

Toda Peace Institute Colloquium, 28 March 2017
‘Challenges to Global and Regional Peace in the 21st century’

Panel presentation by
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Background:

Conciliation Resources is an international peacebuilding NGO based in London working in around ten conflict contexts in partnership with a wide range of civil society partners and networks, and also through regional and global networks. We work at multiple levels, from grassroots up to policy level, and focus primarily, but not exclusively on peace processes, dialogue and mediation support.

Conciliation Resources produces the [Accord](#) publication series, which documents and analyses the lessons of peace initiatives and processes through experiences of policymakers, practitioners and parties to conflict.

Teresa leads on the organisation’s engagement with policymakers on thematic issues related to conflict, peace and security, and on organisational learning. Her background is in UK Government where she occupied roles in political analysis, diplomacy, and in development, peace and security programming.

Presentation:

I have chosen to focus my presentation on what gives me cause for hope that sustainable development, cooperative security and stable peace are possible.

Notwithstanding the many causes for pessimism about the possibility of seeing progress towards these goals, we have a responsibility to remain optimistic and look for entry points and opportunities. I will highlight three reasons to be hopeful:

- 1. A shift in policy commitments and narratives**
- 2. An observable appetite for evidence and know-how**
- 3. Collaborations, coalitions and partnerships**

1. A shift in policy commitments and narratives

There has been raft of policy commitments, statements and frameworks made at UN, EU level and by governments over the last two years which put conflict prevention and more inclusive peacebuilding front and centre.

We have seen this in:

- The inclusion of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies goal within the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- The 2015 review of the UN’s peace architecture, which stressed that lasting peace is achieved through political solutions, not through military and technical engagements;
- Progress in recognising the need for much greater diversity of those involved in peace and security efforts – particularly the inclusion of women, as pursued through UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans;

- The recognition in the UN Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism that persistent unresolved conflict is a major driver of violent extremism, and a call for urgent measures to be taken to resolve protracted conflicts;
- The prioritisation of conflict prevention and investment in fragile situations at World Humanitarian Summit 2016, the report from which stated that *'preventing and ending conflict, including through addressing root causes, is the most important and effective way to substantially reduce risk, vulnerability and humanitarian needs for protection and assistance.'*
- Finally, in the new UN Secretary General, António Guterres', stated commitment to place sustaining peace firmly at the centre of his agenda.

Implicit in these commitments is an appreciation of why conflict prevention and peacebuilding matters for development, stable societies and poverty reduction, and perhaps recognition it has been neglected to date.

Obviously there are challenges and questions: 1) will levels of aid spending match policy commitments and their implementation?; 2) will these achievements be undermined or undone by developments in US policy and in Europe?; and 3) will the UN be strong enough to see these commitments through?

2. An observable appetite for evidence and know-how

There is growing appetite from policymakers for ideas about effective practice, the 'how' of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and evidence that it does work.

There is a sense that this appetite flows from:

1. Failures of statebuilding and stabilisation interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have failed to prevent the reoccurrence of violence in other forms;
2. A recognition of the limitations of traditional diplomacy in peacemaking (for example, in negotiations on Syria) and the need to look at other approaches and ways to secure peace. It is noteworthy that parties to the recent Colombian peace agreement referred to it as the 'first step' in building peace, a recognition that the work to build peace was still to come;
3. An awareness of the limitations of governments and multilateral organisations in tackling some of the drivers of conflict, either because they don't have the tools, access, relationships and staff, or perhaps because they are part of the conflict;
4. Perhaps more pragmatism and realism from external governments and multilateral organisations as to what they can and cannot achieve – and more willingness to understand how they might make better choices.

For civil society actors this situation presents opportunities and some positive challenges:

- The broad peacebuilding sector has more profile and capacity now to demonstrate that peacebuilding is the right and viable response to war and violent conflict. We see governments and multilateral organisations actively reaching out to the sector for ideas, tools and guidance, and consulting us on frameworks and strategy;
- We have an opportunity to learn and share from experience and practice what works and what doesn't, as well as to share more what local

peacebuilding is happening on the ground even in the most violent and volatile contexts, such as Central African Republic and Syria, and to promote support for it;

- While there is evidence of impact, we still have work to do to better evidence the results of peacebuilding and to explore new ways of doing this. Some of you may be aware of the [Everyday Peace Indicators](#) project, for instance, which attempts to address the deficits of standard top-down indices to measure change by supporting communities themselves to develop measures of change in peace and conflict and then use these to inform the design of external interventions;
- We have the opportunity to develop and deepen our tools for understanding conflict. For example, Conciliation Resources along with others practitioner organisations, have been developing tools to understand what integrating a gender perspective into peacebuilding work looks like – what is feasible, what results it can give.¹
- Finally, there is opportunity and need to collaborate across disciplines and sectors, to ensure we continue to challenge our and others' assumptions, and innovate. For example, I was interested to read recently about [Alliance for Peacebuilding's](#) work with specialists to better understand the new applications of neuroscience for the field of peacebuilding.

3. Collaborations, coalitions and partnerships.

I am aware that today, at least in the UK, 'experts' are out of fashion, and there is some confusion and scepticism about facts and evidence. We may therefore risk producing solid evidence and knowledge, which counts for nothing. So my last point for optimism is a trend towards collaboration, coalitions and partnership.

There is an increasing trend in the peacebuilding sector – at least in Europe – towards consortia. Some of this is donor driven, moving to fewer and larger programmes to reduce transaction costs for donors, and to achieve larger scale impact.

Some of these consortia are successful and can be great opportunities for learning. We are part of 4-year research-practice [consortium](#) led by the University of Edinburgh, looking at inclusive political settlements in conflict contexts. The exchange between first hand practice and applied research is a rich one.

However, collaboration can also be hard going when the impulse to come together is a funding imperative.

Where organisations and individuals come together around common cause, there is obviously a different energy. Political pressures and other setbacks can fuel renewed determination and momentum among those pursuing peaceful societies, and we are seeing some of that happen.

For example, there are conversations in our sector about promoting peacebuilding much more visibly as a viable response to insecurity and conflict. Diana (Francis) referred to the efforts of the [Ammerdown Group](#) stimulating new thinking about how

¹ See for instance Conciliation Resources' [Gender and Conflict Analysis Toolkit for Peacebuilders](#) and Saferworld's [Gender Analysis of Conflict Toolkit](#)

we understand, frame and pursue 'security; Paula (Green) will refer to the significant increase in activism and mobilisation in the US against exclusion and injustice.

At this point I want to flag as an example, a relatively unnoticed, but significant success by a global coalition of NGOs in 2016. This group had for years worked to develop a policy dialogue with the largely impenetrable, intergovernmental body – the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

FATF sets standards and monitors compliance in terrorist financing and anti-money laundering rules. 'Recommendation 8' in its provisions stated that non-profit organisations are 'particularly vulnerable' to abuse by terrorists. This one recommendation had been helping to fuel the trend of overly restrictive regulations for non-profit organisations around the globe and bank de-risking of charity accounts.

The efforts of the NGO group, together and in member countries, led in 2016 to a letter calling on FATF to revise Recommendation 8. The letter was signed by 123 organisations across 46 countries. In June 2016, FATF agreed to a significant, positive revision of its provision.²

I found it a remarkable achievement to rally so many to a rather obscure and technical issue, and a great example of collective action. Indeed, Executive Director of FATF agreed. Earlier in January 2016, he tweeted '*NPO engagement with FATF: organized, informed and constructive. A great model for other sectors to follow.*'³

This success also demonstrates that effective coalitions involve conversations with policymakers. Which brings me to a final point on 'partnership'. Partnership seems to mean different things to different people. Conciliation Resources has a model of partnership based around accompaniment, which can involve mutual challenge. Admittedly, it can sometimes be hard to strike the right balance when we are the one with resources.

The UN 'recognises the importance of partnering with civil society'⁴ and sees it as part of the 'third sector' of society along with government and business. Governments talking about 'partnership with civil society' can ring hollow when there is limited opportunity for dialogue and mutual challenge, and civil society are seen as implementers, service deliverers, political opposition, or political allies for that matter.

I think we still have some way to go to achieve a mutual appreciation of the differentiated roles that governments, civil society and private sector play and the way each can empower the each other in the pursuit of peace.

² The revised Recommendation 8 calls on countries to 'review the adequacy of laws and regulations that relate to non-profit organisations which the country has identified as being vulnerable to terrorist financing abuse.' It calls for 'focused and proportionate measures' and a 'risk-based approach'.

³ <https://twitter.com/djwlewis/status/689074080847400960>

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/sections/resources/civil-society/index.html>