



Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue



Meeting report

OSLOforum07

Annual Mediators' Retreat

Dialogue

in a Divided World:

power, potential & pitfalls

Losby Gods,

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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to the promotion of humanitarian principles, the prevention of conflict and the alleviation of its effects through dialogue.

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What is the OSLO forum?

The OSLO forum is a process led by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue to improve practice in conflict mediation, enhance its reputation and status as a profession and contribute to the professional development of the current and the next generation of conflict mediators. Anchored in an annual end of June gathering in Oslo, the process includes regional retreats and other adhoc meetings, the purpose of which is to:

- Provide a venue for those engaged as conflict mediators to meet as a peer group, and learn from each other's experiences in an informal and confidential setting;
- Bridge institutional divides so that UN, regional IGO, government or non-governmental mediators are encouraged to look beyond their own institution for advice and lessons;
- Contribute to a stronger shared identity among conflict mediators to enhance the professionalism of their work; and
- Develop a cadre of experienced individuals from within conflict mediation support teams and beyond and mentor those, who may be able to assume lead roles in conflict mediation in the future.

The retreats deliberately refrain from seeking to generate specific recommendations or conclusions, but aim to define the cutting edge in conflict mediation practice, while stimulating debate and critically examining current practice.

Executive summary

The OSLO forum 2007 retained the unique character of the series of retreats of which it was the fifth, by bringing together over 60 senior conflict mediators and other key peace process actors, who seek to resolve conflict through dialogue from all institutional backgrounds. While the focus remains on practitioners – whether those that lead mediation teams or those that variously support them, the retreat continues its policy of including a small selection of well-regarded specialists on specific, relevant topics. This year all participants were given a choice as to which of two parallel sessions to attend throughout the retreat. While a core of participants has now attended several years and built up strong bonds, there are always new additions, and this year they seemed to integrate particularly well into the group.

There was a larger and more varied cast of speakers this year, aimed at continuing the trend of confronting mediators with the perspectives of critical actors in peace processes beyond their own peers – and this, combined with a strategy of designing the agenda around the expertise and interests of the participants rather than around abstract concepts, proved successful and led to the most lively event the OSLO forum has yet seen, with as much discussion and networking activity taking place between sessions as during them.

Guest speakers and presenters included former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Baburam Bhattarai, Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist); John de Chastelain, Head of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, Northern Ireland; Conor Murphy, Sinn Féin Minister for Regional Development, Northern Ireland; Jonathan Powell, former Chief of Staff to British PM Tony Blair; Luis Moreno Ocampo, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; John Alderdice FRC Psych, psychiatrist and president of Liberal International; former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Ali Ansari, Director, Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews; Owen Bennett-Jones, BBC World news correspondent and presenter; Lyse Doucet, BBC World news correspondent and presenter; Colin Irwin, Research Fellow in the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool and specialist on the use of public opinion polling in peace processes (Northern Ireland); Rami Khouri, Director, Issam Fares Institute, American University of Beirut; Editor, Lebanese Daily Star; and Ahmed Rashid, Pakistani journalist and author of “Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia” and “Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia”.

The fifth annual event of its kind, the OSLO forum 2007’s agenda followed the arc of a peace process, covering vision, dialogue as the pre-eminent methodology, craftsmanship, power and interests, and finally implementation. Drawing on this structure, the sessions were dedicated to a range of topical issues, including:

- Mediator/Envoy-led situation reports from Darfur, Kosovo, Lebanon, Nepal and Sri Lanka;
- The potential and challenges for dialogue in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iran;
- The challenges of transformation from armed group pariahs into politicians with perspectives from Nepal and Northern Ireland;
- The use of psychological approaches in mediation;
- The potential for public opinion polling as a peace process management tool;

- Leading journalists analysing the relationship between mediation and the media;
- Unpacking implementation: an analysis of Northern Ireland's process after the Good Friday Agreement;
- Identifying pragmatic strategies to address the ongoing lack of women and their perspectives at formal peace tables;
- Reviewing the current state of the debate on tensions between peace making and justice seeking;
- The role of great powers in mediation: power diplomacy or facilitating dialogue?

As usual the rich and multi-stranded discussions do not lend themselves to easy or glib summary. However themes and strong points of consensus continue to emerge including:

- The issue of women's participation and perspectives should no longer be sidelined, here as anywhere else, and should have a place on the main agenda next year, dedicated to identifying practical strategies for mediators,
- As the Forum's emphasis grows on understanding the perspectives of all conflict parties, and of civilian victims of conflict, so too did the volume of discussion relating to the need to listen, have respect, and use psychological approaches;
- Linked to this, the Forum has seen mediators, while remaining eminently pragmatic in their approaches, taking a much longer and deeper view of when and how mediation can be useful, and recognising implementation as having a critical need for the mediators' skill;
- Professor Zartmann may have been gratified to see the extent to which the concept of ripeness remains absolutely fundamental for mediators; they also remain fascinated by the means of fostering ripeness where it does not exist;
- While there was no dedicated session on the UN, the role of the SG and the Security Council remains central to discussions on many conflicts;
- New mediation actors at all levels continue to emerge; the Forum needs to keep abreast of them to remain at the cutting edge of practice and ensure the lessons and standards (however informal) generated by the Forum are shared.

