Booklet 2: Civil society – rebuilding peace worldwide

Cypriot Civil Society Strengthening Programme

International Civil Society Forum

June 2008
Peacebuilding

The Forum’s sessions on peacebuilding took us from South Africa to Northern Ireland and to the Cypriot history of bi-communal civil society efforts. We heard inspiring tales of how people have to work through difficult and painful issues – because, as Trevor Ringland and Dave Cullen from Northern Ireland put it, ‘we have to live together. Now we can choose whether we live together in peace or with violence.’ Their very personal and moving story was put in context by an overview of civil society in peacebuilding from Professor Diana Chigas, Tufts University. Roelf Meyer described civil society in the long and complicated South African peace process that led to a new constitution for the country in 1994. Dr Bülent Kanol, Director Management Centre and Dr Maria Hadjipavlou, Lecturer at the University of Cyprus, discussed their research on peacebuilding efforts in Cyprus since the 1970s. They concluded by moving to the here and now, with a discussion session where participants made very useful suggestions for ways to move forward as CSOs, within this window of opportunity we have. Contact bkanol@mc-med.org for information about ongoing bi-communal meetings.

There was a sense of momentum and optimism at the Forum, fulfilled afterwards at the 2008 Civil Society Organisations Awards Ceremony, where 16 exceptional organisations received awards recognising their work on Cyprus.

Civil society - bringing people together in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland there are walls between people – visible concrete walls dividing neighbourhoods from inflicting violence on each other, but also invisible walls that people know they can’t cross. Starting with Partition in 1921 when Ireland was divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there has been conflict in Northern Ireland – sometimes to the scale of a civil war, with bombs and fighting against the British troops, and violence between civilians. Catholics who see the British Protestants as colonisers fight Protestants who see Northern Ireland as part of Britain. Indiscriminate bombings and shootings, attacks on people who enter the ‘others’ areas, provocative marches and demonstrations have created a very tense and unhappy situation. Although a peace process started in 1997 it is hard to get over the knowledge that 3,600 people have died and lots more have been injured. After so much hurt and damage, how can people live in an Ireland that’s shared and hopeful?

Today’s adults in Northern Ireland grew up in a world of pain and hate. But they want to see a different world for their children. Trevor Ringland, one of our speakers from PeacePlayers International, described an 11-year-old boy whose parents and sister had been killed by an IRA bomb. In retaliation for that bomb, there was a shooting into a Catholic pub, where more people died. The little brother of one of the pub shooting victims was also a young boy. A definitive moment for Trevor was in 1996 at a rugby match arranged to promote peace on the island between an Irish rugby team and another made up of some of the world’s best players. These two boys attended the match to highlight the consequences of a society in conflict – and 30,000 people, both Catholic and Protestant, turned up to show support. What happened to them was a challenge to the people to find a better way of “doing relationships” on the island so as to avoid such tragedy in the future.

‘We have already done an awful lot of damage, there’s a lot of hurt here. But we can avoid future damage now. We have to create new definitions for ourselves. Our Irish tradition has to include the British tradition, and the British tradition has to include the Irish tradition. We have to think about inclusion, not the exclusion that led to conflicts and violence. I’m an Ulsterman, (one of the four provinces that make up the Island of Ireland), I am Irish and I am British and those two are interchangeable. I am a European and anyone who demeans any one part of me demeans me as a person.’
One Small Step

Trevor is involved with the One Small Step campaign, working to pass on peace and not conflict to the younger generations. The idea is to encourage people to take one step to interact with the other community.

“If you make friends, you destroy enemies’. It’s about taking responsibility for your own life and taking a step, breaking down a barrier. It can be a big step or a small step, but if everybody does something it adds up. Throughout the conflict there were thousands of people trying to maintain community while others were destroying it. A massive and too often unrecognised effort that helped stop our society from breaking down completely into a civil war, the One Small Step campaign includes people from business, education, sport, the arts and voluntary bodies. They are all committed to a shared future and building from ordinary peoples’ perspectives – as well as lobbying the government to actively promote a shared society.

“David and I are children of the Troubles. We need to let go of the past and not contaminate the future of our children. Nelson Mandela said, “you don’t make peace with your friends, you make peace with your enemies”. In Northern Ireland, I feel we have to make peace with those enemies who should be our friends – and with the others you accommodate them and don’t let those who hate the most determine your relationships.”

Trevor, a Protestant whose father is a policeman, volunteers with PeacePlayers International in Northern Ireland together with Catholic Dave Cullen.

