

# THE IMPORTANCE OF VERIFICATION

## STRENGTHENING VERIFICATION MECHANISMS IN PEACE PROCESSES

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The Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA) and Fundación Acordemos (Colombia), with the support of the Folke Bernadotte Academy, convened a workshop in Cairo in November 2024 with practitioners from different countries to exchange innovative practices and lessons learned on monitoring and verification mechanisms, with the aim of contributing to the design of effective verification mechanisms in current and future negotiations of ceasefires and peace agreements.

Four experiences were studied in detail with actual participants in the drafting and implementing of verification mechanisms in Colombia, Ukraine (2014-2022), South Sudan and Sudan. This policy brief presents the main conclusions of the workshop. Some of the key takeaways include:

**EACH PARTICULAR** conflict demands its own verification mechanisms, but there are many lessons that cut across all recent experiences;

**MONITORING** and verification mechanisms work best if they are embedded in a larger peace agreement and are part of a system of guarantees;

**IN THE CASE** of comprehensive peace agreements, insisting on discussing monitoring and verification when the political contours of the agreement are not yet clear is a recipe for having the talks stall or collapse;

**INVOLVING POTENTIAL** third-party verifiers and experts in the negotiations allows for the construction of more realistic and technically robust agreements;

**THE SUCCESS** of verification mechanisms is tied to the willingness of the parties to comply with what has been agreed, and that is reflected in the level of detail of the mandate and the profile of those responsible for implementation;

**THE LEVELS** of fragmentation in many of today's conflicts and the often "hybrid" nature of some the armed actors demand a degree of flexibility and adaptation in the design of verification mechanisms;

**IT SHOULD** be made clear at the outset whether the mechanism focuses exclusively on monitoring and information collection or also includes the more demanding work of verification and assessment of compliance with agreements;

**IN ANY CASE**, monitoring and verification mechanisms should respect a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity;

**THE LANGUAGE** of the verification agreement should be acceptable to the parties and the public, so as to avoid resistance and generate ownership;

**WHAT CONSTITUTES** non-compliance should be as clear as possible in the mandate, and what courses of action are envisaged in that case: whether public exposure of violations or even sanctions, in order to increase the pressure to comply;

**AT THE SAME TIME**, verification is often more about trust-building between the parties than establishing compliance with an agreement;

**VERIFICATION MECHANISMS** must provide robust guarantees of neutrality and transparency so that they enjoy the support of the parties and the public;

**IT IS IMPORTANT** to start discussing early with potential contributors the nature of the verification mechanism, to avoid gaps on the ground once there is an agreement;

**CIVIL SOCIETY** participation can improve the reach and effectiveness of verification mechanisms, especially when such mechanisms are under-resourced, have difficulty accessing information in contested areas, or have low levels of credibility;

**UNDERFUNDING** of verification mechanisms leads to restriction in the geographical coverage, low quality in the reporting and low qualification of the staff hired;

**VERIFICATION** mechanisms need a communications strategy based on clear criteria of what to communicate, when to communicate and how to communicate;

**TECHNOLOGY** can have a deterrent effect on the parties and help compensate for the logistical challenges of covering a large geographical area with limited personnel;

**IT IS IMPORTANT** to disseminate the knowledge of what makes verification mechanisms work and to strengthen South - South cooperation, in order to build on shared experiences of successful monitoring and verification of ceasefires and peace agreements.



## I. Introduction

Many peace agreements in recent decades have included monitoring and verification mechanisms as a means of strengthening the commitment of the parties to the terms of the agreement or the ceasefire, and of ensuring their effective implementation. And for good reason: effective monitoring and verification mechanisms are directly correlated with the durability of peace, as Virginia Page Fortna noted:

*“Mechanisms within agreements can make durable peace more likely by changing the incentives to break a ceasefire, by reducing uncertainty about actions and intentions, and preventing accidental violations from triggering another round of fighting”<sup>1</sup>.*

At a time of a historic upsurge in warfare in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan, and in many other parts of the world<sup>2</sup>, a proper understanding of what makes verification mechanisms succeed or fail is more urgent than ever. That requires taking the lessons from past experience seriously in order to anticipate future scenarios and prepare effective monitoring and verification mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Page Fortna, *“Scraps of Paper? Agreements and the Durability of Peace”*, International Organization (Spring 2003), p. 338

<sup>2</sup> And these are just the more prominent examples: there are currently 36 armed conflicts and 45 ongoing peace processes or negotiations. Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Negociaciones de paz 2023. Análisis de tendencias y escenarios*, febrero de 2024, pág. 19.



