



## Guest Editorial

### *New Perspectives on Conflict Resolution*

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**ABSTRACT** *Guest editor Yehudah Paz outlines three stages towards conflict resolution highlighting the important role of civil society in two new approaches to conflict resolution: the People-to-People Peace Process and linking peace to sustainable human development.*

**KEYWORDS** *people to people; peace process; sustainable human development*

(Rabbi) Hillel said: 'Be of the disciples of Aaron, love peace and pursue peace'. Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), The Talmud.

#### **From enemies to neighbours, to partners, to friends**

This issue of *Development* sets out the conceptual approaches and practical programmes designed to create constructive alternatives to conflict in a peace process that will lead people from enemies to neighbours, from neighbours to partners, from partners to friends. The journal aims to contribute to the search for an end to the violent conflict that is threatening people in many parts of the world. The tensions and frictions, within nations and between them, require pre-conflict resolution if they are not to degenerate into violence. Global peace may be the order of the day, but peace on the globe has yet to be achieved.

#### **New perspectives**

The journal offers two new perspectives on conflict resolution: the people-to-people peace process and the link between conflict resolution and sustainable human development. These two new approaches to conflict resolution reflect and express the emergence of civil society as a major factor in achieving sustainable peace at all levels.

### **The people-to-people peace process**

The people-to-people peace process (P2P) depends on and derives from the 'political peace process' undertaken by governments and political institutions. This is true of conflicts between nations and also between ethnic, religious, tribal or social groups within one country. We now recognize that governmental/political agreements cannot, by themselves, serve as the creators and guarantors of a long-term process of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution must find expression in the economic and social realities of people's lives. Peace will take root and flourish only in conditions of growing mutual confidence, of deepening mutual understanding and knowledge and of effective co-operation. The achievement of all of these requires direct interaction between broad sectors of society. For this to come about, the organizations and institutions today grouped under the heading of the 'civil society' must become actively involved in the peace process. What is required is the development of a civil-society-centred people-to-people peace process, parallel to the political peace process carried out by governments and political institutions.

### **Stages on the path to conflict resolution: the initial stage**

Civil society plays a significant role right from the initial stage in the peace dialogue led by a variety of people. Often groups and individuals who shared interests or concerns beyond the conflict arena set the stage for the initiation of dialogue. For example groups committed to women's rights, environmental protection, youth organizations, university and research groups, trade unions and co-operatives. At first most of these initiatives were largely divorced from government or political frameworks frequently taking place in the face of opposition and condemnation by 'the authorities'. But when the political climate changed and leaders open to the concept of conflict resolution gained political power, an alliance was often built between the civil society and the government. The civil society channel led to governmental interaction and

political forces on both sides adopting the dialogue initiative as 'their' own. Also some of the civil society initiators were included in the official teams carrying out formal negotiations.

### **The peace-making stage**

The next stage is of peace making after the formalization of the end of conflict, i.e. the peace treaty and the agreement on new forms of governance or social organization.

One of the most significant elements of this phase is in the deepening of mutual understanding and the enhancement of knowledge of 'the other'. If peace is to become a reality, then attitudes must change from the dehumanizing 'enemy' to the human neighbour. The first steps towards this can best take place within a framework of direct human contact and interaction between broad sectors of society. Civil society co-operation can provide such a framework.

At this stage, counterpart components of civil society on both sides of the conflict (whether across national borders or within them) can now begin to undertake joint activities and programmes. They can together develop projects, initiate training programmes, undertake cultural programmes and begin to build a framework of co-operation across a broad spectrum of interests such as economic and social development, education, health, welfare, women's rights, ecology, youth issues, culture and the arts, community development, and academic matters. The articles in this issue of *Development* touch on most of these areas of civil society co-operation in the context of people for peace. The formal, politically-achieved end of conflict makes this kind of people-to-people interaction possible; and the people-to-people process in turn gives an effective base and frame for broad-scale involvement towards sustainable peace.

For P2P activity to be effective it must be carried out on a basis of real partnership at all levels, on joint responsibility for the initiation, planning, management, control of finance, evaluation and all other aspects of the projects. This is often easier said than done. Civil society institutions with a view to ensuring success of their initiatives have to work hard to share all levels of leadership and

control, maintain cultural sensitivity in terms of the language(s) used, the venues chosen for activities, the scope and content of public relations and publicity.

