

**Fostering the Ties that Bind: Practicing Peacebuilding and Development in  
Conflict Sensitive Environments**

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As we gather to open this conference on the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development in zones of conflict, the headlines in the Kathmandu Post (January 16, 2007) read: Maoists Come Full Circle and Enter Parliament; Citizenship Distribution Begins; Interim Legislature Convenes. I cannot imagine a more auspicious day on which to explore practices of peacebuilding and conflict sensitive development, for today marks a new era of post-armed conflict in Nepal.

In the decade that you have been struggling with armed conflict here, the fields of peacebuilding and development have shifted worldwide, now shaping each other's agendas and impacting governments, factional leaders and global institutions. Development NGOs mainstream conflict sensitive practices and utilize new strategies that help war-torn societies both recover and avert future violence. Everyone understands that there is no peace without development that impacts the lives of the marginalized and discontent, that no development can be sustained without human security and peace, and that skillful post-conflict development provides the strongest foundation for future conflict prevention. The necessity of continuous effort and long term collaboration between peacebuilders and development personnel is a key lesson learned.

Nepal stands at a crossroads, in transition from a conflict system to a peace system. What Nepalis accomplished in 2006 will not only highlight your history books but could stand, like South Africa, as a world symbol of significant political transformation. Although you have seen much bloodshed and suffering en route to this pivotal moment, critical stages of your people power movement were managed without resort to civil war, which is a historic and noteworthy achievement. My hope for you is that you go forward as a nation with pride in your nonviolent transition. This is Nepal's rare opportunity to strengthen social, economic and political institutions and structures to support justice, peaceful means of resolving conflict and access to full rights and development for all Nepalis. Those of us who are outsiders extend our appreciation for what you have accomplished and for the victory you have won for yourselves. You have had a people's democracy movement and now you must construct a people's peace.

My theme tonight will be *Fostering the Ties that Bind: Practicing Peacebuilding and Development in Conflict Sensitive Environments*. I come by this theme through a great deal of peacebuilding experience in conflict regions world wide, in witnessing far too much of the needless suffering and impediments to development caused by war and hatred and in awareness of the almost insurmountable challenges of genuine healing from betrayal, brutality and the criminality of mass violence. It is clear to me that as a global community we need to get ahead of the conflicts and focus on prevention. We can barely repair and re-develop what we have already destroyed, both in terms of souls and structures, and that brokenness and destruction itself contains the seeds of yet more violence. The global community has learned, unfortunately, that conflict cycles are self-propelling and escalatory.

According to the World Bank, 80 percent of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered a major war in the past 15 years, and on average, countries coming out of war face a 44 percent chance of relapsing in the first five years of peace. Without efforts to repair the divisions within and between local communities, the Bank reports, development initiatives in war-torn and conflict-ridden parts of the world are often ineffective. Systems become what we call "conflict habituated," almost addicted to

conflict, and with every violent conflict, societies lose part of their capacity to handle grievances in a peaceful way (Miall). Probably the starkest example of conflict habituation is the Mid East, where Israelis and Palestinians remain caught in cycles of revenge, with neither side having any trust left in the other in partnering for peace.

Nepal should learn from studies that clearly show that if there are no visible prospects for ending the distresses that provoked the armed conflict, the chances are high that we will see a return to violence. Sri Lanka and East Timor may be sad cases in point. However, economic and social advances that address grievances, which must include fair distribution of economic opportunity, strongly influence the sturdiness of the peace process. If attractive options are offered for economic development, education, security, employment, political participation, inclusion and respect, for example, Nepal will likely see fewer fighters and more supporters of the new governing structures. These studies on successes and failures of peace processes place a great deal of responsibility on directions set by those of us working in the nexus of peacebuilding and development.

Experiences in conflict environments worldwide have shown me that at every step of the way, conflict involves oppression, exploitation, separation and dehumanization. Peacebuilding, therefore, before, during and after post-armed conflict, must include the embrace of all peoples in the human circle, with their frequently unspoken needs for identity, belonging and affirmation, as well as the creation of structures and institutions that support justice and rights. One authority on social ethics claims that moral progress can be measured by how we enlarge the circle of our concern as individuals and nations, which is clearly an imperative within and beyond Nepal.

We have seen in our work that when identities have been humiliated and too long dismissed and denied, they become wounded identities, exaggerated and distorted in order to draw attention, like an inflamed infection. This is so painfully visible now in relations between Muslims and the West, and was also evident in the way that unhealed identities reasserted themselves in Bosnia and Rwanda with such great impact and tragic consequences. Closer to home for you, I am thinking of Ambedkar's work with the Dalits in India, offering the Dalit community a path of dignity out of the degradation of their wounded identity.

Our US Nobel Peace Laureate Dr Martin Luther King was fond of saying, "Justice delayed is justice denied." And justice denied, I would add, will sooner or later assert itself, as will the denial of identity and other core rights. A rights-based and inclusion-based global ethic, supporting the concept that the full range of material, social and cultural needs are indeed human rights, would add to global stability. I think Nepal is on the correct track with such emphasis on rights and inclusion in your current documents. We see in the world the disastrous results of excluding Muslims as full global citizens welcomed into all of our countries, of excluding Africans from full economic and development participation, and of splitting the world into the haves and the have-nots. It is clear to me that a world of such divisions, delays and denials is fragile and ultimately unsustainable, here in Nepal and everywhere else. We know this lesson learned, and we deny it at our peril.

If conflict is thus exacerbated by inequality, marginalization and the oppression of the weaker by the stronger, so too must Nepali and global peacebuilding and development efforts focus on upending the insult of marginalization and the rage of exclusion through processes of inclusion and re-humanization. For these efforts to be successful, moreover, they must penetrate all levels, tracks and sectors of society, from the grassroots to the elite. All of us are guilty of exclusion through our prejudices, and none of us are free of prejudices and stereotypes about others, no matter what society we were raised in. Becoming aware of and managing our prejudices is part of our life task and helps us move toward developing open and tolerant societies.

In Los Angeles, California, there is a Museum of Tolerance. Two doors invite visitors inside, one with a posted sign saying “I am prejudiced” and the other saying “I am not prejudiced.” Each visitor faces the dilemma of which door to reach for. If the visitor uses the “I am prejudiced” door, the way is opened. However, if the museum guest selects “I am not prejudiced,” the door remains locked, teaching us powerfully the role of prejudice in the inner life of all humans.

Prejudice leads to exclusion, which may involve the process of building walls, both actual physical structures as well as the walls of not seeing, not caring or rationalizing. Nepal has no physical walls of separation but certainly has economic and cultural walls of disconnection and division. In one sense, I suppose, your mountains also act as walls. In Ahmedabad, where we have been working with Hindu and Muslim Indian activists to repair the relationships destroyed in the 2002 riots and to help prevent further cycles of revenge and retaliation, a new wall has been erected. Hindus built this brick structure to wall out Muslims in residential areas of the city. We viewed it from the walled-off home of a Muslim participant who owned a factory that employed Hindus but no longer can offer that employment, as his factory was destroyed in the riots. Both the lack of a mixed factory and the deteriorated communal relations enforced by the wall bode poorly for Ahmedabad’s capacity to recreate a stable environment, to overcome prejudice or to build a system of peace.

We work each year in Ramallah, the current Palestinian capital, now surrounded by a particularly ugly gray concrete high wall with turrets, moats and all the features of prison walls. The damage is more than physical: it seems to me that the psychological and spiritual crush of being walled out attacks the soul, creating lasting wounds. I have seen the wall still dividing Cyprus and the wall that used to divide Berlin. And in the US we have the walls of gated communities to protect the rich and keep out the poor, who are already insulted and diminished by their inferior status and treatment. We have, in addition, shameful walls for extremely large populations of prisoners, most of whom are poor and minority group members. Walls create and reinforce dehumanization. The stereotypes of Israelis and Palestinians about each other, for example, are much greater now than when I worked there 10 years ago, during more hopeful, pre-wall times. Attending to the walls of economic, political and cultural exclusion in Nepal will reduce the use of violence to meet human needs and increase the attraction to developing a proud and inclusive national identity that embraces and celebrates Nepal’s rich diversity.

Building a national identity in a country with as many ethnic, tribal, caste, religious, and cultural groups as Nepal, presents a monumental challenge. One key is to fluidly manage a multiplicity of identities, so that we do not see ourselves only in relation to tribe, religion or caste, for example. On the other hand, these heritages we carry contain the world’s diversity and wisdom, and must be guarded lest they disappear and we all become homogenized. We already know ourselves by a great number of family roles, occupational roles, linguistic, geographical, and cultural groupings. The goal is to hold all those markings of the self and community, to develop cross cutting ties with others who hold some similar identities and simultaneously to feel a sense of inclusion and connection to a Nepali identity. Security and respect aid this process. Attack and threat of losing identity prevent its development, reinforcing instead the wounds of rejection.

I was in South Africa recently and a colleague from South Africa asked me if it was a fool’s errand to imagine that people can hold the complexity of multiple identities strongly enough to not be swayed by the pull of demagogues who start wars through appeal to a unitary identity. I told him that it must be possible because we are otherwise doomed to the power of manipulative leaders who encourage us to kill our neighbors under the banner of a particular identity. My hope for Nepal is that as people begin to feel that the state cares for and protects their well-being, that they may in turn care for the state and come to feel part of it. This must be done in such a way that cultural, linguistic, religious and other identities are not threatened, but are respected and supported. No

nation has managed this balancing task fully, but it is again part of our 21<sup>st</sup> century assignment if we are to build sustainable global peace. This is yet another opportunity for Nepal to establish best practices and leadership.

Development is a social contract for the public good that can be used pro-actively and consciously so that it becomes a tool of social, economic and political justice and healing. While we must honestly acknowledge a history of separation and often competition between the somewhat different mandates of humanitarian aid, development and peacebldg organizations, now we must focus on the realities of Nepal as a conflict-torn and fragile society with a briefly open window of opportunity, where our collaborative efforts can help stem the tide of violence and address the root causes of the conflict. A guarantee of security will be crucial as a building block of this social contract, as it renews people's shattered trust in the government, provides stability and allows for investment in the future. A successful DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) process adds to the social contract, signaling an end to the armed conflict and the war economy, and offering a sense of drawing people together as one nation moving forward in both healing and development.

In post-armed conflict, development and peacebuilding teams will be partnering in what peace researcher Galtung calls the 3 R's: reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. At this time, the potential for renewed conflict remains strong, and reconstruction and rehabilitation left undone, poorly managed or seen to favor some groups over others, hold the danger of a return to violence. The window of opportunity is not left open indefinitely, so our tasks carry both urgency and consequences. In a sense, this is the moment that NGOs have been waiting for, when the silenced guns allow more access and when the people are ripe for change.

Of the 3 R's: Reconstruction allows for the repair of the physical destruction of war and should be planned with connectors and dividers in mind, including well thought-out opportunities for divided communities to reconstitute themselves, building relations as they build infrastructure. Studies from conflict-affected countries show that the establishment of infrastructure networks, including those of communication, contribute very positively to long term political/ethnic harmony, and that the importance of getting it right the first time cannot be overstated (Jonne and Verhoken). Reconstruction also includes structural changes made to unjust and oppressive economic, political and social systems, including strengthening the rule of law, opening these systems to hitherto excluded groups, and rebuilding financial and governing institutions.

Rehabilitation refers to the critical restoration of people's psychological and cultural needs and dignity, as well as to issues of reintegration, land distribution, housing, employment, education and vocational training, and healing of war trauma and fractured community relations. A challenge here, again learned in studies from other countries, is to mobilize sufficient resources to serve both the DDR population and the general citizens, as even the perception of being under-served or unequally-served can trigger resentment and perhaps violence.

Reconciliation is the hardest goal to measure and quantify, for ourselves and for our donors, perhaps because of its deep emotional and spiritual demands, and yet reconciliation is so imperative to prevent future cycles of violence. Galtung uses the phrase "replacing vicious cycles with virtuous cycles." Virtuous cycles can be encouraged through dialogue for mutual understanding of the needs and fears of each community, leading to mutual regard and respect and slowly moving toward reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not only a social, economic, legal and political undertaking, as we have seen from the South African model, but also a profoundly spiritual task. South Africa is clearly the gold star leader in the field and has much to teach other communities embarking on this healing journey into memory, narrative, truth and justice. Nepal will have to find its own way, and I suggest that we build to this slowly, as a genuine national reconciliation process cannot be rushed. I have recently participated in the 10<sup>th</sup>

anniversary conference of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and although there are miracles to celebrate, much remains undone, including respectable reparations for communities and individuals, prosecutions for war crimes for those who did not confess and seek amnesty, and a great deal more healing between victim and perpetrating communities. Some fear that South Africa will explode in violence if these processes are not attended to, as there is a new and very angry young generation who expected more substantive change than has been achieved.

Expectations of Nepali citizens will be a critical issue. Inclusion is required and spoken about in all peacebuilding and development programs here, but making inclusion a reality presents an enormous challenge. Cultural change emerges slowly and usually follows other development changes. Discriminations based on caste, class, tribe, geography and other divisions remain deeply embedded in social institutions, traditions and consciousness in Nepal. Every effort must be made to marshal sufficient financial resources to solve a host of development problems. It is dangerous to the peace and stability of this country if those who have been at the bottom of the ladder do not move up as swiftly as desired by them and by us. Tangible peace dividends and evidence of good will and right intentions will be necessary, so people regain faith in the government and its institutions, and symbolically connect their new opportunities to a trustworthy political structure.

A new study from the former Yugoslavia examines the difficulty of rebuilding community relations after armed conflict and recommends steps toward communal healing.

The three most apparent forms of group self-deception among our participants were denial of what happened during the war, biased memories of the events or embellishment of particular historical episodes, and the downplaying of war crimes committed by members of their own national group. These manifestations of group self-deception offer fertile ground for building national myths instead of national history (Stover and Weinstein, p. 149).

For any change to occur in this frozen post-conflict condition, the researchers recommend that four levels of social reconstruction be planned and monitored to occur simultaneously from the top down and bottom up. These should include individual recuperation from trauma; renewal of communal networks; new civic and economic initiatives and the establishment of the rule of law with guaranteed security (Stover and Weinstein). Absent these measures, they conclude, there is little hope for healing in the Balkans.

I think it will be important to involve a broad range of people in all these development, peacebuilding and social healing processes, opening multiple entry points for systemic interaction among local and international stakeholders. Nepalis should rightfully feel empowered and assume leadership throughout this period. This is their revolution and their peace process, won at large cost and often against international pressure. Those of you who work internationally have seen elsewhere the flood of workers who arrive post armed conflict, and know the problems of dominance, competition, lack of coordination and short-term attention spans. Joint planning by donors, implementers and local workers is essential to minimize competition, manage the temporary INGO influx, and maximize harmonization in this critical period. The road to peace will be full of obstacles and challenges, as it is everywhere, requiring the engagement of multiple stakeholders and extensive planning and commitments by diplomats, donors and development workers to be here for the long haul.

I want to end on some hopeful notes, with a bit of research and a concluding personal observation. This research focuses on inclusion and comes from an Indian academic who studied why 4 Indian cities exploded in Hindu-Muslim riots and 4 other cities did not (Varshney). Those that did not explode had sufficient and stable cross cutting associational ties between the communities. They did business together, knew the

human face of each other, belonged to joint organizations and had good enough relational connections to be able to reach each other when the flames of hatred were fanned by ruthless political leaders. Those cities that erupted in violence had at most only casual ties together, insufficient to mobilize support to stem the tide of hysteria and fear. The lesson here refers back to my title: foster the ties that bind. Those ties can make peace possible.

On a personal note, I want to say that we can be taught to love or hate with equal passion. We can be convinced to act from our base emotions of greed and desire or from our highest moral and ethical values. Einstein said that since wars begin in the human mind, so it is in the human mind that the ramparts of peace must be built. Every institution and structure of justice or injustice was conceived and developed in the human mind. Every act of compassion and generosity is rooted in the human mind, as is every act of cruelty. We are given choices every moment of our lives. I feel that Nepal is currently making excellent choices for its future, and managing well the imperfections of multi party democracy. I hope that all of us in peacebuilding and development will support its direction so that Nepal continues to light a way for its struggling neighbors in Asia and for the rest of the world. Lastly, I hope that lessons learned at this conference give us a firm foundation for the next steps in engagement, commitment and devotion to a bright future for Nepal.

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