

THE DUBLIN CONFERENCE

From March 31 to April 2, Dublin Castle will be the magnificent backdrop for a high-profile conference on conflict prevention. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP), as Regional Initiator for Europe, and the Irish government, as president of the EU, are responsible for organising this event. The conference will host an estimated 250 individuals, representing a broad spectrum of actors: civil society organisations, EU representatives, European governments, the United Nations and academia.

The subject for discussion in Dublin is the role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict. How can relationships between governments and civil society be strengthened, and how can these ties be taken to supranational levels, including the EU and the United Nations?

The conference aims are:

- to raise the profile of civil society involvement in conflict prevention activities;
- to enhance interaction between civil society and governments, the EU and the UN;

OBJECTIVES

In 2003, in response to the UN Secretary-General's Recommendation 27, the worldwide conflict prevention community joined to form a *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict*. All sectors and disciplines working in conflict prevention are involved, from the community level to the international level.

Overall objective:

To develop a common platform for effective action in conflict prevention from the community to the global level.

Main elements:

- To explore fully the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- To improve interaction between civil society groups, the UN, regional organisations, and governments.
- To strengthen regional and international networking between conflict prevention actors.

- to stimulate interaction between different civil society and government actors in order to develop better mechanisms for co-operation;
- to formulate recommendations to the European Union, the United Nations, and civil society organisations;
- to provide fresh input for the implementation of the EU's Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (2001). The new report will be presented by the Irish EU Presidency at the June 2004 European Council meeting.

To enrich the programme further, two panel discussions have been planned to focus on the War on Terrorism, and UN-civil society interaction mechanisms. The first theme will address questions such as: Has the War on Terrorism triggered a resurgence of militarist and unilateral responses for promoting security; and, how does this influence the work in the field of conflict prevention, particularly in the EU? The key question for the group dealing with the second theme will be why the UN and civil society should co-operate more in the field of conflict prevention and, if so, how. The discussion in the second group will be punctuated by a summary presentation of recommendations prepared by the UN High Level Panel on Relationships



Conference will be opened by Tom Kitt, Irish Minister of State

Between the UN and Civil Society, which will have been concluded in the meeting the day before.

On the third and final day, a high-level meeting will be held with governmental representatives. The organisation of this event is in the hands of the Irish government, in co-operation with the European Centre for Conflict Prevention and the Irish NGO Steering Committee. On the same day the outcome of the conference will be presented in the form of a regional Action Agenda. Mr. Danilo Türk (UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs) and Ms. Maria McLoughlin (Head of Unit, Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and ACP Political Issues, European Commission) will be among the officials receiving the Action Agenda.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the last two decades, civil society has become an active player in the areas of human rights, environment, development co-operation and related areas. The international campaign to ban landmines and the campaign for the International Criminal Court (ICC), have shown that civil society organisations can carry major international efforts - but not on their own. Key to the success and impact of the campaign against landmines and the effort to establish the ICC has been effective coalition-building among various disparate NGOs, governments, international organisations and the UN. It is now time that these examples are emulated in the area of conflict

prevention. There is growing recognition of the specific and important role civil society has to play in the area of conflict prevention. The objective of the Global Partnership is to make this role more visible.

The Dublin Conference is proof of the commitment on the part of European governments to actively seek partnership in this area. The UN Member States, in their Millennium Declaration, refer to the commitment of the member states to free their peoples from "the scourge of war". In order to realise this goal, the UN is attempting, among others, two things: to engineer a shift from reacting to conflict towards preventing →

FUNDING & SUPPORT

Five governments have thusfar decided to support the programme: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

A number of NGOs and institutions also support the programme, such as the NCDO, World Vision, Cordaid and Novib/Oxfam the Netherlands.

The Global Partnership has also received support in the form of letters from UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan; EU Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Patten; Executive Director of UNIFEM, Noeleen Heyzer; and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the U.N., Minister Aldo Mantovani, on behalf of the European Union.

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The European Centre for Conflict Prevention acts as the International Secretariat for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict as well as the secretariat for the International Steering Group.



Dublin Castle

conflict; and, to involve civil society actors in conflict prevention. The Global Partnership is a timely response to this pledge. The Partnership has created an integrated three-year programme of research,

discussion and network-building. The ultimate objective is to create a paradigm shift from reaction to prevention. Central to this movement and, indeed, crucial for its success, will be the partnership between civil society, governments, and the UN.

At the UN, a high-level review of UN-Civil Society relations has begun. Part of this important exercise is the establishment of a High Level Panel that will assess relations between the UN and civil society. The Panel's objective is to ultimately present a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Secretary-General for enhancing interaction between the UN and civil society, including parliamentarians and the private sector. The Dublin conference will provide the backdrop for the Panel's presentation of some of its recommendations. The review process at the UN will also include a study of the state of collaboration between organisations of the UN system and civil society organisations. These are two areas of work that are highly relevant for the movement to have civil society involvement in conflict prevention firmly included in international political agendas.

THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Certainly the biggest achievement of them all is the very creation of an international network for conflict prevention, where none was present before. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict has managed to garner the involvement of governments, civil society and the UN system. Five governments are funding the Global Partnership and the UN has been highly supportive of it. Regional and national conflict prevention networks have been established and the foundations for implementing effective conflict prevention mechanisms are being laid with, for example, the formation of some national civil society forums on conflict prevention.

The heart of the Global Partnership lies in the fifteen world regions, where extensive processes of research and networking have begun. The regions are in the midst of preparations for their conferences, of which the most important item is the Regional Action Agenda. Dublin is the first; fourteen more will follow. These conferences will provide significant input to the global conference that will be held at UN Headquarters in New York, in July 2005.

Since its formation in 2003, the Global Partnership has reached several milestones. In terms of organisational structure, the establishment of the International Steering Group (ISG) was a major step. The ISG was formed in June 2003 at the International Preparatory Meeting in Soesterberg, the Netherlands. The ISG's major task is to safeguard the coherence and the integrity of the entire programme. In addition to this, the ISG is responsible for determining the strategy to be taken by the Global Partnership, and to agree on the final international

Action Agenda. The ISG's composition reflects the geographical diversity of the Global Partnership. The ISG accepted the European Centre for Conflict Prevention's offer to act as its secretariat.

In terms of content and policy, papers on key issues have been commissioned, to help focus discussion. Among them are papers on the roles specific actors (such as women, the media) can play and which spheres of life (such as religion, education) are relevant. In addition, a framework of themes that permeate all aspects of conflict prevention has been designed. The regions are now requested to contribute their own experiences and expertise to a "Living Document". All this is complemented with real-life stories that are collected from all over the world and will be published in a second volume of *People Building Peace*, in which the Partnership programme's research findings will be summarised.

At the international level, the profile of the Global Partnership has been raised through a number of important events. On September 4 and 5, 2003, in two meetings at UN Headquarters in New York, the Global Partnership was able to make a full presentation to the UN and its member states. The first meeting took place at the invitation of the president of the 57th UN General Assembly, Jan Kavan. No fewer than 88 member states discussed the achievements, opportunities, challenges and future contributions of civil society to conflict prevention. A number of these member states used the occasion to voice their support, as did senior UN officials and the EU - yet another clear indication that support for the Global Partnership and the ideas it stands for is real and growing. →

The second meeting took place at the invitation of Assistant Secretary-Generals Gillian Sorenson (Head of the Office of External Relations for Secretary-General Kofi Annan) and Danilo Türk (UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs). The subject of discussion here was the ways in which collaboration could be shaped with the UN's

own Inter-Agency/Inter-Departmental Resource Group on Conflict Prevention.

Full UN support for the organisation of the conference at the UN in 2005 was further reinforced at a meeting in New York on February 10-12, 2004, when a seminar was held on how civil society and the UN could interact

for conflict prevention. Participants included UN agencies and departments, government representatives and key civil society organisations. A few issues debated: how to structure UN-NGO interaction; providing input for the UN Secretary-General's upcoming interim report on conflict prevention; and, the format for the conference in 2005.

THE DUBLIN ACTION AGENDA

Central to the Dublin Conference will be the discussion of the draft version of the European Action Agenda for Western Europe (enlarged EU, Norway and Switzerland). Some twenty NGOs have been involved in the drafting process, putting together what they consider guiding principles, upon which they have attempted to build an agenda for tangible action. The ultimate goal is to have comprehensive mechanisms and partnerships in place that may be able, not only to prevent armed conflict, but also, to address their root causes.

The guiding principles of the Action Agenda are the following:

1. Shift to prevention: promoting peace and security in the twenty-first century requires a fundamental shift from reacting militarily to placing the emphasis on the prevention of armed conflict.
2. Creating a "Culture of Prevention": this means the incorporation of conflict prevention as a fundamental policy in security institutions and instruments.
3. Responsibility to protect: the international community has a responsibility to act decisively when states are unwilling or unable to fulfil their basic responsibilities to their citizens. However, this does not mean free licence for military intervention by major world powers.
4. Security for people and states: the security of people - physically, socially, economically - is as important as the security of states. These two types of security actually reinforce each other.
5. Multilateralism: major global problems can only be addressed effectively through the co-ordinated efforts of many countries and through multilateral forums. A system for conflict prevention, therefore, should be undertaken within a strong multilateral framework that includes co-ordinated and systematic responses.
6. Partnership: this will be a crucial component of the new conflict prevention approach, which requires that civil society actors are involved.
7. Primacy of local ownership: national governments and other local actors bear primary responsibility for conflict prevention. They and the people they work



Speaker: Brain Cowen, Ireland's Minister of Foreign Affairs

- with must own any conflict prevention process, while international actors play a supportive role.
- 8. Inclusion and equality: people from social and cultural minorities, men, as well as, women; in short, all must be involved in any effort to seek human and state security. Failure to ensure maximum participation is often one of the root causes of conflict.

A number of concrete issues arise from these principles, and they will be discussed in working group sessions in Dublin. These include, among others:

- the role of education and the promotion of a culture of peace (conflict resolution education, the role of governments, civil society organisations and UN agencies, and how to launch a successful campaign);
- development and peacebuilding (how to encourage conflict-sensitive development);
- involving civil society in EU civilian crisis management (towards a European Peace Agency, the added value of civil society programmes, the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, early warning and early response, how to improve EU-civil society partnership);
- interactions between governments and civil society (experiences from Switzerland and Norway, current practices, lessons learned);
- lessons learned from conflict management techniques in Ireland.

FROM THE REGIONS

In West Africa, the Regional Initiator is the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). WANEP has held preparatory meetings in all the different countries of its network and established national civil society forums on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. WANEP has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the foremost inter-governmental organisation in West Africa. This should eventually establish a working ECOWAS-civil society partnership aimed at both early warning and conflict prevention. At the February seminar on civil society-UN interaction for conflict prevention, WANEP and ECOWAS gave a joint presentation about the potential effects of early warning and early action.

In East and Central Africa the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI) is co-ordinating the programme for this region. The NPI is lobbying hard to link the Global Partnership programme to the preparation of the Great Lakes Forum that will be organised by the UN in November 2004. The Regional Conference will be held in August 2004, and will collect recommendations that are designed to feed into the Great Lakes Forum.

In South Asia, best practices and lessons learned are an essential part of the national meetings since they also connect with other important initiatives. For instance, the national meeting in India coincided with the World Social Forum in Mumbai. The meeting included presentations about the role of women and religious organisations in the field of conflict prevention.

Finally, to Europe, where the Dublin conference represents a milestone in the efforts, past and present, to bring civil society actors and official bodies together for the sake of conflict prevention.



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BEYOND 2005

SOME REFLECTIONS BY PAUL VAN TONGEREN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ECCP

Momentum is building up towards a non-military and comprehensive conflict prevention approach, as opposed to a military response and armed conflict. This momentum has been the subject of most of the material that has been presented to you in this issue. However, it is worth remembering that much of the world has been moving in the opposite direction. The War on Terrorism has put the field of conflict prevention on the defensive. In many parts of the world, governments remain averse to genuinely co-operating with civil society actors.

The performance of civil society itself is open for improvement. There are problems in terms of co-ordination, and these lead to duplication and unwarranted competition. Governments have legitimate questions relating to issues such as civil society legitimacy, transparency and representativeness. Having said this, there is emerging evidence that community-based organisations, journalists, women's groups, businesspeople and human rights activists can have an influence that goes beyond that of the military and the diplomatic corps. It is also true that the desire exists, among a growing number of governments, within international bodies and at the UN level, to establish and/or enhance co-operation with civil society. These developments are precisely the ones that make it incumbent upon civil society to become genuinely professional and transparent.

The founding vision of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict has been to connect professionals and organisations working in this field. The Global Partnership intends the 2005 conference in New York to be a "galvanising event" that will propel this movement to intellectual, political and public prominence. To this end, there must be an agenda for political change. The accumulated regional Action Agendas will fulfil this purpose. Given the relapse towards the military approach, there is a great need to continue strengthening the field of conflict prevention beyond 2005.

The Action Agendas will produce civil society priorities and recommendations for the period following the New York conference. A well-informed global network that has branches in all geographical regions and at all levels of administration is necessary for these priorities to materialise



and contribute to the shift towards conflict prevention. Some of this network's current tasks are network-building, research, and the exchange of experience and information. More systematisation of this activity could, for instance, result in a Who is Who in conflict prevention.

The network-building task can certainly be expanded upon, especially at the regional level, and around issues such as media and peacebuilding, conflict prevention education and local peace initiatives. Partnerships between civil society organisations, governments, regional and UN institutions can also be explored and promoted further, certainly in regions and countries where there is antagonism between some of these actors, in many cases between government and civil society. Here, the emphasis should be on finding common objectives and providing examples of where partnerships have already proved useful and successful. Other areas where the Global Partnership can play a useful, if not critical, role is in establishing partnerships with related fields (human rights, development, relief), capacity building, advocacy and making the public at large aware of the existence of this relatively new and promising field. All these activities will, of course, require funding, which is why a final task for the Global Partnership beyond 2005 will certainly be to broaden and strengthen the resource base. These activities will contribute towards the objective of making the collective of conflict prevention practitioners a serious, reliable and professional partner in the global search for peace.