In the case of Ukraine in particular, there is a wealth of lessons—both positive and negative—that can be drawn from the recent verification efforts in the Donbas (2014-2022) and beyond, which could serve as a starting point in the design of any future verification mechanism.

In this context, the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA) and Fundación Acordemos (Colombia), in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy, organised an international expert workshop on verification of peace agreements in Cairo on 8-9 November 2024, entitled ‘*The importance of verification: Strengthening verification mechanisms in peace processes.*’ The aim of the workshop was to facilitate an exchange between more than 20 practitioners from different verification processes around the world (Colombia, Sudan, South Sudan, Ukraine), in order to identify lessons learned that can inform current and future verification processes and increase their chances of success.

Verification mechanisms have been associated primarily with ceasefires and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes (DDR). However, these mechanisms have also been deployed to verify compliance in the case of comprehensive peace agreements, which present particular challenges of their own.

Recent monitoring and verification processes have produced many lessons learned on issues such as:

- the nature, scope and flexibility of the verification mandate;
- the relationship between the political negotiation and verification mechanisms;
- the phases, timing and geographical scope of verification;
- building trust in the verification mechanism and dealing with breaches;
- the participants, including in joint verification mechanisms;
- the advantages and risks associated with civil society participation in verification;
- the financing, sustainability and transparency of verification;
- the use of technology.

This policy brief presents the main conclusions and calls for action of the Cairo workshop, in four main sections:

- the context in which verification takes place;*
- challenges regarding the design and implementation of verification mechanisms;*
- questions on the impact of verification in transitions to peace; and*
- conclusions and proposals for next steps.*

The following chart presents the agreements discussed in the workshop, the verification mechanisms, the participants and the period during which verification took place.



Four examples of verification mechanisms				
	Colombia	South Sudan	Ukraine	Sudan
<b>AGREEMENTS</b>	2016 Final Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP	-Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) between the government of South Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (2014) -The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, and the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan	Minsk Agreements between Russia and Ukraine and other actors of Donetsk and Lugansk (2014-2022)	The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA - 2005) between the government of Sudan and the predominantly southern Sudanese Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)
<b>VERIFICATION MECHANISMS</b>	- Tripartite Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MM&V) - UN Verification Mission -International verification component Point 6 of the Agreement on implementation, verification and endorsement.	-Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (2014) -Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTS AMM - 2015) -Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTS AMVM - 2018) -Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC - 2015) -Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC-2018)	OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (OSCE-SMM)	Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC)
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	Government delegates, FARC and UN Mission (tripartite). International notables, technical secretariat (CINEP-CERAC), technical support (Kroc Institute).	CTS AMVM (staff from 15 countries, supported by IGAD countries and other partners) RJMEC (45 delegates from parties, civil society and other stakeholders, international community and UN)	57 participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	Delegates from the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A, as well as representatives of IGAD states and international supporters
<b>PERIOD</b>	Tripartite (December 2016 – August 2017) UN Mission (2016 to date) International Component (2016 to date)	CTS AMVM y RJMEC (2018 to date)	OSCE SMM (2014 – February 2022)	AEC (2005 to date)

## II. Verification in the current global context

International practitioners and experts identified at least four elements that have influenced the performance of verification mechanisms deployed in recent years. First, the evolution of conflicts and the changing logic of violence. For example, for some time we have been witnessing higher levels of fragmentation among non-state actors and tensions between their political and armed components, which make the tasks associated with verification more difficult.

Secondly, verification also reflects the particularities of those states and societies in which it takes place. In the cases studied, as elsewhere, the verification mechanisms deployed respond to the particular conditions and contexts in which they operate. Some of them are characterised by incipient processes of state building or institutional fragility (South Sudan), which makes verification all the more difficult:

***“A profound and deep understanding not only of the political but of the social context and the people where monitoring takes place is needed”<sup>3</sup>.***

<sup>3</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



Thirdly, the international community has strongly supported negotiated solutions and peacebuilding efforts, and as a consequence many countries and multilateral organisations have taken an active role in the implementation of monitoring and verification mechanisms. The UN (in Colombia, for example), the European Union (Indonesia), the African Union (northern Ethiopia), the OSCE (Ukraine), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, for Sudan and South Sudan) and other multilateral agencies, countries and international organisations have supported politically, financially and operationally the implementation of verification mechanisms with very varied degrees of success.

