# MEET THE PARTIES

Strengthening Multilateral Diplomacy by Engaging Non-State Actors

AUTHORS

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A POLICY REPORT ON INDEPENDENT DIPLOMAT'S "MEET THE PARTIES" PLATFORM

# INDEPENDENT DIPLOMAT
The Diplomatic Advisory Group

## Independent Diplomat

Independent Diplomat (ID) is a non-profit diplomatic advisory group that helps those most affected by crises and conflict access the high-level political discussions about them. We strive to create more inclusive, just, effective and lasting peace processes and international agreements by building the diplomatic capacity of marginalized groups and democratic governments to achieve their goals. Our work follows a simple premise: we work inside the diplomatic system to help these groups advocate for the legitimate interests of those they represent, leading to more just and sustainable outcomes. ID builds long-lasting, collaborative, and equitable relationships of trust with our partners. Collaboration takes a variety of forms: ID projects range from full-scale logistical support to high-level strategic partnership.

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## About the Authors

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## Acknowledgements

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The multilateral system faces a crisis unprecedented in the post-World War II era. Traditional **multilateral channels are failing** to prevent or resolve today's most pressing conflicts. The current paralysis of the multilateral system demands new, unconventional approaches to offset this dysfunction and achieve modest wins.

- Independent Diplomat's Meet the Parties (MTP) platform addresses one aspect of the current dysfunction: **the UN Security Council's exclusion of non-state actors**. Through confidential, working-level meetings between UN Security Council members and non-state actors involved in, or impacted by, emerging or ongoing conflicts, Independent Diplomat seeks to widen the scope of the UN Security Council's diplomatic engagement and to ensure that the perspectives of parties at the heart of conflict are better understood by the decision-makers mandated to solve them.

- Through MTP, Independent Diplomat has facilitated **dozens of discrete meetings between members of the UN Security Council and non-state actors**, including opposition political parties, non-sanctioned armed groups, and civil society leaders across Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. These informal, off-the-record conversations have been widely attended by UN Security Council members and have been overwhelmingly positively received by both diplomats and non-state actors alike for their candor, practical utility, and provision of unfiltered perspectives on emerging or ongoing conflicts.

- MTP's success stems from three key features: strict confidentiality, third party neutrality and a focus on facilitating direct dialogue rather than political grandstanding. As this report will show, the platform demonstrates that inclusive diplomacy can be achieved even within entrenched institutional structures, offering a potentially replicable model for other multilateral mechanisms such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission and regional organizations like the African Union.

# INTRODUCTION

The UN Security Council's mandate to maintain international peace and security has gone largely unfulfilled throughout much of the past decade.[i] As the number of armed conflicts have reached historic highs, UN appointed envoys on conflicts ranging from Yemen to Myanmar and Western Sahara have struggled to make headway in their respective mediation efforts.[ii] This failure stems from multiple challenges: widening divides in a multi-polar world, a lack of political will to enforce international law, and major powers' prioritization of domestic concerns. But part of the problem is also structural: a failure of state-centric diplomacy to adapt to the complexity of contemporary conflicts, which involve multiple actors, including what are commonly referred to as "non-state actors".

## Understanding Non-State Actors

The term "non-state actors" refers to organizations or entities that operate independently of recognized governments while also playing significant roles in political, economic, and social spheres. International relations practitioners—including policymakers and diplomats—often categorize non-state actors into binary groups: malign actors such as terrorist organizations versus benevolent actors such as human rights defenders. This dichotomy, however, obscures a less convenient reality: the majority of non-state actors involved in contemporary conflicts occupy a complex middle ground—wielding tangible military or political influence, representing what are in many cases marginalized communities, and expressing an openness to diplomatic engagement and negotiated solutions. These actors are neither purely malevolent nor benevolent, but instead, operate in a gray zone.[iii]

This includes non-sanctioned armed groups that control territory, political movements and opposition parties engaged in power struggles, and grassroots civil society organizations that advocate on behalf of vulnerable populations. These actors often possess intimate

knowledge of conflict dynamics, maintain local networks essential to sustainable peace, provide security for local communities, and/or control resources or populations that make them indispensable to any viable political settlement—yet as non-state actors, they often lack formal channels to engage international decision-makers. This is particularly true for those parties seeking to engage with the UN Security Council.

## The Exclusion Problem

Despite being the world's foremost body for international peace and security, the UN Security Council rarely hears directly from non-state actors at the heart of the conflicts on its agenda. In Syria, for example, the Security Council never engaged with Hay-at Tahrir al-Sham before its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, ousted Assad and went on to become the country's President. Likewise in Myanmar, the Security Council has yet to engage directly with ethnic armed groups, despite estimates that they control over 40 percent of Burmese territory.[iv] Similarly, while the situation in Western Sahara has been on the UN Security Council's agenda for over 30 years, the Security Council has engaged the Frente Polisario, who govern the Sahrawi population in the Tindouf refugee camps, just once. And of course, despite its regular discussions on the situation in the Middle East, the Security Council has never formally met with Hamas—a party central to the conflict in Gaza.

The same is true for hot zones across the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America, where non-state actors that control territory, govern populations, and are at the very heart of conflict dynamics, are rarely directly engaged by the UN Security Council, whether behind closed doors or in public settings.

The consequences of such exclusion are profound. While members of the Permanent 5 (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States) often have Embassies or capitals that engage with non-state actors, many smaller Member States (in particular, the elected members of the UN Security Council) do not. Without direct access to non-state actors, Member States risk making decisions with incomplete information, missing critical perspectives from actors whose actions are central to the evolution of conflicts.[v]

At the same time, non-state actors that are excluded from multilateral diplomacy risk feeling shut out of the diplomatic process and un-invested in its success. This exclusion can de-legitimize moderate voices within non-state actors, strengthening hardliners who argue that violence is the only path.[vi] Research shows that exclusion can embolden the very actors who seek to disrupt peace agreements and thereby prolong violence and make the forging of peace more difficult.[vii] By contrast, providing opportunities for non-state actor engagement with high profile institutions like the UN Security Council offers a means to offset this perception, and potentially, build support for negotiated solutions and diplomatic pathways. Unfortunately, the UN Security Council often fails to do precisely this.

