<CO>19

Dialogue-Based Processes: A Vehicle for Peacebuilding

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<ABS>"Dialogue" is the kind of term with which most individuals—whether parties or conciliators to a conflict—can identify, and as such it has become a pervasive element in the field of conflict resolution. While accepting its many positive connotations as a vehicle for peacebuilding, we begin this chapter by clarifying the term's basic meaning within a conflict situation. We then complete this introduction to dialogue by filling in the remaining basic questions: when, who, how, which, and where?<end ABS>

Rather than concentrating on governmental or official dialogue, we will focus on peacebuilding by civil society, from Track Two dialogues among "influentials" all the way to people-to-people exchanges. Illustrating with examples from the five powerful stories that give substance to this chapter, this introduction puts the spotlight on practice rather than theory. Having lived most of my life in a region of violent conflict and having facilitated conflict resolution work in other areas, I will draw on my personal experience as a practitioner in making many of the following observations. Because of the wide global scope and diversity of the communal and national conflicts discussed, generalizations are to be understood as a flexible interpretation of numerous realities.

<A>What? The Intrinsic Meaning of Dialogue

Bringing the concept down from the heights of theoretical model, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines *dialogue* as a "conversation; piece of written work in conversational form." From this meaning, we see that dialogue is not necessarily a synonym of *negotiation,* defined as the process in which we "confer with another with view to compromise or reaching agreement." In our field of work, officials at best perceive dialogue as a prelude to informal negotiation by governments. But at the level of civil society, negotiation is perceived as merely a more advanced stage of dialogue. Rather than take the proximity of both terms as a given, we should aspire to elevate dialogue into an effective tool of conflict prevention and management, toward settling disputes in nonviolent ways.[1]

However, to praise dialogue because "talking is better than shooting" may not be adequate if we take the victim's vantage point. If structural violence as described by Johan Galtung (1996) prevails, the dispute has not decreased through dialogue, it has just entered into another phase. Hence, it may be more useful to analyze dialogue as a conflict resolution tool in terms of costs and benefits, explicitly acknowledging its potential downsides. Both sides of a conflict may experience the negative aspects of dialogue. Typically, rejection of dialogue comes from the powerful. Even for a strong state actor that is seen as holding most of the cards, negotiating with the enemy can be seen as a sign of weakness; here, the state may prefer to avoid recognizing its struggling opponent as legitimate. One effective tactic exploited by the top dog to postpone dialogue is to accuse their opponents of using terror, without conceding that the tools of its own repression are perceived by this same opponent as "state terror." Although reluctance to engage in dialogue can be derived from the arrogance of power, many critiques of dialogue also come from the underdog. At times, the weaker party would rather wait until they can enter talks from a position of strength.

More worrisome, the refusal to engage in verbal exchange comes not only from those opposed to meeting with the adversary but also from those who have previously participated in dialogue and have become either frustrated or disenchanted. Jonathan Kuttab, a prominent Palestinian human rights lawyer, has articulated such counternegative effects (Kuttab and Kaufman 1988: 84–108). A summary of his list of pitfalls includes:

- <BP>The generation of a false sense of symmetry between the oppressor and the oppressed while the actual status between the parties is not that of equals; impediments to true equality within the context of dialogue include technical obstacles to participate (restrictions on freedom of movement, adequacy of preparation, levels of professional expertise and language skills, and availability of advisory services), as well as in power relations (the ability to exercise pressure, the language of diktats, and patronage).[2]
- The tendency to ignore basic conflict issues and, in the effort to reach agreement, the avoidance of tackling the most serious and divisive issues or postponing them indefinitely.
- The tendency to accept the status quo and take for granted the present constellation of forces, focusing more on bringing an end to violence and less on justice and its structural causes.
- In the name of pragmatism, parties engaged in dialogue are often pressurized into compromising legitimate principles and abandoning positions generally held within their own community.
- When meetings include participants closely associated with state military or security forces, there is a fear that dialogue can be used as intelligence gathering. There is uncertainty as to when the motivation of the powerful is "know your enemy" rather than "understand your neighbor."
- Dialogue as a device for "divide and rule." As a counterbalance to this tactic, the parties may adopt a tacit understanding to present a unified front when confronting the other side. Natural

divisions within parties are, therefore, formally overlooked when facing a common enemy out of a simple fear that their opponent may take advantage of their lack of unity.

- Labeling those that participate in dialogue as "legitimate partners" thereby delegitimizing nonparticipants. Talking to some individuals or organizations may be a tactic used in order to avoid negotiating with more representative but problematic opponents.
- The intimidation of parties to dialogue may come from both sides. Within one's own camp, peer disapproval and even, at times of crisis, physical threats have kept many "towing the party line," while individually they may have been tempted to consider alternative positions, some of these more moderate and pragmatic than the group view.
- The "usual suspects" can monopolize participation in dialogue. Granted that talking may involve some risks, it also provides privileges, both tangible as well as elitist. The warm feeling of acquiring new friends from the adversary's camp may become an addiction in itself. As a result, the tendency has been toward exclusion and unwillingness to share access or widen the circles.
- Last but not least, the tendency to make dialogue a substitute for action to correct injustices. Dialogue can be seen as an academic exercise. Often, the organizers see dialogue as an end unto itself and declare themselves satisfied to repeat time and again this inconclusive experience with other groups.<end BP>

In answer to Kuttab, I stress the positive elements of dialogue and its value as a necessary but not sufficient strategy for peacebuilding. For example, dialogue can validate the legitimacy of the "other" when recognition has been withheld as a bargaining chip. But over the years I have come to agree that promoting dialogue instead of action can be used as an excuse for talking and talking without redressing the root causes of the conflict. The fear of normalizing an abnormal situation is real. At the same time, I believe that sustained dialogue diminishes misperceptions, prejudice, and stereotypes. Hence, we need to agree on some ground rules that ensure that talking is not a ploy to postpone action toward a just resolution of the conflict. Dialogue could be a step forward, but once that step is made, there is a danger of stagnation.

In short, dialogue should be a vehicle and not a destination. We need to understand why the expression "we have nothing to lose" is not always shared by the parties involved in the conflict, and that the suggested cost-benefit paradigm tells us that "we have a lot to gain" provided that we maximize the promising positive results of dialogue and minimize its potential negative consequences.

The goal of dialogue should be the transformation of participants into epistemic or "learning" communities in which both sides develop a shared understanding of each other's realities and are willing to invest a good chunk of their lives in changing it. A pioneering example is from the height of the Cold

War when dialogue among Soviet and U.S. scientists evolved into the formulation of and commitment to "arms control" efforts (Adler and Crawford 1991).

<A>When? Alternative Strategies for the Cycle of Conflict

In relation to official processes, three phases of civil-society "dialogue" can be distinguished: "pre," during, and after Track One negotiations. Or, if lined up in terms of the level of conflict, we can focus on preventive work, Track Two negotiations, and postconflict activities. As a rule, we can argue that civil-society dialogue is relevant as long as it is one step ahead of official behavior. So, how does this principle translate into the different stages?

<B>Stage One

When the effort is invested in prevention, before violence erupts or immediately afterwards, there is often a situation where official communication between the parties to the conflict has been severed. An example of *preventive* efforts in the absence of government action to redress conflict is civil society's resistance to cases of enforced segregation policies, such as in South Africa or the southern United States. In both examples, interethnic dialogue in itself was seen as a heroic and risky act. The joint marches and call for nonviolent means to redress discrimination encouraged change in the official governmental policies.

In the immediate aftermath of violence, the reinvigoration of stalled negotiations may also be possible, as described by an Egyptian intellectual in *When the Guns Fall Silent*.[3] The challenge for civil society organizations is to show sooner rather than later that there is a partner to talk with. The therapeutic effect of mutual recognition is important to both sides, and particularly to the party who has been denied legitimacy as a partner. When governments have been reluctant to negotiate, "influentials"—who are separated nationally or ethnically across the divide but inspired by a common goal—can initiate a prenegotiation process, which holds the potential of pushing official representatives to overcome the barrier of sitting around the table together. Mutual recognition of partners to a conflict can be triggered by a Track Two dialogue, as was the case between Palestinians and Israelis when they met secretly in Oslo for close to a year. These side negotiations helped advance the official process toward dealing with the substance of the conflict rather than the form. As described in Chapter 21.5, in the aftermath of the 1995 Cenepa War between Ecuador and Peru, the official negotiations started only after prominent citizens from both sides convened at the University of Maryland and became known as a peacebuilding group.

Often the power asymmetries between the fighting parties lead one side to call for direct negotiations, while the other side will boycott any contact. Interestingly, calls for negotiations may come from the more powerful side when they believe they are well-positioned to achieve their goals through negotiation, or from the weaker side when they assess that their aspirations cannot be achieved through alternative means, such as continued armed struggle. And the preference for negotiation can shift depending upon its perceived usefulness, as well as evolving ideology. For example, from its establishment in 1948 Israel was interested in negotiations despite Arab refusals to acknowledge the so-called Zionist entity. Negotiation was the official declaratory policy of Israel from its independence until the peace negotiations with Egypt in 1978. But by the time Palestinians had become more receptive to dialogue, Israel's policy had also shifted to a refusal to talk with "terrorist organizations." Facing stagnation in official negotiations or during periods of violent clashes, dialogue sponsored by nongovernmental organizations has been instrumental in breaking the ice and demonstrating that there is a partner for negotiation. This is the case with the 2003 Geneva Initiative launched by former Israeli minister of justice Yossi Beilin and Palestinian former minister of information Yasser Abed Rabo. This initiative was among the triggers for the Sharon government to undertake the initiative of pulling out from Gaza, first as a unilateral act and now as part of a negotiated process.

<B>Stage Two

Once official negotiations begin, if peacebuilders are to keep a step ahead, they must be able to come up with creative solutions. At this stage, merely talking to each other is secondary and the need to embrace a problem-solving approach requires the parties to embark on more complex processes of negotiation. As in the Peru/Ecuador case, the impasses as identified in Track One were addressed by Track Two participants proposing ideas such as a transnational ecologic park in a border area under dispute. Numerous meetings took place between Israeli and Palestinians academics and NGOs to address the issues postponed for a later stage in official negotiations, such as borders, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, and Jerusalem. With some issues, such as the allocation of groundwater resources, their recommendations were instrumental in shaping official agreements.

Sustained civil-society dialogue helps to show that no breakdown in official communication can stop the advancement toward peace, and at times, as in Northern Ireland, it provides the promise of a mutually agreed outcome. When third-party facilitated negotiations eventually led the officials to come up with a shared document such as the "Good Friday Agreement," the successful campaign of Catholic and Protestant peacebuilders was crucial in ensuring the wide popular endorsement through referendum.

<B>Stage Three

The postnegotiation stage when a peace agreement is formally reached still leaves open many unresolved issues. Some of these issues are unmet interests but many are intangible needs. International or domestic formal agreements often remain totally or partially unfulfilled even a few years later. Particularly when growing expectations are not met in a timely manner, the recurrent cycles of violence can begin again. The gap that emerges when contrasting insufficient concrete achievements with persisting grim realities can produce setbacks and reversals. Hence transitions to peace or democracy need to be consolidated.