Keynote speech & The Mediator's Studio: learning lessons from a former UN Secretary-General

Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan shared his reflections on the challenges of mediation in an opening keynote speech, complemented by commentaries from Martti Ahtisaari and Thomas Pickering. He elaborated on the particular challenge facing a UN Secretary-General during an interview with Lyse Doucet in this year's Mediator's Studio (a session where a leading journalist probes a leading mediator or party to negotiations on the lessons from their experience for mediation practitioners). Amidst a range of intriguing personal reflections on conflict-resolution related experiences from his long experience in the UN, he offered insights on the invaluable role of personal relationships, the importance of listening, the complex and often contradictory dynamics of critical bodies like the UN Security Council, and the need for endless imagination and flexibility.

“Situation Report” Breakfasts: Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Nepal & Darfur

An innovation this year, individual mediators and envoys agreed to provide informal updates and “Q&A” sessions to smaller groups of participants over breakfast (with the exception of Martti Ahtisaari whose schedule required a teatime session instead). These informal sessions covered Kosovo, Nepal, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Darfur. The discussions were immediate and rich, and the format allowed for them to be direct in a way which participants indicated was a fascinating learning opportunity for those not well versed in the specific conflicts.

Without breaching the confidentiality of the intimate and detailed discussions, some themes were evident such as the possible trade-offs between high local ownership of processes and the presence of mediators which can help make agreements and the process of reaching them more comprehensive and inclusive; the emergence of “new” (for which perhaps read “ignored” or “marginalised”) groups during processes and how to handle them; how to manage different perceptions and visions both of history and of the future, especially in terms of state transformation; how to handle a deliberately limited mediation of one or several parts of a broader process in a crowded field; a consensus on the value of leadership and coordination; the continuing emergence of new, often surprising or counterintuitive state actors in mediation; the critical role of the UN Security Council and the tensions between the behaviour of its members qua members and qua sovereign states; the management not just of party constituencies, but also of the broader population’s expectations, demands and perceptions (a mediator reminded the group that “people are nicer than politicians”); and the extent to which mediators really have a choice over the type of process they will run – or is it always dictated by circumstance?

This was clearly a format participants found useful, and should be repeated in future years. Despite the very diverse topics, and the insistence of all that situations are sui generis, it remains striking how often similar themes emerge.

Dialogue for de-escalation? Engaging Iran

Recognising that the group was likely to be overwhelmingly pro-engagement with Iran, the discussion aimed to assess the real political challenges of doing that, and to sketch out possible strategies and policy instruments for making it work.

It was pointed out that international actors should decide if they are looking to solve, manage or simply live with the problems Iran represents to them – noting that in several countries which could play a key role, such as the UK, there is no significant lobby against engagement. Ideas floated centred around trying to eschew piecemeal approaches over coordinated, if complex, integrated strategies which would include, for example, approaching Iran in the regional context; breaking down areas of engagement into various issues: fuel – oil, gas and nuclear (this latter also of course with reference to possible weaponisation); US–Iran relations; sanctions packages, and the use of force – on which the group seemed to agree that, especially given the likely

reaction on the Iranian and Muslim “street”, would be extremely counter-productive; however it was also argued by some that use of force must be kept on the table to keep the forward dynamic of any dialogue – and because Iran would not believe it had ever really been removed even were it so stated.

On the nuclear issue, several points were made: the need for a comprehensive international fuel regime; a recommendation that Iran be provided all it needs for a full civilian energy programme short of enrichment and reprocessing with maximum inspections; also that if, as expected, Iran will gain full fuel cycle capability by 2013 which will have enormous impacts for the Non Proliferation Treaty as a whole and could have some unpleasant knock-on effects in other unstable states. We also need a clearer definition of where in the cycle weaponisation can be considered actually to begin.

While sanctions were not exhaustively discussed, it was noted that no single sanction instrument should be used alone, and that automaticity in the sanctions process should be avoided; also that, given the devastating domestic effects, petroleum and gas sanctions should be the penultimate, before use of force.

On US–Iran relations, it was suggested that normal diplomatic relations should be gradually resumed to help deal with the range of outstanding bilateral issues and foster mutual understanding; also that the US needed to work harder to find ways to encourage other major energy players like Russia and China to become constructively involved.

The discussion echoed another theme of the meeting, that the international community needs to work hard to understand the perceptions of threat and opportunity on all sides of actual and potential conflicts – and also to take seriously the issue of respect (in this case for a people with a long and proud history). It was also pointed out that Iranians work to a much longer timescale than often impatient Western governments. On perceptions, it was noted that the nuclear programme has been successfully presented to the population as part of a greater programme of state building, national unity promotion and so forth – though the understanding of the programme is not well developed; and the nation has learnt to think of itself as in a state of preparation for war against a common enemy. A lot of store should also be set by people’s perception of what the international community or its more powerful members are actually prepared to do – what price are they actually prepared to pay in the final reckoning for the situations they say they want to pertain? In terms of culture and attitude, it was pointed out that Iran boasts the world’s fourth largest blogging community and an avid appetite for internet-based news – providing huge opportunities, but also potential pitfalls, for understanding and affecting public opinion.