# The Limits of Existing Platforms

The simplest way to measure the UN Security Council's inclusion of non-state actors is through its engagement of so-called "briefers". While Rule 39 of the Security Council's Provisional Rules theoretically allows the UN Security Council to invite all "competent persons" to supply it with information, the practical reality is starkly different. Briefers typically require unanimous UN Security Council support or, failing that, support from nine or more of its 15 members as a procedural matter. This creates a serious limitation as to who can formally brief the UN Security Council.

The Arria-formula meeting was introduced by Diego Arria, the former Permanent Representative of Venezuela to address this gap. Conceived in 1992 amidst the horrors then unfolding in the former Yugoslavia, the first Arria formula meeting aimed to provide a platform for Security Council members to hear an eye-witness account to the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This first Arria Formula meeting enabled Security Council members to hear from affected parties, without being subject to the Security Council's burdensome rules of procedure. These "very informal, confidential gatherings" were deliberately voluntary and designed to facilitate candid dialogue. [viii]

In recent years, the Arria formula meeting has evolved into something far more conventional. Once private, most Arria meetings are now public—frequently broadcast live on UN WebTV—and serve more as platforms for Member State political messaging than genuine consultation. The loss of confidentiality means a forfeiture of frank and open discussion. Moreover, the meetings tend to highlight intergovernmental and non-governmental representatives, excluding more politically contentious non-state actors, such as armed groups or opposition leaders.

Independent Diplomat (ID) launched Meet the Parties (MTP) to bridge this gap, operating on the principle that effective conflict prevention requires talking with affected parties—not just about them.[ix] Like the original Arria formula meetings, MTP functions through informality and candor, enabling the kind of discrete engagement that research consistently identifies as crucial for successful preventive diplomacy.[x]

# TABLE 1: ARRIA AND MTP
**Distinguishing the Arria Formula Meeting from Meet the Parties**

| Arria Formula | Meet the Parties |
|---|---|
| Organized by Security Council members | Organized by neutral third party (Independent Diplomat) |
| Increasingly public (UN Web TV broadcast) | Strictly confidential |
| Often serves Member State's political agendas | No political agenda beyond inclusive diplomacy |
| Features civil society and experts | Focus on parties to conflict, including armed groups and political opposition groups |
| Variable format and frequency | Consistent structure and regular programming |

*"Meet the Parties is doing something different because it gives us an opportunity to engage with the parties directly. This is what makes them special."*
*- UN Security Council diplomat*

# MEET THE PARTIES

## An Alternative Platform for Engagement

The MTP platform was created in 2016 by the nonprofit diplomatic advisory group, Independent Diplomat, to facilitate discreet engagement between the members of the UN Security Council and non-state actors directly involved in conflict and its resolution. It serves as a space for off-the-record, informal conversation at the working-level between representatives of UN Security Council Member States and political non-state actors who are parties to an ongoing conflict of relevance to the Security Council's mandate to uphold international peace and security.

Since its launch, ID has hosted more than 34 such meetings, featuring non-state actors, including political opposition groups, armed groups, and civil society organizations from Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.[xi]

## Meet the Parties Principles

Meet the Parties meetings are defined by the following principles:

- **Confidentiality:** All MTP meetings are strictly confidential, with no publicity or public record. This confidentiality creates space for frank discussion free from the political posturing that characterizes public forums.

- **Neutrality:** ID makes clear that participation does not constitute endorsement of any party's positions. ID serves purely as a neutral broker, managing logistics and facilitation without advancing any political agenda, beyond the organization's commitment to inclusive diplomacy.

- **Working-Level Engagement:** Meetings occur at the working-level (experts and/or political coordinators) rather than Ambassadorial level, enabling more substantive technical discussions free from high-level political dynamics.

- **Parties to Conflict:** Wherever possible, ID seeks to host meetings with non-state parties to conflict. This may include political opposition groups, non-sanctioned armed actors, or movements that either have or seek a role within a peace process. Where multiple parties have a stake in a conflict, ID seeks to host and organize parallel discussions between those parties and the UN Security Council – ensuring each party has the opportunity to speak with UN Security Council members directly.

In all instances, ID vets prospective parties to ensure compliance with UNSC and US sanctions regimes.[xi]  ID cannot and does not provide a platform for parties that run afoul of these sanctions regimes. ID also consults broadly with experts and other stakeholders to ensure that MTP meetings reinforce the existing mediation landscape.

ID organizes MTP meetings through a five-step process, to ensure—to the greatest extent possible—an array of informal consultations that address issues relevant to the Security Council's mandate and introduce the Security Council to a diverse group of relevant stakeholders. The following page provides an overview of the process.

## Selection Criteria

ID gives considerable thought to which parties it invites to engage with the UN Security Council, and which situations MTP highlights. As much as possible, ID strives to be neutral in its decision-making and to adhere to a transparent set of criteria when determining the parties and situations to address. These criteria include:

- **Relevance to UN Security Council decision-making:** Is the non-state actor involved in a conflict on the UN Security Council's agenda and of relevance to its upcoming meetings? Is it involved in an emerging conflict that risks undermining international peace and security, and thus could this meeting assist in preventive diplomacy? Would the party's perspective add value to an issue being considered by the UN Security Council?

- **Political significance of party:** Does the party play an important political role on the ground, either militarily or politically, as determined in consultation with local and international experts, including UN's Department of Peacekeeping and Political Affairs?

- **Openness to diplomacy:** Has the party expressed an openness to dialogue and negotiated solutions?

- **Access:** Does the party lack an established route to engage the Security Council as a whole, and is it under-represented on the diplomatic front?

- **Feasibility:** Is the party under UN Security Council or US sanctions? If not, can ID access the party? Can the party participate either virtually (with reliable internet access) or in person (US visas being viable)? Are at least 50% of UN Security Council members willing to meet the party?

Party selection is guided by two core principles: Do No Harm and non-interference. To ensure MTP meetings reinforce concurrent mediation efforts, ID consults Member States, the UN, the pen-holder on the file in question, as well as experts. ID strives to provide a fully inclusive platform. However, we acknowledge that we cannot platform for all relevant voices and ID must ultimately make a decision based on our best judgement. The final selection of parties is at ID's discretion.