Finally, the success of verification mechanisms depends above all on the level of political commitment and readiness of the parties to comply with what has been agreed. The best designed mechanism, the goodwill of the third-party monitors or fall-back accountability mechanisms will not make up for a lack of will of one or both of the parties or prevent them from acting as spoilers:

***“The verification mechanism does not by itself guarantee peace; it’s not the mechanism but the peace process that usually fails”<sup>4</sup>.***

That said, a well-designed mechanism with robust guarantees can go a long way in ensuring compliance by the parties and decreasing the risk of involuntary escalation following accidents or actions by spoilers.

### **III. Recent challenges and opportunities in the design and implementation of verification mechanisms**

Each conflict and each context demands its own verification mechanisms. Nevertheless, some cross-cutting lessons can be drawn. The practitioners and experts who participated in the CCCPA-Acordemos workshop highlighted the following points, based on the cases studied.

#### ***Preconditions for verification***

1. **POLITICAL COMMITMENT:** As mentioned above, the success of ceasefire and peace agreement verification is obviously tied to the willingness and commitment of the parties to comply with what has been agreed, which is reflected in the type and level of detail of the protocols agreed, the profile of those responsible for implementation and the level of participation in formal monitoring bodies:

***“Political will does not need funding, it’s reflected rather in the specificity of the***

<sup>4</sup> International expert, Workshop *“The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes”*, 9 November 2024.



***mandate and the model of verification. At a micro level, we need to be able to speak about accountability as well”<sup>5</sup>.***

In the case of the conflict in Ukraine, for example, while the deployment of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission contributed to containing violence at specific moments, its work was seriously affected by recurrent violations of commitments and a lack of will to move forward and overcome tensions. The fact that the trilateral Contact Group (TCG) announced up to 17 “recommitments” to the agreements is a palpable sign of the lack of commitment. Something similar can be seen in the case of South Sudan, where political support for the monitoring mechanism (the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission - RJMEC - of 2018) has been very uneven.

In contrast, cases such as Colombia showed that despite the 473 incidents reported by the Tripartite Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (composed of delegates from the government, FARC-EP and a UN Verification Mission) between December 2016 and August 2017<sup>6</sup>, the strength of the agreement and the willingness of the parties to resolve differences facilitated compliance with the definitive ceasefire:

***“We made progress on this agreement on ceasefire and the laying down of weapons because by then both sides had built enough trust in the process. The agreement also included a series of guarantees which greatly facilitated the disarmament process”<sup>7</sup>.***

2. **TIMELY PREPARATION AS A CONDITION FOR SUCCESS:** All experts agreed that it is essential to start preparing verification mechanisms early, long before a comprehensive or issue-specific peace agreement is reached:

***“What were the key elements of our experience? (1) preparation, (2) flexibility and adaptability, (3) participation and inclusion, (4) clear rules and procedures, (5) learn from the past and from others”<sup>8</sup>.***

In the case of Colombia, the first political and diplomatic efforts to set up the verification mission began long before the signing of the agreement on a definitive ceasefire between the government of Colombia and FARC-EP. The first meetings with the Security Council took place in December 2012 in New York, more than three years before the agreement was signed in June 2016:

<sup>5</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Mecanismo de Monitoreo y Verificación (2017). Informe de cierre de actividades del mecanismo de monitoreo y verificación, 22 de septiembre de 2017.

<sup>7</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.

<sup>8</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 9 November 2024.



***“One of the lessons from Colombia is that, even though verification happens at the end of the process, it is very important to start discussing early with potential participants the nature of the verification mechanism, in order to guarantee their sense of ownership and to avoid gaps on the ground once the agreement is signed. Equally, it was key to integrate verification into a broader and more comprehensive system of guarantees”<sup>9</sup>.***

In contrast, in South Sudan, delays and complications in the activation and functioning of monitoring mechanisms and the JMEC ended up limiting their impact in the initial phase of the implementation of the 2015 agreement.

