



## **BALKAN REGIONAL ACTION AGENDA**

**Accepted by participants of  
THE BALKAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING**

Organized by

**Nansen Dialogue Network**

in cooperation with

**Albanian Peace and Disarmament Project  
and Bulgarian School of Politics**

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## **Introduction**

In recommendation 27 of his report on The Prevention of Armed Conflict (2001), UN Secretary General Kofi Annan “urge(s) NGOs with an interest in conflict prevention to organize an international conference of local, national and international NGOs on their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with the United Nations in this field.”

In response to this, NGOs worldwide joined together to form the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict to enhance the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and to strengthen partnerships between civil society organisations and governments, regional organisations and the United Nations.

Diversity is a key element in conflicts and in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. For this reason, the Global Partnership initiated fifteen regional processes, each of which will develop an Action Agenda based on their own experiences, needs and social, cultural and political realities. All these Regional Action Agendas will form the basis of the Global Action Agenda, which will be presented and discussed at the Global Conference which will take place at UN Headquarters in New York from 19 to 21 July 2005.

This Action Agenda reflects the outcome of a process of local consultations and national conferences throughout the region, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, leading finally to the Balkan Regional Conference. The conference which took place in Igalo, Montenegro, 4-6 November 2004 gathered around 125 participants and was organized by the Nansen Dialogue Network in cooperation with the Peace and Disarmament Education Project in Albania and the Bulgarian School of Politics.

## **Goal**

As a result of previous armed conflicts the Balkans remain a region of high tensions, a region in which violent conflicts still exist and where new violence is a threat. The situation related to the genesis of armed conflicts and the current situation is different in each of the countries and should be addressed specifically on national level by participants in GPPAC.

In the last decade many efforts have been made in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Balkan region. These efforts have improved the situation compared to ten to fifteen years ago but have not yet created sustainable peace.

Our goal is ultimately to contribute to prosperous, sustainable peace throughout the Balkan region and to building societies where effective conflict management and prevention mechanisms and processes are institutionalized on local, national and regional levels.

To this end, this Action Agenda is the basis for a common platform among conflict prevention and peacebuilding NGOs throughout the Balkans.

## **Guiding principles — What We Believe In**

### **1. Peaceful co-existence and non-violence**

The key to a more peaceful Balkans is the building of peaceful co-existence between the various communities of the region and demilitarized societies where conflicts are managed in a nonviolent way.

### **2. The values embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

Human rights must be observed by all governments, civil society organisations and individuals. We especially take note of the rights to security and the right to life, freedom of movement, non-discrimination and equal opportunity for all. Human rights concerns are central to our work and should be included in all conflict-related work so that human dignity is valued as it should be.

### **3. Diversity and multiculturalism**

We recognize the value inherent in diversity and difference and believe that differences can be a source of strength. Promotion and protection of rights of ethnic, national, gender, sexual and other minorities are central to our work.

### **4. Shift from crisis management to conflict prevention and peacebuilding**

We believe it is time to shift from a short-term perspective on conflict that emphasizes management of crises after they arise into a medium and long-term approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in all levels of our societies.

### **5. Sustainability**

So that future generations will not inherit depleted social, economic, and environmental resources, we support the principle of sustainable development throughout our work. As part of sustainability, we call for a strengthening of local institutions dealing with conflict prevention and peacebuilding, in order to assure long-term peace and prosperity in the region.

### **6. Accountability and transparency**

To ensure that states and institutions in the region have the ability to meet the needs of the people, we strongly advocate accountability and transparency as key elements of the practice of all institutions and programs in the region.

### **7. Partnership for conflict prevention between governments, CSOs and INGOs**

In order to tackle the complex issues of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, more collaboration, coordination and knowledge sharing is needed between governments, CSOs and INGOs at the local, national and regional level. The role of CSOs in conflict prevention should be better recognized, because of its essential impact on the community and local level.

### **8. Reconciliation**

We value social reconciliation and the rebuilding of relationships as part of our conflict prevention and peacebuilding work in the region, while recognizing the right of every person to choose when and if she/he will forgive and reconcile. CSOs play a crucial role in reconciliation processes on local and regional levels.

## **9. Inclusiveness and equality**

In our peacebuilding work, we practice the values of inclusiveness and equality in order to assure democratic process and the participation of all relevant actors.