# THE 5 STEP MTP PROCESS

ID selects participants through consultation with local, regional, and international experts (including the MTP Advisory Committee[xiii]), focusing on conflicts relevant to current or anticipated Security Council agenda items. Selection follows established criteria that prioritize actors with significant influence in ongoing conflicts and legitimate representation of affected populations. A careful due diligence process is adhered to, ensuring that those parties selected do not run afoul of UN Security Council or US sanctions, and that meetings reinforce the existing mediation landscape.

**01** PARTY SELECTION & DUE DILIGENCE

All 15 Security Council members receive invitations to each MTP meeting, along with the 5 elected incoming members upon the start of their observational period. This universal invitation approach ensures broad representation and prevents any single member state from controlling access. Member States are invited to attend at the political coordinator or expert-level, and it is made clear to all concerned parties that no publicity is allowed, nor is acceptance of an invitation equivalent to recognition or legitimization of the party in question.

**02** UNSC INVITATION

ID provides basic advisory support to invited parties to ensure they are prepared to participate constructively in a substantive discussion with UNSC members. This includes a fundamental overview of how the subject in question has been handled by the UNSC, the positions of Council members on the matter in question, and tips for engaging effectively in diplomacy.

**03** PRE-MEETING PREPERATION

MTP meetings last 90 minutes and follow a structured format: brief introductory statements followed by open discussion between parties and Security Council representatives. ID facilitates these exchanges to ensure productive dialogue while maintaining the meeting's confidential nature.

**04** THE MEETING

Beyond the main session, ID facilitates bilateral meetings between parties and relevant actors, including specific country missions, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, relevant UN agencies, and UN-affiliated organizations. This ensures parties become familiarized with a wider range of diplomatic engagements and build diplomatic networks beyond the UNSC.

**05** BILATERAL FACILITATION

# ASSESSING IMPACT

## Understanding Meet the Parties' Utility

Independent Diplomat hosted Meet the Parties meetings intermittently from 2016 until late 2023, when a Carnegie Corporation of New York grant enabled ID to establish a regular meeting schedule and launch a systematic academic assessment. An independent academic researcher joined as a consultant to evaluate the initiative's impact on participants and diplomatic practice.

From September 2023 through June 2025, the researcher assessed MTP's effectiveness through both perception and outcome measures. Perception measures gauged participant views on meeting value and potential influence on future diplomatic action. Outcome measures evaluated MTP's success against three core objectives: Security Council member attendance, facilitation of open conversation, and creation of new diplomatic networks. Data collection combined surveys, interviews, and direct observation. Participants completed post-meeting surveys evaluating relevance to their work, while non-state actors also completed pre-meeting surveys capturing expectations. The academic consultant conducted follow-up interviews with selected participants, and meeting observations provided procedural familiarity and interview context. This primary data was supplemented with analysis of UN and Security Council documents, conversations with Council experts, and academic literature on non-state actor engagement in international diplomacy.

This assessment acknowledges methodological limitations. Confidentiality—essential to MTP's effectiveness—constrains comprehensive data collection and verification. The informal nature of diplomatic engagement means influence operates through subtle channels—relationship development, information sharing, shifted perspectives—rather than directly traceable policy changes.

Establishing causality between discrete meetings and subsequent Council actions or conflict developments is exceptionally difficult given the multitude of factors shaping diplomatic outcomes. The methods employed—surveys, interviews, and observation—provide credible evidence of participant perceptions and immediate outcomes, but cannot definitively establish MTP's influence on Security Council decisions or conflict trajectories. These findings should be understood as indicative rather than conclusive evidence of MTP's contribution to inclusive multilateral engagement.

# Key Research Findings

Despite their informal nature, Meet the Parties attracted a broad range of Member States that span the geographic and political divides. On average,10 out of 15 Security Council members attended each meeting, demonstrating the platform's credibility and the value member states place on these exchanges. Participants have ranged from the members of the Permanent Five (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States) along with the ten elected members (which vary according to the year in question), though Russia and China have attended only sporadically. Member States from each geographic bloc have participated. This consistently high and diverse participation rate indicates that MTP successfully cultivated institutional trust.

With respect to the survey data, the analysis revealed an overwhelmingly positive reception among Security Council representatives and non-state actors alike. Diplomats who participated in these off-the-record engagements revealed strong support for MTP and direct utility for Member States' work. Likewise, non-state actors welcomed the important role MTP played in advancing their diplomatic outreach and building networks with relevant decision-makers.

*"The voices of ethnic and religious minorities is something I have always identified as a gap in the UNSC discussion on Afghanistan. This opportunity was indeed valuable, and will be very helpful in the Council's future deliberations." - Security Council diplomat*

## Breaking Through Diplomatic Barriers

For non-state actors, MTP provided something they lacked: direct access to decision-makers who shape policies affecting their communities. "ID made it possible for me to meet people I could not meet before because the MTP brought them into the space to speak with us," one non-state actor explained. This access translates into tangible diplomatic opportunities. "I already got calls from countries that I have never talked to before. Now I have direct access to them," reported one non-state actor following their MTP engagement. These conversations suggest that MTP does not just provide a one-time platform—it offers an opportunity to open channels that remain available long after the initial conversation ends.

## The Power of Being Heard

Beyond instrumental gains, participants emphasized the inherent value of voice itself. "Just raising your voice and getting your voice heard is a great value from the meetings," one non-state actor noted. Another framed it more directly: "Meaningful participation means sitting at the table." For actors systematically excluded from formal diplomatic processes, the simple act of being in the room—speaking directly to those with power—carries profound significance. The impact on legitimacy and confidence was also unmistakable. "The meeting added value to the work we do. It says we are doing something good and we need to do more of it," explained one participant. Another described how "the meeting is helpful because we are able to raise the relevant issues with the people who can make decisions. It makes us stronger in our work and helps us gain trust."
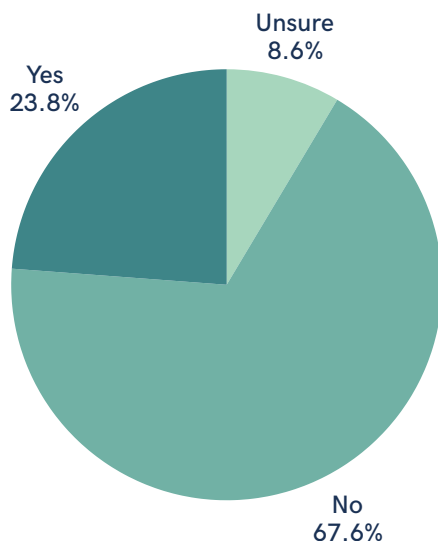
# SURVEY RESULTS: DIPLOMATS