During this peace-making stage civil society also helps to broaden and expand the peace camp. Inevitably, those fundamentally opposed to the peace process will intensify their opposition as it moves forward; in extreme cases this does not exclude provocative acts, and even violence and terrorism. Civil society can serve as a vehicle for the promotion of dialogue with sectors outside the peace movements or in the pro-peace political parties. It can draw in those 'on the fence' through concrete and practical partnerships whose mutual advantages can be made apparent to the 'doubters'. Many components of the civil society function at some distance from the political parties, thus enabling them to reach out to 'doubters'.

Civil society can play a trailblazing role in relation to government at this stage. The political peace process is unable to ensure a full and lasting peace by itself alone. The expansion of mutual understanding and commitment to shared enterprise that the people-to-people peace process can add constitutes a major contribution towards lasting peace. The P2P frequently serves to maintain the thrust towards peace when the political process slows down. Civil society involvement can help maintain the momentum of the process, can foster informal and semi-formal contacts between the parties and can even, in some measure, assist in revitalizing it. People-to-people process is a relatively steady and consistent pace of slow advance; the political process is frequently marked by ups and downs. The interplay between the two disparate actors is an important aspect of conflict resolution.

In looking at the civil society-government relationship one ought to note that in many situations it is not possible to speak of the two as wholly distinct and separate groupings. When one is dealing with the resolution of struggles for national independence, for the recognition of ethnic identity or for major social realignment, what one finds is essentially a spectrum, a continuum linking the wholly political with the almost autonomous. In these circumstances, civil society institutions and organizations in health and education, economics

and welfare, culture and youth activity are in some way politically coloured. As the conditions of struggle and conflict give way to near-peace, the autonomous nature of civil society organizations gains strength. Full autonomy for civil society takes time and at this second stage civil society can well be affected by the way the political wind blows. In the long run it is the political power that has the last word but the voice of the civil society has a significant role in shaping that word.

### **Towards resolution**

The movement towards full partnership and friendship of the third stage of resolution happens only when there is no longer a threat of renewed conflict. This stage is marked by a high level of effective co-operation between the parties, heralds major attitude changes and the emergence of formal frameworks of partnership. Conflict resolution becomes a realistic alternative for former enemies. Geographic and economic rivalries (perhaps ethnic and cultural ones too) will still be present and their long-term resolution requires growing co-operation between the parties. Any programme of co-operation must take into account the legitimate concern of those involved for the preservation of their identity, must avoid the danger of economic, social or cultural (as well as political) domination and/or exploitation and must serve the development needs of all parties. Conflict resolution is a process of growing and mutually beneficial interaction.

At this stage, the link to sustainable human development is critical. One of the most important aspects of every conflict resolution process is that peace will serve as the basis for a major leap forward in terms of sustainable human development. Such development expectations are not limited to socio-economic but also extend to the process of democratization and to the protection of human rights. The price to be paid for the failure to link conflict resolution and development is high and could well endanger the peace process itself. Without development, significant sectors of the population, just recently liberated from the conflict situation, may be tempted to turn to crime or to return to the conflict once again. Where there is no

advance towards development, the slippery path from despair to a return to hatred and from hatred to violence is all too real.

Clearly, this post-conflict reconstruction and development will be a central element in the political/governmental peace process and will include a variety of activities and projects carried out jointly between yesterday's-enemies-today's-partners. If the civil society is a fully fledged partner it can promote a human-focused and ecologically-responsible development along with empowerment of women; rural as well as urban advance in terms of health, education and community building. It can help to involve a broad sector of society through mass-based, grassroots and people's organization in the process. Beyond these classic roles civil society can contribute its experience gained in the people-to-people peace process such as how to foster truly joint partnerships, whether economic or social in nature. Here the asymmetry between the partners may be revealed: for example, a joint business venture where one partner provides capital and know-how and the other supplies the labour. Such businesses may be of major developmental significance, but the danger is that they may be perceived as ventures designed to prosper through the use of cheap labour. Civil society can help to reduce the asymmetry and build real partnership.