The timely preparation of a verification mechanism requires, among other things:

- early diplomatic efforts with organisations and countries that will act as monitors;
- specialised training of personnel that will be part of the mechanism, especially given the existing deficit in resources and training schemes for monitoring;
- securing sufficient resources for the optimal implementation of verification;
- early surveys of the needs for the first phases of verification;
- awareness-raising exercises with national and local actors regarding compliance with agreements and their verification;
- coordination of the necessary institutional support to assist the verification work.

### **3. FUNDING AND EFFICIENCY AS A PRIORITY FOR SUSTAINABILITY:**

Experts and practitioners highlighted the difficulty of deploying verification mechanisms when missions are severely underfunded, as was the case in South Sudan, Sudan and Sierra Leone. This inevitably leads to restrictions in the geographical coverage, delays in payments (cases of more than 11 months without pay in South Sudan), desertion of personnel, reporting that is not timely and is of low quality, low diversity and qualification of the staff hired (as in the case of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission - AEC - for Sudan), among others.

In some cases, such as Sudan and the AEC, the mechanism itself had to help in maintaining the support and funding of the international community for the implementation of the 2005 agreement:

***“Funding shouldn’t be an afterthought, and capacities should be maintained overtime (...) It needs to be predictable”<sup>10</sup>.***

It is also important to ensure an efficient use of resources, avoiding as much as possible their allocation to tasks not prioritised by the mandate and ensuring

<sup>9</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 9 November 2024. Something similar has been identified in Indonesia where “the rapidity with which the AMM was established was a key factor in sustaining both the momentum of the Helsinki Agreement and the sense that the situation on the ground was truly changing, and in communicating that the AMM was serious about its work”. In: Aly Verjee (2020). After the Agreement. Why the oversight of peace deals succeeds or fails, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.





compliance with a timetable and a work plan. Diversion or misappropriation through clientelist or corrupt practices is always a risk, as noted in cases such as South Sudan.

**4. CLARITY IN THE DESIGN OF THE PEACE PROCESS:** The scope and effectiveness of the verification mechanism depend on the structure and sequence of the peace process. Progress in the political process and clear links to the ceasefire will build trust between the parties and facilitate the work of verification. It is also important to choose the right moment to start the verification negotiations, which usually happen when talks on such issues as ceasefires and disarmament start.

In the case of comprehensive peace agreements, insisting on discussing ceasefire monitoring and verification when the political contours of the agreement are not yet clear is often a recipe for having the talks stall and sometimes for their collapse:

***“We should let the political process drive the ceasefire agreements, because when people think that they know where they are going, they are more likely to comply with the ceasefire agreement... That’s what we did in Colombia: It’s all about the linkages and the sequencing and trying to put the pieces together... It all has to be done in the right sequence and with a comprehensive approach as part of a broader set of guarantees”<sup>11</sup>.***

In the case of Colombia, the level of trust in the process achieved by the end of the negotiation was reflected in the fact that a UN political mission was approved by the Security Council months before the signing of the agreement on cease fire and disarmament in June 2016 (resolution 2261 of January 2016).

In some cases, a degree of flexibility is required for verification to respond effectively to the particularities of the process and the uncertainties of the implementation process. Often verification is more about trust-building between the parties than establishing compliance with an agreement.

In South Sudan, for example, the ceasefire verification mechanism evolved in different versions, from the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM) to the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) in August 2015, following the new peace agreement. Subsequently, the mandate for the new Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) was adjusted with the Revitalised Agreement of September 2018. In line with the new agreements, the bodies to which these mechanisms reported were also changed, the most recent being the RJME (Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, formerly JMEC)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



Third, verification can be an opportunity to broaden the margins of ownership and inclusiveness of a peace process. Greater civil society participation can help improve the reach and effectiveness of verification mechanisms, especially in situations where such mechanisms are under-resourced, have difficulty accessing information in contested areas, or have low levels of credibility. Such participation may facilitate interactions between armed groups and communities that build trust in the ceasefire and to give voice local citizens<sup>13</sup>.

Sometimes when formal mechanisms fail, alternative civil society-led mechanisms have been deployed with impressive results, as in South Sudan and its “shadow reporting” backed by the University of Juba and other actors.