**How helpful was the meeting in informing your understanding of the situation on the ground?**
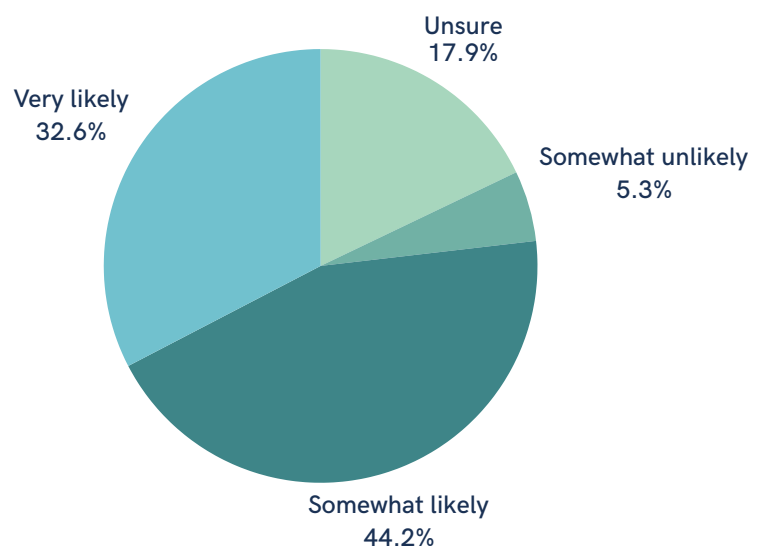
Somewhat helpful
8.8%

Very helpful
50%
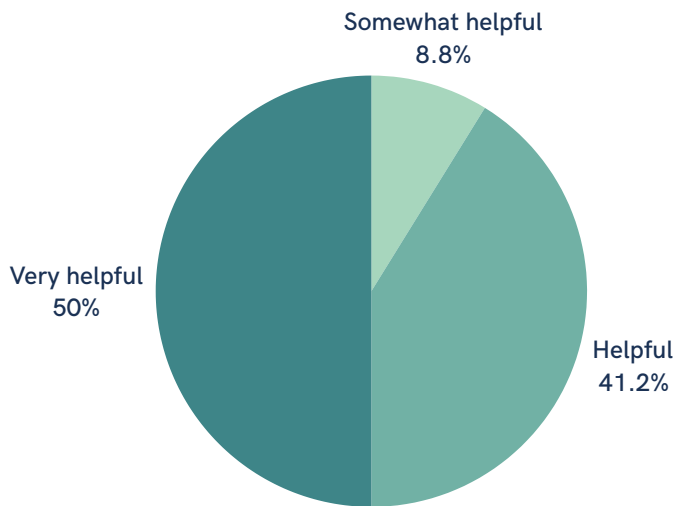
Helpful
41.2%

**How helpful was this meeting in informing your understanding of the viewpoint of members of the party?**

Somewhat helpful
3.9%

Helpful
37.3%

Very helpful
58.8%
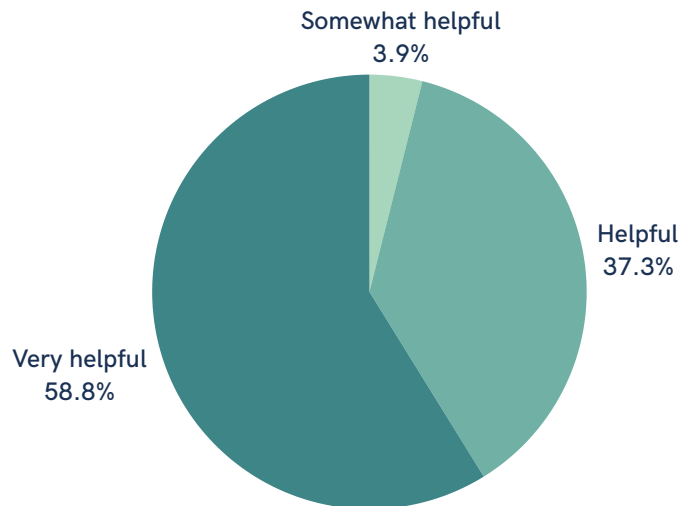
**Have you engaged with members of the party prior to the 'Meet the Parties' meeting?**

Unsure
8.6%

Yes
23.8%

No
67.6%

**How likely is it that this meeting will influence your work at the Security Council?**

Unsure
17.9%

Very likely
32.6%

Somewhat unlikely
5.3%

Somewhat likely
44.2%

*"I would appreciate the opportunity to have periodic meetings with the group or representatives of the same non-state actors and remain updated on overall developments and their viewpoints." - UNSC diplomat*

# SURVEY RESULTS: DIPLOMATS

**How might information shared in the meeting influence your work at the UN Security Council (select all that apply):**
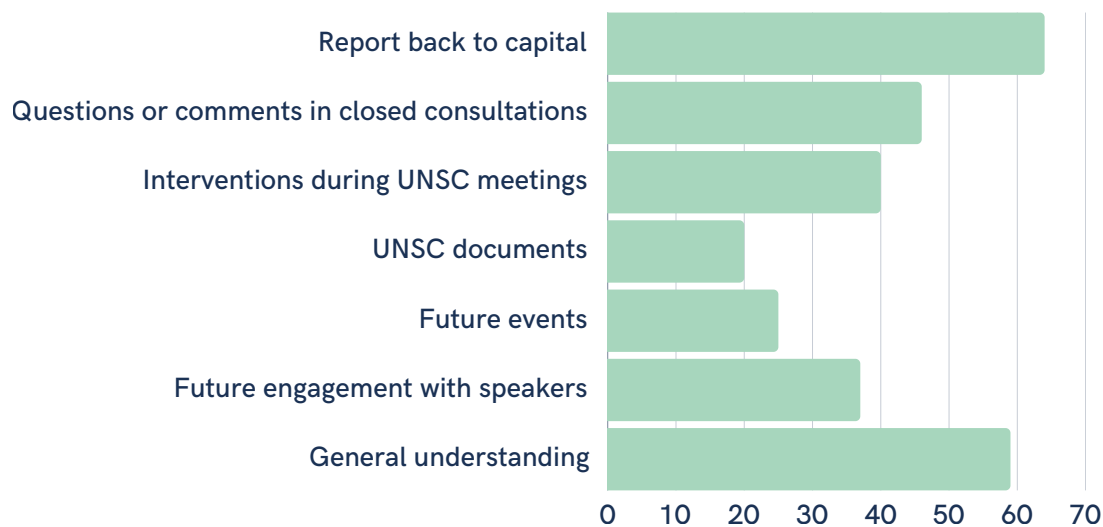


