

Peacebuilding challenges in an unpredictable world

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Ladies and Gentlemen, we live in a world in which violent conflict seems pervasive. But this is no excuse for pessimism: instead consider that never before has peacebuilding had the profile and capacity that it has today to demonstrate that it is the right response to war.

This morning I would like to share with you some of the challenges we face in magnifying the impact of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is not an easy fix, it requires investment and political capital. And it also requires imagination. A colleague in Kashmir observed, after taking part in a peacebuilding initiative, that it effectively gave birth to a new reality in which the idea of collaborating with somebody on the other side entered our imagination. It is in creating this bridge in the imaginations of people who have been engulfed by violence that peacebuilding is critical.

Shocking statistics demonstrate the destructive impact of armed conflict around the world. They are repeated so often as to become banal. They are not. We must associate real people with the numbers. What does it really mean to the real people involved that:

- More than a billion people live in places affected by large-scale violence;
- that more than 65 million refugees and displaced people;
- that conflict, terrorism and political instability cost the global economy more than \$13trillion a year, that is more than 13% of its total value.

This litany of violence leaves a legacy that will continue to impede development, exacerbate poverty, violate human rights and undermine justice.

On this Commonwealth Day, with the theme of *Peacebuilding Commonwealth* let me put it to you that we must think about how states and societies, individually and collectively, can navigate the proliferation of violent conflicts and why the need for peacebuilding is greater than ever.

It is not just that the promotion of peacebuilding as an ideal is important. We need to reimagine what peace can be whilst recognising that peacebuilding is what happens in real life: it involves real people changing the way we think about how our societies work and how to transform the broken relationships that litter societies riven by armed conflict.

There is a simplicity to the notion of building peace . but as the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung framed peace it is more than just the absence of overt violent conflict, or negative peace; rather positive peace describes the attitudes, relationships, structures and institutions that underpin and sustain peaceful societies. More recently the Institute for Economics and Peace has outlined a system of eight factors that work together to build positive peace . from well functioning government through the equitable distribution of resources to the acceptance of the rights of others. For most countries, it is an aspirational list. So when the absence of these factors threaten or even generate violent conflict, what can be done?

Peacebuilding, peacekeeping and peacemaking, were popularised as a response to violent conflict by the 1992 UN *An Agenda for Peace*. Let's think of peacebuilding as a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, mediation and

dialogue, the promotion of institution building, and political as well as economic transformation.

However, we face the challenge that prevailing responses to armed conflict are reactive and securitised. Sometimes violent conflicts erupt unexpectedly but more often than not they approach in slow motion and efforts to prevent them are too little too late. And responding late, governments too often intervene with military force, even though this escalates violence and undermines painstaking conflict prevention efforts, and so inhibits the space for negotiated political solutions to be found.

There are, however, opportunities for peacebuilding actions to gain currency. There are more people and organisations involved in peacebuilding than ever before . international organisations, regional groupings and multilateral bodies, NGOs, universities . international and local actors are engaging in an ever wider pattern of responses to violent armed conflict.

At the global level we can see positive momentum. For all the criticism thrown at it, the UN is a champion of peacebuilding.

- A 2015 review of the UN's peace architecture stressed that 'lasting peace' is achieved not through military and technical engagements, but through political solutions+
- the inclusion of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies mandate within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that the United Nations adopted in 2016, provides an important bridge to a peacebuilding future; and
- The new Secretary General António Guterres has placed peace firmly at the centre of his agenda.

At a sub-state level from organisations such as my own or our partners in London at Saferworld and International Alert to a local organisation like the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria with which we work to address communal violence in the Plateau State of Nigeria - there are many and diverse actors engaging in practical responses. There are more and more efforts to make the engagement of different actors complementary and often civil society peacebuilding, from local community actors to INGOs, can go places that states or the UN cannot reach.

Peacebuilding is not just a question of making an emotional plea: the dedication of state and civil society actors to weave together peace agreements in contexts as diverse as Northern Ireland, Nepal, the Philippines and Colombia demonstrate that complex and protracted conflicts can give rise to negotiated political settlements. Let's be clear peace processes are not a panacea, after all a third of peace agreements break down and relapse into violence because not enough is invested in supporting societies in the difficult post conflict years as they move from violence to politics, but negotiated peace agreements have resolved 75 per cent of the nearly 60 armed conflicts that have ended over the last 30 years.

I recently came back from Kenya where I spent a few days with a group of Somalis from Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and the diaspora who were analysing what they could about the long running conflict in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Reflecting on what peacebuilding meant to them, their priorities are no different to those of so many people facing protracted armed conflict. They said peacebuilding initiatives give them:

- the space to connect, to analyse and devise joint responses to violence;
- the support and solidarity that is critical to people under threat from armed groups, oppressive and/or weak governments; and

- an ability to articulate a vision that without addressing the social and political aspirations of people affected by violent conflict, lasting peace cannot be achieved.