Dave told his story of growing up in an awful area of West Belfast, of his father being killed in the Troubles in the early 1970s, of his mother’s struggle to bring up the family, of getting into fights – once, ending up in hospital with serious injuries. Because his father had been a Republican, the police and British Army harassed his family. Basketball is an American game with no political connotations. Playing basketball at university gave Dave a breathing space.

PeacePlayers International was founded on the premise that ‘children who play together can learn to live together’, in 2002 by brothers Sean and Brendan Tuohey. They realised they had a potential to use their skills and passion for Ireland, along with their contacts in America, to help the troubles between Catholics and Protestants.

www.peaceplayersintl.org

PeacePlayers – play together, live together

Dave is now a volunteer coach with PeacePlayers, where children and young people from both communities play basketball in mixed teams.

The first PeacePlayers events in Belfast took place with children from two schools in the same area. Although the schools were on the same street, the children had never met. Fearing violence, the school authorities kept the kids apart – even arranging different start times so that they would not walk to school at the same time. Some parents refused to let their children join the first PeacePlayers game. For the first game, the children were taken to the sports hall on separate buses. When the game went well, with the children playing together and talking to each other, they shared buses for the next visit. Those kids had made a connection across the walls.

Dave said: ‘PeacePlayers International, Northern Ireland has taught me that there is a better way than that which being brought up in a segregated community teaches you. That you do not have to hate the other side of the street. They are human beings who love their families the same as we all do.’ Dave to this day would
admit that there is no love lost between him and the police or British Army for what they did to his family. However, he chooses to use that anger to help other children in similar surroundings that he was, to a better future. Although Dave has moved to a Protestant area and send his children to one of the few integrated schools in Belfast, his family still have to hide their identity from their neighbours.

Dave insists that ‘the troubles in Northern Ireland are far, far from over.’ But having ongoing problems is a strong reason to engage with them and do something to solve them yourself.

Putting our experiences in perspective

Diana started by discussing the concept of civil society. Civil society includes many kinds of organisations and associations – public purpose NGOs, trade unions, churches, chambers of commerce … Civil society with international links is very different from locally-based CSOs (often called community-based organisations), and the geographical reach of a CSO can be anywhere between those two. Within the development aid sector we can also talk about ‘project society’ – organisations that only exist to implement one project after another, taking whatever project they can get, without having a deeper vision for their existence.

It’s difficult to assess civil society’s contribution to peace – most peacebuilding programmes are separate efforts aimed at affecting one (often small) piece of the puzzle, and no one project can do everything. Practitioners often say, ‘I have to assume that, over time, all of our different activities will add up.’ How can the small steps add up to create momentum for change?

Diana presented findings from the Reflecting on Peace Practice project (RPP), which has involved over 200 agencies and many individuals who work on conflict around the world in a collaborative effort on how civil society peacebuilding efforts can improve peace impacts.

The RPP found that although many peace activists work at many levels, conducting good programmes at each level, the potential of these multiple efforts is not fully realised. How do many different peace efforts have cumulative impacts on a situation? And how can we link micro and macro levels in designing programmes in order to improve the impacts of all programs on the broader peace?

You can read more, and download papers, at www.cdainc.com/cdawww/default.php

Talk to people, involve people

Civil society cannot build peace by itself. Civil society is involved in many activities that contribute to peace, but it is not the main actor in the process. A peace process needs synchronised progress on many levels – social, political and structural. It also needs support from the leadership and many other actors, including civil society.
Civil society actors work towards peace by reaching out to other concerned people: peace cannot be built without the participation of citizens. There are two main tactics here: involving ‘more people’ or involving ‘key people’, at two levels: the individual and the socio-political. This is illustrated in the diagram on page 4.

Key people are important individuals who matter to the success of the initiative (although their effect on the peacebuilding project could be either negative or positive). On the other hand, broadening ownership of the peace process through participation is important. This inclusion – nurturing a sense that the peace process belongs to people – is more important than holding activities and their success. In Northern Ireland 65% of people had some involvement in the peace process. In South Africa there were peace committees and the peace and reconciliation trials were televised. In this way people change from being ‘targets’ to being ‘actors’ and feel that they are able to do something about peace.

For successful peacebuilding you have to involve both key people and more people – one without the other is ineffective.

These civil society roles help peace efforts ‘add up’:

- Communication – between parties, by bringing excluded voices to the table, communicating with the general public, opening space for dialogue on difficult issues. In Macedonia, bringing women politicians from radically different parties together to further the cause of women’s issues was a good example of facilitating dialogue.
- Broadening the ownership of the process
- Socialisation and bridge-building – creating an environment that is responsive
- Preventing ‘spoilers’ from ‘spoiling’.