**How frequently do you engage with political non-State actors (i.e. political parties, armed groups, opposition movements) in your work at UNSC?**
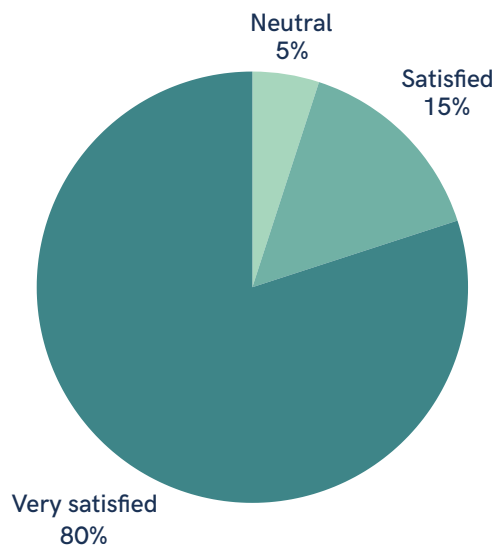


Frequently 17.9%
Never 4.8%
Infrequently 42.9%
Regularly 34.5%
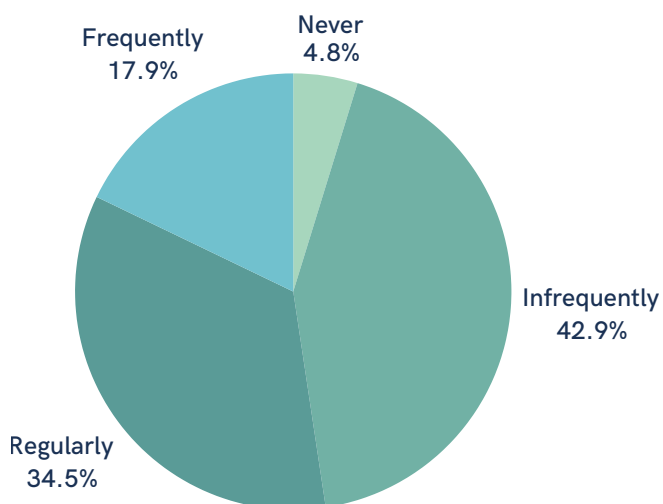
**Has this meeting increased your interest in engaging more with non-State actors in the future?**
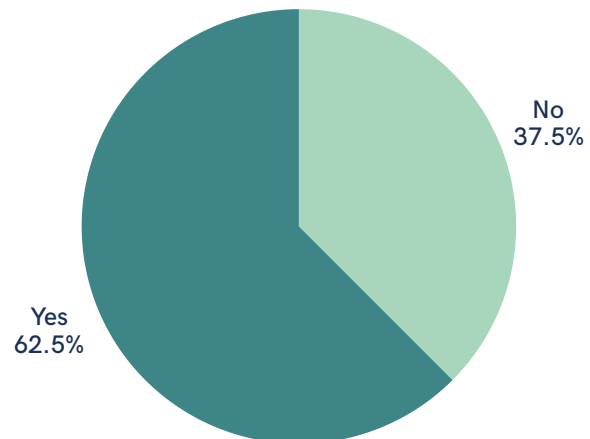


Unsure 25%
No 5.7%
Yes 69.3%
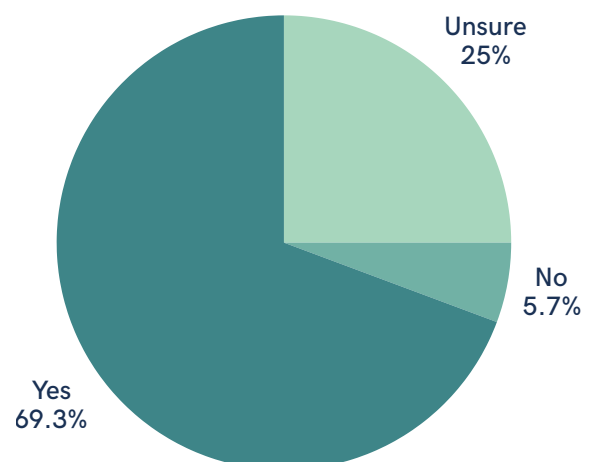
# SURVEY RESULTS: NON-STATE ACTORS