Related to this, discussants made a distinction between Ahmedinajad’s powerful ability to manipulate propaganda at home and with Muslims overseas (often garnering more support amongst the latter than the former) – but in a way that often plays against Iran’s interests overseas. It is important, therefore, to engage those waiting in the wings, and disaffected elites who may have future roles to play, recognizing that there may be multiple centres of power; another discussant noted that the Iranian political system works to keep the contradictions in foreign policy alive.

Somalia: what role for dialogue?

This discussion asked whether there is space for dialogue in Somalia and explored the opportunities and difficulties for dialogue playing a role. The discussion focused on three main points.

First, it was argued that the international community does not have a clear plan for Somalia to which significant international actors are committed. The participants agreed that this was very troubling given the fact that the Somalia crisis has implications beyond the country's borders. It was argued that there is little interest and drive within the international community to engage vigorously in the resolution of the crisis.

Second, the role of the transitional federal institutions (TFIs) was explored. On one hand, it was recognized that having a transitional government and transitional institutions in place is a significant achievement in Somalia. The transitional federal government (TFG) is now based in Mogadishu and making plans for the upcoming National Reconciliation Congress (NRC). On the other hand, it was pointed out that the transitional institutions have not succeeded in bringing consensus in Somalia. For the Somali opposition, the transitional government is part of the problem and they do not recognize it as their government. Therefore, some participants argued that it is important to integrate the opposition into the political process and to devise ways through which the opposition can talk to the government. It was suggested, for example, that moderate elements of the opposition be incorporated in the TFIs and the TFG. Finally, participants pointed out that the transitional government has not been able to complete in a timely manner all the tasks that fall under its mandate and it is therefore important for a discussion to start on how to best assist the TFG to do so.

The third issue the session explored revolved around the upcoming National Reconciliation Congress and its role in the efforts to revive the Somali peace process. The discussion recognized that the Congress offers an opportunity for dialogue and negotiations to take place and to potentially move the process forward. On the other hand, there was scepticism on the ability of a brief Congress to contribute much to an extremely complicated political reality. Some participants pointed out that for the Somali opposition the NRC will be an inadequate tool for dialogue, if it is controlled and dominated by the transitional government. The opposition is therefore demanding an independent and impartial management of the Congress, guarantees of security, and adequate representation at the Congress. However, it is not clear that the transitional government is ready to include the opposition in the NRC in a meaningful manner. As a result, some expressed concern that the TFG will simply engage in dialogue with its allies in the NRC as opposed to opening up the political process and engaging the opposition.

Is dialogue a viable tool in today's Afghanistan?

The discussion started with a reminder that the Taliban are a heterogeneous group, a fact which has to be taken into account when analyzing whether and what kind of dialogue is possible. Talking to local commanders – not necessarily affiliated with the Taliban's core ideology – is possible and necessary. The Afghans themselves should

eventually lead a process that would need to be backed by a wide international consensus. Engaging with the Taliban's leadership, on the other hand, was deemed unwise by some discussants, as they were too closely linked with Al Qaeda. This raises the question, unanswered for some, as to whether we are dealing with terrorism or ideological fundamentalism. One should also recall that dialogue, principally through the *loya jirga* and other traditional mechanisms is an old and respected methodology for problem solving in Afghanistan,

One discussant distinguished between cultivating mere contacts (essential), being engaged in actual talks (though such engagement couldn't be publicly talked about); and conducting negotiations (viewed as unlikely to be possible and to "demand a heavy price"). Some discussants agreed there were opportunities for confidence building measures. There was a broad consensus that what Afghanistan needs is a strong reconciliation platform, with dedicated outreach efforts towards the countryside; this should be based on strengthening and stabilising government institutions and conducting dialogue using the local, tribal leadership. There were differing views on the extent to which the last five years showed positive achievements or not. On the military side, the point was made that the Taliban Spring offensive this year was not as successful as last year, when they almost took Kandahar, the second largest city. In general, there was a sense that problem is not the absence of talks, but the absence of coordinated investments in Afghanistan.

The Taliban issue was discussed with reference to Pakistan's national interests – there is a close Al Qaeda-Taliban-Pakistan link. The Taliban started as a cross border group and needed to be dealt with on/by both the Afghan and Pakistan sides; by now, some argued, this has become a regional problem. It is important therefore to have a more regional approach by including China and Russia. Such a regional approach can also include SAARC, since Afghanistan is now a member and Pakistan has been fully supportive of this membership. Linked to this, operations in Iraq continue to have a great impact on the discussion on how to tackle the Taliban question. Additionally, some felt that the initial unwillingness of the international forces to get involved in a DDR dialogue at the outset had exacerbated the Taliban problem.

The discussion moved to the possible complementarity of the two approaches – dialogue with some elements; military response with others. All agreed that the Afghan national forces needed to be strengthened.

From bullets to ballots: enabling the transformation of armed groups

The objective of this session was to better understand the processes through which armed groups decide to cease armed struggle in favour of negotiations for a political solution. The group discussed the situations in Nepal and Northern Ireland.