To be able to move from the management of conflict to a real transformation means addressing not only the symptoms but also root causes. A process that supports personal growth, an attitudinal change toward the "other," and the development of strong ties can strengthen its own sustainability.[4]

During the so-called postconflict period, one of the main challenges of peacebuilders is to help launch a process of reconciliation. Reconciliation includes numerous aspects, from material compensation to reducing impunity to justice. Among the intangible needs are healing wounds from the serious suffering produced during the violent conflict, with elements of acknowledgment, apologies, forgiveness, etc. In fact, a good process of reconciliation should start its planning stages during the negotiation period and then develop its implementation in the aftermath of the agreement. Later in this book, Hizkias Assefa explores in more depth the nature of reconciliation processes (see Chapter 23).

<A>How? The Tools of Dialogue

We can identify a wide range of tools, some related to the technical aspects and others to the deeper meaning of mutual exploration. In terms of its complexity, dialogue can be as unstructured as a spontaneous "walk in the woods" or as systematic as a problem-solving workshop.

Spreading the word runs the risk of engaging peacebuilders in a one-sided communication, which may indeed be just a monologue. But perseverance in some cases has resulted in breakthroughs that eventually open up the authorities to new ideas. For example, the Oxford Research Group began a traditional process of letter writing to decisionmakers, spreading from a cluster of concerned scientists to citizens-at-large, with a shared concern with the need for nuclear disarmament.

But dialogue has also been developed through nontraditional techniques assisted by new technologies, such as Internet chats and the establishment of virtual communities of academics and intellectuals in regions of conflict. The use of videoconferencing can also enable peacebuilders physically separated by the confrontational policies of their respective governments to meet face-to-face through their computer screens.

Indeed, technology provides new avenues for communication. But the connectivity is also dependent on the ability to deliver an effective message. For this, those involved in dialogue need to develop the skills of articulating their views as well as listening in a way that can maximize mutual understanding. Care is needed to prevent the clarity of the message from being distorted by the "noise" of intercultural obstacles, or by the uneven status of the partners in conflict (as is the case with gender differences in traditional societies or class inequalities in modern societies). It is important for us to be trained in how best to express our thoughts, choosing the sentences and words that not only are true to our feelings and positions but also maximize receptivity, and at the same time to ensure that our body language and the tone of our voices are not threatening to the receiver of our message. On the other side of the transmission process, we should train ourselves to become active listeners, a skill that helps us to put ourselves into the shoes of the "other." Furthermore, active listening also facilitates an introspection by the interlocutor, opening up to express his/her own needs beyond the known declaratory postures.

We also know that sustained dialogues produce better results than one-off encounters. There is no evidence to support the assumption that one-time contacts (such as mutual school visits or joint social events) can help to reduce stereotypes and are "better than nothing." In fact such exchanges may generate expectations for more and disengagement may result in the frustration of these expectations and an unwillingness to accept future invitations for interaction.

While objectives such as personal transformation and building intra- and intergroup relationships within and among the parties are meaningful in themselves, we should seek to maximize the investment. Dialogue is a step in the right direction, but over the years we have learned how to move forward from simply chairing and moderating meetings into facilitated processes that unite the adversaries in the search for common ground. Following the lead of Herbert Kelman (2003) and Edward Azar (2003), new approaches show that effectiveness depends on four autonomous but synchronized and progressive phases: an initial phase focusing on trust building among the stakeholders, the participants, the facilitator, and the methods used; a second phase developing both individual and group skills relevant for conflict resolution; a third stage building consensus on the identified agenda items; and the final phase addressing the challenge of reentry, in which the participants bring back home their shared commitment to working hard toward the implementation of their agreements.[5] This innovative form of citizens' diplomacy also needs to take into account the spiritual traditions across cultures, religions, and civilizations and include these dimensions in the dynamics of the process.

Who? The Partners for Dialogue

In identifying potential dialogue partners, it is useful to map the various linkages between civil societies and the parties in conflict. If we imagine a diagram, we would place civil society in the center as the dialogue initiators and draw arrows outward from the center indicating different interactions that occur: first, we direct arrows horizontally between the two civil societies across the divide, which seems to demand the largest number of interactions with the "other." Then, within each party's civil society, we draw arrows vertically upwards toward the decisionmakers and downwards toward the general public of their own society.[6] From our experience, most of the dialogue takes place across the divide between representatives of each others' civil society. Participants invest in these joint efforts with the hope of empowering each other and then influencing as agents of change their respective political and social processes.

The five stories in this chapter provide us with interesting examples of partners in dialogue. An English team of researchers struggling for nuclear disarmament launched the Oxford Research Group. The group trained and mobilized about seventy teams to write sophisticated letters to decisionmakers in the United Kingdom and China. They then expanded to involve concerned citizens from other countries. This demonstrates a form of unilateral dialogue, in which active writers made contact with passive receivers. Eventually the percolation of ideas in the minds of the decisionmakers allowed the unilateral action to evolve into a true exchange.[7]

An interesting example of powerful intrastate dialogue is the transition in Georgia from an authoritarian regime to a democratic state. The organizers of large demonstrations were not only able to control violence, but also nonverbally communicated to aggressive law enforcement forces their peaceful intentions by offering thousands of roses to the police officers.[8] These gestures are as important as words, and both together can have a strong effect on reconciliation.[9]

The joint Israeli-Palestinian campaign "Hello Shalom, Hello Salaam" has generated close to a half million telephone conversations worldwide between Israelis and Palestinians. Organized by a prominent NGO, the campaign connects the grassroots populations from both sides, often strengthening the dedication of those already committed to dialogue but also generating curiosity among newcomers to hear and thereby recognize the humanity of the "other."[10]

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<BH>Inter-Tajik Dialogue

A combination of actors participated in the nonofficial Inter-Tajik Dialogue, which began in March 1993 when seven individuals from different factions in the civil war sat down around a table in Moscow. At that time, they formed a unique channel of communication across factional lines. Just past the peak of violence in a vicious civil war, they could barely look at each other. By the end of 2000, after twenty-nine meetings, the dialogue continued. The dialogue has helped to support a multilevel peace process that includes government negotiators, highly informed citizens outside government, and citizens at the grassroots level—all working in complementary ways that reflect these roles in their respective roles.

Participants in the dialogue helped to start and then maintained the involvement with the inter-Tajik negotiations and engaged in activities in society a large. The dialogue had been convened six times before the UN-sponsored inter-Tajik negotiations began in April 1994. It continued throughout the period of official negotiations and then through the three-year transitional period after the 1997 General Agreement and beyond. Because most of the participants were citizens outside government, they were at the heart of Tajikistan "public peace process."

<BN>K. Abdullaev and C. Barnes. Introduction to "Politics of Compromise. The Tajikistan Peace Process." *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives* 10. London: Conciliation Resources, 2001. Online at: http://www.c-r.org/accord/tajik/accord10/index.shtml. **{AU: Note that I have expanded your citation to include the online version of this extracted material. If this all seems correct, please leave as is; if not, please change as you see fit.}**

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<A>Which? The Models of Dialogue

We can borrow from Jay Rothman (1997) the classification of four dialogue types, categorized according to the nature of participants and objectives.

- <BP>*Positional dialogue*, adversarial in nature, focuses on articulation of positions, often in the presence of a foreign or local observing audience for the purpose of scoring points. Participants emphasize differences rather than commonalities. It becomes a dialogue of the deaf: we stop listening once the adversary is in the middle of his statement and start planning our retort. Even then, the exercise can have some positive results when participants role play in reverse, or come to the conclusion that dialogue serves as a first unavoidable step for speaking their truths (or half-truths) before moving into the search for common ground.
- *Human relations dialogue*, when differences of opinion on the substantive issues are relegated to a secondary status, gears its main efforts toward a better understanding of the "other." Methods of active listening help us to achieve this goal and even encourage introspection. It can lead to the sharing of some of the needs, fears, and motives that were not articulated previously, paradoxically helped by the expressed empathy of the once adversarial interlocutor.
- *Activist dialogue* occurs when "partners in conflict" have identified some common ground and plan joint action in implementation. Being an activist may not be a precondition for participation, but this inclination toward action may evolve within the participants as a result of the process

dynamics. The dialogue process itself may move individuals from “knowledge” to internalized “act-knowledgement.”

- *Problem-solving approach*, the most ambitious of all, maximizes and integrates the positives of the previous dialogue types and puts particular emphasis on how to implement the outcome of dialogue when returning to the participants’ respective communities, which continue to mistrust and be hostile to the “other.”<end BP>

Mixing the models may create more challenges than we can handle. Sometimes we can transform participants from the first approach into the second and then move on. For transformation to occur, civil-society dialogue needs to take into account that conflict is typically not only between governments but also between the constituencies they represent. Hence inclusion of diversity of positions in the dialogue process is a priority for most types, avoiding the pitfall of simply “preaching to the converted.” The limits of dialogue may exclude identified spoilers. However, when it comes to ideological and militant extremism, the challenge is indeed to move them away from being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution. Rarely can one hope for a conducive dialogue between extremes, such as the Islamic fundamentalists of the Palestinian West Bank and the militant Jews settled on the same land that they call Judea and Samaria. Provided that we know how to identify the type of dialogue that we can use, a gradual approach may include a peace activist or mainstream component on my side and an extremist group on the other. Or, as Mary Fitzduff **{AU: If you are going to quote this person by name, there needs to be some context or explicit reference to the source of the quoted material, if in print or not—e.g., who is Mary Fitzduff, and in what format did this quoted material emerge?}**explains, “there will be no stable peace until the extreme Catholic and Protestant military organizations are integrated into the negotiation process.”

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<BH>Third-Party Involvement

The role of third-party involvement needs to be carefully assessed. Although there are clear advantages in the parties conducting principled negotiations without a third party’s involvement, the parties may choose to invite a third party when facing a high level of violence or complex issues. Under such conditions, third-party facilitators might even invite themselves. However, conflicting parties grow weary of an imposed dialogue by outsiders and such forced scenarios rarely lead to productive outcomes. Inviting also a variety of third-party participants makes a dialogue across purposes, like confrontations such as those that frequently occur in the UN General Assembly. On the other hand, third-party dialogue facilitators can be useful if they work to train and empower the parties to engage in direct dialogue.

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<A>Where? The Impact of Context on Dialogue

The particularities of a conflict's context influence the form and success of dialogue efforts. While we tend to prioritize dialogue, and rightly in areas of violent conflicts, we need to remember that *most* of the time *most* countries and communities live in peace with each other. During these times and in these places, the absence of violence is not because there are no conflicts but because the communities opt to deal with these conflicts by nonviolent means, including dialogue. As described below, the context can determine a dialogue's various main functions.