## **10. Shift from national security toward human security**

We affirm the human security paradigm in our work. We are committed to promoting personal security of the people in all its ramifications: physical security, socio-economic security, and respect for human dignity and identity.

## **11. Dialogue**

In our work as CSOs, we recognize that dialogue is one the main tools for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Dialogue promotes understanding and relationships that would help sustain peacebuilding efforts at all levels of the society.

## **12. Respect for International Law and Instruments**

In order to address the legacy of violence and impunity in the Balkan region, we support international law and instruments that offer protection and legal justice. The UN Charter, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, in particular, provide frameworks for ensuring legal justice and protection for the region's most vulnerable.

Through a process of consultation on the local, national and regional level we recognize the following areas as crucial to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Balkan region:

- *Education for peace*
- *Interethnic dialogue, human rights, minorities and human security*
- *The gender perspective in peacebuilding and women's role*
- *Returnees and integration*
- *Transitional processes and EU integration*
- *The role of religious communities in peacebuilding*
- *Dealing with the past*
- *The interaction of various levels and actors including inter-governmental organizations, governments and civil society organizations*

**We therefore bring the following recommendations to international attention.**

## **1. Peace Education**

The goal is to introduce peace education in all sectors of society including schools, families, communities, media, civil society organizations, public actors and religious communities, in order to strengthen the capacities of citizens and societies to deal with conflicts non-violently and to transform destructive conflict into dialogue. Peace education can prevent violence and facilitate a significant change in personal mentalities and community behavior to ensure a sustainable positive peace environment. Peace education can help create the circumstances in which trust and reconciliation can be achieved and sustained in the region.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*We recommend governments to:*

- *Integrate peace education into appropriate school subjects (such as civics, ethics, and history) and in cross-curricular and extra curricular activities at all levels, from primary through post-graduate and professional;*
- *Peace education curricula should be designed with cooperation from government actors, NGOs, peace educators, and/or peace workers and should focus on issues such as intercultural tolerance, human rights, disarmament, and conflict resolution. Textbooks should be tested and revised to remove bias and propaganda and include human rights, in consultation with NGOs and peace education experts;*
- *Ensure that school systems and educational decision-making meet local needs (such as for diverse languages and children with special needs), that effective local educational actors are empowered, and that schools become nonviolent institutions for sustainable social peace;*
- *Increase spending on peace education and include peace education in all national education strategies;*
- *Ensure the preparation of teachers, academics, and school professionals to teach peace education. This includes mandating peace education teacher training.*

***We recommend civil society actors to:***

- *Work together through educational partnerships and networks to develop peace education curricula and standards for specific issues of concern to the region, including, but not limited to: multilingual education, democratic citizenship education, education for sustainable development, and critical thinking. Curricula and teaching methodologies should promote active learning, such as “learning by doing”;*
- *Develop educational spaces in which tolerance and mutual understanding can be cultivated, particularly in divided and ethnically diverse societies;*
- *Work transparently, independent of political party, donor, or other stakeholder priorities, and in the interest of developing peace education within societies;*
- *Engage members of diasporas from the Balkan region in education for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.*

***We recommend local communities to:***

- *Form a coordination body for the development of a peace education strategy at the local level with active participation of all stakeholders. The strategy should include peace education curriculum development, should be based on a comprehensive needs assessment of local target groups, and should benefit all community members;*
- *Facilitate the implementation and promotion of peace education activities through concrete community and media involvement, such as with peace radio, community TV, and interactive websites for peace education.*

***We recommend media to:***

- *Educate and train journalists on standards and practices of peace journalism by promoting positive, balanced, and nonviolent messages in all media;*
- *Develop codes of ethics for reporting about sensitive humanitarian issues and particularly about violent conflicts and war.*
- *Work with NGOs, governments, and all stakeholders in promoting values and models of peace and non-violence.*

***We recommend political parties to:***

- *Support education and training for politicians and party members (in particular young politicians and future decision-makers) for a culture of peace, nonviolence, and non-violent conflict resolution.*

**We recommend sports and cultural institutions to:**

- *Cooperate with NGOs to promote peace through sports and cultural events, and include a gender perspective in the whole process.*

**We recommend INGOs, IGOs and UN agencies to:**

- *Partner with regional actors in implementing and promoting peace education, including education on international humanitarian law, and to assist in the coordination and supportive monitoring of peace building efforts. This process must involve a two-way exchange and dialogue with local actors.*