**How satisfied are you with your participation in this 'Meet the Parties' meeting?**

Neutral
5%

Satisfied
15%
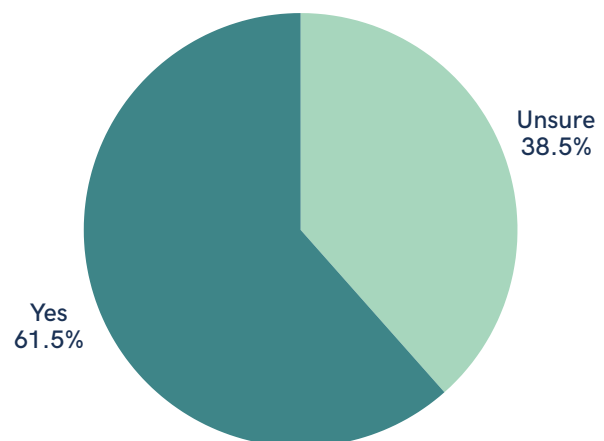
Very satisfied
80%

**Was this your party's first time meeting UN Security Council members multilaterally?**

No
37.5%

Yes
62.5%

**How likely is it that this meeting will influence your future diplomatic engagement?**

Neutral
10.5%

Likely
26.3%

Definitely
63.2%
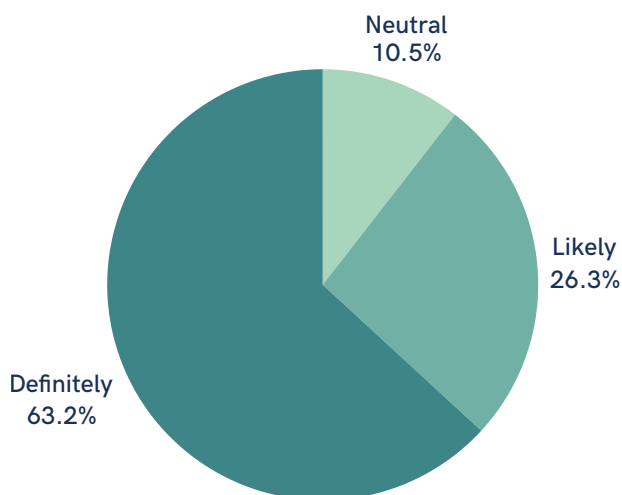
**Did you feel that your views were given serious consideration?**
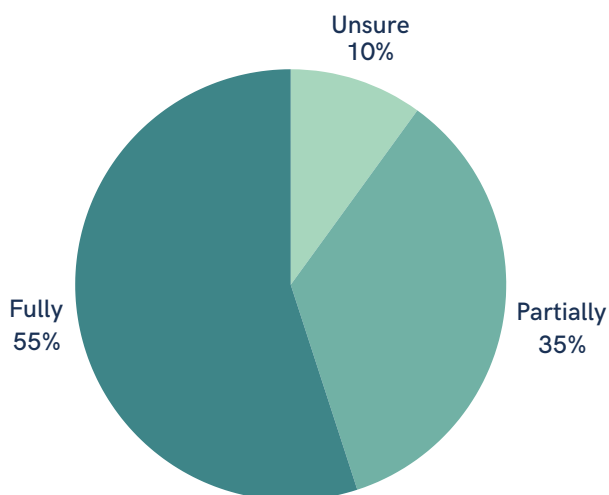
Unsure
38.5%

Yes
61.5%

*"The format is very useful and provides a chance to respond or provide perspective on the issues the SC often discusses without having all relevant sides participate in the formal meetings. This was a great opportunity to do this." - Non-state actor*

# SURVEY RESULTS: NON-STATE ACTORS

## What was your goal in participating in this meeting?

To deliver concrete asks
25%

Presenting our perpective
25%

Open exchange of ideas
8.3%

Update on situation
41.7%
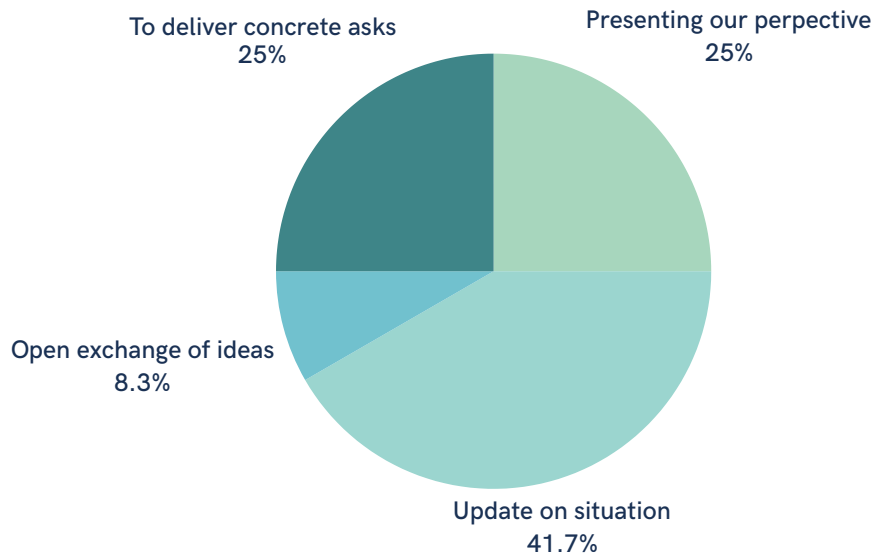
## To what extent do you think that goal was achieved?

Unsure
10%

Fully
55%

Partially
35%

## Did this meeting provide enough space for you to express your perspective?
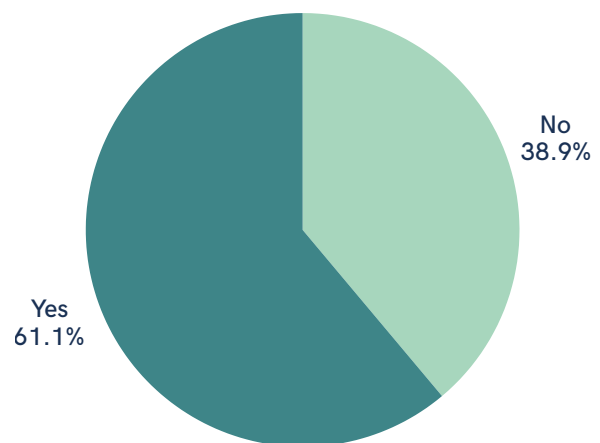
No
38.9%

Yes
61.1%

*"The meeting is helpful because we are able to raise the relevant issues with the people who can make decisions. It makes us stronger in our work and helps us gain trust."*
*- Non-state actor*

## A Different Kind of Diplomacy

Participants consistently emphasized MTP's distinctiveness. "This is the only program that exists right now at the UN that is doing something different. It is not people giving their talking points," observed one non-state actor. Another noted: "Most organizations just do the work for you or give you the funding to do the work yourself. The tailored approach from ID is unique." Security Council diplomats echoed this assessment. "The MTP is doing something different because it gives us an opportunity to engage with the parties directly. This is what makes them special," explained one diplomat.

## Humanizing Abstract Policy

For diplomats working within bureaucratic structures, MTP also served another vital function: connecting policy outcomes to human reality. "The work we do is very abstract sometimes and the MTP gives us an opportunity to put faces and feelings on it, and that's very important," one diplomat explained. Another emphasized: "I think it's really important to get exposed to people who come directly from the ground of the conflict rather than people we meet at conferences."

The quality of information changes when it comes directly from those experiencing conflict. "It's very useful to hear from affected people, from strong voices giving fresh perspective rather than repeat the same messages over and over again," noted one diplomat. These fresh perspectives prove professionally useful: "We can use the information we gather from meetings to reinforce our work on certain issues."