Dialogue is badly needed in *protracted communal conflicts*. Nowadays, the prevailing form of violent confrontation is within and not between states, or when one party is a nonstate actor. Recognition as a valid interlocutor is essential to get the dialogue process going, and often it is less problematic for nonofficial actors to deal directly with players who are unrecognized by formal authorities. The relative advantage of civil society over state actors is especially evident when parties to the conflict include those responsible for violence against innocent civilians, actors that are labeled illegitimate partners in Track One activities, and when governments are facing the dilemma of negotiating with terror, a major impediment for Track One. Once again, civil-society exchanges have a relative advantage

The context of *transitioning democracies*, as has been the case in Latin America and Eastern Europe, introduces the dilemma of dialogue with regimes that have been involved in gross violations of human rights. Such authoritarian regimes have a history of crushing democratic opposition, including killing their leadership, members, families, and uninvolved bystanders. In some cases such as Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, a *mesa de dialogo* (in the latter case, within military barracks!) with the military regime was acceptable to some opposition parties but not to others. In such cases, the ground rules for who can participate in the dialogue and for what purposes are essential if not life-saving. When regimes were too oppressive and no domestic forces could lead the way to dialogue, we have seen the contribution of either a regional or international third party, as was used in facilitated dialogues in El Salvador and Guatemala

In many developing countries, environmental, water, and other *common pool natural resources* have generated cross-border and domestic conflicts that cannot be resolved without the involvement of all stakeholders. While the technical and legal ramifications of environmental disputes demand that the negotiation itself be conducted by experts, it does not preclude a transparent participatory process in which grassroots constituencies are given an opportunity to be consulted from the early stages and to play a constructive role in the implementation of the resulting agreements.

For several decades, most countries in Europe and the Americas have been called “zones of peace” (Kacowicz 1998) without interstate wars. Hence, promoting a sustained dialogue as part of the political culture is a sound preventive of international conflicts as well as contributing to the decline of domestic riots and ethnic tensions. Institutionalized forums for dialogue—from debating societies in the old Oxford and Cambridge Universities to peer mediation in schools—provide long-term guarantees of constructive means for conflict resolution; such formalized practices should be expanded. Furthermore, approaching authorities through constructive negotiations is a useful addition to the protest tradition of many popular movements. But the promotion of a culture of dialogue should not only be the prerogative of one part of the world. It is no less relevant in the context of majority-minority protracted conflicts. Interethnic dialogue, like the one conducted in the nine centers of the Nansen Dialogue Network in the Western Balkans, stimulates renewed relationship building in divided communities and is a crucial step toward reconciliation. While at times dialogue is a process of rediscovering the good ties from the past, according to the West Balkan organizers, their dialogue is inventing a new partnership with the political culture of Western and Northern Europe.[11] Dialogue rediscovers historically positive relationships and encourages building of new relationships.

Conclusions

Dialogue is a tool for advancing conflict resolution efforts, especially within the realm of civil society and unofficial contacts. But we must emphasize that dialogue in and of itself is not a universal panacea, but a means to an end. While it is typically Track One dialogue between leaderships that results in binding agreements, Track Two activities greatly enhance the feasibility of implementation, content, and commitment of the constituent populations to these formal agreements. Perfecting negotiation skills of Second Tracks can transform its inherent weaknesses into an asset. Citizen diplomacy provides room for flexibility, informality, and creativity that may be missing from official exchanges.

In-depth analysis of cases presented in this chapter has shown that peacebuilders have not sufficiently employed approaching decisionmakers and engaging public opinion of the “other.” Exceptional cases—such as the Oxford Research Group’s contacts with Chinese authorities or Israeli academics providing stimulating feedback to Palestinian NGOs working to promote nonviolence—demonstrate the potential of outreach exchanges. Dialogue with the “other” at all levels seems to be more conducive to solutions than monologues in which each side tends “to play chess with itself.” However, we should not neglect the need to bridge the gap inside our own camp, generating a consensus-building process in our own societies that strengthens the ability to negotiate with the adversary. Hence peacebuilding often requires promoting dialogue within and across the ethnic, religious, community, or national divide.

We should all engage in dialogue, even if only a few will be negotiators and influence changes in public policy. Dialogue should bring us one step closer to each other.

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<A>Notes

1. "In the conflict management field, the term *dialogue* refers to a method of getting people who are involved in an emotional, deep-rooted conflict to sit down together with a facilitator and to talk and listen, with the goal of increasing mutual understanding, and, in some cases, coming up with joint solutions to mutual problems" (Burgess and Burgess 1997: **{AU: Page number for this quoted material please.}**)
2. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinians often stress the "occupied-occupier" unevenness and ask for solidarity with the weak. However, some Israelis also emphasize their weaker position when taken in the context of a small country surrounded by what are perceived as hostile neighbors and rising anti-Semitism.
3. The name of a pioneering book calling for Arab dialogue with Israel (Sid Ahmed 1975).
4. For a more detailed analysis of the different approaches in the field, see Ropers (2004).
5. Such an approach was applied in the Peru/Ecuador Track Two case study in Chapter 21.5. For a full presentation, see Kaufman (2003).
6. For a concrete use of this framework, see the "Lessons Learned and Best Practices" chapter in Kaufman, Salem, and Verhoeven (forthcoming).
7. See Chapter 19.3, "Creating Expertise: The Oxford Research Group in the U.K."
8. In the political tradition, the idea was developed from the words of the first Georgian president, Zviad K. Gamsakhurdia, "We shall throw roses instead of bullets at our enemies." See Chapter 19.4, "Inside the Revolution of Roses: Georgia."
9. See Mitchel (2000).

10. For a full description, see Chapter19.2, “Building Trust, Promoting Hope: The Families Forum Hello Peace Project in Israel/ Palestine.”

11. See Chapter 19.1, “Engaging the ‘Other’: The Nansen Dialogue Network in the Balkans.”

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<A>Resources

<B>Lead Organizations

Berghof Research Center—Germany
Research Programmes on Dialogue and Conflict Management
E-mail: info@berhof-center.org
Website: http://www.berghof-center.org

Center for Humanitarian Dialogue—Switzerland
E-mail: info@hdcentre.org
Website: http://www.hdcentre.org

Coexistence Center—Uganda
E-mail: uganda@coexistence.net
Website: http://www.cecore.org

Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)—Philippines
E-mail: davao@iidnet.org
Website: http://www.iidnet.org

Institute for Global Dialogue—South Africa
E-mail: info@igd.org.za
Website: http://www.igd.org.za

Institute for Multi Track Diplomacy—United States
Dialogue Initiatives
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<CO>19.1

Engaging the “Other”: The Nansen Dialogue Network in the Balkans

Steinar Bryn

<ABS>A regional network of centers in the Western Balkans aims to stimulate dialogue in divided communities. In so doing, the goal is then to break down enemy images and to increase understanding of the perceptions, interests, and needs of those on the other side of the divide.<end ABS>

In Kosovo, local political leaders and administrative municipal personnel came together to find solutions to the ethnic division in their municipalities. In Macedonia, twenty-five young politicians of different ethnicities gathered in October 2004 to discuss the current challenges of Macedonian society. In Croatia, teachers, parents, and official institutions cooperated on developing strategies to end the ethnic segregation in the school system. Journalists from several parts of the former Yugoslavia joined forces to address the challenges and responsibilities of the media in ethnically divided communities.

In each case, the organization behind the activity is part of the Nansen Dialogue Network. The network is attempting to make a contribution to peacebuilding in the western Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia) by encouraging interethnic dialogue and reconciliation and by making available a neutral and open space where the different actors in a serious conflict can meet face-to-face in truthful and honest communication.

The overall goal of the project is to support the region’s peaceful and democratic development by encouraging dialogue, and to thereby bring the region’s political culture more closely into alignment with the dominant political culture of western and northern Europe. A secondary goal is to influence public discussions of politics and policy in the region. By applying the ideas and skills of dialogue, the Nansen Dialogue Network seeks to empower people who live in conflict situations to contribute to peaceful conflict transformation and the promotion of human rights. The facilitators try to stimulate the cognitive analysis of the conflict and the experience of the “other’s” position. The focus is not on who is right or most guilty, but on how to encourage respect for democratic principles, human rights, and peaceful conflict resolution as alternatives to national and ethnic chauvinism.

The Nansen Dialogue Network differs from other international peacebuilding efforts in its emphasis on dialogue and reconciliation—just as essential to sustainable peace as are the issues of security, economic development, and democratization. The network grew out of work initiated at the Nansen Academy in Lillehammer, Norway. Founded in 1938, the Nansen Academy’s aim, throughout its history, has been to defend human dignity and human worth, and to serve as a meeting ground for people of different cultural, religious, and political backgrounds. Its Democracy, Human Rights, and Peaceful Conflict Resolution project was launched in 1995, and has since then gone through several different phases.

In 1997, on the initiative of previous participants at the seminars in Lillehammer, the project entered a second phase with the establishment of a “dialogue center” in Pristina, Kosovo. In the next two years this center organized a series of dialogue meetings between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs. Although the war in 1999 put an end to these activities, the experiences from these meetings inspired the establishment of other Nansen Dialogue Centers.

During 2000 and 2001, nine dialogue centers were set up in Skopje, Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo, Mostar, Banjaluka, Mitrovica, and Osijek. By 2004, sixty full-time staff members were engaged in promoting interethnic dialogue both locally and regionally. The core staff members were recruited from the Lillehammer alumni, thereby creating a network of people with a common dialogue experience.

The participants at dialogue seminars testify to a dearth of dialogue spaces where people from different ethnic background can come together and talk about political issues. The Nansen Dialogue Network’s most important contribution has been the creation of such spaces, particularly in so-called microcommunities (Mitrovica, Presevo Valley, Sandzak, etc.) where new constellations and new ways of cooperation can develop, and where community development depends on personal relationships.

<A>Dialogue as a Methodology

Existing literature on dialogue is limited, apart from certain classics such as Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (1922). The Nansen Dialogue concept is therefore mainly constructed from experiences in the field. It is simply a way of communicating that focuses on understanding the “other,” rather than convincing him or her that you are right. This understanding is a prerequisite for successful mediations and negotiations. In the dialogue workshops we attempt to create a space of support and safety, where it becomes possible for the participants to honestly communicate their experiences, feelings, and more rational thoughts. In a dialogue on the status of Kosovo, for example, the aim is not to find the solution, but to explore the different standpoints and improve the understanding of why people have such opposing views. This means to practice tolerance and active listening, rather than to pass moral judgment on the “other’s” position or to seek out weaknesses in his or her arguments. Then, as the next step, based on this deeper understanding of each other’s position, one can attempt to find acceptable solutions for all parties involved.

Dialogue center staff members are cognizant of the fact that debate is an important part of the political world, and they are there to provide the very space for the important issues to be discussed. In fact the deficiencies inherent to political debate in many parts of the western Balkans are a fundamental problem. So the dialogue centers have taken the strategic choice to attempt to influence public debate over important issues, and specifically to attempt to influence the tone of the debate. When engaging in public debate, the centers will focus on bringing forward facts, providing space for all sides' arguments, and arguing in favor of mutual respect between disputants. In short, the centers argue that dialogue—an exchange of ideas and opinions—rather than diatribe is crucial to debate.