Many would see disarmament to be the prerequisite or first tangible step in the transformation of an armed group into politics. In contrast, from a nationalist Northern Irish perspective, the armed struggle itself was the very prerequisite for negotiations to revive repeatedly failed political attempts to resolve what was seen as a colonial

interruption of Irish political affairs by the British. The armed conflict emerged as a strategy to force the British to the table. The availability or non-availability of arms was irrelevant. Rather, the decisive element for transformation was the willingness not to use arms. For this willingness to emerge, space for alternatives was needed. It was widely recognized that continuous violence would only limit that space.

If disarmament is not a prerequisite, but rather a confirmation of a longer peace process, then how does one get to such positive politics and the minimum degree of trust necessary to start disarming? In Northern Ireland, the creation of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, presented a turning point, gradually creating a viable alternative to the armed struggle. Later, its emphasis on the bigger picture and the actual purpose of the struggle, as opposed to individual loss, gained wide support. In Nepal, the Maoists decided to return to politics once the government had acknowledged the legitimacy of their goals and conditions. Since then, the Maoists would argue, they have been adjusting their language to match the political discourse, but that does not mean they are adjusting their goals and conditions.

While in some cases creating space for dialogue means strengthening the political wing of an armed group, in others, this distinction may be inappropriate to begin with. In Nepal for instance, the Maoists argue their resort to arms was a consequence of failed politics to begin with. In both Northern Ireland and Nepal, an external monitoring and verification process of disarmament was crucial for guarding the parties' confidence. Earlier ceasefires had broken down for lack of trust, and this in turn had led to sceptical views of what dialogue can achieve.

Once negotiations are underway, what qualities do armed groups look for in a mediator to keep the peace process on track? Discussants agreed that mediators should come with as little baggage or interest in a conflict as possible. Mediators should listen, and avoid having an opinion, if that was impossible they should at least try to avoid expressing it. Direct dialogue is often preferable to intermediaries; at least this was the case for Northern Ireland. Negotiations can easily unravel if a mediator tries to euphemise issues or dominate talks. Most importantly, mediators should have political common sense and a capacity to analyse and understand the root causes of the conflict. Ultimately, it was agreed that the only tactic to succeed is genuine engagement, otherwise mediation will only tackle the symptoms as opposed to the causes, and conflict is bound to flare up again at a later stage.

The disposition of the international community to proscribe groups as terrorist was viewed sceptically as the success of such strategies in moving armed groups towards a political process has yet to be shown. Labelling a conflict party as terrorist could only contain conflict temporarily by suppressing opposition to governing structures further, but would eventually backfire.

Psychology in peace processes: some principles for practitioners

Socio-economic and political explanations for a conflict can sometimes be very unsatisfying: once communities get into political violence, ways of thinking and

behaviours move away from rational political debate and get closer to what would be called “regression” at the individual level. As a mediator, one needs to be aware of the psychological aspect of a political struggle, so as to understand, for example, why “communities frequently do things that are not in their best interest”. The presentation deconstructed a widespread myth by underlining that the pathology was fundamentally to be found at the level of the community rather than of the individual: a constant sense of humiliation and disrespect produces a rage that is ultimately taken up by the community itself.

Mediation is more a process, a human relationship that needs time to develop, than a set of techniques, the discussants felt. In this regard, it had moved from classic diplomacy to something more of an “art” where emotional intelligence was a key asset. Yet understanding and being able to impact on disturbed (and often very paradoxical) behaviours requires more than basic common sense. Real psychological skills are needed; using a profiler (e.g. a personality test) could be useful for complementing the mediator’s set of skills – though one wouldn’t want to put too much emphasis on it.

Several participants – underlined how disturbing it was to see “normal” people turning into so-called terrorists or/and capable of abominable brutalities. Was the capacity of violence in everyone? Moreover, it was noted that people engaged in political violence often didn’t believe that what they did was fundamentally wrong; there was a sense that they were engaged for the higher good of their communities. Consequently, as a mediator, one needs to show empathy, try to understand how such people function, treat them with respect – and eventually encourage them to imitate constructive behaviours. Indeed, a participant noted: “Every mediator I know fancies himself as an amateur psychologist”.

The – very vivid – discussion also revolved around the mediator him/herself. We need to move away from the “Western, male, single, grey-haired mediator” model: the more diverse (and complementary) a team, the better the chances will likely be to increase empathy, understanding and personal relationships with the parties. Finally, it was noted that being a mediator certainly needed empathy but also – and perhaps foremost – resilience; being able to rely on collegial support to debrief on difficult experiences – and if needed, on professional help – should not be underestimated so as to ensure the personal balance, and ultimately the success, of a mediator.

All in all, the participants particularly welcomed this session on psychology and engaged actively with the speaker and responders. It was felt that the discussions had been very topical and could be further encouraged in the future.

