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**Issues Paper for the Session on Partnerships and Civil Society: Roles and Capabilities in  
Conflict Prevention and Peace building**

*Summary*

In conflict prevention and peacebuilding, there are several points of entry for NGO intervention. NGOs can pick up relatively insignificant changes in social dynamics, often subtle signals of brewing conflict. Similarly, NGOs can conduct “peace and conflict impact assessments” to ensure that development aid ‘does no harm’ and builds peace. Further, when hostilities have already broken out, NGOs can play a role as mediators. In the post-conflict phase, NGOs can enhance the chances of lasting peace by promoting the establishment of participatory governance through advocacy, promotion of local conciliatory customs, and activities aimed at strengthening the democratic and governance process. These might include assistance in re-building social infrastructure, strengthening delivery of basic social services and social integration.

The transition to peace entails the introduction of new, structures and processes to put on place measures to redress longtime social, economic, ethnic, gender-related inequities. Working in partnership with the UN, the civil society can play a constructive role in promoting creative responses to conflicts. In particular, this partnership is crucial in DESA’s current work which focuses on institutions and processes in areas such as sustainable development, eradication of poverty and social inequity, good governance, inclusive democracy, respect for human rights, and the promotion of the culture of peace and non-violence.

Questions that the session on *Partnerships and Civil Society: Roles and Capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding* is expected to address:

- How can DESA strengthen partnerships with the civil society, including women’s organizations, and the private sector in conflict prevention and peace-building in its governance, social, economic and environmental work?
- How can DESA play a more prominent role as an enabler in building partnerships? A case in point would be defining a role for DESA to utilize its expertise in bringing the lessons learned in following up on the implementation of the outcome of major inter-governmental conferences?

- How can DESA assist its NGO and civil society partners in the NGO sponsored global conference on the Role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict and peace building in July 2005?
- How can DESA empower, build the capacity of Civil Society Organizations to participate meaningfully in policy and decision making aimed at preventing conflicts, building durable peace and promoting long term development?

*“...We are building new partnership with the business community, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors in order to promote information sharing and learning, to support operational delivery and to mobilize private funds”- Kofi Annan.*

## **I. Introduction**

1. The changed nature of armed conflict and the consequent intensification of peace-building efforts over the past decade have broadened the role of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the nature of their working relationship with the United Nations. Long recognized as leaders in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the ability of civil society and NGOs to influence peace-building at the policy and operational level is also being increasingly recognized.

2. Since NGOs have close contact with the people and the situation on the ground, there are several possible points of entry for meaningful NGO work in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In particular, partnership with civil society and NGOs is indispensable to the UN in fulfilling its Charter responsibilities of maintenance of peace and security as well as in social and economic development. As a consequence of their ongoing involvement with local communities, NGOs are in an advantageous position to pick up relatively insignificant changes in day to day social dynamics that are often subtle signals of brewing conflict. Thus NGOs can play a valuable role in performing an early warning function. NGOs can also assess the impact of policies and programmes through conflict/peace impact assessments. For example, will a seemingly straightforward development project on one side be perceived as a biased act that might trigger resentful feelings of inequity in a neighboring community? Building a capacity for accurate “peace and conflict impact assessment” is one of the most valuable contributions that NGOs can bring to development aid and its timing to ensure that it ‘does no harm’ and in practical ways builds peace.

4. Further, when hostilities have already broken out, NGOs can play an even more active role. By virtue of their close working relationship, NGOs usually enjoy the trust of the grassroots population and where they are service oriented, are generally perceived as being non-partisan. Thus they can act as valuable mediators once conflict has broken out. A notable example of this kind of NGO intervention was the peace brokered between warring factions in Mozambique through the efforts of an NGO: “San Egidio”.

5. During the post-conflict phase, NGOs including women’s groups and youth organizations can offer their unique understanding of the grassroots level dynamics to the decision-making process on policies and programmes. They can help ensure lasting peace by promoting the establishment of participatory governance through advocacy, promotion of local conciliatory

customs and activities. These might include assistance such as re-building the social infrastructure and strengthening civil management of well-run and respected local institutions.

