



The Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict

An integrated program of research, discussion and network building

**Expert Group Meeting on Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Development
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Partnerships and civil society: roles and capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Peace-building

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OUTLINE PRESENTATION

Introduction

- It is of great importance that DESA organizes this Expert Group Meeting, and to discuss on how DESA could better deal with conflict prevention and peace-building
- It reminds me of the processes years ago on 'Do no Harm' approaches, and the DAC Guidelines on Helping Preventing Violent Conflict: preventing the negative, conflict-escalating effects of conflict interventions and strengthening the conflict-de-escalating effects and factors. It took many years for the development community to realize the need to develop conflict-sensitive approaches.
- According to the World Bank, the average country reaching the end of a civil war faces a nearly 50/50 risk of returning to conflict within five years, depending largely on whether the root causes of violent conflict have been addressed.
- The UN Secretary-General calls for a Shift to Prevention: this shift will not happen when only done by UN and governments, also broad civil society involvement is essential.

DESA should indeed look for strategies and entry points as well, also on how to involve civil society in DESA's strategies. We very much welcome this initiative.

Strengthening engagement between the UN and civil society working with conflict

The United Nations was founded "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and the first commitment made by member states in the UN Charter is to "take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace." The UN system for peace and security issues was created on the assumption that the main threats were from wars between states. Although this threat has not disappeared, the predominant trend has been towards conflicts within states (in which civilians are the main casualties – and even targets – of fighting) or, increasingly, through unconventional transnational militant movements. Yet the collective security architecture developed in the UN System was not designed for responding to these sorts of challenges. While there have been efforts to adapt the system to be more proactive in responding to these challenges, leadership responsibilities for making the system work remain diffused. The UN General Assembly, Security Council, ECOSOC and the Secretary-General have mandates to consider these situations but – it could be argued – none are designed especially to address them.

A discussion paper entitled "*United Nations, Civil Society & Preventing Armed Conflict: Principles & Recommendations for Operational Prevention*", written by Dr. Catherine Barnes, has been prepared to stimulate the development of concrete recommendations for improving interaction between the UN and CSOs. The paper was discussed during expert meetings with UN representatives and CSOs in Geneva and New York. Furthermore, the paper is also based on input from the regions on their experience on interaction with the UN. The paper explores four main themes, namely i) mainstreaming, integration & specialized capacities within the overall UN system, ii) instruments to address the (sub-) regional dimensions of conflict, iii) prevention and peace-building through in-country operations, and iv) integrated early warning and early response systems.

The paper elaborates on the role of the UN, and that the UN should play a leading role in proactively responding to the potential for conflict by **convening multi-stakeholder dialogue**. The aim should be to open channels of communication, to clarify issues and develop joint strategies. The following principles can guide the design of the UN 's approach:

- **Focus on the long-term goal** of transforming the causes of conflict and the relationships that have been damaged by it. A focus on early enough prevention. Short-term expediency should not be pursued at the expense of medium- to long-term sustainable peace-building.
- Pay attention to **local knowledge and perceptions**, rather than assuming that the analysis of external 'experts' is more reliable. This should be informed by broad-based consultations that incorporate diverse perspectives outside elite circles. Through processes that are appropriate and sensitive to local conditions, listen to the needs that are articulated by conflict-affected communities and their ideas about what can be done to address them.
- Strategies and initiatives should be **locally derived and internationally supported** to help ensure appropriate and sustainable change. Build on capacities that exist; do not duplicate or displace locally developed initiatives.
- Help to **strengthen civil society capacities** by providing both practical support and recognition of the legitimacy of their role.

The UN has well-developed mechanisms for crisis response, but it needs to **strengthen its capacity for leadership in prevention**:

- UN needs to **better mainstream and integrate strategies for long-term/'deep' structural prevention** into the work of all departments, agencies, and programs and to strengthen mechanisms to integrate strategies across the system;
- Combined with a **new high-level and action-oriented specialized instrument or body to serve as the principle catalyst for early-stage operational prevention**.
- A new mechanism should **support, expand and systemize the 'good offices' role of the Secretary-General** and should fully integrate with existing coordination mechanisms, such as the Framework Team and the ECPS.
- **High-level leadership** should be located either in the Secretary-General's office or led by a new Under Secretary-General able to conduct specialized initiatives and engage on an equal footing with others throughout the UN system.
- To be effective, any such mechanism must have a **small, dedicated and highly-skilled staff** trained and experienced in conflict analysis and resolution and capable of: (a) conducting analysis and developing proposals; and (b) mediating / facilitating dialogue at early stages of prevention.
- **An advisory body of distinguished civil society leaders**¹ can assist with context-specific advice, provide additional support.