However, establishing the limits of civil society involvement is no easy task: participating in verification may entail security risks for those involved and affect trust between the parties, insofar as one or the other may feel that communities are being manipulated. There is also the risk of promoting participation that communities perceive as “empty” or of creating very complex structures of inclusion:

***“We find good and bad examples of inclusion. Sometimes it is best to keep it very simple, especially for early ceasefire monitoring. It allows you to find better balance. Comprehensive peace agreement implementation often calls for a more complex structure, which does not necessarily translate into effectiveness... The civilian participation was not a way to overcome some of the challenges, because of the complicated political landscape in Sudan”<sup>14</sup>.***

5. **PEACE PROCESSES WITHOUT AN ‘ENDGAME’:** A verification process without a political agreement on the horizon or at least a recognisable arrival point for the parties increases levels of uncertainty and the temptation for non-compliance by making it contingent on the fulfilment of partial objectives (such as de-escalation or humanitarian relief) that do not reflect the real interests of the parties. It also risks diluting political support if verification fails prematurely, as in the case of Ukraine:

***“There was no notion of purpose nor sequence which restrained the scope of the OSCE SMM work during its mandate (...) It was already clear in 2015 that the Minsk agreements didn’t work (...) and that it was necessary to review them, recognizing early on that they didn’t work”<sup>15</sup>.***

<sup>12</sup> Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) <https://www.jmeconsouthsudan.com/index.php/institutions-and-boards/ctsamm>

<sup>13</sup> Cate Buchanan, Govinda Clayton y Alexander Ramsbotham (2021). Ceasefire monitoring: Developments and complexities, Conciliation Resources, Junio de 2021, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 9 November 2024.

<sup>15</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



## Elements of verification agreements

Each verification mechanism responds to the particular context and specific needs of the agreements and in general of the peace process. Several lessons on the content of verification agreements were reiterated by the practitioners and experts:

1. **CLARITY OF THE MANDATE:** Experts and practitioners agreed on the importance of having an unambiguous mandate that can be understood and implemented under the same criteria by all parties involved:

***“Avoid ambiguity, vague language and loosely defined terms”<sup>16</sup>.***

In practice this translates into lessons such as:

- Differentiate the scope of the work, whether it focuses exclusively on monitoring and information collection or effectively invokes the verification and assessment of compliance with agreements.
- Specify what constitutes non-compliance with what has been agreed and what course of action is envisaged following non-compliance: whether sanctions or other types of action to ensure the implementation of agreements and prevent further non-compliance. In cases such as Ukraine, one of the central problems was:

***“finding ways to hold the violations accountable, there was a lack of enforcement mechanisms”<sup>17</sup>.***

- Clarify the roles of each actor in the mechanism at both national and local levels, including those instances and actors in charge of resolving differences and making substantive decisions.

2. **OBJECTIVITY AND NEUTRALITY AS GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF VERIFICATION:** Verification mechanisms must provide robust guarantees of neutrality and transparency so that they enjoy the support of the parties and the public, rather than becoming an additional field of dispute. This implies the selection of impartial third parties that are accepted by the parties and have sufficient capacity and experience to verify (usually multilateral organisations such as the UN, EU, AU, ASEAN, CELAC, OSCE, among others):

***“When we look at the contexts, the states are less able to be independent or neutral, so in these cases, regional or multilateral organizations are more suitable”<sup>18</sup>.***

<sup>16</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 9 November 2024.

<sup>17</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.

<sup>18</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



### 3. A COMMON LANGUAGE THAT CREATES A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP:

This is not just a matter of clarity. A verification agreement requires language that is accepted by the parties, avoids resistance and generates ownership.

In the case of Colombia, the commitments on verification reflected the vision and language that the parties had been jointly constructing for years in the negotiation framework: they did not speak of ‘disarmament’ but of ‘laying down weapons’; they did not speak of ‘demobilisation’ but of ‘transition to legality’; they referred to ‘reincorporation’ instead of ‘reintegration’:

***“Emphasis on the language and what this symbolises is at the very core of a potential agreement and its implementation”<sup>19</sup>.***

4. THE ADDED VALUE OF DIFFERENTIAL APPROACHES: Recent experience demonstrates the importance of incorporating differential approaches in the deployment of verification mechanisms. In practice, this involves clarifying the criteria for the composition of the mechanisms and taking into account gender, ethnicity, population with disabilities and youth. In South Sudan, the fact that the AMM CTS was mostly composed of men (military and ex-military personnel) had an impact on the possibility of adequately monitoring non-compliance related to gender-based violence<sup>20</sup>.