The very fact that the centers promote dialogue and reconciliation leads them to stimulate democratic thinking, respect for human rights (particularly minority rights), and awareness of modes of peaceful conflict resolution. As a result, the centers are becoming key actors in civil society. The dialogue perspective stresses an understanding of democracy as much more than an election and voting system. Indeed, a fundamental tenet is that the essence of democracy is the acknowledgment that one might very well be wrong, which is why public debate in open spaces is necessary. To paraphrase John Stuart Mill, you don't really know your own arguments before you have listened to the counterarguments to your own position.

In segregated societies, the information systems are parallel. It is possible to grow up on one side of the river exposed only to certain ethnic "truths." If there is no interaction with the people on the other side of the river who are developing "truths" diametrically opposed to your own, your worldview is unlikely to be challenged. In a dialogue space, people can simply compare notes, share the explanations they have of different events, and confront each other with alternative interpretive frameworks.

Dialogue can turn out to have a radical effect because it challenges the very self-image and worldview of the participants. We have observed that opposing parties believe they have the same set of facts. They believe that questions such "what happened?" and "who did it?" have unambiguous answers. Their perception is often that the "problem" is that the other side *denies* the facts. In a dialogue setting it becomes obvious that the parties have quite different interpretations of reality and possess different versions of the "facts"—totally different analyses of history and the present—and quite different hopes for the future. Dialogue groups provide the necessary cross-fertilization between the parallel systems of information; suddenly the "crazy" behavior of the enemy becomes more meaningful when interpreted within a different cultural and political framework of understanding.

If one can come to understand (if not accept) the other's perspective, then one comes to understand the "legitimacy" of a decision to fight for or against independence. One might argue that a political position is born of one's own situation in society. It is logical that an Albanian is in favor of an independent Kosovo while a Serb is in favor of Kosovo as a part of Serbia. Through the practice of active listening and tolerance it becomes possible to see that one's bitter enemy also perceives himself or herself as a victim of forces outside his or her control whose own political goals represent an escape from misery. This deeper recognition of the validity of each other's positions fosters mutual respect and makes it easier to enter negotiations. At this point dialogue partners may realize that despite their differences, their human needs and interests are often similar. A qualified facilitator can assist in shifting the focus from "position" to "interest" by making the participants realize that they have common interests in economic development, quality education, a reliable system of security, improved job opportunities, less corruption, more independent media, clearer separation of politics and business—and the simple pleasure of drinking a morning cup of coffee in peace.

When the focus is on that which we have in common, it becomes easier to embrace the thought of a civic state. Since politics most often is organized around ethnic principles, the notion of citizenship in a civic state offers a concrete alternative to nationalism. People are often very receptive to a clearer division between state and nation, where a civic state does not threaten the different nations, but rather allows them to flourish in the cultural sphere according to internationally recognized minority rights. Such a multinational state offers an alternative to the sort of thinking about a strong nation-state that leads members of each "nation" (ethnic Croats, Macedonians, Serbs, etc.) to believe they have more rights in their nation-state (Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, etc.) than other citizens in the state.

<A>A Range of Programs

The Nansen Dialogue Centers are involved in a range of activities to promote the dialogue approach, including seminars, interactive workshops (addressing topics such as human rights, mediation, negotiation, and strategic peacebuilding), regional network projects (e.g., the project directed toward journalists from nine different divided communities), conferences on topics related to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and instant response activities (lectures, public debates and hearings, and roundtables and poster campaigns, organized in response to burning issues in society).

<A>Impact

Before the Nansen Dialogue Centers were established, the physical spaces for dialogue were absent and the population groups had few opportunities to meet across ethnic divides. The centers themselves provide "space" for dialogue, as do the seminars, and these dialogue spaces are being used to address the challenges these societies face. In addition to this concrete infrastructure, lasting contact and relationships have been established across ethnic divides between political leaders, young politicians, journalists, academics, educators, government officials, activists within the NGO community, and others who will take part in shaping the future of the region. A specific focus in 2004 has been on local politicians in municipalities, where “doing good” for the whole community is introduced as an ideal and alternative to ethnic struggle and competition. In conjunction with this program focus, the network organized a Regional Forum for Young Politicians in Ohrid, Macedonia, for six days in June 2004. More than forty young politicians from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia participated in the forum. Such activities reflect one of the network’s chief goals: to develop relationships across the borders, and to prepare young Balkan citizens to assume leadership roles. The effectiveness of these efforts can best be judged by the fact that many previous participants now occupy important professional positions as journalists, lawyers, judges, political advisors, or in government.

<A>Challenges

Working to promote interethnic dialogue in an environment marked by ethnic violence, insecurity, and enemy images is not an easy task. It is a long-term investment, with unpredictable outcomes, requiring sustained commitment from the actors involved. Therefore, it is important to be able to cope with setbacks, such as new episodes of ethnic violence and renewed political instability, and to maintain motivation under difficult circumstances. It is also a constant challenge to develop plans of action in an environment of insecurity and constant change.

In addition, the staff members have to keep in mind their personal security in relation to their work. Working with “the enemy” in multiethnic organizations in ethnically segregated societies implies a risk of being labeled a “traitor.” It has repeatedly been a challenge to find the right balance between when to maintain a high profile and when to be more careful, how to be on the “cutting edge” challenging the public to enter interethnic dialogue, without undermining the network’s credibility or endangering personal security.

All the staff members of the Nansen Dialogue Centers are locally rooted and subject to the flow of information from within their own community. Consequently, the different staff members adhere to different views about the political situation. A lesson learned is therefore that it is important to have multiethnic teams in all offices where the society is ethnically segregated, to ensure not only that the staff members are constantly challenged by each other in their perceptions of the day-to-day situation, but also that the centers are perceived as unbiased. Another challenge is connected to the regional dimension: since the causes of the ethnic conflicts in the different countries are interrelated, the solutions must also be explored on a regional level, not only in each state. The Nansen Dialogue Network regional reach is what makes the network unique and is therefore its greatest asset. Finding a balance between local and regional focus has, however, been a challenge.

<A>A Model for Other Regions?

Not all divided communities end up in shooting wars, but whether the divisions result in mild segregation, general mistrust, open hostility, or outright bloodletting, they are, in general, accompanied by a total breakdown in communication and, as a result, a complete lack of understanding of the “other’s” position and perceptions. The model provided by the Nansen Dialogue Network can be a useful one, then, for many divided communities where well-meaning individuals are willing to listen to what their counterparts on the other side of the divide have to say. The fact that the effort in Kosovo fell apart, at least temporarily, as the tensions in Kosovo turned into a hot war, should serve as a warning that one should temper optimism with a realistic appraisal of human nature. Nonetheless, the dialogue approach embraced by the Nansen Dialogue Network and the nine dialogue centers does indeed still serve as an example of one way to break down the invisible barriers that separate communities.

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<BH>Mitrovica: Interethnic Dialogue in a Divided City

In 2000, Kosovo was firmly divided resulting from decades of interethnic conflict and the horrors of the war in 1999. The city of Mitrovica was divided by barbed wire and international armed forces. The security precautions were keeping Serbs in the north and Albanians in the south of the city. Most international actors in Kosovo believed dialogue to be impossible, particularly in Mitrovica.

In this situation, Nansen Dialogue Network succeeded in transporting a group of twenty-five Albanians and Serbs to Struga, Macedonia, in December 2000. The aim was to discuss what had happened and why, and what could be done to rebuild society. Four of the participants in this first seminar became the core of the Nansen Dialogue group in Mitrovica, and organized ten new interethnic dialogue seminars in the year to come. In a seminar for journalists, two of the participants discovered that they had taken part in the same battle, trying to kill each other in April 1999. This was the first time they met face-to-face and they discovered that they liked each other. This is just one of many stories of meetings across the ethnic divide.

The dialogue work in Mitrovica was so useful that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo ~~UNMIK~~ and **{AU: Please spell out this acronym here at first use.}** ~~OSCE~~ realized the need for a dialogue component in the repatriation work. Today, three Serbs and three Albanians are working full time on this. Dialogue did not fail in Kosovo. Dialogue had just never been properly tried.

<end box>

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<CO>19.2

Building Trust, Promoting Hope: The Families Forum Hello Peace Project in Israel and Palestine

Aaron Barnea and Ofer Shinar

<ABS>Contacts between ordinary Israelis and Palestinians are almost nonexistent these days. Hello Peace allows both groups to contact each other—anonymously—simply to talk. In less than two years, close to five hundred thousand telephone conversations have been facilitated by the project, which aims to rebuild both trust and hope.<end ABS>

> <epi>"The leaders on both sides refuse to talk, but through Hello Shalom, nothing can stop the ordinary people—precisely those who have to face the most crippling consequences of the conflict—from trying to understand each other, which may end up saving lives."
>
> —"Peace on the Line," Nick Taylor, *The Guardian*, 8 May 2004<end epi>

In November 2000, the second Palestinian intifada had been raging for nearly two months, and relations between Israelis and Palestinians were at a new low. When a young Israeli woman named Natalia Wieseltier picked up the telephone to call her friend, it was not with the intention of being a peacemaker. But things took a strange turn. "A man picked up and said I had a wrong number," she told Nick Taylor of the British newspaper *The Guardian.* "I said who is this, and he called himself Jihad and said he was an Arab living in Gaza. Instead of hanging up, I asked him how he was. He said he was very bad, his wife was pregnant and their town was under curfew, and we ended up talking for about 20 minutes."

With this serendipitous wrong number, a tenuous bridge between one single Israeli and one Palestinian was established, from which has developed an impressive project to encourage dialogue between ordinary Israelis and ordinary Palestinians. The project is called Hello Shalom/Hello Salaam (Hello Peace).

Hello Salaam, Hello Shalom is perhaps the best-known project of The Parents Circle—Families Forum (the Families Forum), an organization of over two hundred Palestinians and two hundred Israelis who have lost children or other family members in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Members of the Families Forum believe that "to move beyond silent despair and isolation, people must begin talking again—especially with people on the other side." For almost a decade, the Families Forum has attempted to play a crucial role in spearheading a reconciliation process between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Families Forum itself developed from the unique response of a father to the murder of his son. On 7 July 1994, the body of nineteen-year-old Arik Frankenthal was found in a village near

Ramallah. Arik, an Israeli Defense Forces soldier and an orthodox Jew, had been hitchhiking home on leave when he was kidnapped and murdered by members of Hamas.

<A>No Revenge

Israeli society at the time was torn between hope and despair. On one hand the government led by Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres showed a profound commitment to the peace process initiated at Oslo. But at the same time, the mass media fed the public a steady stream of images of terror, death, and bereavement.