However, there are certain caveats to keep in mind:

- The participation of civil society is not the same as participation of all the people. Civil society is not always balanced ethnically or politically.
- Local CSOs may get their funding from larger international NGOs, who in turn are funded by governments … The priorities for how to spend this money are often not the priorities of those local CSOs. It can be difficult to maintain an independent vision and have the courage to negotiate with your funder, but it is a central feature of independent civil society.
- Independent civil society is also not automatically the same as peacebuilding: there has to be a link between civil society and the peace processes.
- Sometimes CSOs do not need to be autonomous to help the peace process – there is much to be said, for example, for working with your government rather than against it.
- It is possible for civil society to support democracy, but fuel conflict at the same time. For example, independent media can both promote reconciliation or violence.

We know this works:

- We need to link strategy to analysis. Most peacebuilding programmes are ineffective because they miss the mark: their strategy is not based on thorough enough analysis of the situation.
- We need to establish linkages between:
  - Track 1 (official processes) and track 2 (citizens processes)
  - ‘Key’ people to ‘more’ people – especially the ‘hard to reach’ people.
  - Individual work to larger-scale socio-political work. This works where key people in important positions start working for reconciliation.
Ways for key people to link the personal and the socio-political – bringing peacebuilding to the public rather than personal sphere – include:

- Using reconciliation language in public
- Taking actions in a professional or political capacity that show concern for the other side
- Work to get ideas adopted into policies, structures and agreements
- Put ‘previously unthinkable’ ideas on the negotiating table
- Change structures and processes to address the roots and drivers of conflict
- Empower people – changing ‘targets’ into ‘actors’.

**Peacebuilding cooperation between local and international agencies**

Local CSOs can work with international agencies or donors to drive peacebuilding work. This can have significant benefits – and there are some risks for drawbacks too.

There can be tremendous opportunities in cooperating with international agencies:

- An open space to bring out important issues
- Creating safe spaces for people to meet across the divides
- Protection of people
- Increased participation
- Provide comparative experiences from other countries
- Help CSOs access resources
- International advocacy attention to the issue.

However, cooperating with international organisations can also undermine long-term impacts:

- Constrains CSOs’ opportunities to deal with governments
- Can undermine local efforts and momentum with changes in strategies, funding etc
- International agencies may pursue their own priorities rather than those that are most important locally: because of funding or political constraints, they may fund work that is relatively easy – but that may not address the biggest issues.

In the end, the solution has to work for the people who will live with its results.

**Roelf Meyer: South Africa’s reconciliation**

“I sincerely think there’s a window of opportunity here today for Cyprus.

I wanted to confirm what Trevor and Dave said about Northern Ireland. Northern Irish leaders came to South Africa in 1997. They were not prepared to sit in the same room. Even when Nelson Mandela came to speak to them, he had to make two speeches. Today you see what the end result is – a peace process is happening, even though it is not easy. What were those guys doing correctly in Northern Ireland?

In South Africa we started the process for democracy in 1990 – with talks about talks, then some talks, then talks about negotiations, then negotiations. We didn’t learn it - we just practiced it. A few years into trying to solve the problem of democratic rule, the violence started to erupt. In South Africa there were high levels of political violence at that time (there has been none in Cyprus recently, thankfully). We had more people killed between 1990 and 1994 than in the whole previous era of apartheid.

We couldn’t talk about peace while violence was going on. Who could? There was one person who could: Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He could say, ‘You, Mandela, de Klerk, get together and talk about how we can establish peace.’ This is a successful model of how civil society got the politicians involved. On a Saturday
afternoon we got together with Archbishop Desmond Tutu. That was the first time we sat down as a group of South Africans. Three months later, on 14 September, the document was signed – the National Peace Accord. There were ten chapters – dealing with each area that was important to define peace at the time. It was negotiated in three months. This was the start of the negotiations towards a peaceful settlement in South Africa.

Desmond Tutu and the rest of the leaders got together civil society, and business and political leaders. It was a tripartite arrangement which is why this became one of the most effective documents. Jaco Cilliers – here today working for UNDP-ACT – was one of the young activists getting it implemented. There were peace committees at the grassroots level. The perpetrators on the apartheid side and the activists on the anti-apartheid side sat down. They crossed the barrier in an institutional way and became a well-organised institution around South Africa during five years. And during the constitutional negotiations, these people looked after the peace and we could peacefully negotiate the constitution.

It was a cooperative effort, an interaction across the divide – racial separation – that had prevailed in South Africa for 340 years. We lived in different areas according to racial segregation. Is it like Cyprus? You might say the Cyprus problem is not racial. I challenge you – what is it then?