Polling for peace: public opinion as a tool for mediators

Public opinion polls are most commonly used to analyse the electoral fortunes of political parties, their leaders and policies, frequently with a view to advancing their own interests and agendas. But in Northern Ireland, public opinion polls were used as a tool to enhance the peace process by increasing party inclusiveness, developing issues and language, and testing agreement proposals. Such polls can help to identify

appropriate policies for both domestic and international actors. Further, the process of agreeing on polling questions can engage the parties in useful ways, and the polls may help to build public ownership of the process. But there may be risks too. Are there situations where polling would not be advisable? Can publics become fatigued or cynical about polling, especially if the conflict drags on? Can polling create problems – and is there a distinction to be made between good and bad practice in polling? What happens when parties disagree with polling results?

This session aimed to explore the multiple uses of public opinion peace polling as a tool in peace process management, drawing mainly on the example of Northern Ireland, and discussing the extent to which these approaches might be relevant to other ongoing processes.

Discussants were intrigued by the tool. They were interested to explore if polling of this kind might call into question the legitimacy of elections. Does it bring new information, they asked, or confirm what is already there? This led to a discussion about how, even if information is not new, it can help you to “balance the yin and yang of a process”, providing a way of mapping the society, identifying its centre of gravity and finding ways to separate off and deal with extremists. As in other discussions, ripeness reared its head: if parties are not really interested in making peace, they won't be interested in developing polling questions either. It would not have been possible before Dayton, for example, but afterwards could have had immense value.

Polling in real hot spots is obviously very difficult, and some bias towards more developed societies for this tool may be inevitable: literacy and technology may have some limiting effects, although it was emphasized traditional societies have their own often highly effective means of communication. Situations where the government or the media deliberately mislead the population, as indeed situations where strong ideologies are at play, will also pose challenges: in essence the whole exercise, while very valuable done at the right time in the right way (by a professional, neutral organisation), is extremely political and should be recognised as such.

Media and mediation: leading journalists have their say

The media have often been demonised as obstructing mediation efforts by leaking or inflating information on ongoing peace processes. This session tried to approach the issue more constructively by offering renowned journalists an opportunity to discuss the role the media play in the pursuit of peace and how mediators could use the media to advance peace processes. Are journalists shaping public opinion or should they act as a quality control mechanism for mediators?

The three panellists – Lyse Doucet from the BBC, Rami Khouri from the Lebanese Daily Star and Ahmed Rashid, a well known Pakistani journalist – agreed that one cannot generalise, and stressed the diversity of the media landscape, media motivations, media expertise and their audiences. It was made clear from the beginning that while mediators could benefit from getting to know journalists personally, the media is neither a tool, nor at the mediators' service. Journalists do become friends with mediators and

other actors, but that does not necessarily affect their professionalism to put things in context as opposed to promoting personal views and sympathies. Nevertheless, even among quality media, one has to differentiate between global, regional and local levels. The panellists acknowledged that global media such as the BBC was closest to objectivity, whereas regional and local journalists were often experts and activists at the same time. Their job was to provide insights, and often cover for the lack of an independent academia and NGO community. Though this might be interpreted as a disadvantage by some, one panellist made it clear that it was these multiple roles that made local journalists so valuable as a credible and non-corrupt source of information and contacts even to mediators.

The panellists were sceptical as to the impact the media can have on peoples' perceptions of a conflict. The so called "peace journalism" – a term coined in the context of the Thai peace process assuming that if journalists write in a certain way, peace will follow – was largely dismissed. Though it may allow for alternative solutions and the possibility of peace to enter the public discourse, it might also marginalise single media unless there was a general agreement among all providers. The media may have been weaponised, but largely reflect society. In the Arab world, the media is the only playing field that puts the region on a par with the rest of the world. Many journalists invariably see themselves linked to resistance struggles. The media does not speak for other people, if moderates do not speak out, there is not much journalists can do about it: journalism is about giving a voice, not about having one.

The same holds true for mediators and their peace processes. If they are obsessed with secrecy, there will be no balanced reporting. There was considerable discussion about the degree of secrecy needed for successful mediation, and to what extent the media should act as an accountability or quality control mechanism. Some participants agreed that peace processes are often treated like sacred cows, and that it was impossible to criticise a process without being branded as being against peace. However, there was a strong feeling that media criticism of an ongoing peace process was counterproductive, in spite of examples where leaked information had given new impetus to the proceedings.

One positive contribution of the media that participants and panellists did agree on was the important role of the presence of journalists in the protection of civilians, though sadly, journalists themselves have increasingly become targets.

The politics of implementation: reflections on the Northern Irish peace process

The peace process in Northern Ireland offers an impressive range of insights for those engaged in peacemaking efforts, not least the importance of sustaining momentum through a lengthy implementation period. Drawing on the experiences of those who participated directly in the process as a government negotiator, a member of a conflict party and an independent expert, the discussion generated reflections on a range of themes: what tactics and principles were used to increasing leverage and pressure on the parties? What were their perceptions of this? How was reaching agreement on complex, unappealing issues such as power-sharing and disarmament

resolved? What role did “creative ambiguity” play in creating political space? And what processes occurred to develop internal consensus amongst armed groups and political movements?