Yitzhak Rabin's historic words of 13 September 1993, spoken from the White House lawn, still resonated with the Israeli public:

> <ext>Let me say to you, the Palestinians: We are destined to live together, on the same soil in the same land. We, the soldiers who have returned from battle stained with blood, we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes, we who have attended their funerals and cannot look into the eyes of their parents, we who have come from a land where parents bury their children, we who have fought against you, the Palestinians—we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough.<end ext>

<FL>But some Israelis were unable to embrace the words that followed:

> <ext>We have no desire for revenge. We harbor no hatred towards you. We, like you, are people who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, live side by side with you—in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men. We are today giving peace a chance and again saying to you: Let us pray that a day will come when we will say, enough, farewell to arms.<end ext>

After each incident of terror, for example, the Terror Victims Association called for vengeance and violence against Palestinians. In response to the brutal murder of Arik Frankenthal, they raised the same cry. Then something new happened, something revolutionary. Arik's father, also an orthodox Jew, faced the group and said, "You don't represent me and my family. My Judaism is not one of revenge and hatred. I know that violence against Palestinians, revenge and inflicting bereavement and affliction to Palestinians will not bring back my son, but will cause more pain, more bereavement to other families in

Israel. I call all of us to stop the killings, to stretch our hands towards the other in search of reconciliation. This is my view of authentic Judaism: a profound thirst for life and peace."

Other bereaved Israeli families echoed his thoughts. These bereaved families became the core of the future organization—the Families Forum—which called for peace and reconciliation rather than vengeance. The forum was with Rabin, Peres, and Arafat at the Nobel Prize awards ceremony, and was at Rabin's side on the tragic night of his assassination by an Israeli extremist.

<A>Message of Reconciliation

The Israeli group soon approached bereaved Palestinian families, who enthusiastically embraced its message of reconciliation. The joint appearance of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families had a tremendous impact on individuals in both societies. An ambitious growing program was articulated and implemented, which included meetings in Palestinian and Israeli schools with kids aged sixteen to eighteen, bold public pronouncements, and support for peace rallies. The Family Forum's actions attracted extensive media attention in the form of TV and radio interviews and numerous articles in the press.

Notably, the Families Forum sees reconciliation not just as a process following conflict resolution, but as part of the process that helps to bring violent conflict to an end. Reconciliation allows each side to transform precisely those views about the other side that led to a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. This transformation creates trust between the two sides, a prerequisite for any peace process.

Empathy for those victims on the opposing side who have suffered loss is a key step in the process of reconciliation. Empathy can create the emotional change needed to undertake the transformation of beliefs that is inherent in genuine reconciliation; generating such empathy has been a prime focus of the work of the Families Forum.

The activities of the Families Forum focus on victims who, instead of seeking vengeance, choose to pursue dialogue with victims of the opposing side. And the Hello Peace project of the Families Forum is, accordingly, a logical extension of this goal of pursuing dialogue and reconciliation.

<A>Creating Contact at the Level of the Individual

According to the article "Palestinian-Israeli Hotline Melts Hate" by Deborah Blachor of the *Daily News,* 8 December 2002, Sammy Waed, a Palestinian user of Hello Peace, said: "Before, I thought Israelis didn't care at all when innocent Palestinians suffer and are killed, but now I know they do care. And now I have hope that there can be peace." "We are all people and want the best for our children and grandchildren. We have the power to make a change," responded Miriam Inbal, an Israeli user of Hello Peace.

Hagit Ofran, an Israeli user of Hello Peace, said in a letter to the editor of *Haaretz* on 11 October 2002: "Instead of continuing to weep in frustration we should pick up the phone, hear the voices, and continue onward with renewed hope, knowing that there's someone to talk to, that the cycle of bloodshed can be brought to an end."

The Hello Peace project is an attempt to respond to the lack of trust and empathy between the Palestinians and Israelis that, scholars say, is one of the primary reasons that the cycle of violence continues. By getting thousands of Israeli and Palestinians to talk with each other, and by publicizing this fact, the popular belief that "there is no partner for peace" can be dispelled.

Hello Peace is the brainchild of Natalia Wieseltier and developed from that first errant phone call. Recalling that initial contact, she says, "We weren't making apologies to each other; I wasn't trying to make him feel better. We were just talking as individuals. At the end of the conversation, he said he was amazed that Jewish people were able to talk like that. He thought we wanted all Palestinians dead." After that phone call, Jihad discovered Natalia's phone number on his own mobile phone, called her back the next day, and left a message saying that the conversation had changed the way he thought. And then he gave her number to his brother. Soon, a circle of strangers from the two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide were talking to each other. Attitudes began to change. And that gave Natalia an idea. The contact she had created by mistake led Natalia to approach the Families Forum with a proposal to set up a system to allow Palestinians and Israelis to talk to each other over the phone.

With Hello Peace, Israelis and Palestinians can call a special number—*6364—and a computer will automatically connect them to someone on "the other side" who has expressed a similar willingness to talk. Users do not have to leave their details or even their telephone number, ensuring that their privacy is protected.

From the moment of inspiration until the project was officially launched, it took two years of fund raising and preparation. In October 2002, the project started up with a massive media campaign under the same slogan in both Arabic and Hebrew: "You can talk about peace/pain/reconciliation." The publicity campaign leading up to the launch was undertaken on both sides of the divide in a similar manner and at the exact same time. This is crucial to the success, which depends on the perception that Hello Peace is totally unbiased. A second media campaign was conducted in October and November 2003, coinciding, completely by chance, with the intensive media campaign to alert the international community to the independent peace initiative known as the Geneva Initiative. With the synergies of these simultaneous campaigns, peacemaking received a new impetus, and public interest in peacemaking was clearly apparent, suggesting a grassroots movement for peace was alive and well in both Palestinian and Israeli society.

Hello Peace endeavors to break down the psychological, if not physical, barriers between the two peoples. If numbers can serve as a measure of success, than Hello Peace has been a resounding success, and stands as proof that many Israelis and Palestinians are willing to engage in dialogue; between the project's inception in October 2002 and October 2004, more than 480,000 phone calls had been made. Hello Peace is probably the broadest peace project ever implemented regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its success suggests that many in both societies remain hopeful that peace is possible and are willing to communicate and learn more about those on the other side.

With Hello Shalom a link has been established between the activities of the Families Forum promoting reconciliation over revenge among bereaved families, and the more general need among ordinary citizens on both sides to engage in a humanizing dialogue. As Roni Hirshenzon, a member of the Families Forum notes, sometimes the conversations initiated through the Hello Peace system begin with arguments, but quickly the parties will ask more personal questions, such as "where are you from," "how old are you?," "do you have children?," and so forth, and then, often, the anger dissipates. The intimate nature of the contact that is possible with the Hello Peace system allows both sides to view the "other" as human beings rather than nameless members of an impersonal mass. By creating contact at the level of the individual, participants on both sides come to understand more of the complexity of the situation and learn more about the circumstances and difficulties of those on the opposing side. This knowledge, which is generated by all who are involved with the project, is the basis for the creation of trust between the sides.

<A>Impact

While an independent evaluation of Hello Shalom has yet to be undertaken, it can be said that its impact radiates out from the participants in three concentric circles: an inner circle that includes all those who have actively taken part in the project by talking with a person from the opposing side; a middle circle consisting of the friends and relatives of those who have used the system and who have heard about the project and its influence; and a third circle comprising those who have heard about the project either from news articles of from the media campaign. While the impact of Hello Peace on the inner circle is clear, the influence on those in the wider circles has also been notable. Those in the "middle" circle who have heard about the conversations of their friends or relatives have also grasped the significance of dialogue and are likely to feel more inclined to trust the opposing side as a result. Those in the outer circle may also be influenced, especially by the notion that so many have taken up the opportunity and used the system.

<A>Challenges

Hello Peace now faces two challenges: first, to increase the number of users, and second to create a sense of community, allowing the nascent dialogue to become a normative part of the lives of many Israelis and Palestinians. This will not only legitimize the project but will also give credibility to the opening of new and innovative channels of communication.

Currently, thousands of calls are being made each month. The Families Forum now aims, in the second stage of the Hello Peace project, to tie in other Families Forum activities to stimulate more extensive grassroots activities involving both Palestinians and Israelis. This second stage will focus on further development of the current telephone system, the launch of a new website, and a media campaign. Alongside the inventive use of traditional means of communication, it will exploit technology to allow more people to join in and participate in the dialogue, offering, for example, Palestinians and Israelis ways to expand their communication to the Internet as well as to continue talking over the phone. Already, the Families Forum, in collaboration with the international NGO One to One Children's Fund, are setting up an Internet site allowing Israeli and Palestinian youth to communicate online.

Building trust between Israelis and Palestinians may seem to many to be futile after so much violence, but Hello Peace has proven that where ordinary people make contact with each other on a personal level, it is still possible to bridge the divide and rekindle hope, which had long seemed extinguished.

<AN>Aaron Barnea, who has lost his twenty-one-year-old son, Noam, due to the conflict, is the Families Forum international relations director. Ofer Shinar, the Families Forum Reconciliation Initiative's director, has researched reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians under the guidance of Alexander Boraine, the former cochair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<end AN>

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<CO>19.3

Creating Expertise: The Oxford Research Group in the U.K.

<ABS>By getting activists to enter into dialogue with those who make decisions about weapons, the Oxford Research Group opened up a new window in the struggle for nuclear disarmament. It took years, but gradually more and more decisionmakers became inclined to work with the group and other NGOs on the challenge to develop security through a collaborative approach, and to abandon the old Cold War thinking based on fear and distrust.<end ABS>

> <epi>"When faced with a large system composed of many individuals, which is producing results you may want to change or influence, it is simply not true or realistic to believe that there is nothing one individual can do. With a small number of allies, the effects of the decision of one individual can spread dramatically throughout the whole system, and thereby change the decisions it produces."
>
> —Textbook of the Open University (U.K.) Systems Theory decisionmaking course

Official Chinese banquets are highly formal affairs, especially when they involve very senior government and military officials. Scilla Elworthy was bowled over by the atmosphere when she led an Oxford Reseach Group (ORG) delegation to Beijing in 1995. Walking up the long red carpet into the Great Hall of the People at the head of such a delegation was, for her, the realization of a dream. She was brought down to earth when her Chinese host, walking forward to greet "Dr. Elworthy," went with outstretched hand straight toward the nearest male.

For the next three days, Elworthy and the Oxford Research Group delegation engaged in a rare discourse. Seated around a huge square of tables, and with the help of simultaneous translation, military and civilian disarmament officials and independent experts from the West discussed with their Chinese counterparts the topic of nuclear disarmament in the context of "Global Security in the post–Cold War World."

<A>Building Bridges

The visit to Beijing was a triumph for ORG. Since the early 1980s, the organization has made persistent efforts to do something about the dangerous nuclear arms race based on a simple idea: that the struggle against nuclear arms was best served by opening up channels of communication for face-to-face, nonconfrontational dialogue between antinuclear activists on the one hand and government decisionmakers on the other.