In the case of Colombia, a “gender approach” was incorporated into the Final Agreement through the creation of the Gender Sub-Commission, which worked for more than two years on the language in the Agreement. Its work touched all points, including the ceasefire verification mechanism, which had 187 female observers and a specialised gender route with focal points at the local and regional levels and educational activities.

## **Problems and contingencies during implementation**

1. HIGH PROBABILITY OF ADJUSTMENTS OR EXTENSIONS OF ONGOING MANDATES: Verification mandates are often transformed as a consequence of political and military factors, new decisions within the peace process, or adjustments necessary for its proper functioning.

In Ukraine, the OSCE SMM had to adapt its operation as ceasefire-related commitments were re-negotiated; as mentioned above, at least 17 commitments were “recommitted” and were always contested by the parties; while in South Sudan the JMEC was adjusted as the political agreement between the parties was strengthened in 2018 through the ‘*Revitalised agreement on the resolution of the conflict in the republic of South Sudan*’.

*ce Processes*, 9 November 2024.

<sup>19</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘*The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes*’, 8 November 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Aly Verjee (2019). “*A very ugly mission*”. Ceasefire Monitoring in South Sudan 2014–2019. United States Institute of Peace (USIP), August 2019, p. 18.



In Colombia, the mandate of the UN Verification Mission was extended to other points of the agreement beyond DDR (such as the implementation of the point on rural reform or the “ethnic chapter”). In other cases, such as in Sudan in 2008, the mechanism (AEC) went beyond its mandate by organising a visit with delegates from the parties after an attack on the city of Abyei, a decision that was not within its mandate, but which facilitated conditions for a new agreement between the parties.

**2. CONTINUITY BETWEEN THOSE WHO NEGOTIATE AND THOSE WHO IMPLEMENT:** It is important for there to be a minimum of continuity between those involved in the verification mechanism negotiations and those who will be in charge of implementing them, to ensure a proper understanding of what has been agreed to when the verification mechanism is launched. Similarly, involving potential third-party verifiers and experts in a timely manner in the negotiations allows for the construction of more realistic and technically robust agreements.

It was precisely the lack of continuity that was one of the errors identified in the case of Sudan, as people who played a strategic role in the negotiations as part of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) did not play any role in the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) created to monitor the 2005 general peace agreement<sup>21</sup>. In contrast, in Colombia the deployment of the tripartite ceasefire verification mechanism that was activated in 2016 was much facilitated by the involvement of military, police and FARC personnel who had previously been part of the sub-commission that drafted the ceasefire agreement, ensuring continuity at the national level:

***“When somebody designs an agreement, he must also be responsible for implementing it. This is the experience we had with the tripartite verification mechanism in Colombia: we were the ones who designed and agreed to the process of ceasefire and disarmament, and we were part of the tripartite mechanism. We knew everything that had to do with this agreement, and that in the end facilitated the whole process”<sup>22</sup>.***

**3. THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:** Verification mechanisms need a communications strategy based on clear criteria on what to communicate, when to communicate and how to communicate, in accordance with the status of the process and the scope of the mandate.

While sufficient information should be provided to the public, disseminating too much information about what is happening on the ground or showing results in a late or non-transparent manner can work against confidence-building and

<sup>21</sup> Aly Verjee (2020). *After the Agreement. Why the oversight of peace deals succeeds or fails*, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘*The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes*’, 8 November 2024.



make it difficult to prevent non-compliance. In the case of Ukraine, **“too much information backfired at some point”**<sup>23</sup>, increasing the perception of non-compliance and the fragility of the whole process.

**4. ANTICIPATING SPOILERS AND WARNINGS OF POSSIBLE NON-COMPLIANCE:** Some experts drew attention to the need to anticipate possible ‘spoilers’ as part of the preparation of the verification mechanism, generating timely warnings and preparing possible responses to overcome spoiler-related incidents that may arise, particularly in the early stages. The fragmentation of armed groups, as in the case of Sudan, often increases the risk of spoilers, as well as the security risks for the personnel involved in the verification mechanism.