The Northern Ireland peace process is replete with examples of the creative use of language and positions. As one individual observed “a good peace deal is a lot of fudge and fancy foot work”. Ambiguity, it was agreed, is a “diminishing asset” and needs to be squeezed out over the duration of peace negotiations for sustainable conclusions. Caution was directed to mediators on the “overuse” of opaque language and procedures as it can make those for whom the peace is being negotiated on behalf of “despair that change will ever come”. Indeed, as one participant observed, it can become “destructive ambiguity”.

Synonymous with disarmament or decommissioning, “putting weapons beyond use” in the parlance of the Northern Ireland process (terms chosen to avoid the surrender that is often associated with the term and concept of disarmament), dogged the peace talks from their inception. It provides a powerful example of the compounding effect of preconditions, and the reaction-rejection cycle associated with them. The establishment of the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning was explained, and provides a model worthy of replication in other settings where trust is low or security institutions tainted.

The panel reflected on learning lessons from the African National Congress and the anti-apartheid struggle more broadly, particularly on the challenge of building consensus within a political movement with an armed wing. The strong desire for unity meant that considerable time and energy was invested in communication and debate with the membership and wider movement. Tallying this with the sequencing of a peace process can be a tight balancing act, but crucial for an inclusive conclusion.

Finally, in identifying lessons learned a synchronicity of opinion was clear: invest time in building trust and personal relationships, often difficult to do in the early stages when there is strong pressure to quickly resolve the problems at hand but will likely reap dividends when the process hits rough patches; avoid preconditions on dialogue as positions quickly ossify around them; the pressure of deadlines and “forcing devices” such as progress reviews were recalled as important for keeping talks moving even in tougher moments; proximity talks can assist in reducing people “mishearing each other”, but requires the impartiality of the mediator(s) to be beyond question; and, always maintain contact even through complete breakdowns and stalemates.

No easy answers: a debate on peace and justice

Moderated by Owen Bennett-Jones and set against the backdrop of ongoing mediation under the constraints of ICC indictments in Northern Uganda, as well as the situation in Darfur, the debate provided a direct opportunity for mediators to engage with the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC. The debate was not conclusive, but allowed for a stock-taking of the developing stance of the Chief Prosecutor and also for a lively general discussion.

While of course “the law is what it is”, the ICC has its mandate, and mediators theirs too, there are bound to be situations where the objectives of the Prosecutor and of mediators differ. Mediators’ objectives are to end war, reduce human suffering and to reconcile parties. The debate addressed the question as to whether or not there is proof that the threat of prosecution works, either to deter the worst abuses, or to encourage parties to negotiate. The ICC, it was argued on one side, is a young organisation and fragile through its failure to gain universal acceptance. While numerous African and European countries have ratified the Rome Statute, many Asian countries and countries with simmering conflict have not. This makes the ICC largely irrelevant in many conflict situations. In response, it was argued that the ICC is not a human rights court, but rather exists to “transform huge massacres into small cases”, and that any fragility that remains lies not in the lack of global standards, but in the lack of a global police. Delivery rests most often in the hands of States Parties (to the Rome Statute).

It was argued that the dichotomy between peace and justice in ongoing conflict in the ICC’s case was a transitional problem, and was likely to disappear altogether when the Court had been in existence for some decades. It was also argued that although indictments might be a problem for instant peace, they might also assist in ensuring longer-term solutions. An indictment too against key leaders might have the effect of removing them from the scene, allowing other, perhaps more pro peace leaders to emerge.

The issue of sequencing was also raised, in terms of the occasional necessity to allow people to gain enough confidence in peace having taken hold to pursue justice later. It is impossible to move further (on justice) than the process allows. However, silence also has a price.

Power in mediation: do great powers make great mediators?

The discussion examined the role of great powers in mediation. What is the added value in any mediation of great power involvement? What are the types of power that are most relevant in conflict mediation and how are they used most effectively? What are the responsibilities and limitations of great powers in terms of the ability to contribute to successful mediation outcomes? The discussion approached these questions from the point of view of the United States, India, China and the United Kingdom.

The discussion noted that a powerful country can bring significant assets to a mediation process, but that its contribution is very much dependent on context and on the types of assets a particular context needs from a mediator. These assets may include good relationships with the conflict parties, ability to form alliances or “group of friends” in support of a peace process, economic incentives, access to intelligence information, and promises of reconstruction assistance. Also, great powers are most effective when they manage to work together to bring to bear their military, economic and other assets to convince parties to commit to peaceful solutions. Specific cases were mentioned where the assets of a powerful country were immediately relevant to a particular situation and contributed to the resolution of a dispute. Such an example

included the role of the US in a dispute between Greece and Turkey in the mid-1990s. It was also recognized that, although in some cases great power involvement is crucial for the resolution of specific conflicts, as for example, the role of the US in the Middle East, in other cases such engagement may not be desirable.

It was also emphasized that a powerful country needs to always consider the domestic impetus for conflict resolution prior to intervening or offering its services as a mediator. It was argued that India's engagement in Sri Lanka was not successful because domestic consensus supporting India's involvement was lacking. On the other hand, in Nepal, India worked with a large part of the political spectrum and was conscious to ensure that the Nepali concern of domination by India was addressed. India facilitated key moments of the Nepali peace process urging all parties to continue talking and to not resort to violent means to resolve their differences. It was pointed out that India has been involved in mediation and facilitation mostly in its neighbourhood and that it has not yet had ambitions for a global involvement.