## ***II. DESA and civil society partnerships***

6. DESA's activities create conditions that help sustain peace through its focus on institutions and processes in areas such as sustainable development, eradication of poverty and all forms of social inequity, good governance, inclusive democracy, respect for human rights, and the promotion of the culture of peace and non-violence. In these activities, there is a reciprocal exchange of information with NGOs and coalitions and partnerships with the civil society. Some examples of such initiatives are given below:

-- Recognizing the call made by participants at the NGO Millennium Forum urging the United Nations to involve a broad coalition of civil society organizations in more proactive conflict prevention efforts, the Secretary General's report on 'Prevention of armed conflict'(A/55/985-S/2001/574) and on 'Interaction between the United Nations and other International actors in the prevention of armed conflict' recommended that NGOs with an interest in conflict prevention organize "an international conference of local, national and international NGOs emphasizing their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with United Nations in this field" (Recommendation 27). DESA is working through its partnerships with civil society organizations to support this civil society initiative led by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict in its preparation for a conference at the United Nations on conflict prevention in 2005.

-- DESA has worked to ensure the incorporation of gender perspectives into all departmental conflict prevention and resolution, peace building, peacekeeping, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts while offering training and institutional capacity-building in post-conflict societies in conjunction with local civil society and women's groups particularly at the regional level.

-- With civil society partnerships, DESA has undertaken mainstreaming conflict prevention in the sphere of governance, institutional development and post-conflict reconstruction. For example, Dam's National Conflict Management Capacity Building Project seeks to strengthen the ability of African institutions to anticipate, analyze and respond effectively in conflict environments. This region wide effort offers: (I) training in conflict analysis, mediation, negotiation, and conflict sensitive development to government and civil society officials; (ii) capacity development for universities and training institutes to offer conflict managements skills training; (iii) policy advice and technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of governance institutions in managing conflict; and (iv) the Peace Building Portal, an on-line, interactive database and networking tool working to strengthen the conflict prevention/peace building community in sub-Saharan Africa.

-- DESA had also developed a database of NGOs and women s' groups and associations active in areas related to peace and security, humanitarian assistance, demobilization and disarmament. (DPADM); to further integrate the gender perspective, The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) has compiled a list of gender contacts on peace and security, including on conflict prevention and resolution. Desk's outreach activities to promote networking,

information dissemination and capacity-building through UN-NGO-IRENE (United Nations Non Governmental Informal Regional Network) initiative which is designed to ensure that the concerns raised, the positions taken and the voices heard should be truly representative of NGOs worldwide and should effectively and efficiently contribute to a better and more peaceful world for all.

-- DESA has developed on-line tools for knowledge management, information sharing and networking among organizations working in peace-building and development. Desk's NGO section is building an interactive e- publication on civil society success stories highlighting the work of the NGOs and their contribution to the work of ECOSOC in implementing the MDGs and their relationship to Peace and security and human rights. Also, the NGO Search Engine and on-line interactive database of 2531 NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC maintained by NGO Section/OESCSC assists all staff members at UNHQ to search for over 72 activities related to ECOSOC. The search engine provides data on 431 organizations that deal with Peace and Security, 183 in disarmament and 183 in International Security.

### ***III. Challenges***

- How can DESA utilize its comparative advantage in its partnerships with civil society and NGOs, including women's NGOs, in its governance, social, economic and environmental work in conflict prevention and peace building?
- As there are many public, private partnerships already in existence, (the Global Compact, the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development), how can DESA play a more prominent role as an enabler in building partnerships? A case in point would be defining a role for DESA to utilize its expertise in bringing the lessons learnt in following up the implementation of the outcome to major inter-governmental conferences and to assist its partners in the aftermath of the NGO sponsored global conference on the Role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict and peace building in July 2005.
- How can DESA build the capacity of Civil Society Organizations to participate meaningfully in policy and decision making aimed at establishing formulae for durable peace and development?