The focus on empowerment and democracy that are so prominent in civil society's peace building projects is another important element for development programmes. Similarly, regard for cultural and linguistic elements is also essential. The experience gained in building an effective link between the political peace process and the people-to-people peace process can support the involvement of non-governmental frameworks in development.

Most critical at this stage is an attitudinal change to treat the former 'enemy' as a legitimate partner in dialogue. There must be a mutual recognition that 'the other' has needs, aspirations, and fears that must be addressed. Such a change must accept that 'the other' views reality, particularly that reality which is shared by both parties, from a different viewpoint, with different assumptions and different conclusions. In this context, 'the truth' about an event consists not only of the facts

as such (to the extent that these can be really ascertained) but equally of the conceptual filters, the presumptions and the historical perspective through which these facts are observed and evaluated. This ability to see shared realities through the eyes of 'the other' is an important aspect of conflict resolution. If learning is really about broadening horizons and enlarging perspectives, rather than merely accumulating facts, then it is this sort of learning which is necessary for conflict resolution. Civil society, working through the mechanisms of the people-to-people peace process, can play a significant role in furthering this kind of attitudinal change.

Equally important is to recognize 'the other's' legitimacy – as a human being, as a group, as a viewpoint – does not necessarily imply a diminution of one's own legitimacy or of the validity of one's point of view. Recognition that another viewpoint may actually and even legitimately exist does not imply acceptance of that viewpoint. It does however imply that it must be taken into account. Here, as in other aspects of the peace negotiation, it is necessary to move from a confrontational, all or nothing perception of the situation in which my gain is his loss and vice-versa (win-lose) to one which recognizes that the compromises which lead to conflict resolution (in this case, changes in attitude) can, while preserving a core legitimacy for the views of each party, ensure the future of both, thus yielding greater gain for each of them (win-win). Once again, civil society interactions can provide an effective framework for the development of these perceptions.

Another change of attitude which must happen at this stage is about the place of history, particular during the process of conflict resolution. The initiation of a process of conflict resolution depends on the willingness of both parties to suspend historical analysis and debate (for the moment) and to take the present reality as their point of departure. They have to project their thinking towards what the future can be like rather than seeking to apportion blame for how the present came about. We ignore history at our peril, not only because, as Gertrude Stein's aphorism would have it, 'history teaches that history teaches', but because nowhere is history more meaningful than in the minds of the

parties to a conflict. Conflict resolution may need a suspension of thinking about history in order to get underway, but it cannot proceed towards its goal without relating to the past. In a sense the readiness to deal with the relevance of the past, to confront the pain, the injustice, the failure and the guilt – all of which lie to some measure with both sides to any conflict – is the measure of progress, at the human and subjective levels, towards conflict resolution. The relevance of the frameworks of interaction created by civil society through the people-to-people peace process to this aspect of conflict resolution is abundantly clear.

### **Conclusion**

The people-to-people peace process and the link of peace making to sustainable human development reflect the emerging important role of civil society. In the sphere of conflict resolution the importance of civil society takes on a special weight because, quite simply, these are issues of life and death. Peace making and peace preservation are not easy tasks; attempts to achieve them often fail, or are only partial. They require patient and persistent pursuit and this pursuit must rest on the deepest of commitments and sense of optimism. But above all, the pursuit of peace requires the effective means

and modes that can lead to its success. To this goal, civil society is important and it needs not only recognition but also resources. These can be provided by the political powers but civil society's autonomy is also critical. Therefore international agencies and other nations can play an important role. As outsiders, they function within the constraints that – at the end of the day – it is the parties to the conflict who must resolve it themselves. But they do have a role as facilitators, as furnishers of venue and framework, as providers of assistance, guidance and good advice and as guarantors. They also are of major importance in terms of the provision of the resources which conflict resolution requires in addition to the funds needed for the sustainable human development. It is therefore of great importance that they include in their agenda support for the institutions of civil society that carry out the people-to-people peace process.

This issue of *Development* aims to highlight two new perspectives on conflict resolution, not only to increase knowledge of the important work civil society is doing but also to generate increased recognition and support for them.

A peace is of the nature of a conquest;  
For then both parties nobly are subdued,  
And neither party loser.

(William Shakespeare: *Henry IV* pt. 2, Act 4, Scene 2.)