*"Ensuring regular follow-up after such meetings can also be critical. It helps maintain momentum on discussed issues and fosters ongoing engagement. Utilizing the expertise of ID to track progress and facilitate ongoing dialogue between meetings could further strengthen outcomes and ensure that key points and commitments are actively addressed." -Non-state actor*

## Keeping Forgotten and Emerging Conflicts on the Agenda

MTP also played an important role in sustaining attention amid competing crises. "Because there is a lot happening in the world, the MTP reminds the UN Security Council of certain forgotten issues and helps them not die," explained one diplomat. In an international system overwhelmed by multiple emergencies, platforms that maintain focus on marginalized conflicts serve an essential function. Perhaps most striking is participants' sense that MTP represents something larger than its immediate impacts. "This is moving the needle somewhere," said one non-state actor. Said another: "I don't know where this is going to lead. It is very respected in a space where nobody is doing anything. ID might be planting a seed."

## Quality of Dialogue

Participants consistently highlighted MTP's ability to enable frank interchange rather than prepared talking points. As one diplomat noted, the confidential, informal setting allows diplomats to engage in genuine dialogue. "The MTP gives a safe space where we can have a conversation without it becoming a political conversation. There is a frank discussion. Not in your position as a diplomat or delegate but as a concerned person that wants to understand the situation." Said another diplomat, "I think the meeting was really helpful, really engaging. It was a diverse group of people and that made it interesting. They had different views and could speak from their own experiences and highlight different points, which is helpful to us."

## Network Creation

For non-state actors, MTP offers a unique opportunity – often the party's first – to engage with Security Council members. Parties who participated in MTP meetings were able to develop direct communication means with members of the Security Council, which subsequently led to follow-up phone calls, emails, and bilateral meetings between participants. Significantly, non-state actors reported gaining access to Security Council members they previously could not contact, enabling them to expand their diplomatic networks. In some cases, following MTP meetings, participants have been invited to formally brief the UN Security Council on developing dynamics.

*"Without the MTP platform, the work we do would be impossible to do otherwise." - Non-state actor*

## Enhanced Decision-Making

It is difficult, if not impossible, to assign causality to MTP meetings and subsequent deliberations and actions by the Security Council or non-state actor participants. There is anecdotal evidence, however, to suggest that both have been positively affected. UN Security Council meetings have at times seemed to reflect information shared during MTP meetings, with the UN Security Council's attention drawn to emerging issues raised by MTP participants. This had included issues such as Afghanistan, where MTP meetings with, for example, Hazara minorities, have been followed by an uptick with Member State's references to minorities during their statements in the Security Council. Similarly, there is anecdotal evidence that MTP engagements have influenced the decision-making of non-state actor participants. For instance, one party subsequently embarked on a disarmament process that it had been stalling. Another undertook informal outreach to a wider range of domestic stakeholders, to broaden their own inclusivity and outreach domestically.

## The Need for Sustained Support

Evaluation data revealed consistent demand among non-state actors for continued diplomatic support extending beyond initial MTP meetings. Parties valued the access MTP provided but expressed clear interest in sustained engagement with UNSC members. Responding to this need, ID organized repeat MTP meetings for several parties, enabling them to provide updated information on evolving conflict dynamics and deepen relationships established in initial sessions. These repeat engagements proved invaluable: participants reported that ongoing access strengthened their relationships with the UN Security Council members and enhanced their ability to influence diplomatic attention to emerging issues.

These responses point to both a limitation and an opportunity. While MTP creates initial access between non-state actors and diplomats, single meetings alone cannot address the systemic exclusion these actors face. Maximum impact requires supplementing MTP meetings with sustained diplomatic support: long-term advisory services, facilitation of follow-up meetings, and assistance maintaining diplomatic relationships. Ultimately, MTP should be conceived as one component of longer-term engagement strategies that help non-state actors build sustainable access to international decision-makers.

# RISK MITIGATION

MTP participant feedback speaks to the value provided by informal and discrete non-state actor engagement. But by its very nature, such engagement carries risks. Even the informal platforming of armed groups and opposition movements risks being be misinterpreted as endorsement. There is also a risk that parties could exploit their participation for propaganda purposes. Likewise, the platforming of some but not all risks further entrenching marginalization of excluded actors.

ID employs multiple safeguards to mitigate these risks. All participants undergo rigorous vetting to ensure compliance with UNSC and US sanctions regimes. ID conducts extensive due diligence—consulting with UN entities, conflict specialists, and regional experts—to verify that parties are part of the conflict landscape and open to diplomatic solutions. The platform's strict confidentiality requirements also prevent parties from publicizing their participation for propaganda purposes.

ID's "Do No Harm" principle guides all programming decisions: ID consults with Member States and UN officials so MTP reinforces rather than undermines concurrent peace processes, sequencing meetings to complement formal mediation tracks. Finally, ID's explicit clarification that participation does not constitute endorsement, as well as the working-level nature of MTP, allows UNSC members to gather conflict information without appearing to legitimize controversial actors.

# CONCLUSION

## The Future of Inclusive Multilateralism

Meet the Parties demonstrates that meaningful reform of multilateral diplomacy need not wait for wholesale institutional change. By creating confidential spaces for direct dialogue between UN Security Council members and conflict parties, MTP addresses an important gap in how the international community understands and responds to contemporary conflicts. This report has highlighted several key elements that distinguish MTP from existing engagement mechanisms, and point to areas upon which future diplomatic engagements can be built.

### ID as Neutral Broker

Central to MTP's effectiveness is its role as a neutral broker extending a platform to a multiplicity of parties involved in conflicts. Independent Diplomat's position as a third-party facilitator removes many of the political dynamics that undermine member state-organized meetings. Security Council members can engage without appearing to endorse particular non-state actors, while these actors can in turn share sensitive information directly with international decisionmakers.

### Information Quality and Early Warning

MTP addresses a critical information gap in Security Council decision-making. Formal diplomatic channels often provide sanitized, politically filtered information that can obscure crucial conflict dynamics. By enabling direct engagement with conflict parties, MTP provides Security Council members with unfiltered perspectives on emerging threats and escalation risks. This early warning function can prove particularly valuable for preventive diplomacy. Rather than responding to conflicts after they erupt, the Security Council can gain access to information that can inform preventive action, directly from the parties with most at stake in those conflicts.

## Replication Potential

MTP's design principles are inherently scalable. The platform's adaptability to different institutional formations suggests potential application across regional and multilateral organizations facing similar inclusion challenges. As the UN increasingly emphasizes regional approaches to conflict prevention—through bodies like the African Union, ASEAN, and the Organization of American States—as well as UN bodies like the Peacebuilding Commission, MTP's model offers a practical framework for enhancing their inclusivity, based on: neutral third-party facilitation to manage political sensitivities; confidential settings that enable frank discussion; consistent programming that builds institutional trust over time; and working-level conversations that involve those most directly involved in the substance of these files.

Of course, MTP remains a modest intervention in a system requiring far more fundamental change. It cannot substitute for political will, replace stalled peace processes, or overcome the Security Council's inherent structural limitations. What it can do—and does effectively—is ensure that when decisions are made, they are informed by voices that would otherwise go unheard. As conflicts grow more complex and multilateral institutions face mounting credibility challenges, the need for informal platforms like Meet the Parties will intensify. The rise of non-state actors as decisive players in international security demands diplomatic adaptation. MTP offers one model for this adaptation: working within existing constraints to achieve incremental progress toward more inclusive multilateral engagement.

# END NOTES

[i] The rise in conflict includes an increase in the number of inter-state conflicts, a five-fold surge in conflict-related deaths, and an alarming trend towards the targeting of civilians. or more see: Uppsala University. "UCDP: Sharp Increase in Conflicts and Wars." Uppsala University, 11 June 2025, www.uu.se/en/press/press-releases/2025/2025-06-11-ucdp-sharp-increase-in-conflicts-and-wars.

[ii] A growing number of conflicts have emerged over the past decade, with the number of armed conflicts reaching a "historic high". See for example, Institute for Economics and Peace. "Global Peace Index Map." Vision of Humanity, www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/. Accessed 12 September 2025.

[iii] See for example: Arjona, Ana, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, editors. R*ebel Governance in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.  Nilsson, Desirée. "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of Civil War Settlements." Journal of Peace Research, vol. 45, no. 4, 2008, pp. 479-495. Ghais, Suzanne. "Inclusivity in Peace Processes: Civil Society and Armed Groups." *Contemporary Peacemaking*, edited by Roger Mac Ginty and Anthony Wanis-St. John, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 235-259. Risse, Thomas, editor. *Governance Without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*. Columbia University Press, 2011. International Crisis Group. "Rebel Inclusion and Mediation: Challenges and Opportunities for Myanmar." Asia Report No. 319, 2021. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Humanitarian Mediation and Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups. HD Centre, 2020.

[iv] "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar." Global Conflict Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar. Accessed 3 Nov. 2025.

[v] The exclusion of non-state actors is in stark contrast with research evidence that shows that the success of preventive as well as post-conflict diplomacy necessitates the building of trust with all relevant non-state actors through their effective involvement in the diplomatic processes. Academic research shows that the success of preventive diplomacy depends on building trust with parties to conflicts. See: Nathan, Laurie et al, "Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy: Why and How Does It Work?" United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, Policy Paper and Case Studies, April 2018 and Steiner, Barry H. *Collective Preventive Diplomacy: A Study in International Conflict Management*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. As an inclusive process, MTP is based on evidence that preventive as well as post-conflict approaches to peace have more likelihood of success with the involvement of all relevant non-state actors. See for example Nilsson, Desiree. "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of War Settlements," Journal of Peace Research, vol. 45, no. 4 (July 2008): 479-495 and Ghais, Suzanne. "Inclusivity in Peace Processes: Civil Society and Armed Groups." In *Contemporary Peacemaking,* by Roger Mac Ginty and Anthony Wanis-St. John, 235-259. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

[vi] Jones and Libicki argue that political engagement can strengthen moderates, while exclusion risks empowers hardliners. Jones, Seth G., and Martin C. Libicki. "How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida". RAND Corporation, 2008.

[vii] Nilsson argues that peace agreements are more durable when they include relevant armed actors; whereas their exclusion could spark spoiler violence. Nilsson, Desirée. "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of Civil War Settlements." Journal of Peace Research, vol. 45, no. 4, 2008, pp. 479-495. Stedman similarly warns of the challenges posed by such spoiler violence. Stedman, Stephen John. "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes." International Security, vol. 22, no. 2, 1997, pp. 5-53.

[viii] The inaugural Arria formula meetings were envisioned as "very informal, confidential gatherings which enable Security Council members to have a frank and private exchange of views, within a flexible procedural framework, with persons whom the inviting member or members of the Security Council…believe it would be beneficial to hear and/or to whom they may wish to convey a message. *The Security Council Working Methods Handbook*, New York, United Nations, 2012, pp. 78–9.

[ix] The platform represents what scholars term "polylateral diplomacy"—an approach that recognizes both state and non-state actors as essential agents for sustainable peace. For more on polylateral diplomacy, refer to: Wiseman, Geoffrey. "Polylateralism and New Modes of Global Dialogue." Discussion Paper No. 59, Diplomatic Studies Programme, Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, University of Leicester, Nov. 1999. Shi, J. "Multilateral or Polylateral Approaches? To More Effectively Address Contemporary Diplomatic Challenges." Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media, vol. 42, 2024, pp. 240-245.

[x] See for example: Akiba, Okon. *Preventive Diplomacy, Security, and Human Rights in West Africa*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrace Macmillan, 2020. Nilsson, Desiree. "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of War Settlements," Journal of Peace Research, vol. 45, no. 4 (July 2008): 479-495. Dema, Astrit. "Preventive Diplomacy and United Nations." Vizione, 2022: 407-416. Brown, Katherine. "Face-Time: Building Trust in International Affairs." USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 27 Feb. 2020, uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/face-time-building-trust-international-affairs. Ghais, Suzanne. "Inclusivity in Peace Processes: Civil Society and Armed Groups."

[xi] None of these parties or the individuals invited were on UN Security Council or US sanctions list. All "Meet the Parties" participants are vetted to ensure full compliance with sanctions protocols. For more on how ID selects MTP participants, please refer to the section on MTP criteria.

[xii] Due to the fact that ID organizes MTP meetings in the United States, we are required to ensure compliance of all invited parties with US sanctions regimes.

[xiiii] ID established an MTP Advisory Committee in early 2024 comprised on experts in non-state actors, UN working methods, and former diplomats. The advisory committee is chaired by Larry Johnson, former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs.