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Dealing with the Past Roundtable on Promoting Reconciliation in Guatemala and the West Balkans

A KOFF Dealing with the Past Roundtable on „Promoting Reconciliation in Divided Societies: Challenges in Dealing with the Past in Guatemala and the West Balkans“ took place in April. This was the first in a series of consultations planned for this year on Dealing with the Past in Guatemala and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH), 10 years after the peace agreements in those two countries. It brought together Mark Salter, a senior program officer with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Stockholm, and the representatives of two Swiss NGOs active in BH and Guatemala, respectively Nena Skopljanac, director of medienhilfe who is program manager for the West Balkans, and Daniel Hostettler, responsible for the Guatemala program of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund.

In his presentation, Mark Salter placed particular emphasis on the issue of reconciliation in „divided“ societies, arguing that transitional societies suffer from many divisions, which in many cases do not arise from or lead to armed conflict, but are in need of some form of reconciliation. In his view, there is a need to mainstream conflict resolution mechanisms into democratic systems of governance. This is especially important in post-conflict societies when reconciliation becomes a matter of public policy. To address the need for guidance in the public sphere, IDEA has adopted a pragmatic approach to reconciliation which focuses on the need for healing, justice, truth-telling, and reparations.

The presentations by Daniel Hostettler and Nena Skopljanac focused on the challenges and practical issues involved in Dealing with the Past in Guatemala and the West Balkans, respectively. They provided an overview of the outstanding issues in the two countries and situated their work as NGOs accordingly. In the case of Guatemala, the Lenten Fund collaborated with other Swiss partners on a capacity-building program in the field of peace promotion in the Ixil region, an area which was severely affected by the war. The program met with numerous personnel and contextual difficulties and is only now after three years beginning to show some positive results, for example in the justice field. In the West Balkans, the focus of Medienhilfe has been on supporting independent media in their efforts to address the legacy of the war. One of the greatest challenges for local media has been to question nationalist interpretations of the war in their own countries.

The ensuing discussion drew attention to a number of unresolved issues in Dealing with the Past which are common to both regions. One of the most difficult issues to address is certainly impunity, which in turn is linked with the legacy of violence and the growth of criminal organizations and other „parallel powers.“ It was noted further that there is a need for external actors, i.e. both governmental and non-governmental organizations, to coordinate the development of strategies for Dealing with the Past in Guatemala and the West Balkans.
Gender Roundtable on UN Security Council Resolution 1325

At the beginning of April, representatives of the Swiss government, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academics attended the special session on the Swiss National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution 132. This session was the first occasion for Swiss NGOs and academics to discuss and comment on a first draft of the Swiss NAP. Participants stressed the richness and the detailed format of the draft. A lively discussion centered on such questions as accountability, monitoring and the role of non-governmental and non-state actors in the implementation of the NAP.

As the Chatham House Rule was applied at this roundtable, there are no references to specific organizations and speakers in this article. 04.04.06

Challenges and trends in the Sri Lankan peace process

In the wake of the 2nd round of peace talks in Geneva an off-the-record meeting on the current challenges and trends in the Sri Lankan peace process took place in mid-April at KOFF. Different NGOs, academics, members of the Diaspora and Sri Lankan guests participated and discussed the current political situation. Since the meeting was held off-the-record, there is no further information on the speakers and the specific topics of the discussion. 10.04.06

Palmyrah is a new KOFF member organization

At its last meeting the KOFF Steering Committee approved the admission of the Palmyrah Association, the Bern-Jaffna/Sri Lanka Ecumenical Partnership Project as a new KOFF member organization. This brings total KOFF membership to 43 non-governmental organizations. Palmyrah will be presented in the next edition of the KOFF Newsletter. 29.03.06

KOFF annual report 2005

KOFF has published its annual report for 2005. In 13 pages it provides a survey of the Center for Peacebuilding’s activities over the past 12 months. In addition to the topics and regions that usually dominate the Center’s activities, the year 2005 was marked by the first ever external evaluation, the development of a medium-term strategy for 2006-2008, the tsunami and the organization of an International Conference on Transitional Justice. 31.03.06
How can NGOs mediate in violent conflicts? 
The example of Sant’Egidio

At the beginning of April the Mediation Support Project (MSP) of swisspeace in Bern organized a Roundtable on the question of how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could take on a mediation role in violent conflicts. The guest speaker was Don Matteo Zuppi, co-founder and member of the Catholic Community of Sant’Egidio, founded in Rome in 1968. Today the Community is a lay movement with more than 50,000 members. It works on behalf of the poor in over 70 countries and is also active in peace-building. Sant’Egidio has participated in several peace processes as an official mediator, for example in Mozambique. In most cases according to Zuppi it is the parties to the conflict themselves who request its services as mediator. In fact the community benefits from its religious background, which earns it respect and trust.

The Roundtable touched upon every possible aspect with regard to the role and the potential of NGOs in mediation processes, discussing them in a critical light. In Zuppi’s opinion it is advantageous for NGOs that become active in peace and mediation processes when the state backs up their efforts through diplomatic activities. In Zuppi’s opinion the key to a successful mediation process is in-depth knowledge of the conflict in question, long years of personal contact with the leaders of the parties to the conflict, and unflagging commitment. In the past 20 years Sant’Egidio has managed to establish a great many contacts through the structures of the Catholic Church. Although at first these did not seem particularly useful, in later years they have proven their worth, when it comes to bringing the conflict parties to the negotiating table. Zuppi felt that there was a lack of critical reflection between mediators and he welcomed the MSP Roundtable as a useful instrument for this.

04.04.06

Further information:
MSP Matthias Siegfried

Systemic conflict transformation, by the Berghof Foundation

The Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (BFPS) has developed a systemic understanding of conflict transformation in the context of a 15-month research project and has produced a study describing its experiences and making a number of recommendations. The study also contains brief case studies illustrating possible applications in Nepal, Aceh, Sudan and southern Sudan. This Focus article summarizes the background to the study, some key aspects as well as possible applications and possibilities for the further development of the approach.

Peace-building and civil conflict transformation will continue to be key areas requiring international cooperation (IC) in the years ahead. In the experience of the Berghof Foundation there are four main challenges, which raise four major questions: 1) How can we measure the high degree of complexity and the external framework conditions involved in violent conflicts which are of a protracted nature? How can this complexity be taken into account in conflict analyses as well as in strategic planning and assessment for future interventions?
2) Weaknesses at the level of strategic planning contribute in a way that is not negligible to a lack of harmony between various third parties. How can we build a framework that will systematically facilitate synergies and cooperation? 3) The asymmetry of conflict structures is not sufficiently taken into account by the international political system. This applies equally to non-state violent actors and to state actors, in particular with regard to failed states. How can inter-state IC overcome the problem of limited perspective or at least learn to be more sensitive in it’s approach? 4) Neither the overall context, nor the interests and needs of the central actors in the conflict are taken sufficiently into consideration in IC today. Indeed the classification of the actors in peace constituencies and „hardliner“ as well as „spoiler“ groups tends to be too approximate for a number of reasons including the fact that the composition of these groups of actors is generally very heterogeneous. How can individuals and sub-groups be taken more effectively into consideration without sacrificing the focus on structural change?

This question is a source of concern to many practitioners, and a great variety of concepts have been developed to deal with it. It is often the case that not enough attention is paid to the complexity, and many faceted nature of escalated conflicts. By adopting a systemic approach the Berghof Foundation hopes to develop greater understanding in its handling of these issues, more appropriate and comprehensive answers to the above-mentioned questions and to identify more feasible ways of intervening in the conflict system.

**Not a new school, just a broadening of the concept**

Systemic conflict transformation is not an attempt to found a new school of civil conflict transformation. It is an approach that seeks to provide a conceptual framework that will help to further develop peace-building and civil conflict transformation, both in theory and practice. The approach is based on the following: 1) Key peace-building concepts and central insights; 2) Evaluation of the practical experiences of the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Transformation, and in particular the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation (RNCST) in Sri Lanka, promoted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), as well as the lessons learned from a high level dialogue project in Georgia-Abkhazia. The latter was carried out by the Berghof Center together with Conciliation Resources (CR) and is part of a comprehensive CR capacity-building program. 3) The adaption and utilization of systemic practice concepts and instruments which have been established for years in disciplines such as advisory services for organizations, psychotherapy and family therapy and cybernetics.

**Characteristics and core ingredients**

A systemic approach can be defined by the following insights and characteristics: 1) Highly complex „systems“ can be modeled only in a limited way. All actions – including those based on a complex and participative conflict analysis – rely on limited knowledge and need to be adapted to system changes and indeed should be able to anticipate these. 2) For system analysis and system
intervention it is essential to have a precise definition of the system’s limits and to be aware of the grouping of systems in supra- and sub-systems, their mutual dependence and self reproduction. Among other things this requires a change of perspective both with regard to the system as a whole („bird’s eye view“) and when considering individual sub-systems („frog’s eye view“). 3) The relevance of a systemic approach is not simply as a way to describe the complexity of systems however – it also helps to see through this complexity. System interventions require an analytical reduction of the complexity and a series of working hypotheses. These should make feasible interventions possible, helping to identify „agents of peaceful change“ and to achieve the critical mass necessary for political and social change.

Systemic conflict transformation tries to activate the system’s own resources, so as to support or strengthen sub-systems, and to stimulate and support political and social change towards a fair and peaceful society. It can be divided into five work areas. In actual fact these overlap in many ways and should not therefore be considered as a series of steps: conflict analysis and conflict monitoring; planning of interventions; collaboration and networking with actors; mobilization of „agents of peaceful change“ and creativity in the imagination of substantial solutions. The study identifies principles, methods and tools for each of these work areas.

**Utilization and further development**

The systemic approach can be used as a framework for analysis, planning and action, in particular by intermediary organizations which are active in the areas of civil conflict transformation and conflict transformation. It also has much to offer in the areas of strategic planning, political control and the coordination of donor contributions in the areas of peace-building and for further development of the instruments needed in this field.

The next step will be to further develop core areas essential to this approach, such as the concept of „agents of peaceful change“, and applications. Efforts here will focus on pinpointing the criteria according to which advocates of peaceful solution approaches can be identified and better supported. In this context the BFPS would like to take a closer look at the role of inclusive and systemic acting support structures in peace processes – such as peace funds, peace council and peace secretariats. An effort will also be made to develop a greater understanding of the role, effectiveness and optimization of „Track 1.5“ approaches.

The project was financed by the DFA and the BMZ. Further work on the development of a systemic approach will take place in the framework of a strategic partnership with the DFA and in particular through closer collaboration with Political Affairs Division IV and the „Conflict Prevention and Transformation Division“ (COPRET) of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This will also include „backstopping“ and advisory activities.
News from Swiss NGOs

Developing capacities for “democratic security”: Impact of WSP International supported projects in Guatemala

In December 2006 Guatemala will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords. War torn Societies Project International (WSP) has identified various impacts projects it has supported have had in the transformation from a military concept of “state security” to “democratic security” in Guatemala. The projects continue to have a real impact at two levels, respectively and cumulatively: the first is the specific achievements of the projects themselves, the second the fulfillment of the Peace Accords. Some fundamental transformations have been grounded in concrete technical work that has resulted in specific proposals which were then taken up by the authorities. The challenge has been to produce proposals that can be broadly supported, by different sections of society. The ability of Guatemalans in different state sectors and in society to deal with security issues in a constructive and effective manner has improved significantly over the years. 24.04.06

Afghan/Danish/Swiss human rights manual (GfbV)

A human rights manual developed by an Afghan/Danish/Swiss working group was published for the first time in Afghanistan at the beginning of 2006. The idea behind the manual is to offer a dual approach to the subject of human rights: on the one hand an introduction to human rights, designed to make Afghans of both sexes familiar with basic international documents on the protection of human rights. At the same time the manual includes passages on the need to protect and recognize the freedom and dignity of all individuals, taken from the Koran, general Islamic writings on human rights as well as Afghan law. Human rights manuals available until now were constantly criticized for the lack of an Afghan context.

The 250-page manual, written in such a way as to be easy to understand, is in the Dari language. A Pashto version is due to appear shortly. With the help of simple didactic tools it attempts to interest the ordinary Afghan in such a way as to contribute to a greater and more general understanding of human rights, encouraging discussion.

The new human rights manual has met with considerable interest in Afghanistan. It has already been used for training in Kabul and Jalalabad. As a result of its positive reception, and at the express wish of the partner organizations, it will continue to be used as a training tool in the next two years. It will be used on a regular basis in Mazar e Sharif and Herat. The human rights manual is the work of the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV) in collaboration with the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Afghan Civil Society and Human Rights Network, with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). 20.04.06
„Cuisine sans frontières“

After the doctors, vets, homeopaths, reporters and other humanitarian workers „without frontiers“, we must now add „Cuisine sans frontières“ (Csf) to the list. This public service association was founded in Switzerland in 2005 for the purpose of offering restaurants and cultural facilities which would be neutral, and provide an environment favorable to culture and communication in areas struck by disaster or some sort of crisis, under the brand name „Kredenzia’s Roof“ (restaurants of hope), to be operated with local partners. Csf can also work as an independent coordination body between those concerned and the development organizations. Csf is preparing to open the first restaurant of hope in the Ukrainian locality Lypnyki, in an area severely contaminated by the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe.

Playing a major role in the launch of the idea and the projects associated with „Cuisine sans frontières“ is the Swiss organization Info-Link, which offers Csf infrastructure, know-how and resources in the area of organization-building, administration and project development.

17.04.06

News from Swiss Government Agencies

Swiss Coordination Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina – development efforts as a contribution to peace-building

The Cooperation Office of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (secO) was opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) 10 years ago. The end of hostilities had left a country much destroyed, which had undergone a great deal of ethnic cleansing, with around two million displaced persons, including a million refugees abroad. The dead amounted to over a hundred thousand, and much of the infrastructure, including half a million homes, had been destroyed. Those suffering from serious traumas as a result of their experiences numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Mistrust still runs deep between the three main population groups, the ethnic Bosnians (Muslims); Croatians (Catholics) and Serbs (Orthodox).

Swiss cooperation efforts, financially support by the SDC, secO and the Federal Office for Migration, amounted to a total investment of SFr 400 million in the past 10 years. Since the year 2000 the humanitarian program has been systematically converted to a development and transition program, covering three specific areas „private sector development and the promotion of small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)“, the „social sector“ and „governance“. Even if today’s program does not explicitly mention the concepts peace work and reconciliation, all efforts are implicitly directed towards the same end. All projects are set up in such a way that people from the different ethnic groups are forced to work together, whether in the economic sphere, the return of minority groups to their point of origin, in community work and in social projects. Being able to work together in this way and become better acquainted helps considerably to overcome prejudices and develop new relations based on mutual understanding.

22.04.06
Workshop on human rights violations in Nepal

An international workshop coinciding with the worsening of the human rights situation in Nepal was held in Geneva in mid-April. Some 50 persons attended and 20 countries were represented by delegates from their missions. The workshop was organized by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP).

The Representative of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights in Nepal, the Director of the International Commission of Jurists as well as members of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, the Nepal Bar Association and Nepali human rights defenders analyzed the current crisis in Nepal and expressed serious concern about the human rights situation and the violent repression of the country’s democratic movement.

Those attending spoke of the need for mechanisms for the protection of human rights and international humanitarian rights, and for a national dialogue. Furthermore, they called on the international community to consider sanctions in the event that the democratic movement in Nepal continues to be subjected to repression and violence.

18.04.06

Ninth round of China human rights dialogue in Switzerland

The ninth round of human rights dialogue between Switzerland and China took place in Bern, Zurich und Fribourg at the end of March. The first dialogue with China occurred in 1991, since which date rounds have been held at regular intervals, alternating between the two countries.

Switzerland has made it clear that in continuing the dialogue it sets particular importance on transparency and concrete results. The Chinese have let it be known that they are interested in a deeper understanding with Switzerland, and collaboration in the area of human rights, including an exchange of experiences.

In the area of criminal law/criminal procedures/sentencing the main topics discussed include the death sentence, torture, administrative detention and ratification of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Both sides view as positive the current exchange of experts in the area of sentencing, and ways have been discussed in which this collaboration might be deepened and extended. Insofar as the rights of minorities and religious freedom are concerned particular attention was paid to the situation of the Tibetan and Uighur minorities, and dealings with religious groups that do not have official recognition.

In the area of human rights and the economy discussions turned on the Swiss model of the social partnership between employers and employees and the possibility of mediation in labor disputes. There was also a more open exchange on such questions as property rights and the social responsibility of companies.

At the center of the discussion on international human rights questions was China’s co-operation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the creation of a UN Human Rights Council.
The various discussions in the ninth dialogue round took place in an atmosphere that was generally open and constructive, showing a readiness to deal with all topics. While significant steps are still needed to improve human rights in China, there is a readiness to move ahead in the areas in which the dialogue is focused, and to somewhat intensify cooperation at a concrete level, which can only be judged as positive.

29.03.06

International Partner Organizations

Berghof-Center

In March, the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management published Berghof Report No 11, „Theories of Social Change and their Contribution to the Practice of Conflict Transformation: Developing the State of the Art in Conflict Transformation. Theory and Practice“.

Conciliation Resources

CR and the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ) from Colombia have co-published „Cooperacion internacional en procesos de paz“. This Spanish publication contains case studies of international cooperation in peace processes in Angola, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Colombia, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan. It will be used as resource material for CR’s comparative learning project with people involved in peacemaking in Colombia.

May 10-14: A „Youth and Xenophobia“ conference will take place in Serbia as part of the Releasing Indigenous Multiculturalism through Education (RIME) project, which focuses on ethnicity and diversity issues in the Balkans, Ukraine, Southern Russia and the South Caucasus.

EPLO

EPLO published two policy papers on the EU Instrument for Stability and on the proposal for a European Peacebuilding Coordinating Cell.

On May 3, the Austrian Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission and EPLO are jointly organizing a conference on „What Future for EU Conflict Prevention?“ followed by a Working Seminar in the afternoon.

FriEnt

The current FriEnt-Newsletter includes reports on a roundtable on Colombia, and a workshop on the role of science, lobby activities and think tanks for an effective peace policy. Moreover there is the new briefing, which discusses „EU foreign relations — between security and development policy“. Finally the Newsletter presents „Lessons learned“ of a conflict analysis in Aceh, and sheds light on the current challenges leading up to the elections in the Congo.
Events

This section gives pointers to selected events in Switzerland pertaining to civil peace building.

- The meeting of KOFF member organizations takes place on May 12 in Bern. The statutory part of the meeting will be followed by a discussion on the topic „The peace policy of Switzerland — well developed abroad, non-extant at home?“.

- The Guatemala network of Bern is organizing an event on May 19 in Bern under the title „Guatemala – Peace without Land – Land without Peace. Conflict over Resources and Human Rights”.

- The second „Salon international des Initiatives de Paix“ is to be held in Paris on June 2-4. The Association for the study and practice of non-militarization and demilitarization (APRED) is organizing two panels, one entitled „Peace studies, a tool for the future?“ and the other „The non-violent state, a useful concept ?“.

- Peace Watch Switzerland is conducting training sessions for the deployment of human rights observers in Palestine/Israel, on June 8-11 and June 29 to July 2.

- The first of this year’s four KOFF training sessions take place in June and July, and there are still vacancies (further information and registration). On June 26-27 a training session on „Do no Harm“ will be conducted by Wolfgang Heinrich (Church Development Service, eed) and Anita Müller (KOFF), and on July 3-4 there will be a dialogue project on peace-building, featuring Norbert Ropers of the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, and Guenther Baechler (Political Affairs Division IV of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs).

- The Institute for Peace and Democracy of the distance learning university in Hagen is offering the third in a series of interdisciplinary courses Master of Peace Studies. This Master class can be followed as a remote student on a part-time basis so as not to interfere with professional commitments. The course begins on October 1 2006.

Publications

Women for Peace Switzerland: „Friedfertig und widerständig“

The dramatic story of „Women for Peace Switzerland“ from its founding 25 years ago right up to the present, is the subject of a new book, written by seven of the original founder members. The emergence of the movement, its philosophy, and the effectiveness of the women who make it up is demonstrated with the help of texts, documents and pictures. The book is also a piece of contemporary history, showing the extent to which the political landscape has changed in Switzerland in a quarter of a century.
Since the beginning of the 1980s women have banded together to protest against nuclear weapons, a pro-war mentality and to come to an understanding as to the importance of peace for women. Among other things they came out in favor of a civil alternative to military service and against the enrolment of women in the national defense structure. At the time they were regarded with suspicion and accused of harboring sympathy for Moscow. Today many of their ideas have become accepted, and „Women for Peace” is now a recognized organization, which works hand in hand with both state and non-state organizations.

Web tip

infoshare

infoshare is a Sri Lankan based non-profit technical support organization providing web media services and application development. Its aim is to make a positive social impact by supporting the work of non-profit and other development organizations. The content is good, and it is an interesting example of how the internet can be used to enhance peace-building activities. The service is connected worldwide and covers more than just Sri Lankan issues. infoshare provides a wide variety of tools and databases including the Peace Library, the Civil Society Support Group Database, a Community Blog and the Mumbai Human Trafficking Victims Registry. Cooperating with other NGOs, infoshare is working locally and globally to develop new tools and applications to support multi-track and multi-sectorial peace initiatives.