**5. TECHNOLOGY TO CLOSE INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY GAPS:** In cases such as Ukraine, new tools and state-of-the-art equipment allowed verification efforts to expand their geographic reach and produce reports in real time. The use of cameras in Ukraine and other equipment had a deterrent effect on the parties and helped compensate for the logistical challenges of covering a large geographical area with limited personnel, increasing the flow of information, transparency and accuracy.

## **IV. Some questions and preliminary conclusions on verification of peace agreements**

Practitioners and experts agreed that verification should ultimately be understood as part of a larger system of guarantees of peace agreements, which allows for the reduction of the margins of uncertainty and facilitates the transition from a logic of confrontation to one of reciprocity and cooperation. However, there is still a debate about how best to ensure its effectiveness. The following questions emerged from the workshop:

### ***How do we know whether a verification mechanism is fulfilling its purpose?***

Establishing metrics of success in verification remains a contested issue. Each peace process probably demands its own indicators. However, the discussion on how to measure the effectiveness of verification is tied to the understanding of its key purposes:

<sup>23</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



- (i) to contribute to achieving tangible progress in a peace process;
- (ii) to gather accurate and real-time information that facilitates decision-making by the parties;
- (iii) to prevent non-compliance or expose and sanction non-compliance;
- (iv) to build trust between the parties to achieve greater ownership of the process;
- (v) to facilitate a complementary space for the parties to clarify agreements and generate new ones.

As one of the practitioners said:

***“What is the ultimate purpose of verification? It is about both ensuring compliance and generating trust between parties... There is a lot of emphasis on the concept of trust but note that what’s important for cooperation is not really trust but the durability of the relationships. Whether the parties trust each other in the long run is less important than to build a stable system of cooperation with each other”<sup>24</sup>.***

### **How do you ensure compliance with commitments and support the work of a verification mechanism?**

There is no formula that guarantees acceptance by the parties of the results of verification and implementation of the recommendations resulting from its work. The possibility of verification mechanisms being able to sanction non-compliance is often in doubt. In cases such as Ukraine, the mechanism did not have a deterrent effect that prevented non-compliance. Often enough, the parties simply cannot agree on the need to cede sovereignty or decision-making power to a third party:

***“I think that the issue of sovereignty in defining agreements for verification is how to describe it in a way that makes clear it’s voluntary and design it in a way that is respectful of sovereignty (...) In South Sudan, sanctions don’t work, so how do we think beyond sanctions?”<sup>25</sup>.***

### **How do we know when verification should end?**

Except in cases where the mandate specifies the date and conditions for the end of verification work, it is still a challenge to determine the criteria to be followed to terminate the operation of a verification mechanism.

Mandate extensions (justified or not) alter the duration of the mechanism, usually without a clear time horizon (there are cases of countries with monitoring or verification missions with more than 20 years of operation),

<sup>24</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 9 November 2024.

<sup>25</sup> International expert, Workshop ‘The Importance of Verification: Strengthening Verification Mechanisms in Peace Processes’, 8 November 2024.



while the breakdown of peace processes or the reactivation or escalation of the armed confrontation between the parties tends to precipitate the end of these mechanisms, as happened in Ukraine with the OSCE SMM<sup>26</sup>.

### ***How can an understanding of the demands and challenges of verification mechanisms be improved?***

Finally, the question was raised of how to improve knowledge and understanding of what makes verification work. Some of the ideas mentioned included: the creation of a repository of best practices on verification; strengthening institutional capacities on verification in regional and multilateral organizations; the promotion of further South - South exchanges on verification, working with partners in light of growing experiences and expertise available in the South in this area; and raising awareness about importance of verification and fostering a dialogue around it in different international forums and platforms.

These questions are all the more urgent in the current context of a sharp increase in warfare and a weakening of international law. Recent experiences in the design and implementation of verification mechanisms provide important lessons for future mechanisms and for the strengthening of systems of guarantees that give peace and ceasefire agreements a greater chance to last over time.

**26** In the case of South Sudan, indeed: *“given no defined exit strategy, the mission appears set to continue indefinitely, or until donor fatigue sets in, rather than in response to parameters defining conditions for success, mission reorganization, or departure. Some argue that continuing a mission unable to demonstrate that its findings will lead to consequences for the perpetrators of violence offers only diminishing returns”*. In: Aly Verjee (2019). *“A very ugly mission”*. Ceasefire Monitoring in South Sudan 2014–2019. United States Institute of Peace (USIP), August 2019, p. 4.