It is also important to **strengthen mechanisms to address the cross-border and sub-regional dimensions of emerging conflicts**. For the most part, the UN is operational at either the country-level or the global-level, whereas its regional and sub-regional operations are less developed:

- (Sub-)regional prevention mechanisms are most likely to be effective if they **develop according to the needs of the area** and **respond to the existing patterns** of regional conflict dynamics
- Mechanisms could be developed principally under the auspices of a (sub-)regional organization, or under the UN, or be a joint instrument, depending on the existing multilateral arrangements in the (sub-)region and should be consistent with the **subsidiarity principle**.
- There should be a **high priority on engaging local and regional CSOs and networks** and to **explore mechanisms for ongoing cooperation and partnerships**.²

An example of interaction between regional organization and a CSO is the MoU on early warning between **WANEP and ECOWAS**. At the level of ECOWAS, CSOs can work in partnership to operationalize prevention mechanisms at the pre-conflict stage-early warning for early response, at the crisis stage-early warning for early response and at the post-crisis stage-early warning for early response. In February this

¹ This builds on the Secretary-General's 2001 Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict, where he stated his intention to establish an informal network of eminent persons for conflict prevention (recommendation 9.3).

² These paragraphs are part of the paper "*United Nations, Civil Society & Preventing Armed Conflict: Principles & Recommendations for Operational Prevention*", written by Dr. Catherine Barnes



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year, WANEP has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ECOWAS to validate and give meaning to an ECOWAS-Civil Society partnership through WANEP in Early Warning and Conflict Prevention.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks are needed. Networks are needed because:

- Complementary partnerships are created;
- Opportunities to exchange information are formed;
- Duplication is avoided;
- Exchanging experiences create a symbiotic relationship that enable organizations to learn from each other's successes and failures, saving time and money;
- Joining forces (coalition building) helps strengthen the field and amplify the voice of coalition NGOs as a group;
- Participating organization outreach is more effective (i.e. publications or articles can reach a broader audience); and
- A broad network comprised of organizations from different fields (conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, development cooperation) and from different regions provides the best guarantee against a one-sided approach to complex issues as each participating organization approaches a subject from a unique perspective.

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict

Origins:

"I urge NGOs with an interest in conflict prevention to organize an international conference of local, national and international NGOs on their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with the United Nations in this field"

In response to recommendation 27 of the UN Secretary-General's Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (June 2001) - in which he emphasizes the need to a shift to culture of prevention and highlighted the important role of civil society - the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) initiated a program to mobilize the worldwide conflict prevention and peace-building community to form the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

- June 2003: establishment of the Global Partnership
- In 15 regions preparatory processes started, leading to national meetings, Regional Conferences and Regional Action Agendas

(Since April 2004, six regions have held regional conferences: EU+, Latin America and the Caribbean, West Africa, South Asia, East & Central Africa, and the Balkans)

- Meetings with UN Staff from various agencies, including DESA, DPA, UNDP, OCHA, to involve the UN system in the Global Partnership
- Meetings with governments and missions to the UN
- Discussing creation of a Group of Friends
- 19-21 July 2005: Global Conference at UN Headquarters

Objectives and Aims:

To create a fundamental **shift from reaction to prevention**

By:

- developing a **common platform** for effective action in conflict prevention from the community to the global level
- exploring **the role of civil society** in conflict prevention and peace-building (publication People Building Peace II: 65 inspiring stories)
- improving **interaction** between civil society, UN, regional organizations, and governments
- strengthening regional and international **networking**
- stimulating the creation of a **Group of Friends** for conflict prevention and peace-building

Structure:

ECCP acts as the International Secretariat for the Global Partnership, which is rooted in fifteen regional processes worldwide. An International Steering Group, comprised of the fifteen regional initiators and several international NGOs, guides its overall direction and decides its overall policy and operational priorities. The International Secretariat and the liaison offices of leading NGOs at the UN formed the NGO -UN Conflict Prevention Working Group. This working group is the main liaison with the

UN, UN agencies and Missions. Furthermore, several months ago a Conference Secretariat in New York, comprising of a conference coordinator and a program assistant, has been set up, which closely works together with the Conflict Prevention Working Group.

