyed rated analysis quality as “good” or “excellent.” Partners rated analyses highest on relevance, and one-third noted that analyses had improved following reform.

**Figure 6: Partners gave positive ratings to the quality of DPPA analyses**



Source: OIOS survey of DPPA partners

34. Despite an overall good rating, “boldness,”<sup>17</sup> was the lowest ranked of the assessed criteria, in line with staff perceptions as well. Staff interviewed and surveyed commonly expressed frustrations with the limiting effect of political sensitivities and being asked to be less bold in criticizing Member States. The most common improvement that staff suggested for producing more useful and rigorous analyses was for these to have greater boldness and increased visibility, as also noted in para 31. However, DPPA staff also appreciated the need to be cautious in their work given these political sensitivities noted above. Staff also noted the risks of leaks of sensitive information.

*Analyses have lacked more integrated assessments*

35. There was also room for improvement in the integration of analyses. Partners surveyed and interviewed noted a need for improved coordination across the system and across pillars to produce more integrated analyses; they highlighted work with the development pillar as an area where increased collaboration was needed to produce more holistic scenarios of emerging crises. Insufficient linkages with field staff producing analyses was also identified as a risk; in Jordan, for example, Amman-based staff had little to no input to talking points for senior-level United Nations visits, posing a risk to cohesive messaging with government counterparts. Furthermore, some staff interviewed volunteered that they felt frustrated with format constraints to their analyses - particularly being limited to one page and being required to include action points - which they believed reduced their ability to produce more in-depth analysis (it should be noted that not all one-pagers contained analysis and some were intended to serve only information purposes). While DPPA senior managers and Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) staff expressed appreciation for the clarity and efficiency resulting from these requirements, some staff voiced concerns about their inability, within these constraints, to flag important issues which may not require immediate action but should be on decision makers’ radar.

*Despite some positive examples of where good analyses contributed to conflict prevention, their use for decision-making at senior levels has been mixed and not always clearly understood*

36. Good analyses have contributed to effective conflict prevention engagement in a number of contexts. Observation and interviews with participants confirmed that analyses were used effectively in Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs), as well as Executive Committee and Deputies Committee

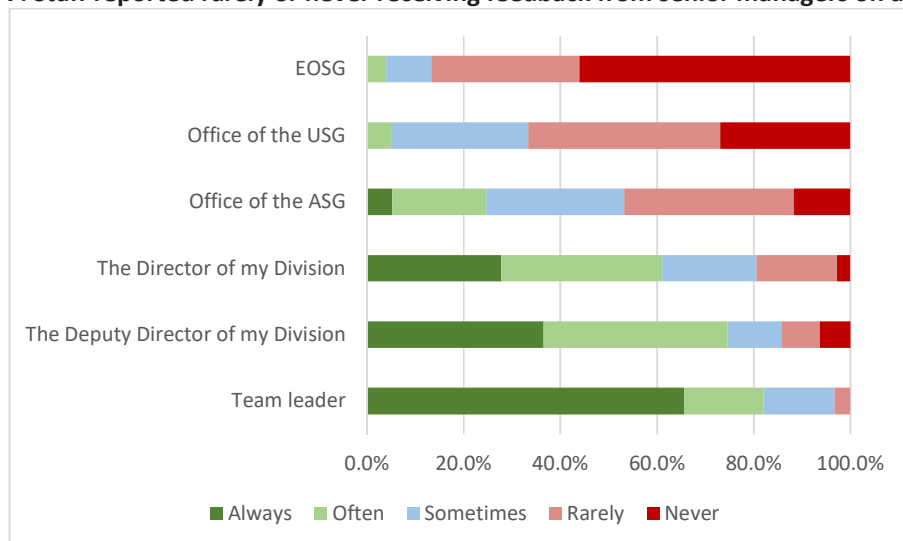
<sup>17</sup> Defined as “noting policy implications, member state power dynamics, and/or client interest.”

meetings, the main mechanisms for escalating country-level situations for senior leadership action. These settings also provided examples of cross-pillar collaboration, as RMRs were co-chaired by DPPA and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and included Headquarters and field partners from humanitarian and human rights system entities. Furthermore, all six case studies provided examples of analyses being used to support conflict prevention engagement. For example, work from the Burundi OSE formed the basis of Special Envoy briefings to the Security Council, and in Honduras, DPPA political analyses played a primary role in guiding the dialogue effort. In Solomon Islands, a conflict and development analysis and national perceptions survey on peacebuilding provided critical inputs to Peacebuilding Fund projects.

37. Despite the positive examples noted above, however, some staff interviewed expressed their opinion that the overall large volume of information produced has been underutilized. When asked whether they use DPPA analyses in decision-making, 72 per cent of partners said to some or a great extent; however, EOSG staff, who are key users, gave mixed responses in interviews on the utility of analyses received from DPPA. This corresponded to DPPA staff perceptions that EOSG relied less on DPPA than its own in-house resources for political and prevention analysis and information.

38. A lack of feedback on their analyses contributed to a lack of understanding among DPPA staff on how their work could best meet the information needs of senior leaders and be the most helpful for decision-making. Most DPPA staff interviewed reported that they received no feedback from their Office of the Under-Secretary-General (OUSG) or EOSG, and several noted that, during the period under review, they were rarely invited to join senior-level meetings or participate in high-level visits, as was the practice in the past, meaning in turn that they did not always understand the context of analysis requests. Staff surveyed reported the same issue, as seen in Figure 7; 85 per cent received little or no feedback from EOSG, and 65 per cent received little or no feedback from the OUSG. This lack of feedback and access to high level meetings, they argued, raised the risk of producing information that was less well tailored to the needs of senior leaders. DPPA senior staff noted, however, that not all information could be shared with staff at all levels given its political sensitivity.

**Figure 7: Staff reported rarely or never receiving feedback from senior managers on analyses\***



Source: OIOS survey of DPPA staff

\* The survey question asked about average frequency of feedback provided on all conflict prevention analyses; it does not assume that all conflict prevention analyses reach all levels of Department management.

**D. Partnerships with United Nations entities have played a positive role in the Department's conflict prevention engagements, while those with regional organizations and civil society have varied**

*DPPA effectively leveraged its partnerships within the United Nations system to implement its conflict prevention activities*

39. DPPA strategic documents highlight the importance of partnerships as key to prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding,<sup>18</sup> and within the United Nations, these have generally worked well. Overall, DPPA staff viewed United Nations system partnerships favourably: 98 per cent of staff surveyed said that these partnerships facilitated their conflict prevention work. This sentiment was reciprocated by the Department's United Nations partners surveyed, 70 per cent of whom rated their partnerships with DPPA as good or excellent. Partnerships, particularly with United Nations entities, were featured in almost all OIOS-observed meetings.

40. United Nations partners surveyed and interviewed indicated several ways in which their partnership with DPPA positively impacted conflict prevention. First, DPPA provided comprehensive and high-quality analyses: three-fourths of United Nations partners reported that DPPA met their analytical needs in this regard. Also, DPPA effectively engaged with partners for cohesive engagement at the field level. For example, in Honduras, DPPA and the Resident Coordinator (RC) worked with the UNDP Resident Representative to facilitate political dialogue, resulting in members of opposing parties speaking to each other for the first time, while in Solomon Islands, a strong partnership with UN-Women facilitated the participation of women in peace-building dialogues.

*The Joint Programme with UNDP has been a particularly effective United Nations system partnership*

41. DPPA has established an effective partnership with UNDP through the Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention (Joint Programme). This programme was reconfigured in 2018 to provide a more coherent and strategic approach to conflict prevention as well as improved knowledge sharing in the context of peace and security and development reform and ensuring a continuous link to RCs. In 2019, the Joint Programme deployed 49 Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs) to work with RCs and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to connect the development and peace and security pillars in-country by providing political and conflict analysis and supporting conflict-sensitive program design. Staff and partners interviewed expressed near universal praise for the PDA programme as a key tool for improved analysis, field-level information and strengthened system-wide collaboration. The Joint Programme also contributed to addressing gender issues in conflict prevention: 84 per cent of PDAs surveyed reported supporting the participation of women and youth in their activities.

42. Several case studies provided concrete examples of how DPPA leveraged the Joint Programme effectively. In Honduras, it was utilized to build strong relationships with UNDP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others to support work on prevention. In Jordan, the PDA outlined a plan of action for the UNCT to undertake coordination for better analysis of risk factors to develop an early warning system, and collate conflict risk and responses under a single, SDG-aligned framework. PDAs were also instrumental in identifying the need for and initiating the launch of the PBF projects in Solomon Islands.

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<sup>18</sup> DPA Strategic Plan 2016-2019, p. 3.

*While there is no formal framework for DPPA and RC engagement, these partnerships have shown some promise in enhancing the Department's conflict prevention work*

43. While development system reform has repositioned the RC role to represent the Secretary-General at the country level and act on behalf of the entire Organization, there is no formal framework for DPPA and RC engagement and RC involvement in conflict prevention has been somewhat unclear. Most RCs surveyed were uncertain how much prevention engagement to undertake with governments, and how to utilize DPPA support most effectively on this engagement. Similarly, some DPPA staff interviewed indicated uncertainty about how much information to share, when and with whom.

44. Nevertheless, RCs and DPPA staff did report some success in the context of their new relationship. One-third of RCs surveyed reported improved relations with DPPA since the reform, primarily due to better communication and sharing of information. In this regard, RCs expressed appreciation for receiving more support from Headquarters, and DPPA staff appreciated having a presence on the ground that contributed to informing their analysis. There were several examples of effective partnerships between DPPA and RCs. In Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Honduras, the RCs' political experience and acumen contributed to a positive relationship with DPPA and more effective conflict prevention engagement.

*Partnerships with regional organizations have been more mixed in contributing to conflict prevention*

45. Regional and sub-regional organizations were important prevention partners for DPPA, but the effectiveness of these partnerships was uneven. The strongest DPPA regional partnership was with the African Union (AU), as codified through the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the first of its kind. The framework outlined an extensive number of cooperation mechanisms for: preventing and mediating conflict; responding to conflict; addressing root causes; and reviewing and enhancing partnerships. Staff interviewed most frequently cited the AU as an effective regional partner. One example of this effectiveness was in Madagascar, where a cohesive approach of the United Nations, African Union and the South African Development Community yielded positive outcomes in preventing further electoral and political crises. Staff interviewed noted other regional and sub-regional organizations which have worked effectively with the Department on conflict prevention, including the Economic Community of West African States and the Caribbean Community. Where these partnerships worked well, DPPA was able to leverage the comparative advantages offered by regional and sub-regional organisations, specifically their field presence, local knowledge, networks and influence.

46. Despite the positive examples noted above, several constraining factors contributed to overall mixed effectiveness of regional partnerships. One factor was the limited or undefined structure of the partnership: a review of ten United Nations partnership agreements with regional and sub-regional organizations found that seven of them explicitly discussed coordination and cooperation on conflict prevention, but only three were specific to DPPA. In interviews, some staff expressed that, without a DPPA-specific Memorandum of Understanding, they found it difficult to know how to best support or engage regional organizations. Another factor contributing to mixed effectiveness was a lack of relevant capacity in some regional organizations. In some cases - including with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the League of Arab States and the East African Community - the key regional or sub-regional partner had a primarily economic focus and/or was less operational or equipped for a prevention role. Finally, not all regional or sub-regional partners were perceived to be the neutral brokers required for prevention efforts.

*Partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) have been more ad-hoc*

47. While PBSO has regular engagements with CSOs and provided almost \$12.9 million in PBF funds for CSO-conflict prevention work, the DPPA approach to engagement with CSOs has been ad-hoc and lacked a strategic departmental approach, which was illustrated in the varied CSO engagement across the six case studies. In Honduras and Burundi, civil society participation in dialogue and mediation processes was closed or limited, which reduced the possibility for women to participate. In contrast, women and youth groups were an essential part of the dialogue and mediation that DPPA supported in Solomon Islands in 2018, which increased an understanding of local conditions and ultimately strengthened the peace dialogue. Several staff interviewed also identified enhanced civil society engagement as an area for improvement.

**E. Shortcomings in regional division integration, work processes and knowledge management have created challenges to efficient achievement of conflict prevention goals**

*Integration with DPO has been uneven, but where it has occurred, stronger analyses have been produced*

48. One of the primary components of peace and security reform was combining the regional divisions of the former DPA and DPKO into a shared DPPA-DPO regional pillar. Views on the extent to which reform has achieved the integration of those divisions are, however, mixed. A majority of DPPA staff interviewed indicated a low or mixed degree of integration, with the lowest level of integration reported in the three divisions of Central and Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, and Western Africa, which are the regions with the highest number of peacekeeping operations. Most DPPA staff surveyed also reported that the integration of DPPA and DPO organizational cultures, an important indicator of effective integration overall, had occurred only to a small extent (39 per cent) or not at all (25 per cent).

49. There were several factors contributing to this uneven integration. These included higher levels of former DPKO staff in some divisions and slowly changing mindsets. Some DPPA staff interviewed also noted the challenges in having two Under-Secretary-Generals and of merging different approaches. During a time of reform when functions have been merged, more rather than less communication from senior leadership is helpful for stronger integration. In 2019, one town hall with both DPPA and DPO Under-Secretary-Generals was held, and there were at least three meetings with the Under-Secretary-Generals, Assistant Secretary-Generals and Directors, as well as reform retreats that both Under-Secretary-Generals attended.

50. While recognizing that not all regional divisions needed to integrate to the same extent, the positive effect of reform on producing integrated analyses was rated lower by staff from divisions who were still in transition to full integration. Interviewed staff also commonly stated that effective integration facilitated a more holistic and cohesive assessment of country situations and greater awareness of cross-cutting themes impacting on conflict. Additionally, the quality of analyses conducted in 2019 (discussed in Result C) with regard to breadth, coherence and depth was higher in those divisions which had to integrate less than in those divisions which had to integrate more. Observation of internal staff meetings in divisions in general revealed a good flow of information-sharing amongst staff in the division.

*Work processes have created inefficiencies*

51. Some work processes around key activities of the Department have hindered a more streamlined approach to its work. An internal review conducted in 2019 identified several examples of work process inefficiencies in document production, including the following:



- the same clearance process for all documents regardless of their priority;
- multiple clearance layers and duplication of review functions across layers;
- unclear document review standards; and
- unclear accountability for written documents.

52. The review recommended that document review roles throughout the clearance process be better defined, and that different, and shorter, clearance paths be undertaken for documents of higher strategic priority and urgency. Dual reviews by both the USG and ASGs were also questioned. Some DPPA staff interviewed also questioned the necessity of multiple layers of review within the Department.

53. Furthermore, only half of staff surveyed (54 per cent) agreed that their division focused on being efficient, with several commenting that unclear and/or lack of management roles and accountability, slow decision-making and cumbersome travel approval processes reduced efficiency. Some staff surveyed also noted that the role of the Executive Office was unclear and therefore it was not seen as adequately supportive of the Department's substantive work, and that clear and consistent operating procedures were lacking for the new integrated structure. Some Directors interviewed noted potential inefficiencies from attending two sets of weekly management meetings for both DPPA and DPO, as opposed to having a single, joint meeting.

*Despite impressive efforts, DPPA is not taking full advantage of its existing knowledge management systems*

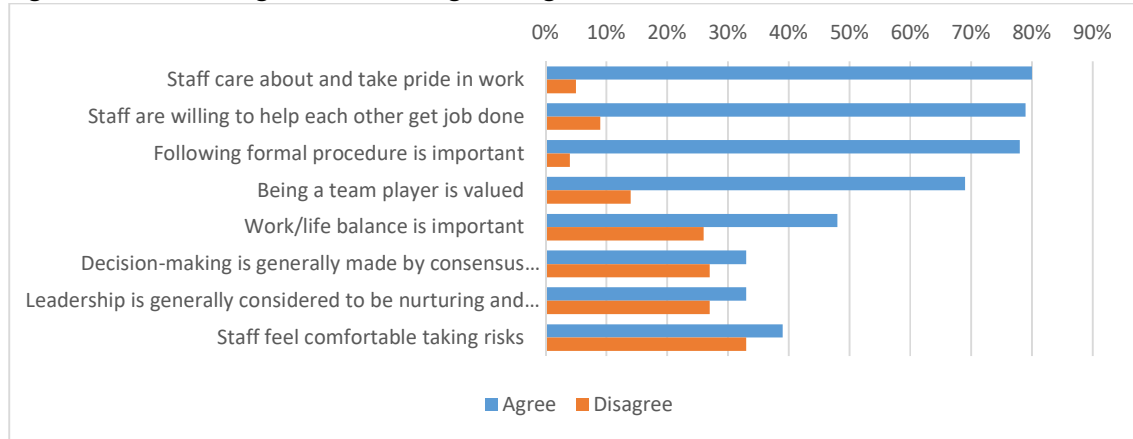
54. DPPA has established a solid knowledge management framework. It has a Learning and Evaluation Framework that discusses knowledge management roles and responsibilities, provides a "best practice tool kit," disseminates best practices to the field and supports various other learning exercises. Three focal point networks for SPMs, planning, and policy have provided further opportunities for sharing experience and knowledge, and DPPA is working with DPO on a joint knowledge management framework.

55. Nevertheless, staff interviewed and surveyed reported that the use of DPPA knowledge management tools and processes, as well as their impact, has been uneven. This is due to several factors, including lack of staff awareness of, and training on, their use, and lack of implementation. Staff also reported some shortcomings to knowledge-sharing, related primarily to it being unsystematic and/or overly personal in nature.

*DPPA organizational culture has exacerbated these shortcomings*

56. The organizational culture of DPPA has elements that both facilitate and hinder the efficient and effective achievement of its goals. The highest and lowest rated elements of the Department's culture, as reported by staff surveyed, are presented in Figure 10 below.

**Figure 10: DPPA staff gave varied ratings on Organizational culture**



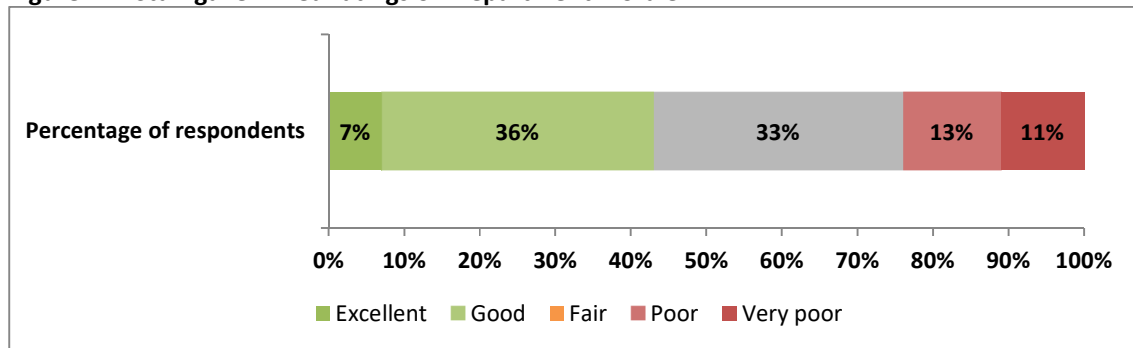
Source: OIOS survey of DPPA staff

57. DPPA culture is one in which staff take pride in their work and believe strongly in the core values of the Organization. Staff are perceived as being supportive of one another, committed and team-oriented, all of which contribute to a working environment in which staff come together with positive intentions to achieve common goals. In all the internal Department meetings observed, information and ideas were shared in a professional manner, with different opinions voiced and discussed collegially.

58. At the same time, DPPA is also challenged by a culture that is perceived as being hierarchical, formalistic and lacking innovation. This is noteworthy in that creativity and “thinking outside the box,” as well as encouraging and empowering staff at all levels, are all needed to develop and try new solutions for preventing conflict where key enabling factors are missing and an atypical approach may be required.

59. Furthermore, morale in the Department was mixed. Fewer than half of all staff surveyed that had an opinion (43 per cent) rated morale as excellent or good, as shown in Figure 11 below. Approximately half (49 per cent) reported that morale had decreased since the reform, with 42 per cent saying it had remained the same and 9 per cent saying it had improved. Some staff interviewed reported feeling that their work was undervalued, a feeling exacerbated by changes associated with reform, perceived limited career development prospects and a challenging physical work environment.

**Figure 11: Staff gave mixed ratings on Department morale**



## V. Conclusion

60. In a world often burdened with discord, the United Nations occupies a unique and invaluable space as a knowledgeable, impartial and objective broker that can anticipate and respond to critical moments when the risk of conflict may be high. While the number of armed conflicts has been trending downwards globally,<sup>19</sup> new and re-emerging tensions also continue to threaten fragile peace agreements in many parts of the world.

61. Within this context DPPA possesses significant experience and expertise acquired through its decades as the main political arm of the Secretariat. It has demonstrated that in the right context, it can play an important role in contributing to effective conflict prevention through its key tools of analysis, early warning, mediation, and advice. Yet this role has been more uncertain in recent years. Staff in the Department question whether and how their work is used by senior leadership in the Organization, feedback is limited, and DPPA is at risk of being under-utilized.

