

# Track II Mediation

## Unpacking the process, exploring the potential

For the purpose of this session, Track I mediation will be defined as diplomacy conducted by government officials, whereas the term Track II mediation will refer to dialogue between members of opposing parties who are not official representatives and which takes place outside the formal peace process. While distinctions between peacemaking tracks are not always as clear in practice as they are in theory, it is important to be aware of each track's advantages and disadvantages for engaging in mediation.

Depending on the nature of the Track II endeavour, participation in these efforts can vary enormously. Track II initiatives carried out by professional non-governmental conflict resolution practitioners can involve stakeholders who have some connections to their government but are not official representatives of their government. They can also be people close to officials, former diplomats and sometimes friends of the political leaders.

In many conflicts, state actors can do very little within their official roles while some Track II actors can prove to be significant contributors to managing conflicts. Track II initiatives can go beyond the limits of formal diplomacy and are responding to the need for unofficial, informal initiatives which don't require formal commitments by the conflict parties. They are designed to deal with issues beyond the reach of official efforts, in a different way and with a different timeframe. They also operate without the leverage of pressure based on power.

Track II processes can complement Track I peacemaking efforts in many ways and at various points during a peace process. Track II practitioners can facilitate workshops that bring parties together across conflict lines to engage in low-key dialogue and further understanding of the conflict from the perspective of the other parties. Track II processes can also be helpful in stimulating new ideas and recommendations for potential political solutions to a conflict which may, in turn, find their way into the Track I process. Some track II initiatives have created informal forums for identifying common interests and generating, testing (and possibly vetting) ideas; provided reality checks that led to the clarification of intentions and the correction of misperceptions; and provided reliable channels for unofficial communications on sensitive issues and during times of heightened tension. When official Track I talks are interrupted by a highly contentious issue, they can be referred to a parallel Track II process which may bring together actors who have developed interpersonal relationships over time for deeper discussion of the issue, away from the formal Track I process.

The second main advantage of Track II initiatives is their ability to shift public opinion. They can complement and reinforce Track I initiatives by building a peace constituency—people who see the value of peaceful relations with the opposing party and who will become public advocates of formal negotiations. In this way, Track II activities can be useful in stimulating the ripeness of a peace process. In some places Track II actors can also play a significant role in influencing and moulding foreign and security policies by seeking, for example, to informally ascertain the positions of the parties before they enter into official and formal talks. In addition, Track II initiatives can prove to be very valuable in resolving post-agreement disputes after Track I negotiations have concluded. Such disputes are common and Track II actors can play a crucial role, especially when sections of the population are unhappy with, or ill-informed about, the outcomes of the agreement.

Finally, Track II negotiations sometimes involve armed political groups or other groups that officials cannot engage with for legal reasons. They may also be groups with whom officials do not want to be seen engaging in formal dialogue because of a lack of popular or political support. Track II actors can be less concerned about the risk of conveying official recognition.

Despite these advantages, mediation processes at the Track II level have sometimes been ignored, criticised or dismissed by Track I actors. The long-term approach entailed by Track II initiatives often makes the assessment of the success of past and current Track II efforts very complex. As many initiatives involve a series of engagements it is hard to assess which intervention was decisive. In both Track I and Track II initiatives, facilitators need to be astute to the politics surrounding the process. Indeed, some argue that some Track II efforts are at best a distraction, and at worst a trap; enabling a regime to send out misinformation and portray itself as more willing to compromise than it really is.

Building on concrete examples, this session will focus on Track II processes involving actual mediation. It aims to elaborate on their added value in peacemaking and investigate what these processes can and cannot achieve. The session will consider whether Track II processes provide a valuable adjunct to formal peace negotiations; compensate for the absence of official Track I negotiations; or complement official processes by counterbalancing their constraints. The session will also consider cases where Track II activities have actually complicated, damaged or undercut the work of Track I actors and identify ways to improve co-operation to avoid this disruption of the formal process. The session will also explore what Track I actors can learn from Track II initiatives in order to ensure that different peacemaking efforts complement and reinforce one another.

## Questions for discussion

**Which Track II processes have worked or helped pave the way for peace? Which stakeholders have been the most efficient when leading Track II talks?**

**How can mediators make better use of Track II processes and their ability to correct misperceptions, bridge differences, keep channels of communication open and influence public opinion (when the process is public)?**

**Is it possible to identify some points which might make future Track II dialogue processes more productive?**

**How can the useful strategies and tools employed in Track II processes be carried over into Track I mediation? What can be learned from Track II confidence-building measures and how can they be used in formal channels?**

**In which current conflicts areas could Track II initiatives potentially add value? What would it take to encourage initiatives in these areas?**

**Is there a significant risk that Track II processes undermine or undercut formal processes and how can this be avoided?**