July 2005 Conference at the UN:

A global conference, *From Reaction to Prevention: Strengthening Partnerships for Preventing Violent Conflict and Building Capacities for Peace* will be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 19-21 July 2005. We expect about 800-1.200 participants from all over the world, including CSO representatives, UN agencies, governments, and regional organizations. Because space and resources are limited, CSO participation will be on a 'by invitation only' basis to ensure an appropriate balance from all the different regions engaged in the Global Partnership.

The substantive focus for the conference is to deliberate methods and ideas to **implement the Global Action Agenda**. The Global Action Agenda will be developed through a consultative process throughout the first half of 2005 and finalized at the International Forum during the weekend preceding the main conference. It will then be presented to the UN Secretary-General at the opening session of the Global Conference.

Support from the UN Secretary-General:

The proposal for the formation of a Global Partnership is fully supported by Kofi Annan:

"I support wholeheartedly your initiative to organize regional preparatory meetings leading to an international conference of local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area of conflict prevention ... Your initiative is a timely and important contribution to engaging civil society in the task of developing a culture of prevention in the international community." (letter from Kofi Annan to the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 31 May 2002)

"The United Nations system supports the objective of the conference to establish a global partnership so as to prevent armed conflict by engaging civil society, from the grassroots all the way to the global level... For prevention strategies to become more effective, all actors- civil society, governments and UN agencies- have to work together. The 2005 Global Conference will present an opportunity to bring together these different actors in an innovative framework and will contribute to maintaining conflict prevention and peace-building at the top of the international political agenda." (letter from Kofi Annan to the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 19 October 2004)

Potential/or possible input from DESA

Over the years we already developed a good relationship with DESA, and we especially work closely together with Mrs Gay Rosenblum-Kumar on issues as the UNDESA's *Peace-building Portal*. This is one important entry point with DESA: *information sharing and networking*. This is of great help making peace-builders visible, like ECCP has done with our *Searching for Peace* publications. DESA could contribute greatly by helping producing **directories** of the main conflict prevention and peace-building NGOs and networks ... in the different continents, *before* the Global Conference in July 2005.

Through DESA's *technical cooperation* work, you can help organizing *workshops and training* programs on conflict resolution and transformation: for practitioners, but also at university level. How many universities in Africa have a well-developed conflict resolution and peace studies program?

DESA is producing *Policy Review* documents, would it be an idea to elaborate on these issues as well? DESA has a NGO unit, this would be a perfect entry point for further collaboration.

DESA is focusing on *good governance and inclusive democracy*: this is a crucial issue for many regions facing conflicts or regions that are in a post-conflict phase. Would it be a suggestion to *organize a working group* on the *Global Conference* next year in July on *Democracy, Good Governance and Human Rights* with DESA's input, and with cooperation from the OHCHR, parliamentarians and Transparency International? I would suggest to think about such an opportunity. Also, input could come from the *Clean Election Campaign* in Kenya, which are one of the inspiring cases in the publication provisionally entitled *People Building Peace: 65 Inspiring Stories*, which we will publish just before the Global Conference. Clean Election Campaign is now even expanding towards a *Clean Africa Campaign*. This is an example of a network that would be very glad to receive your support, and this network is also beneficial for DESA's work.

Increased momentum

We have a lot working on our side at this time; the General Assembly Resolution; the UN Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society and UN Relationships, who released their report "We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance" on 21 June; the UN High Level Panel



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on Global Threats, Challenges and Security who will come with their recommendations in December this year; the growing debates on the success or failure of military intervention; the debates in the regions on how to improve CSO relationships with the UN and conflict prevention implementation; and, the Global Partnership's International Conference on Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding from 19-21 July, 2005 at UN Headquarters in New York will all combine to give more body to the growing public debate on conflict prevention and peacebuilding and, especially, the need for the Shift to Prevention.

Besides all these suggestions, the Global Partnership likes to liaise in the process leading up towards the Global Conference with several UN departments that are involved and committed to this process. We aim for a small *liaison working group with UN officials* to further develop the program in close consultation, hopefully with participation from DESA, DPA, UNDP and UNIFEM. We would very much welcome your active participation.