**2. Inter-ethnic dialogue, human rights, minorities and human security**

It is essential that government and civil society organizations cooperate productively through coordinated action, critical dialogue and ongoing monitoring to promote human security and the growth and sustainable development of tolerant, ethnically diverse societies. Inter-governmental and international actors play a key role in facilitating and creating space for productive engagement in this area.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**We recommend governments to:**

- Promote inter-culturalism as a public good by:
  - Reforming legislation in accordance and harmony with international standards, with particular emphasis on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and identifying region-specific criteria such as religion and language as vehicles to promote those rights;
  - Following through on the proactive implementation and reporting on international obligations, including all treaties and conventions;
  - Promoting capacity development and sensitization of governments and civil societies in peace education, with support from intergovernmental organizations;
  - Increasing the transparency and effectiveness of state bodies responsible for protecting human rights;
  - Promoting equitable and proportional representation of ethnic groups in the institutions of state;

- Institutionalizing inter-ethnic dialogue through formal and informal mechanisms within state, media and civic organizations.
- Establish a Special Committee of Ministers for the Western Balkans to coordinate institutional cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights and human security, using conflict indicators and early warning systems as mechanisms for review, response and prevention. The Committee must function on a consultative, inclusive basis that creates meaningful space for the participation of civil society.

**We recommend inter-governmental organizations to:**

- Provide strategic and targeted assistance to local and regional mechanisms and work on finding solutions to inter-ethnic and human security challenges through sustained, adequate financing and political support;
- Recognize the importance of economic development within multi-ethnic communities throughout the region as an important point of entry to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and provide appropriate, sustained support in this area;
- Support legitimate local actors to engage in reconciliation dialogue in good faith and offer appropriate, sustained protection and support, including capacity development, to governmental, civic and media actors;
- Recognize the potential threat and negative regional impacts of a failure to establish and promote direct dialogue between official Belgrade and Pristina.

**We recommend the media to:**

- Support legislative reforms to promote responsible reporting standards and create space for productive dialogue on issues of common concern and interest with reconciliation and tolerance as overarching objectives;
- Develop functional mechanisms to promote regional-level information exchange in order to build understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity and to share good news stories.

**We recommend Civil Society Organizations to:**

- Recognize the importance of working towards inclusive, diverse and vibrant civil societies – emphasizing the special needs of vulnerable groups – through the promotion of tolerance, and support the development of local capacities at the individual and organizational level, including through local and regional civic networks.

### **3. Peacebuilding Through Gender Perspective / Women in Peacebuilding**

#### **Introduction**

Women in the region have increased the level of knowledge and awareness about gender perspectives and women's rights, which resulted in greater attention to and recognition of women's work in peacebuilding. Advocates of gender equality are promoting a common regional approach that could subsequently be adapted to respond to the conditions and needs of women and men in each country.

Building on these advances, the goal is to develop a regional platform that will encourage women and men to include women's contributions to awareness of issues of sex and gender in all programmes of conflict prevention and resolution, building and sustaining peace, as well as reconstruction and building of society at local, national and regional level. A viable strategy for gender awareness is one of the preconditions for sustainable peace in the whole region.

#### **We recommend NGOs to:**

- Establish channels of information and communication among women's groups and CSOs in the region in order to: gather information on women's contributions to peacebuilding; publicise achievements, efforts and problems, taking into account specific local features; explore and analyse possibilities, problems and obstacles; promote work, documents and good practices through public debates, media and campaigns; disseminate information and materials for increasing awareness of gender perspective values;
- Help women's networks to initiate a regional platform with a strategy for implementing a gender perspective in peacebuilding. The networks should include both women and men and be drawn from women's groups, civic initiatives, institutions, international organisations, and other NGOs whose work is not focused exclusively on gender awareness

#### **We recommend governments to:**

- Provide a budget that will support gender sensitive work on peacebuilding;
- Fulfil their obligations under international instruments and UN undertakings that they have ratified and accepted, and integrate these norms into their work;
- Report and inform the public on their international obligations and the progress in implementation;
- Increase level of knowledge and awareness of gender perspective within their own structures.

### **We recommend regional INGOs to:**

- Create a joint strategy on how to approach to the priority issues in peacebuilding and security;
- Establish cooperation and clear channels of information and communication among local, regional and international organisations;
- Raise the level of knowledge and consciousness about gender perspectives in their work.