62. The peace and security reform introduced in 2019 was intended to position the United Nations to provide more holistic and seamless support to countries and regions either afflicted by, or at risk of, conflict. Along the continuum from conflict to peace, solutions incorporating the full range of the United Nations' tools and mechanisms have the greatest opportunity for success. DPPA must therefore take on a more integrated approach to its work and be more innovative in considering new solutions in those situations where a more traditional approach has not worked. With an organizational culture perceived as being hierarchical and formalistic, this will be particularly challenging.

63. The Department must furthermore be cognizant of the morale amongst its staff. The changes introduced with reform, workspace constraints and new procedures have made the past year a time of transition that has been demanding. These factors make it imperative that attention be given to bolstering morale and fully harnessing the Department's valuable human resource assets.

64. It is not possible to speak candidly about conflict prevention without acknowledging the critical role played by Member States themselves, both in Headquarters and at the regional and national levels. DPPA needs to provide Member States with honest and open assessments of conflict.

## VI. Recommendations

65. OIOS-IED makes four important recommendations to DPPA.

Recommendation 1: (Results A, B, C and E)

66. **DPPA should strengthen management culture and communications** through:

- Enhancing management communication practice, including conducting regular Division staff meetings;
- Ensuring that internal feedback is given on analyses, and exploring the use of relevant platforms (e.g. Microsoft Teams or SharePoint) to do so;
- Proactively seeking external feedback from senior clients, including EOSG;
- Responding to issues raised in the 2019 Staff Engagement Survey;
- Strengthening knowledge management to better share and disseminate case study information and lessons learned around conflict prevention.

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<sup>19</sup> Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), <https://www.prio.org/Data/Armed-Conflict/?id=348>

Indicators: Regular division meetings; regular internal feedback given as part of analysis review process; action plan to address issues from Staff Engagement Survey.

Recommendation 2: (Result B, C and E)

67. **DPPA should establish a mechanism for staff to anonymously voice different viewpoints on political analyses** and to encourage greater boldness in those analyses. In establishing this mechanism, DPPA may want to review and adapt existing models of “dissent channels” that are used in various national foreign ministries.

Indicator: Mechanism established and in use.

Recommendation 3: (Result B, C and E)

68. **DPPA should establish a strategy for addressing hindering factors to conflict prevention.** This could be developed through an internal process that would consider new approaches for addressing these hindering factors, as well as strategies for more complex situations, to feed into senior decision-making.

Indicator: Strategy established and applied.

Recommendation 4: (Result D)

69. **DPPA should strengthen its external partnerships** through:

- Proactively identifying a greater number of relevant external partners for strengthening conflict prevention work;
- Develop an overall partnership strategy to identify goals, objectives, types and complimentary capacities of external partners; and
- Better leveraging existing partnerships in the development system to improve coordination with DCO, the Resident Coordinator system and other development partners.

Indicators: Increase in number of external partnerships; partnerships strategy developed; plan for increased coordination with development partners in place.

## Annex I: management response

In this Annex, OIOS presents the comments received from DPPA on the evaluation report in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

OIOS has made changes to paragraph 10 of the report to address DPPA comments



TO: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary General  
A: for Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 10 March 2020

REFERENCE: DPPA-2020-00404

THROUGH:  
S/C DE:

FROM: Rosemary A. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary General  
DE: for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary A. DiCarlo". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned over the printed name of the sender.

SUBJECT: **DPPA's response to draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight  
Services (OIOS) on the Evaluation of the Department of Political and  
Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)**

1. I refer to your memorandum (OIOS-2020-00250), transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).
2. Thank you for undertaking a consultative process and for incorporating most of my team's initial comments into the report.
3. I welcome your openness to work with our team to amend the language on conflict prevention in paragraph 10. As you know, our approach to and understanding of conflict prevention has evolved over time. We see it as encompassing a wide range of activities to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. We do not draw a clear distinction between structural prevention and other forms of prevention; we also do not see sustaining peace as part of one of these two categories. Rather, "sustaining peace" also helps capture the holistic nature of the dimensions of conflict prevention. We further believe that it would be incorrect to indicate that addressing underlying conditions that contribute to conflict do not necessarily correspond to the Department's scope, mandate and activities.
4. Having reviewed the assessment, we are pleased to inform you that we will be accepting the recommendations of OIOS set forth in the draft report. We are confident that this evaluation and its recommendations will further strengthen our conflict prevention efforts. Accordingly, we have completed a recommendation action plan highlighting the key steps that we intend to focus on in the coming years.

cc. Mr. Guo  
Ms. Arapakos