Operating as a body of independent researchers with support staff, ORG first identified who made the decisions on nuclear weapons in all the nuclear nations—the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, China, and France—and within the Warsaw Pact and NATO, and how the decisions were made. They then increased the level of knowledge among antinuclear activists about the issues at the center of their concern by providing information packets, and encouraging them to make contact directly by letter with one key decisionmaker each in the U.K. and in China. Traditionally, many of these decisionmakers—scientists in weapons laboratories, intelligence analysts, military strategists, defense contractors and civil servants—operated behind firmly closed doors. ORG's approach was that by focusing on the personal and human relationships aspects of the arms race, they would foster a lasting process of informed dialogue and openness leading, eventually, to policy change.

Their approach effectively overcame some of the rebuttals commonly used by officialdom to put off critics: that the subject was too complicated for ordinary people to understand, for example, or that it should best be left to those in authority. In many instances, such responses would be just an excuse for maintaining secrecy and for hiding mistakes, accidents, and waste. The ORG wanted to remove this veil, and in so doing encourage greater public accountability for decisions on nuclear weapons.

ORG always stressed a collaborative, bridge-building approach involving "dealing with people, developing trust, finding common ground, [and] building confidence." In the early 1980s, when the organization started, the Cold War was at its height and discussions about disarmament amounted to a dialogue of the disinterested. Conferences held to discuss the issue were long on speeches, devoid of genuine dialogue, and short on meaningful results. The different sides of the divide held fixed positions and, with the atmosphere poisoned by Cold War thinking, there was no dialogue between official government and military representatives on the one side and nongovernmental and civil-society organizations on the other.

The idea of trying to change this culture by using a fresh approach came out of an experience Elworthy had just had as a delegate to the Second UN Special Session on Disarmament in New York in 1982, where she had seen nearly a million people demonstrating against nuclear weapons in the streets without making any impression at all on the delegates inside the UN building. She came home, gathered friends around her kitchen table in Woodstock, near Oxford, England, and after several brainstorming sessions, Oxford Research Group was born.

<A>Getting Started

The direct-contact approach developed by ORG began with a pilot project that aimed to facilitate dialogue between seventy groups throughout the U.K. and nuclear weapon decisionmakers. These included women's groups, Quaker organizations, doctors, teachers, church members, and others simply concerned about the buildup of nuclear arms, and at a loss as to what they could do about it. One thing marked out all these "pilot" groups: they were all willing to do their homework, and they were prepared to drop their traditional "confrontational" approach and learn the skills of dialogue. Each group "adopted" one British nuclear decisionmaker, and—in the interests of balance, and to ensure that the focus was widened beyond a narrow Western one—a counterpart from China.

Each group was provided with an information pack with contact details and background information on their British decisionmakers and his counterpart in China, and their specific area of responsibility. The pack also included a "How To" section, containing detailed guidelines on how to write the first letter, how to deal with a "brush-off," how to persist, and so on. Above all they were encouraged to write letters to their decisionmakers containing no angry polemics, but respectful, to the point, and designed to trigger a response. Just the seemingly straightforward act of writing a letter had an unexpected effect. Previously, some members of these groups had felt frustrated, helpless, depressed, or angry. Being able to address themselves directly to someone of influence, in appropriate language and citing hard facts, changed their attitudes and feelings: they began to feel empowered by the process.

The activists also learned the value of persistence. In one case, a group of musicians and actors opposed to nuclear weapons wrote to the U.K. chief of defense staff every six weeks, for three years, undaunted by the one-line response he sent to each letter. Eventually, when this man left government and was promoted to the House of Lords, his maiden speech to that chamber surprisingly included verbatim quotes from the letters he had been sent by the group.

Many activists became experts on the issues on which they worked, forcing officials to abandon the excuse that an issue was too "complicated" for the ordinary man or woman in the street. It was no longer easy for senior officials to merely pass the buck on to ministers, who would then instruct junior civil servants to send meaningless replies on their own. They felt challenged to provide substantial answers.

ORG made secrecy and accountability in defense decisionmaking the specific focus of its research. During the period of the group's dialogue project, the British Ministry of Defence imposed a ban on senior civil servants and military officers having any contact with ORG, but this did not prevent independent-minded officials from cooperating—thus reinforcing the underlying principle of ORG's work: that, ultimately, individuals can make the difference.

<A>Spreading the Message

Very soon, helped by funds from Quaker charitable trusts, ORG was able to commission expert researchers to carry out research into decisionmaking structures and published the results in *How Nuclear Weapons Decisions Are Made* (Macmillan, 1986). By 1998, ORG had published thirty titles. In addition, it began to hold seminars and consultations bringing together policymakers and their critics, using the dialogue methods it had developed through the group's project. ORG eventually published these methods in a a handbook called *Everyone's Guide to Achieving Change: A Step-by-Step Approach to Dialogue with Decision-Makers*.

The group's dialogue project soon spread outside the U.K. In 1985, ORG launched a Nuclear Dialogue Project in the United States, linking concerned citizens' groups with thirty U.S. decisionmakers. Five years later, a similar project was organized in Sweden involving professional groups of medical practitioners writing to French and British nuclear-weapons decisionmakers.

In time several professional organizations adopted what came to be known as the "dialogue approach" as a model, including the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in their global Abolition 2000 campaign of 1999.

<A>Meeting Critics Face-to-Face

One of ORG's most important roles came to be as organizer of international gatherings at which decisionmakers met their critics face-to-face. The conference in Beijing referred to at the start of this article is a case in point: it was cohosted by ORG on condition that substantial and challenging issues could be raised. For its delegation, the group invited knowledgeable independent experts and some of the military and defense science contacts it had developed over the years. The delegation to China was therefore a rich combination of physicists, security academics, high-ranking military officers, and peace activists.

Opening the seminar on the morning after the banquet, Elworthy caught some of the participants off-guard by asking for two minutes of silent contemplation. She asked each person in the audience to imagine his or her image of a world without nuclear weapons. Everyone complied.

In the ensuing discussion, the Western and Chinese participants enagagd in deep discussion about the doctrine of deterrence, the risks inherent in building stockpiles of plutonium, and a timetable for phased disarmament. The tone and content of the discussion pointed to the real and practical difficulties of disarmament. Soon the seminar participants began talking to each other as human beings, rather than adversaries, softening the serious tone with the occasional touch of humor.

On the final afternoon of their visit to China, the ORG delegation was invited to the key Chinese institute for nuclear weapons research, including arms control. In a remarkably informal roundtable discussion that lasted several hours, staff there answered detailed questions about subjects normally considered closed, such as a fissile material ban. ORG discovered later that these were the only bilateral discussions on nuclear weapons taking place between China and Britain at any level, even informally, during those years. “I left China having learned one thing clearly,” notes Elworthy.

> <ext>The manner in which most international relations are conducted is based on fear. The entire doctrine of nuclear deterrence is based on fear. This is consequent upon a hardware approach—we count weapons, we assess strength, we send spies out to discover enemy secrets, we compete to have the newest, cleverest weapons.
>
> We are quite capable of adopting instead a software approach, even at the very top. Software would mean dealing with people, developing trust, finding common ground, and building confidence. It is what the best of tough leaders do; it’s difficult, challenging work. It requires time. It requires flexibility and patience and savvy and wisdom.<end ext>**{AU: I note that there is an entry in the Bibliography at the end of your chapter of a published work by Elworthy—if this extensive quote, and any other quoted material from Elworthy, derive from that work, such instances should be properly cited by an author-date citation here (including page number) that refers to the work cited. If these quotes are anecdotal in nature, i.e., if they derive from personal conversations between yourself and Elworthy or from other nonpublished sources, they may of course remain uncited.}**

<A>Changed Attitudes

When ORG started, back in the 1980s, there was practically no dialogue between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and no dialogue between government and military officials and NGOs. Fear-based Cold War thinking polarized and poisoned the atmosphere. Such attitudes have changed.

Today, ORG—still a tightly run outfit with a small budget—adheres to the original idea that underpinned its creation, although its focus has widened over the years in response to changing demands and the altered social, political, and international security circumstances.

In 2002, it distilled its dialogue techniques developed over twenty years into an offshoot body called the Oxford Process. The Oxford Process offers consultancy services using skilled, experienced facilitators and the tried and tested methods of effective dialogue with decisionmakers, which combine expertise on political and technical issues with a recognition of the vital importance of building personal, human relationships.

Now, decisionmakers are much more open to working with the organization and other NGOs on the challenge of developing security through a collaborative approach, and to finally abandoning Cold War thinking based on the notion that, as one Chinese army general put it during the seminar in Beijing, "my security is based on your insecurity."

What enabled Oxford Research Group to change attitudes to disarmament was its focus on putting research tools at the disposal of common citizens through education and training. By communicating directly with decisionmakers, it has shown them that they can make a difference, and from the decisionmakers' point of view, made them aware that entering into discussions with "ordinary" people can help them break out of outdated approaches and attitudes, and develop useful policies for a more secure future for all.

In 2003 the Japanese Niwano Peace Foundation recognized Elworthy's achievements by awarding her the prestigious twentieth Niwano Peace Prize. The foundation particularly mentioned Oxford Research Group's work in "building relationships with policymakers from all the nuclear nations, and bringing them together with their critics to develop creative approaches to building down arsenals and exploring nonviolent methods as a force more powerful than weapons in resolving conflict."

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<CO>19.4

Inside the Revolution of Roses: Georgia

Irakli Kakabadze

<ABS>The peaceful Rose Revolution that took place in Georgia in November 2003 has started a new wave of political change in this former Soviet republic. This nonviolent shift of power brought hope to the local population, as well as to the members of the international community. I am deeply touched by the overwhelming desire of ordinary people to choose nonviolent approaches to change.<end ABS>

As the election period approached in November 2003, the party of Georgia’s longstanding president, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Citizens’ Union of Georgia, was divided into many factions. Most prominent among those factions was the National Movement for a Democratic Change, led by a young U.S.-educated jurist, Michael Saakashvili.

Saakashvili had served as the head of a judicial committee in the parliament of Georgia, as minister of justice, and finally as the head of Tbilisi’s city council—the elected local government body of the Georgian capital. His outstanding advocacy and interpersonal skills had transformed him into a clear favorite to win the next presidential election. His party and allies had gained support throughout the country and was expected to gather the most votes in the parliamentary elections of 2 November 2003.

The first results of the exit polls showed that the party was leading in practically all regions of Georgia. However, the government resorted to fraud and the results published on 7 November by the election commission were false. They gave first place to Shevardnadze's party and second place to the party of the autocratic leader of the breakaway republic of Ajaria—both had been showing single digits in opinion polls and exit polls alike. This was a final blow to the disenfranchised citizenry of Georgia and they decided that dramatic civil disobedience was necessary.

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<BH>Inequality as a Source for Conflict

After a long history of being an independent state, although at times occupied by different conquerors, in February 1921 Georgia was occupied by Soviet troops. As one of the republics of the Soviet Union, it soon became more centralized. Its resources and power soon became concentrated in Tbilisi, which was directly subservient to Moscow authorities.

The resulting unequal distribution of resources and power generated increasing dissatisfaction throughout Georgia . As a result, since the 1991 breakup of the Soviet empire, Georgia has faced a number of serious internal problems. Three civil wars in Georgia, between 1990 and 1993, each claimed thousands of victims. Russian forces were sent into the conflict to protect Soviet interests. They naturally sided with each region's self-declared government in order to maintain influence on the Georgian state.

President Shevardnadze returned[MSOffice1] to Georgia in March 1992 with overwhelming Western support, promising to build a democratic nation-state. He started peace negotiations with breakaway regions, but did not succeed in building conditions for peaceful conflict resolution. There were many reasons for this:

- <BL>Neither the regions nor the Russian leadership trusted Shevardnadze
- His style of leadership, although cosmetically changed, remained essentially based on the centralized Soviet government system
- Structural problems had grown and the social environment for creating conditions for positive peace were completely absent
- Widespread and systemic corruption resulted in massive draft avoidance[MSOffice2]
- Misappropriation of funds, salaries below the poverty level (when paid at all), and public officials profiting from drugs and arms naturally contributed to the popular loss of faith in the government<end BL>

Georgia lacked favorable conditions for development and the creation of a truly democratic society. Georgian society enjoyed a relatively free press, but problems with corruption and mismanagement remained. Minimum wages were equal to roughly $20 month, pensions $14 a month, and these were very rarely paid on time. While a few in the private sector prospered enormously, most of the population lived below the poverty level. The wealth and resources were concentrated in Tbilisi; government officials took huge kickbacks from various Georgian and foreign companies, whereas regional governments had very little. New capitalism proved to be good for only about 1 percent of Georgia's population. While people did not want to go back to the Soviet years, they longed for a democratic, capitalistic system that supported social justice and human rights for the whole population.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this economic inequality, the nongovernmental sector strengthened during the last six years of Shevardnadze's rule. NGOs made significant strides in educating the general public about their civil and human rights. Foreign NGOs, such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Eurasia Foundation, CARE, and MerciCorps, together with the local Liberty Institute, the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation, and the Young Jurists Association, managed to change the political climate. People’s consciousness of their rights and duties as citizens of a democratic country grew. The time for a peaceful revolution in 2003 was ripe, but there were many challenges ahead.

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<A>Civil Disobedience

Some thirty to forty thousand people amassed at Liberty Square for several weeks in November to protest the election. Protests escalated and the government brought ten thousand armed police and soldiers to defend its headquarters.

The confrontation intensified after talks between the government of Prime Minister Jorbenadze and Michael Saakashvili failed. Demonstrators demanded that President Shevardnadze resign, allowing for new parliamentary and presidential elections. He refused and the tension grew.

The other political parties were not powerful enough to challenge the president. The troops were ready to defend the “legitimate” government if the crowd attacked its headquarters. The political leaders of the opposition therefore appealed to the demonstrators to establish a nonviolent yet revolutionary Civil Disobedience Committee.

The committee was created on 10 November and included film director Goga Khaindrava, writers David Turashvili, Lasha Bughadze, and Defi Gogibedashvili, U.S.-educated lawyer Nicholas Rurua, Liberty Institute activists Giga Bokeria and David Zurabishvili, and Young Jurists Association leader Tinatin Khidalsheli. The books of Gene Sharp, John Burton, Richard Rubenstein, John W. McDonald, Dennis Sandole, and Johan Galtung, together with works of Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and Georgian activist Ilia Chavchavadze, a proponent of nonviolent social change, were our guiding voices for the peaceful revolution.

For a successful, nonviolent completion of the revolution, temporary dispersal of the demonstrating crowd was needed. Here creative thinking and decisionmaking proved to be crucial. The crowd had to disperse to allow the government to save face and to avoid confronting the soldiers who were, at that time, ready to fight. The organizers decided to encircle the government building for half an hour, giving a clear signal to the government to resign before starting their final action. They circled the building and handed a thousand roses to policemen and soldiers before returning to their homes. This changed the disposition of the armed forces toward the peaceful demonstrators and won their favor.

For the next five days, the Civil Disobedience Committee visited a vast number of universities, organizations, and regions, while opposition leaders continued working to convince the population that the resignation of the existing government was necessary for the good of the country. Saakashvili went to western Georgia and managed to bring in thirty thousand people from Samegrelo and Imereti. By 21 November, many people had also joined from eastern Georgia.

On the morning of 22 November, about one hundred and fifty thousand people assembled at Liberty Square. Opposition leaders and the Civil Disobedience Committee gave a final signal to the government to resign peacefully. It was clear that if the government used force, they would lose moral and legal power. The government refused once again and the leaders of the civic movement then made a direct appeal to the president: “If you do not resign, we will not obey you. We won't kill you and we will face death if your order is imposed upon the people. You can have our dead bodies, but you will never have our obedience again.”

Those words of the great Mahatma Gandhi proved powerful. Thousands of people took to the streets to support the nonviolent change of power. Rock musicians played for the demonstrators in a musical protest that lasted all night, very much reminiscent of Woodstock. All parts of Georgian society became involved in the process, bringing together everyone from scientists, doctors, and teachers to farmers and students and all religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities—nearly 80 percent of Georgian society in total. Yet, the government remained unyielding.

How long would it be possible to hold peaceful demonstrations before somebody provoked the crowd? It was very important to leave a face-saving exit to the government, but at the same time to not give up. The people clearly wanted the president out, but they did not want to see blood. Not necessarily in support of one or another political party, people took to the streets, supporting the call for a nonviolent change of power. They spoke out against the corruption and structural dysfunction of the existing regime. The old-guard politicians, however, were not ready to act decisively.

In these tense moments, the young Saakashvili found enough resources within himself to conduct a very wise political campaign that would eventually lead to the unprecedented Rose Revolution. He borrowed the words of the first Georgian President, Zviad K. Gamsakhurdia, in saying, “We shall throw roses instead of bullets at our enemies,” and drew on the experience of the so-called Flower Children during the civil rights movement in the United States, as his guiding principles for action.

The first Georgian president failed in his attempt to use roses as a nonviolent weapon for progress and change—he did not have a well-trained, mobilized political team or the skills for waging a nonviolent campaign for change. Also, many people thought this was an overly idealistic approach, which eventually destroyed President Gamsakhurdia. However, Saakashvili proved that peaceful change was possible in Georgia. This was the lesson for Georgians and all liberation movements around the world: the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama could actually be implemented and sometimes they could be more realistic than realpolitik itself.

Independent media, especially the news channel Rustavi 2, played a major role in the success of the Rose Revolution as the media coverage contributed to the relatively high degree of transparency during the revolutionary events. The media's involvement was constructive, and their coverage of the tensions helped to prevent an outbreak of violence in many cases. The information and views forwarded by independent channels were on the side of prevention most of the time, rather than simply providing routine coverage of heated confrontations or violent events. They covered problems that could have led to the violence, supporting the nation's work toward peaceful solutions.

For example, Rustavi 2 showed a documentary about Mahatma Gandhi only six days prior to the revolution and aired a special program on *satyagraha*—nonviolence, the force that is generated through adherence to truth, or a way of life based on love and compassion. Throughout the days leading up to the revolution, Gandhi's word, *satyagraha*, became used more and more by revolutionaries who felt that being firm in truth and nonviolence did not represent a retreat or sellout of social justice.

At the same time, the government did not find a useful tool against Gandhi's philosophy. The rules of *satyagraha* were translated into Georgian, published in *Peace Times* magazine, and distributed to activists and demonstrators. Newspapers published papers while radio and TV stations aired programs educating the public about conflict resolution and the thinking of Gandhi, Johan Galtung, Richard Rubenstein, and other peacebuilders.

<A>The Day of the Revolution

The events of 22 November were crucial for the revolution. Political and civic leaders assembled in Tbilisi's city hall to finalize their plans. As President Shevardnadze tried to convene his illegally elected parliament, the people stormed both the government and parliament buildings, giving the police hugs and roses on their way in. The demonstrators had established such good relationships with the armed forces through giving them food, supplies, and roses, that many of them laid down their arms, welcoming the spirit of change.

Moments later, Michael Saakashvili delivered a final rose to President Shevardnadze, who was then rushed out of the parliament through a back door. He did not resign immediately. The next day the Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, came to Tbilisi and facilitated a dialogue that eventually led to Shevardnadze's resignation and a peaceful transition of power.

<AN>Irakli Kakabadze is editor in chief of *Peace Times* magazine and South Caucuses Office coordinator for the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy. He was one of the leading members of the Civil Disobedience Committee during the Rose Revolution and is based in Washington and Tbilisi.<end AN>

<CO>19.5

Taking the Constitution to the People: The Citizens Constitutional Forum in Fiji

Shoma Sharon Prasad

<ABS>Against a background of political and constitutional turmoil, coups, and court cases, a Fijian NGO is attempting to defuse a volatile ethnic political struggle by providing a safe space for the free and frank discussion of key issues within the community—whether the community is made up of the inhabitants of remote villages or recalcitrant politicians.<end ABS>

After nearly a century of British rule, Fiji achieved independence in 1970. The British decision to protect the indigenous population from exploitation by other Europeans by importing Indian laborers to work on their sugar plantations laid the ground for ethnic tensions that are still being worked out in the independent state. With many of the Indian laborers deciding to stay on in Fiji, the island now has a flourishing Indian population—some 44 percent of the total—while the indigenous Fijian population has fallen to around 50 percent.

The ethnic tensions first came to a head in 1987 when two military coups staged against the Indian majority government led to the drafting of a new constitution in 1990, which was then amended in 1997 along multiracial lines. Elections in 1999 returned a coalition government headed by the Fiji Labor Party under Fiji's first ethnic Indian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. However, in May 2000 extreme nationalists under the leadership of failed-businessman George Speight launched a coup and demanded the revocation of the multiracial constitution and the replacement with one that would allow only ethnic Fijians to hold the posts of prime minister and president. This coup, during which the prime minister and members of parliament were held hostage, ushered in a prolonged period of political turmoil. New parliamentary elections held in August 2001 returned a coalition government dominated by the nationalist Fijian United Party of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. However, he in turn faced a legal challenge from former Labor prime minister Chaudhry, on the grounds that the constitution guaranteed cabinet seats for his Labor Party.

It was in 1995 in this context, where constitutional debate expressed ethnic divisions established in the colonial period, that the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) first emerged. Widely regarded in the Fiji Islands and beyond as the leading human rights advocacy NGO in Fiji, the CCF is supported by members of civil society in its fight for human rights, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, and the building of a multicultural Fiji.

<A>Power to the People

After two preliminary consultations, the CCF began its activities in 1995 and from the beginning set about creating a space for dialogue and debate in order to achieve a sustainable constitutional solution of the tensions between the different ethnic groups. Initially this took the form of a series of workshops for political leaders, NGOs, religious and community leaders, and ordinary citizens on various aspects of constitution making, which inspired people to make submissions to the Constitutional Review Commission chaired by Sir Paul Reeves, the former governor general of New Zealand.

In this process, international experts and jurists assisted the CCF in national consultations on constitutional matters. Political and community leaders were invited to these consultations to encourage dialogue and discussion and help build consensus on a new democratic and nonracial constitution.

Having helped secure the adoption of the 1997 Constitution, the CCF has focused on educating citizens about the new “multiracial” constitution. A major instrument in this is a popular version of the constitution, “Your Constitution, Your Rights,” a pamphlet that is published in English, Hindi, and Fijian. Besides its use in schools, it has been serialized in the *Daily Post* newspaper and has been widely distributed in the community. Through instruments such as this the CCF works at strengthening democratic institutions by ensuring the full implementation of the provisions of the 1997 Constitution, building multiculturalism and an understanding of human rights, and seeking a more proportional and fair electoral system.

However, the CCF has also taken a more direct role in the developments around the constitution. In the 1999 election, the architects of the 1997 Constitution—the Soqosoqo Ni Vakavulewa Ni Taukei government and the main opposition party, the National Federation Party—were defeated by a coalition led by the Fiji Labor Party (FLP). After one year in government, the FLP was deposed by a group of soldiers and some indigenous Fijian nationalist extremists under the leadership of George Speight. They held Prime Minister Chaudhry and members of his government hostage in parliament for fifty-six days. The Fiji military forces commander decided to remove the president, abrogated the constitution in response to the demands of Speight’s group, and continued negotiations for the release of the deposed government.

As a vociferous and passionate defender of the 1997 Constitution, the CCF soon after these dramatic events took the bold step of supporting a human rights challenge by an individual, Chandrika Prasad, in the High Court and the Fiji Court of Appeals. Prasad contended that the commander of the Fiji military forces had not acted lawfully in abrogating the 1997 Constitution on 29 May 2000. The CCF led the NGO movement that organized the presentation of evidence in support of Prasad's litigation.

The High Court decided on 2 November 2000 that the 1997 Constitution was merely suspended by the purported abrogation and came back into effect when the hostages were released. The court also declared that the interim administration led by Laisenia Qarase was illegal. The government appealed against the judgment. The five judges of the court of appeals upheld the High Court judgment on 1 March 2001, declaring that the May 2000 revolution had been unsuccessful. The 1997 Constitution thus remained effective. Professor George Williams—one of the counsels involved in the Chandrika Prasad case—comments in an article in the *Oxford University Commonwealth Law Journal* (summer 2001): "It was the first time ever that the leaders of a coup had voluntarily submitted to the jurisdiction of a court only months after taking power. It was also the first time ever in Fiji's history that a court decision has restored a constitution and the democratic system of government created by it."

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<BH>Constitutional Awareness Campaign

Of all the work carried out by the CCF since its formation in 1995, the most effective has been its use of advocacy and public education to create awareness of constitutional and democratic issues among the wider civil societies ranging from grassroots communities to schools and religious groups. After the unsuccessful coup in 2000, the CCF has focused on building relationships between communities using the constitutional awareness campaign to encourage dialogue and reconciliation. This has been promoted through newspapers, radio, television, and a website that provides a forum for dialogue on important national issues.

The main aims of the CCF's educational workshops are to counter the misconceptions that the communities hold about the constitution and to inform them about their rights. In the rural areas, this is done mainly through village workshops and through the distribution of booklets and pamphlets about the constitution and rights, such as "Your Constitution, Your Rights."

Most of the CCF's activities are accomplished through volunteer efforts and respond to the needs of the moment. Educating people from different communities has required a major commitment. For example, between May and June 2004, a prominent tribal chief led a multiracial team to areas in Tailevu North and Lower Naitasiri Provinces, over a period of six weeks, and conducted thirty workshops in a total of thirty-three villages. Many of the supporters of the coup came from these areas.

A total of 943 people took part in these workshops. All households in the villages and settlements visited by the team now have a copy of the "Your Constitution, Your Rights" booklet. Important issues such as the entrenched constitutional protection of indigenous-owned resources such as land and fishing grounds, elections and the democratic process, the importance of following the rule of law, and good governance issues associated with development were discussed and debated.

The program has met some apparent resistance from the Ministry of Fijian Affairs through the provincial administration. A number of calls were received, allegedly from the Provincial Office, requesting that the team cancel its programs. However, the teams proceeded with their visits to the villages and were welcomed almost everywhere.

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<A>Achievements

The response from the community at large was very encouraging. It appeared that people had very limited knowledge of the constitution and their rights. The impact of these educational workshops has not been measured and analyzed, but it is hoped that by providing people with accurate knowledge of the disastrous consequences of the 19 May coup, the nationalists will find it more difficult to mobilize these villagers in the future.

The workshops and discussions also covered other issues that were important to the communities, such as the meaning of human rights. In every workshop, the importance of democratic process and its institutions, the need to support the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and respect for human rights and other cultures were emphasized through discussions. Women and children actively participated in the workshops with local police representatives, who at the same time used the opportunity to educate them about crime.

All the workshop discussions were recorded and reported to the CCF's steering committee members. In 2002, the CCF hosted similar grassroots human rights educational workshops in towns and villages of the other provinces, attracting a total of two thousand participants. All the issues covered were directly related to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Fiji after the coup. During these rural education visits, the CCF was able to identify a number of influential local people who have since been trained and are being maintained as part of this ongoing grassroots education project.

The CCF has also organized workshops that focused on constitutional issues in the urban centers. These provided opportunities for discussing the Bill of Rights, squatter settlements and evictions, land rights, indigenous rights, and the foundation of a coalition government, multiculturalism, tolerance, and peacebuilding culture.

More recently the CCF joined with other NGOs to make submissions to parliamentary committees on subjects such as information technology, the freedom of information bill, the defense review, and prison reform. The CCF has facilitated continued dialogue and consensus among the nongovernmental organizations, civil society, and government.[1]

In 2002, the Fijian government, after a lapse of eighteen years, presented a report on Fiji to the United Nations Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The NGO Coalition on Human Rights in Fiji, for which CCF provides the secretariat, presented a shadow report in Geneva.

After the two groups had presented their papers, a debate ensued in the national parliament on human rights issues and the legality of the present government. Ordinary citizens contributed to this debate through articles and letters in the three national newspapers. The debate continued in the newspaper columns for weeks.

<box>

<A>The Multiparty Issue

The CCF has been deeply involved in the contentious issue of multiparty government in Fiji. The Fijian Constitution stipulates that after general elections, the leader of the party or coalition of parties that wins the election must invite parties with more than 10 percent of seats in the seventy-one seat House of Representatives to be part of the cabinet.

On forming his government after the 2001 election, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase failed to invite the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) into the government, the only party with more than 10 percent of the seats. Consequently there has been litigation in the High Court, which recently ruled that the FLP was entitled to a proportionate number of ministries.

The CCF tried to encourage politicians from both sides to discuss the agreement for the formation of the coalition government. A workshop on multiparty government was organized for the two main political parties and the minority parties to enable them to have open dialogue and raise differences. However, this was not achieved because the ministers and MPs in the current government declined to participate.

The members of the FLP and other opposition parties did share similar concerns about the country's progress and recognized the importance of working together for the betterment of the nation. Apart from observing the development progress between the two leaders of the political parties, the CCF has also encouraged dialogue and participation of other parties and civil-society groups on this issue.

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In another area of conflict and peacebuilding, the CCF is involved in the Vatukola Goldmines trade union's twelve-year-old court case against Emperor Gold Mines Limited. The CCF provided legal aid to the union. Although the decision of the court went against the union, the CCF has continued its support in a study of the gold mines and the effect they have on their workers. Individual members and Oxfam Australia have assisted this.

CCF work has been reported widely in the news media, ranging from newspaper articles to radio talk shows. Overseas radio and television stations and Australian and New Zealand radio have frequently reported on the work of the CCF. Promoting and advocating the work of CCF has been a key feature in encouraging open dialogue between civil-society groups publicly.

The aim behind all this community work is to motivate and create a well-informed public that could, in the long run, become the most effective watchdog for public finance, and would act as guardians of the constitution, democracy, and the rule of law. The program will enhance and foster tolerance, respect, and goodwill within the many different communities, cultures, and religious groups in Fiji.

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<A>Note

1. Internationally, the CCF’s work has been made possible by assistance from the European Union, AusAid, Nzaid, and Oxfam Australia. The CCF has also worked with International Partner NGOs such as Conciliation Resources London and the European Center for Conflict Prevention, and other overseas-based trade unions. High-ranking academics have paid regular visits and have supported the work of the CCF.

{AU/Eds.: This "stray" box doesn't seem to belong to any of the chapters in this section (Chapter 19), but rather in some location within either Chapter 7 or Chapter 20.2—please find an appropriate place for it within that chapter.}

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<BH>South and North Korean Women Re-Unite

After more than fifty years of partition on the Korean Peninsula, the scene on 17 October 2002 in Kumkang Mountain, North Korea, was a truly remarkable one: on that day, hundreds of women from the communist North Korea and capitalist South Korea were dancing and singing together. It was the closure ceremony of the South-North Women's Reunification Convention, with 357 participants from the South and 300 from the North. The conventions consisted of art and craft exhibitions, games, sports, joint banquets, cultural and musical performances, discussion groups, and small group meetings. Women came from different sectors of society including agricultural, religious, business, academic, nonprofit, and educational. Preceded by a smaller-scale Reunification Forum that was held one year earlier in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, this was the first large-scale meeting of women from both sides. The South-North Korean women's interchanges substantially contributed to reducing the decades-old antagonism and tension between both sides.

Women Making Peace initiated the Reunification Exchange program between North and South Korean women in 1997, with a campaign called Sharing Love Sharing Food. During this campaign civic groups and public support in South Korea were mobilized to collect money fore milk powder to send to the women and children in North Korea.

This was one of the first acts of cross-border engagement between the two Koreas since the partition and it became the spiritual and ideological basis of the "Sunshine" policy of the Kim Dae-Jung government, which resulted in the 2000 South-North Summit Meeting between the leaders of both Koreas.

The women from South and North Korea ended their 2002 convention with a resolution, declaring that they would keep peace together so that there would never be war again on the Korean Peninsula, and that women, the main victims of the division, should lead the way to reunification. When the South-North Joint Event for the Anniversary of the Independence Movement of 1 March was held in Seoul, North Korean women representatives joined with South Korean women to make a statement against war, and for peace and reunification, at their separate 8 March women's conventions. South-North Korean women's working-level meetings have continued after the conferences and have been held six times up to September 2004.

According to Women Making Peace, the North-South women’s events and the continuous working-level meetings have had a major effect on peacebuilding in Korea and on the prevention of military conflict. South and North Korean women have offered an example of how to practice reconciliation and cooperation together. Women have recognized their core responsibility and have tried together to open the way to human security.

~~Contact~~

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