### **We recommend to the UN to:**

- Continue to increase the number of women employed at all levels in the UN;
- Develop means of direct access for recommendations and suggestions produced by activists in the regions.

## **4. Returnees and Integration**

### **Introduction**

The Balkan region is struggling with political instability and unequal economic development, lack of transparency, general security problems and lack of the rule of law. With an unofficial estimate of one million refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) the objective is to create conditions conducive for the sustainable return and integration of refugees and IDPs in the region and to strengthen democratic development.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **We recommend governments to:**

- Develop functional regional mechanisms for cooperation and dialogue among themselves to contribute to the long term solution of refugee issues in the region. Governments with positive experiences should take on a leading role in this work;
- Harmonize national legislation with international standards of human rights and minority rights;
- Enforce the rule of law at all levels in accordance to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including minorities' rights, with special focus on security, freedom of movement and access to public services, in order to improve the processes of return and integration.
- Have an honest approach to the return process and work with transparency and clear indicators towards promotion and realisation of the process of return, right to home and equal opportunity.
- Develop strategies for regional economic development with special focus on areas for potential return.

**We recommend civil society organisations to:**

- Strengthen and extend existing networks dealing with refugees and IDPs
- Establish mechanisms for exchanging information and experiences relevant for their work on return and integration of refugees and IDP and use these experiences for creation of joint actions;
- Work with media in the region in raising awareness on all levels about the importance of creating conditions for sustainable return and integration of refugees and IDPs in society.

**We recommend the international community to:**

- Support Civil Society Organisations in establishing mechanisms for effective monitoring of the return process;
- Provide technical and financial support to improve the conditions of return for refugees and IDPs, and to develop and implement long term strategic plans for sustainable economic development;
- *Shift focus and increase support for organised return rather than individual returns.*

**5. Transitional processes and EU Integration**

The goal is to accelerate the transition process towards open, democratic and peaceful societies in the Balkans through EU integration.

**Recommendations:**

**We recommend the United Nations to:**

- Mobilize and support civic participation of the local communities and NGOs to meet local needs;
- Improve harmonization of its policies with the EU in the region.

**We recommend NGOs to:**

- Support and monitor institution building and its implementation;
- Enrich civil society capacity at local and regional level.

**We recommend the governments to:**

- Establish partnerships with civil society actors in order to meet EU standards and values;

- Strengthen and promote inter-governmental cooperation on regional, bilateral and cross-border levels including learning from the experience of acceding countries
- Ensure permanent transparency and accountability in the processes of EU integration;
- Further include marginalized and impoverished groups in socio-economic development programmes.

**We recommend the European Union to:**

- Increase the availability of EU funding in the region and facilitate access to it;
- Assist in implementing the Stabilization Association and enlargement processes in all the Balkan countries.

**We recommend the inter governmental organizations and donors to:**

- Identify local priorities and work in partnership with local actors in order to implement them.

## **6. The role of religious communities in peacebuilding**

The objectives are to:

- Promote interreligious understanding, reconciliation processes, and overcoming of the consequences of violent conflicts;
- Overcome ethnic and religious prejudices;
- Develop tolerance and dialogue using the respect that religious communities enjoy in all societies and nations all over the Balkans;
- Achieve greater interaction between religious communities and other stakeholders.

And to this end to develop strategic programs that would focus on research, discussion and education listed below.

**We recommend universities and research institutions to:**

- Conduct empirical research into the public's knowledge of various groups' religious traditions, history, beliefs, customs, perception of others, prejudices etc;
- Conduct empirical research into the political and social role of religious communities with regard to distribution of power, their role in the armed conflicts, and their general influence on society;
- Create new textbooks and educational methods and to provide training of educational staff in these methods.

**We recommend intergovernmental organisations to:**

- Provide expert support, primarily from the region, funding, and coordination for research, discussion and education on the above mentioned topics.

**We recommend NGOs to:**

- Provide the staff for implementation, logistical and administrative support of the above mentioned research and discussions;
- Organise conferences and hearings, panels, and workshops that will bring together experts and officials of religious communities and state authorities, to the purpose of discussing research results and developing concrete proposals for action;
- Organize courses and other educational processes for young people and other groups about their own and others religious tradition.

**We recommend governments to:**

- Support initiatives for research, discussion and education in the public, and to delegate their experts to participate;
- Conduct simultaneous changes of curricula and/or education patterns in accordance with agreements made at the regional level;
- Conduct reform of primary and secondary school curricula and develop educational methods for the purpose of promoting learning about the region's main religious traditions.

**We recommend religious organisations to:**

- Support the above mentioned efforts to research, educate and provide fora for discussions into the role of religious communities in peacebuilding.

**We recommend media to:**

- Promote research, discussion and education about religious traditions.

## **7. Dealing with the past**

### **Introduction**

Dealing with the past in war-torn, post-conflict, transition countries is a crucial prerequisite to achieving sustainable peace and a secure future. Fundamental to this endeavor is to recognize and understand the significance of facing up to the harsh realities of a painful past. In order to enable comprehensive integration, such modalities as are introduced must be fully supported by governments, and fully supportive of all citizens of all ages, in particular victims of mass atrocities and all other human rights violations. In order to process violations of international humanitarian law and support

local judiciaries prosecuting war crime suspects, full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, other ad hoc tribunals and the International Criminal Court is essential. Only by a full commitment to this process can citizens seek to recover and regain their confidence, mutual trust, self-respect and human dignity.

We believe that such a process is integral to the overall efforts towards reconciliation and the prevention of further armed conflicts.

## **Recommendations**

### **We recommend governments to:**

- Cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), other ad hoc tribunals and the International Criminal Court;
- Strengthen the capacity of national justice systems for war crime trials;
- Legally ensure free access to documentation revealing facts relating to events of the past and war crimes committed;
- Allocate funds for tracing mass graves and missing persons, victims' reparations and support for the victims' families;
- Allocate funds for educational, scientific and cultural programmes dealing with the past;
- Provide funds for trauma recovery assistance and continuous psycho-social support to victims, their families and communities with special attention to the specific needs of women and children;
- Create the legal preconditions for places of remembrance and memorials.

### **We recommend NGOs to:**

- Research and document past events through individual and joint projects which involve those institutions of State and society that have access to relevant materials and information.
- Develop a closer relationship with the media and educational institutions of all levels to produce an environment, which is conducive to dealing with the past.
- Develop capacity and practices to deal with the past in a constructive way on an individual, family and community level in a fully participatory and inclusive manner.

### **We recommend International Organizations/Institutions to:**

- Include dealing with the past in their programmes, resolutions and conventions, and thus obligate signatory countries to be fully participatory in the process.
- Strongly support independent media and civil society organizations and governmental institutions in addressing the issue of dealing with the past.

## **8. Interaction between different actors**

Cooperation between governments, civil society and inter-governmental organisations is the key to successful conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Governments in the region should consider forming a crisis prevention and peacebuilding fund based on the principles of GPPAC. These funds will be managed comprised of NGOs and government representatives.
- International organisations should utilise local capacities in the field in planning and implementing peacekeeping missions. Outside interventions should avoid devaluing or taking over the role of local organisations and people that have knowledge of the concrete situation.
- In order to enable cross-border regional cooperation and networking, the issue of freedom of movement needs to be addressed and resolved.
- We urge the UN and governments in the region to create a short and long-term peacebuilding platform along with the civil sector.
- NGOs should be encouraged to tackle crisis situation and work on peacebuilding at the grassroot level. International organisations, governments and local authorities should take into account and support grassroot activities.
- We urge governments and public media to join with civil society actors to provide regular opportunities for raising the awareness of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- We recommend to governments and international organisations to invest in longer term civil society activities in order to ensure sustainability, instead of focusing only on immediate crises.

**And in support of these principles and recommendations, NGOs gathered in Igalo for this conference will cooperate to:**

- Work with peace educators to develop effective networks for disseminating the idea of peace education in the Balkan region; for developing its concepts, curricula and methodologies; and for introducing it in the education policies of the region;
- Incorporate inter-ethnic dialogue into our work;
- Develop a regional platform to incorporate a gender perspective in peacebuilding;
- Strengthen and extend the existing NGO networks for supporting the process of return of refugees and IDPs;
- Monitor and contribute to the continued process of institution building in our societies to ensure it conforms to international norms of democratic legitimacy, transparency, accountability and responsibility.
- Provide practical support to the development of inter-religious understanding;
- Join in the effort to develop a constructive approach to dealing with the past.
- Coordinate our efforts in developing more effective interactions with governments in the region and IGOs so as to strengthen the common endeavour of regional peacebuilding.