When I first came to Cyprus in 1997 I spoke to people in the south and I managed to cross to the north and talk. What I heard on both sides was that people talked about each other as enemies. Sometimes even worse – they spoke about each other as animals. I don’t think it should stay that way.

It should not stay that way. This day can become a time for a new beginning in Cyprus.”

Bi-communal work towards a solution in Cyprus: a history and a current portrait

After hearing these examples about civil society peace building around the world, what about the situation in Cyprus? Büulent Kanol, Director of the Management Centre, and Maria Hadjipavlou, Assistant Professor at the University of Cyprus (and founding member of the Peace Centre) gave an overview of their research from 2007 into this issue.

Conflict resolution work and peace building activities have had a long history in Cyprus. One of its aims was to create contacts between citizens from both societies to build a culture of mutual understanding and develop a human infrastructure in the event of a solution.

There have been civil society peacebuilding initiatives in Cyprus since the 1960s. The bulk of Cypriot peacebuilding has taken place between leaders and foreign guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey, Britain). Until the mass mobilisation of opinion for the Annan Plan referendum in Turkish Cypriot Community in 2004, the role of civil society had been very limited.

Yet, a great deal of less high-profile peacebuilding work did take place among Cypriot civil society from the 1980s onwards. Generally speaking, civil society peacebuilding work followed the intensity of ‘Track 1’ negotiations. During periods when the political climate was favourable, bi-communal activists linked their personal capacity to wider civil society organisations ‘to mobilise the masses’. When larger public sector unions and the Chamber of Commerce joined the smaller public benefit CSOs in peacebuilding, the movement gathered momentum.

Civil society movements in the Greek Cypriot community was:

- instrumental in the early stages of rapprochement and peacebuilding
- less effective when it came to actually influencing the process
- loosely defined, scattered and impermanent
- associated with political parties and other political forces.
Turkish Cypriot civil society movements were organised under two main platforms: ‘Common Vision’ and ‘This country is Ours’. They

- managed to set aside their differences over internal economic and political issues
- joined forces under the banner ‘Solution and EU’
- organised mass demonstrations to mobilise a ‘yes’ vote for the Annan Plan
- created the critical mass needed to topple intransigent political leadership.

In the lead-up to the referendum on the Annan Plan in 2004, Turkish Cypriot peacebuilding activists managed to marshal a mass movement to vote in favour (a good example of reaching ‘more people’). On the Greek Cypriot side, in contrast, peace activists failed to convince a broad base of support, and also failed to link their activities to Track 1 (official) processes.

While civil society efforts for reconciliation struggled through the decades, the political machinery and the media were seen as working against their efforts. Overall, civil society in the peacebuilding efforts is seen as led by very dedicated people, but also elite persons with good English skills, “intellectual idealists”. These people faced enormous criticism from their own communities – participating takes a lot of courage.

The researchers’ recommendations for new Cypriot peacebuilding initiatives are:

- Work intra-communally and develop a power-sharing culture in a multi-cultural society
- Discuss peacebuilding activities openly with more people in both societies
- Discuss the practical workings and benefits of a solution
- Work at the grass-roots level and develop campaigns which the people can fund and feel their own
- Fight together as Cypriots and realise our commonality
- Form a committee to formulate a common plan and call all the groups together – not to tell them what to do but recognise that we are a big movement in society
- De-politicise education and transform education into an institution for critical thinking and mutual understanding
- Support less biased media.

The research paper – containing far more detail about Cypriots’ views, a background to the Cyprus problem and similar – can be downloaded at 


It was very encouraging for us in the audience to hear about all the different ways that Cypriots have worked to be Cypriots together. It was also impressive to hear about the scale of problems and setbacks that they have to deal with.

Concluding words from Bülent Kanol:

“We need to build the joint mentality that the Cyprus conflict is a shared problem to be solved cooperatively and that there is an inter-dependent relationship between the two communities. Strengthening civil society’s peacebuilding is needed by programmes for both conflict resolution training, dialogue groups on different issues, and capacity building for institutions promoting joint projects as well as empowering NGOs. This will produce a new political bi-communal culture and movement as well as policy papers to be circulated both at the societal level and at the Track I level. We need to develop a third space in which all the peacebuilding groups and independent thinking individuals will have the opportunity to meet and work together. The efforts should be to make the peace process more civil society driven and less dominated by political leadership.

It is at this very junction that the bi-communal peace activists can play a leading role with their experience and skills and the necessary networks they have built over the years across the divide. This can only be possible with a firm strategic support and encouragement from the international community and their relevant organizations who believe that peace and stability in Cyprus will make a lot of difference not only for the region but for the security and well being of the whole humanity.”