But it is a real shame and actually absurd that the capacity of people affected by conflict is too often ignored. People affected by violence are all too easily marginalised by those with power. Yet pioneers of peace who come from within communities experiencing violence . people who demonstrate resilience and creativity in responding to violence . need more support. I would like to give you a few examples of how peacebuilding can work, starting from the perspective of how it facilitates community action and community response to conflict drivers.

In the Central African Republic, a country that has come close to collapse in recent years, we have seen Local Peace Cells take on roles as mediators providing space for dialogue to resolve inter-communal violence amidst extreme insecurity. And they have brought their experience to an Inter Faith Dialogue Platform established by religious leaders and fed into a national dialogue process. Now the Peace Cells are pushing an agenda of how to engage with armed groups and how to create pathways out of violence for young people who without economic opportunities were sucked in at the height of the conflict. As in many contexts these efforts work best when they engage with and shape the agendas of state institutions, in this case the Ministry of Reconciliation. This local empowerment is peacebuilding in action.

A peacebuilding approach supports the facilitation of dialogue in the face of escalating tensions. The Nobel Prize-winning Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet that established an alternative, peaceful political process at a time when Tunisia was on the brink of civil war is a striking example of people driving a process to prevent escalation. But the work does not stop when the Nobel Prize is awarded, indeed this is just the beginning.

As the Tunisian experience indicated innovative peacebuilding work is not just about engaging at the community level. Critically it is about shaping what happens at the political level. Too often peace interventions are too narrow and only focus on the political, elite level. While official peace talks and negotiations are essential to end fighting they are never sufficient to secure and sustain the peace. Elite peace talks too often focus on what elites want, and elites generally want to protect themselves. Multiple and complementary paths are needed to facilitate more inclusive political transitions out of violence.

Inclusivity has rightly become a critical dimension of peacebuilding. Inclusion is both about who is at the table and the breadth of issues discussed. The agreement signed last year in Colombia is an example of innovative approaches to inclusion:

- for the first time it brought victims to the negotiations table and
- through the array of official and informal ways that women were brought into the process, including the creation of a dedicated sub commission on gender.

The experience has demonstrated how greater consideration of gendered power dynamics as well as an increased participation of women in the peace process creates greater buy in. And as Colombia works to implement peace accords it will better equip the country to address the difficulties it undoubtedly faces as it seeks to transition from 50 years of armed conflict with more than 6 million victims to a more sustainable peace.

Since 2009 experience in the Philippines, where Conciliation Resources was part of an International Contact Group comprised of 4 states and 4 NGOs to support the Malaysian facilitation of a 5 year process of talks between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, demonstrated how over 26 rounds of talks NGOs could support formal mediation leading to the signing of a peace agreement. And critically it enabled the NGOs to

be a link between local civil society and the formal process in feeding in ideas and then monitoring the implementation of the agreement. A recent example being a consultation process that enabled more than 3000 women to articulate their expectations and policy recommendation regarding the process.

Peacebuilding encompasses a wide range of engagements, and with the theme of today's event being "Education to support a peacebuilding Commonwealth", I want to share one peacebuilding initiative in which Conciliation Resources has engaged for the past decade in Kashmir, a protracted conflict that has destabilised South Asia for 70 years.

Educational collaboration across the Line of Control a de facto border that divides Indian and Pakistan administered Kashmir is one of a number of confidence building measures we have supported. These are an integral part of transforming conflictual relations, designed to facilitate contact and promote reliable, accountable and trustworthy behaviour and relations between conflicting parties.

We have worked with universities across the Line of Control to support the evolution of an informal Vice Chancellors Consortium bringing together VCs from at least 8 universities. It is a platform that aims to encourage educational collaboration across the divide. It has been a slow process with bureaucratic obstacles as well as political caution inhibiting progress. But it has been a framework for unique academic collaboration in terms of video lectures between universities across the divide and joint research projects on issues such as cross LoC investment, endangered languages, and exploring cross LoC tourism and peacebuilding and joint disaster management responses.

This is work that requires patience and persistence in the face of political resistance that has characterised cross-LoC relations for generations . but small steps need to demonstrate that it is possible to break down barriers and stereotypes and change mindsets. Education as an area for peacebuilding endeavour is particularly well suited to do this.

With the plethora of conflicts around the world there is no doubt that peacebuilding needs more and better support: it is undertaken too late, ignoring its potential to actually prevent conflict. Resolving conflict and building sustainable peace is long-term collaborative endeavour, one that the 52 member states of the Commonwealth need to engage with on an ongoing basis . within their own states, in relations with neighbouring states and as a community of states. While the Commonwealth Charter might articulate the principle that international peace and security, sustainable economic growth and development and the rule of law are essential to the progress and prosperity of all, the practice of international relations often struggles to live up to this aspiration.

Peacebuilding presents a framework and opportunities to promote and protect the Commonwealth's values of respect, tolerance and diversity and the goal of a more equitable and peaceful world. By electing to promote peacebuilding as a theme the Commonwealth is making a contribution to addressing these challenges. But the Commonwealth cannot afford to be complacent . it is not enough to choose a powerful concept and be seduced by comfortable rhetoric. If a Peacebuilding Commonwealth is to have meaning states must make their actions align with their words.