With regard to China, it was argued that China is very much preoccupied with its internal agenda of economic development and stability and does not see itself as a global force in mediation and peace efforts. However, it was also pointed out that China is slowly rethinking its international role and responsibilities and increasing its contribution to peacekeeping operations. In certain cases, such as North Korea, China has no choice but to get involved and it is accepted as a key player by the parties. However, it was emphasized that in that situation, China does not hold the key to the issue which is rather held by the DPRK and the US.

Finally, although not a great power, the UK can contribute to mediation efforts by utilizing two of its main assets: i) its membership and influence in important alliances and institutions, including the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, the G8 and the UN Security Council; ii) its small and effective armed force which can contribute to peace-making, as for example in Sierra Leone.

An overriding conclusion of the discussion was that powerful countries and great power make the most significant contributions to peace processes when they complement each other's efforts or offer a supporting role to the efforts of others, including international institutions.

Conclusions: OSLO forum and beyond

While the Forum has become increasingly topical – focussing much more on specific conflicts than on concepts – it has become more self-critical and complex in its approaches to those subjects, generating a range of insights and options, which participants continue to stress they find extremely valuable. An example of the changing character of the event was that alongside discussion on the thorny political problems presented by a Somalia or an Afghanistan, participants engaged with just as much vigour on the subject of the uses of psychology in mediation, and in calling for the issue of women in track one conflict resolution to take its rightful place on the main agenda next year, such that practical strategies to resolve ongoing blockages can be identified and shared.

As in previous years, participants of the OSLO forum 2007 put forward many ideas and suggestions for further debate, and we are keen to incorporate and address those in our planning of next year's retreat and our work more broadly. While the next OSLO forum is scheduled to take place at the end of June in 2008, a related meeting focusing on Asian conflicts is scheduled to take place in Beijing in March 2008.

Agenda OSLO forum

Tuesday June 26

- 17.30 – 19.00 Meyersalen Room - Opening
Dialogue in a Divided World:
Kofi Annan reflects on ten years of talking for peace
- 19.00 – 19.45 Reception
- 19.45 – 20.00 Photograph
- 20.00 Dinner
Speech by Erik Solheim

Wednesday June 27

- 08.30 – 09.45 Lumholtz Room
Optional
“Situation report breakfast” with Ian Martin
Nepal

- Karl Johan Room
Optional
“Situation report breakfast” with Geir O. Pedersen
Lebanon
- 10.30 – 12.30 T. Heftye Room
De-escalation through dialogue: Engaging Iran

- Karl Johan Room
Somalia: What role left for dialogue?
- 13.00 – 15.00 Informal lunch
- 15.00 – 17.00 T. Heftye Room
From bullets to ballots: Enabling the transformation of armed groups

- Karl Johan Room
Beyond boiling point: is dialogue still a viable tool in Afghanistan?
With special remarks from Chair Jonas Gahr Støre
- 18.00 – 19.00 Library
The Mediator’s Studio
The BBC World’s Lyse Doucet interviews Kofi Annan
- 19.00 – 19.45 Country Club
Optional
Search for Common Ground Multimedia Presentation
on “The Use of TV and Radio in Peacebuilding”
(with short video clips)
- 19.45 Informal Barbeque

Thursday 28 June

- 08.00 – 09.00 Lumholtz Room
Optional
“Situation report breakfast” with Jon Hanssen-Bauer
Sri Lanka
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Karl Johan Room
Optional
“Situation report breakfast” with C. Andrew Marshall
Darfur
- 09.30 – 11.00 T. Heftye Room
Polling for peace: public opinion as a tool for mediators
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Karl Johan Room
Psychology in mediation: some principles for practitioners
- 11.30 – 13.00 T. Heftye Room
The media and mediation: Leading journalists have their say

Karl Johan Room
The politics of implementation: Northern Ireland
- 13.00 – 15.00 Informal lunch
- 14.00 – 15.00 Second floor coffee area
Women in mediation: identifying solutions
- 15.00 – 16.00 Meyersalen Room
Justice in peace process: no easy answers
A debate
- 16.15 – 17.45 Meyersalen Room
Power in mediation: Do great powers make great mediators?
- 17.45 – 18.00 Meyersalen Room
Conclusion
- 19.00 Excursion on the Oslo Fjord

OSLO forum

Participants, speakers and discussants

Participants

Sir Michael Aaronson	Chairman of the Board, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Mr Walid Musa Abdelkarim	Senior Political Advisor, European Commission Delegation in Kenya
President Martti Ahtisaari	Former President of Finland; President and Chairman of the Board, Crisis Management Initiative
Mr Yasushi Akashi	Representative of the Government of Japan on Peace building, Japan Centre for Conflict Prevention
Ambassador Christopher Alexander	Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan
Dr Samir Altaqi	Director, Orient Center for Studies, Syria
Dame Margaret Anstee	Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Angola
Dr Günther Bächler	Special Advisor for Peacebuilding in Nepal, Foreign Ministry of Switzerland
Ambassador Atta El-Manan Bakhit	Assistant Secretary General, Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC)
Dr Andrea Bartoli	Sant' Egidio Representative in New York; Director Center for International Conflict Resolution, Columbia University
Ms Betty Bigombe	Senior Fellow, United States Institute of Peace (USIP); Former LRA- Uganda mediator
Ambassador Hans Brattskar	Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka
Mr Matthew Bryden	Independent expert on Somalia
Right Honourable Kim Campbell	Former Prime Minister of Canada; Former Secretary-General Club de Madrid
Ambassador Emilio Cassinello	Director General, Toledo International Centre for Peace
Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh	Director and Professor of Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Patterson School of Diplomacy
Prof Diana Chigas	Co-Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice, CDA-Collaborative Learning Projects
General Lamine Cisse	Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Central African Republic
Ms Sarah Cliffe	Head, Fragile States Unit, World Bank
Dr Elizabeth Cousens	Vice President, International Peace Academy (IPA)
Dr Audrey Cronin	Academic Director of Studies, Oxford Leverhulme Programme on the Changing Character of War, Nuffield College
Mr Alastair Crooke	Director, Conflicts Forum
Prof Ahmet Davutoğlu	Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey on Foreign Policy

Ambassador Alvaro de Soto	Former United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
Ambassador Jan Egeland	Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on matters relating to the prevention and resolution of conflict; Former Emergency Relief Coordinator
Mr Gareth Evans	President, International Crisis Group (ICG)
Mr Hans Jacob Frydenlund	Director for East and Central Africa, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ambassador Thomas Greminger	Head of Political Affairs Division IV / Human Security, Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Michele Griffin	Officer-in-Charge, Policy Planning and Mediation Support, United Nations Department of Political Affairs
Mr Martin Griffiths	Director, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer	Norwegian Special Envoy to Sri Lanka
Mr Tore Hattrem	Director General, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Priscilla Hayner	Director, Peace and Justice Program and Director, Geneva Office, International Center for Transitional Justice
Prof Nicholas Fink Haysom	Political Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General
Dr Bruce Jones	Co-Director, Center on International Cooperation (CIC) New York University
Ambassador Mona Juul	Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Norway
Ms Raya Kadyrova	President, Foundation for Tolerance International, Kyrgyzstan
Ms Rina Kristmoen	Counsellor, Somali Affairs, Royal Norwegian Embassy Nairobi
Mr James LeMoyne	Advisor Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, former Special Advisor of the United Nations Secretary-General for Colombia
Mr Ram Manikkalingam	Advisor, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka
Mr John Marks	President and Founder, Search for Common Ground
Ms Susan Collin Marks	Senior Vice President, Search for Common Ground
Mr Andrew Marshall	Deputy Director, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Mr Ian Martin	Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Nepal
Mr Luis Moreno-Ocampo	Chief Prosecutor, International Criminal Court (ICC)
Dr Thant Myint-U	Former UN DPA, Senior Visiting Fellow IPA
Mr Geir O. Pedersen	Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in the Southern Lebanon
Dr Desra Percaya	Director of International Security and Peace, Indonesia
Ambassador Thomas Pickering	Former US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Dr Surin Pitsuwan	Former Foreign Minister of Thailand
Sir Kieran Prendergast	Advisor to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs
Ms Elisabeth Rehn	Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dr Kirsti Samuels	Senior Project Manager, Constitution-Building Processes, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
Shri Shyam Saran	Special Envoy of the Indian Prime Minister; Former Foreign Secretary
Ambassador Svein Sevje	Norwegian Special Envoy for the Middle East
Mr Donald C. Sinclair	Director-General, Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Canada
General Sir Rupert Smith	Former Deputy Supreme Commander Allied Powers Europe
Ambassador Jenö Staehelin	Board Member, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Dr Gunnar Stålsett	Norwegian Special Advisor on East Timor
Mr Michael Vatikiotis	Southeast Asia Regional Representative, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Ambassador Francesc Vendrell	European Union Special Representative for Afghanistan
Mr Johan Vibe	Special Envoy of Norway to the peace process in Colombia
Ms Teresa Whitfield	Director, Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF)
Dr Ruan Zongze	Vice President, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)

Speakers

Mr Kofi Annan	Former United Nations Secretary-General
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Discussants

Lord Alderdice	FRC Psych, psychiatrist and president of Liberal International; former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly
Dr Ali Ansari	Director, Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews
Mr Owen Bennett-Jones	BBC World news correspondent and presenter
Dr Baburam Bhattarai	Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist)
General John de Chastelain	Head of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, Northern Ireland
Ms Lyse Doucet	BBC World news correspondent and presenter
Dr Colin Irwin	Research Fellow in the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool and specialist on the use of public opinion polling in peace processes (Northern Ireland)
Mr Rami Khouri	Director, Issam Fares Institute, American University of Beirut; Editor, Lebanese Daily Star
Mr Conor Murphy	Sinn Féin; Minister for Regional Development, Northern Ireland

Mr Jonathan Powell
Mr Ahmed Rashid

Former Chief of Staff to British Prime Minister Tony Blair
Pakistani journalist and author of “Taliban: Militant Islam,
Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia” and
“Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia”