

Role of Women in Violent Conflict Prevention and Negotiation

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyse the contributions of women in transitions from conflict to peace (i.e. cease-fires, negotiations, peace accords) and to identify successful strategies of women peace-negotiators. It furthermore attempts to share and reflect on two decades of experience working both with governments and civil society in the field of conflict prevention and poverty eradication in Asia. The sad reality that brings us together this week is that women and children are increasingly becoming targets of deliberate aggression and hostility around the world. Not being able to provide security to women, but especially children in the face of armed conflict is one of the greatest failures of the world today, not only because it creates so much pain, suffering and lasting damage, but most of all because the shattering of innocent lives could have been avoided.

While working for and with the poorest of the poor in Asia for the past 20 years, it has become clear that we need to explore new ways to prevent violent conflict because:

- Most serious threats to the life and security of poor people come from within their society by the hand of their own countrymen, usually not from an unpredictable, foreign “enemy“;
- Armed communal violence is on the rise and jeopardises the fruits of many years of hard development work in marginalized communities;
- Ethnicity and religion are mobilising factors for outbursts of violence but not the causes;
- Mechanisms of protection belonging to the state, the judiciary, the police, the army, communal and religious institutions, in place to protect civilians in times of crisis, often fail to do so at crucial moments in time;
- Violent conflicts do deep and lasting damage to local communities and it takes generations to overcome the anger, hatred and distrust and make the communities whole again;
- Victimisation of non-combatant civilians, women and children, as a deliberate strategy of armed groups is underestimated and should become a major global concern.

The first part of this paper opens with an introduction of conflict and conflict handling approaches and provides some academic data on global incidence of civil wars, the nature of self-determination movements and their current activities. Next it introduces the ongoing privatization of armed conflict, resulting in aggravated and prolonged armed conflicts with an alarming increased numbers of deliberately targeted civilians.

The second part of this paper assesses the impact of violent conflict on women and children and their role in current conflict prevention efforts, largely undertaken in post conflict situations. It examines specific bottlenecks and dilemma’s women are facing in this work and how they can be better equipped as pro-active peacemakers.

In the third and final part examines the connection between absolute poverty, injustice and violent conflict and explains the urgency to focus on global human security and realisation of the

Right to Development for all. A set of recommendations and readings completes the paper.

2. Conflict, conflict handling approaches, reconciliation and prevention

Before introducing the main topic of this paper, it is important to reflect briefly on the definition of conflict and different conflict handling mechanisms. Conflict can be defined as a perceived divergence of interests or a belief that current aspirations of different individuals or groups cannot be achieved simultaneously¹. Because diverging interests among individuals or among groups are a natural consequence of living together, conflict is an inevitable feature of social life and often a positive force for change.

Conflict is also a cultural phenomenon, which implies that there are culturally specific ways of perceiving and responding to conflict. These responses can sometimes remain invisible as unquestioned social assumptions to the members of any given culture². Societies deal with conflict by denying its very existence, negotiating a mutually desirable solution, compromising, threatening verbally, attacking physically, appealing to a third party, and so on. Another way of looking at prevention and/or resolution of conflict is to analyse the strategies that parties adopt to protect their own and/or the others' interest. These strategies include avoiding, yielding, contending and problem solving.³ It is important to analyse and cross check the cultural assumptions of the different parties first, when dealing with conflict prevention in cross-cultural settings and in situations in which the power balance between the conflicting parties is asymmetric.

When parties get involved in ending violent conflict there are four conflict-handling mechanisms to choose from, depending on the nature, stage and involvement in the conflict:

1. Conflict management approach generally tends to focus more on mitigating or controlling the destructive consequences that emanate from a given conflict than on finding solutions to underlying issues causing it. The use of military force for deterrence or in peace keeping is typical conflict management strategy.
2. Conflict resolution approach aims at going beyond mitigation of consequences and attempt to resolve substantive and relational root-causes so that the conflict comes to an end. They tend to last longer and contribute more to the interests of both parties and the welfare of the broader community, than to compromises and agreements about how to choose a winner.
3. The distinguishing aspect of reconciliation from other forms of conflict handling is that it is not adversarial and there is no coercion. It is in essence "a voluntary initiative of the conflicting parties to acknowledge their responsibility and guilt and its force for change is primarily internal." There is a readiness of the conflicting parties to 'let go' of the anger and bitterness caused by the conflict, a commitment by the offender not to repeat the injury; a sincere effort to redress past grievances and to enter into a new mutually enriching relationship.
4. While conflict management and resolution are reactive -- they come into motion once conflict has surfaced, conflict prevention tries to anticipate the destructive aspects of the

¹ Hakizas, 1999 p.1

² Fry, Douglas (ed) - Cultural Variation in Conflict Resolution. Alternatives to Violence, 1999, p.11

³ Hizkias Assefa – The making of Reconciliation (In: People building peace, European Centre for peace Studies, Utrecht, 1999, p.37-48): 1. avoiding (low concern for one's own and other's outcomes); 2. yielding (low concern for one's own and high concern for other's outcomes); 3. contending (high concern for one's own and low concern for other's outcomes), and 4. problem solving (high concern for both one's own and other's outcomes).

conflict before they arise and attempts to take positive measures to prevent them from occurring.⁴ This paper deals largely with the latter category.

3. Overview of incidence and causes of civil conflicts around the world

Deadly conflict data and causes

Academic research undertaken at the Kennedy School for Government of the Harvard University, identified 102 wars over the decade 1985 – 1995, of which only twelve were cross border wars and ninety (or 87 percent) were intrastate conflicts.⁵ Deadly civil conflicts are unevenly spread around the world. Europe had an unusually high incidence in the nineties, because of the Balkan wars. Africa has its fair share of civil conflicts, but interestingly, Asia has in fact been the most intensely affected area over the past decades.

Continent	1984 - 1995	1995 – 1996
Latin America	14%	14%
Europe	13%	08%
Africa	31%	45%
Asia	42%	32%

The causes of the 90 civil wars can be divided into two categories:

- Territorial conflicts, e.g. stemming from contested postcolonial divisions; and
- Intergroup fights, in which the people are organised around race or religion resort to armed combat to realise homeland aspirations, end economic deprivation and/or settle a religious strife. Seventy-two of these deadly civil conflicts had an ethnic character.

By 1996, 68 percent of these wars had ended⁶. When negotiated settlement and recurrence rates of civil wars are being considered, the figures become even more dramatic. Only 25 percent ended through negotiated settlement, while military victory provided a solution in 75 percent of the cases. Furthermore, military victory seems to provide a more lasting solution too, because only 15 percent of the conflicts resumed within five years after a military victory, while for negotiated settlements, the figures show that a staggering 50 percent of the wars had resumed. One third of the 102 wars were still ongoing or in stalemate at the end of the decade.

Minorities at Risk and the impact of democracy and societal resources on

One of the best longitudinal studies on civil conflict is the “Minorities at Risk” project at the University of Maryland’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management, that has been analysing the political activity of 272 minority groups “at risk” in 116 countries over the past three decades. Gurr defines minority groups at risk when they have collectively suffered or benefited from systematic discrimination of in relation to other groups in the same state. His study also includes advantaged minority groups, because they can also assume and abuse power

⁴ idem, p. 39

⁵The academic definition for a war or civil conflict is not shared by everyone, because it excludes small conflicts and most conflict among indigenous communities, because their numbers are too small. Three important elements of the definition are: 1. There should be at least 1.000 battle deaths a year; 2. The two parties should be organised and purposefully equipped to engage in warfare, 3. The constituency of an ethnic group should be at least 50.000 persons.

⁶ Dr. Monica Toft – Fall 2000 Course Civil Wars, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

and become vulnerable when their powers wane. His second book “People versus States”⁷, published in 2000, reaches a cautiously optimistic conclusion. The civil turbulence that had accompanied the end of the cold war in the early nineties has subsided and three positive global trends are observed: the number and magnitude of armed conflicts within and among states have lessened since the early 1990s by nearly half; conflicts over self-determination are being settled with greater frequency, usually when ethnic groups gain greater autonomy and power-sharing within existing states; democratic governments now outnumber autocratic ones.

Democratisation and international conflict resolution are determining factors in this success. To prove that a country’s capacity to build and maintain ‘social peace and security’ depends largely on the characteristics of its politics (autocratic, in transition or democratic), Gurr presents two kinds of evidence. First he calculated the ‘average annual risk’ of armed political or ethnic conflict for each of the three types of polity from 1959 through 1999 and concludes that democracies have had substantially less violent conflict than autocracies and that autocracies have been less violent than transitional regimes. Next, he analysed the relation between polity types and self-determination movements and concludes that democracies have a better track record at negotiating an end to wars of self-determination than autocracies. Between 1995 and 2000 eight wars for self-determination began and led to negotiated settlement in democracies. However, it is not democracy in itself that reduce self determination aspirations, but:

*“Self-determination movements in democracies are more likely to use conventional political strategies than rebellion. Only seven democracies had armed self-determination conflicts in 2000 compared with ten in transitional and autocratic countries.”*⁸

But the Project also provides comprehensive insight into the motivation of and decisive factors for ethnic groups to take up arms to get justice done. The chance that ethnic groups will initiate political action depends on four factors: the salience of the group identity, the collective incentives, the capacity for joint action and the external opportunities. Globally, only 25% of the 275 minority groups went for rebellion in 1995, while another 25% were not active at all. Interestingly, these figures deviate greatly for Asia, where one sees a more all or nothing scoring: nearly one third of the 57 ethnic movements were inactive, while nearly fifty percent was in small or large scale rebellion. 55 percent of all large scale rebellions around the world occur in Asia (see table below).⁹

In analysing these Minorities at risk in-depth, the study makes a distinction between national peoples and minority peoples. National Peoples are regionally concentrated groups that have lost their autonomy to states dominated by other groups but still preserve some of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. Their political aim is to protect or re-establish a politically separate existence. Minority Peoples on the other hand have a defined socio-economic or political status within a larger society – based on some combination of race, ethnicity, immigrant origins, economic roles and religion -- and are concerned mainly about protecting or improving that status. Next it further specifies three groups under each main category, table below gives the data for 1998¹⁰:

National peoples	Asia	%	World	%	Minority peoples	Asia	%	World	%
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⁷ Gurr, T.R. – Peoples versus States, Minorities at risk in the new century, US Institute of Peace Press, Washington, 2000.

⁸ Gurr, T.R. ao. – Peace and Conflict 2001, A global survey of Armed conflicts, self determination movements and democracy, University of Mary land publication, 2001, p.20-22

⁹ People versus States, p.7-12

¹⁰ idem, p.17-29

Total no of groups	36	151	Total no of groups	23	124
Ethnonationalists	10	28 41	Ethnoclasses	04	17 43 35
National minorities	06	17 44	Communal contenders	14	60 68 55
Indigenous peoples	20	56 66	Religious sects	05	22 13 10

Political action in 1995	Asia	World	Asia/World
Total no NP & MP groups	57	275	21%
Inactive	19 (32%)	71 (26%)	27%
Mobilisation	08 (14%)	86 (32%)	09%
Demonstrating or rioting	05 (09%)	40 (15%)	13%
Small scale rebellion	13 (22%)	49 (18%)	27%
Large scale rebellion	12 (21%)	22 (08%)	55%

But one of the most important conclusion appears in the summary sheet of ‘Global warfare by level of societal capacity¹¹ 1946-1999’ on basis of which Gurr concludes, that may by not polity, but poverty is the most determining factor for the peace building space:

“Magnitudes of warfare declined significantly during the 1990s in countries in the top four levels of development. In the bottom quintile however, the trend is essentially flat. In these countries, which include most of Africa, high magnitudes of conflict during the last 20 years of the cold war continued through the 1990s. This evidence suggests that Africa along with very poor and non democratic states elsewhere in the world, will continue to experience serious warfare in the future – and will pose a series of challenges to those responsible for maintaining regional security and preventing humanitarian disasters. Poor societies are at risk of falling into no-exit cycles of conflict in which ineffective governance, societal warfare, humanitarian crises and lack of development perpetually chase one another.”¹²

4. Privatisation of Conflict and Lack of Hope for a Better Future

There is another alarming trend gaining importance, which is similarly linked to the poverty – bad governance – failing states downward spiral. Though most civil conflicts have an ethnic dimension, it is again important to stress that ethnicity alone never provides a sufficient explanation for conflicts to turn deadly. While conflicts in Rwanda and Yugoslavia occurred along ethnic lines, other examples of extremely violent civil conflicts, e.g. Cambodia and Guatemala, clearly did not. Tharoor concludes that

“[C]ivil conflict is usually the result of failing political leadership. There are always more prosaic motives of ethnic leaders to be considered... Indeed it would be safer to proceed from the assumption that politics is at the root of most contemporary conflicts”. Ethnic conflict can be used by “Opportunistic political leaders who find in it the ideal vehicle to preserve or enhance power, or to distract their citizens from other domestic failures, often when ethnic division is nowhere as profound as it is being claimed”.¹³

Tharoor gives four major causes that can trigger future conflict:

¹¹ Societal capital in Gurr’s definition is the material resources a nation possesses.

¹² Peace and Conflict, 2001, p.13

¹³ Tharoor, Shashi, 1999. ‘The Future of Civil Conflict’ in *World Policy Journal*, Volume XVI, no.1, Spring, p. 1-11

1. Residual problems from the end of the era of colonisation (border disputes, conflicts between groups which were materially favoured and the disadvantaged, or overcoming mixed colonial histories);
2. State fragmentation and re-formation, as result of the geopolitical changes in the nineties;
3. Failed states (enduring state of underdevelopment combined with crisis in governance);
4. States in economic transformation towards open market capitalism.

Tharoor furthermore identifies a number of “circumstantial factors” that are often overlooked: the instability caused by proliferation of small arms and the role of external incitement, especially the impact of an ethnic diaspora, that intellectually and financially underpin deadly civil conflict and in nurture political extremism, is not to be underestimated (e.g. Sri Lanka and Cuba).¹⁴

The economics of ethnic conflict in poor societies should also be considered. Conflicts are often kept alive by the opportunities for profit and the issue of who actually benefits becomes key in understanding what motivates the battling fractions. Armed conflict can be extremely lucrative for the warring elites, who would effectively lose their access to natural resources and income once the conflict ends. Precious natural resources play rather decisive roles in a number of recent deadly conflicts: diamonds in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola; drugs in Colombia, Afghanistan and Myanmar; oil in the Democratic republic of Congo. In addition, the steady influx of relief goods provided by international humanitarian agencies form an important source of food and medical supplies, which would dry up once the deadly conflict ends.

This privatisation has changed the face of armed conflicts dramatically over the past two decades. Modern armed civil conflict results in disproportionately high rates of casualties and displacement. As they are commonly fought with conventional weapons and rely on strategies of ethnic expulsion and annihilation, many more civilians are killed than soldiers. War and civil conflict in the 1990s forced 50 million people to flee their homes and become internally displaced persons for prolonged periods– i.e. 1 person of every 120 in the world. The politics of civil conflict, years of depressing poverty and lack of hope for a better future, make the continuation of armed conflict an almost rational choice, an alternative way of life. Being “deprived of hope” to a fair chance in life provides the most immediate cause for violence and conflict.

Three additional trends stepped up the privatisation in the 1990s: the role of television as an important propaganda instrument to whip up passions and hatred; the growing involvement of private mercenaries and military companies providing expert military services to their combatant clients around the world; and the reduction of successfully negotiated solutions to civil wars in the nineties. In the twentieth century, the average duration of a war between nations was twenty months, as opposed to 120 months for civil wars.

5. Impact of deadly conflict and impunity on women and children

The majority of conflict prevention efforts are current undertaken in post conflict societies, aimed at preventing the past deadly conflict from re-emerging. In 2001, USAID published the results of a two year study¹⁵, which analysed the impact of deadly intrastate conflict on women

¹⁴ With the growing ‘displacement’ “the movement of populations across frontiers everywhere means the expatriation is a central feature of the Zeitgeist. .. Perhaps 5% of the earth’s people today live in countries other than those in which they were born.” In other words: the ethnic diaspora impact will only increase.

¹⁵ US Agency for International Development - Women and Women’s Organisations In Postconflict Societies; The Role of International Assistance. 2000. Washington DC, USAID Program and Operations

and on women organisations that emerged during the conflict. Based on findings from Rwanda, Cambodia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the study concludes that there are five major impacts of intrastate conflict on women and gender relations: 1) violence against civilians, of which 95% is female; 2) internal displacement, of which 90% is women and children; 3) redefinition of female identities in the society, both as victims and as perpetrators; 4) increased poverty and starvation, as result of targeted destruction of civilian property; and 5) communal violence leading to lasting bitterness, anger and hatred.

The Study concludes that in all six countries the most traumatising factor for women in conflict is the lack of physical security, both during the conflict and the post conflict demobilisation of the militia. It keeps women trapped in their homes, not being able to move around freely. Rape was used as a systematic tool of warfare and torture in all six case countries. Moreover, many women saw themselves forced to engage in prostitution in the post conflict era, as only available means of income. Family structures were damaged through death and trauma, resulting in women becoming heads of households and an increased incidence of domestic violence. Trauma in women manifests itself in depression, chronic fatigue, stress, anguish and listlessness. Continued research is needed to determine how trauma affects the reconstruction of a nation and the effectiveness of western trauma counselling methods in impoverished countries. Because they are often very costly, available for short time only and culturally inappropriate, it is important to develop indigenous counselling methods, because overcoming hate and anger is a determining factor in preventing conflicts from re-emerging in the near future.

Furthermore, during but especially after the conflict, women are confronted with economic restrictions leading in two countries to a decline in the status of women. Lack of property rights for women in many societies make female-headed households lose their land, nor do they have access to bank loans. In all case countries, the number of women entering the labour market increased during and after the conflict, though many lost their jobs in the formal sector once the ex-combatants returned to civilian life. Increased poverty hit the female population hardest: they are most malnourished and often deprived of basic education and health services. Hence, the Study makes a strong plea for rapid post conflict law reform re property rights for women.

At the same time, the political impact of war on women does seem to be positive. Women expanded their public roles and ran local political institutions during the war. Initially, many women organised themselves in support of the war. Later some women founded organisations to promote peaceful solutions and became powerful voices in peace-accords. Although in the post conflict era some disenfranchisement occurred, overall lasting political headway was made and more women participate in politics since¹⁶.

As most conflict prevention and reconciliation work is undertaken in post conflict societies, much less attention is paid to the impact of political violence, even though it has the potential of affecting many more women and children than other forms of violence. It is different from domestic violence for example, because it concerns intergroup violence and the perpetrator is a stranger to the victim. Political violence is considered to be more stressful for children than other forms of violence, because of the concealed, unresolved and cumulative nature. Furthermore, its prolonged state and unpredictability makes it potentially more psychologically damaging¹⁷.

Assessment Report No.28. the six case countries are Rwanda, Cambodia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹⁶ USAID report no. 2001, p.

¹⁷ Cairns, Ed - Children and Political Violence. Oxford, 1996. For a more elaborate analysis of the impact of violent civil conflict on women and children, see Scheper, E - On the Brink: the prevention of violent

The malleability of children's physical and psychological development makes them more apt to changes and adaptations to violent situations. But living in constant fear, without possibility of planning ahead, makes that a child's body, mind and thinking will adapt permanently and restructure accordingly, which seriously affects their ability to function in the society in future. Research into political violence and impunity in Cambodia indicates that the impact after twenty years is clearly visible in the lack of a long term vision, mutual trust, accountability and respect for the judiciary. This makes political leaders act mainly in the interest of short-term profits for themselves, and their supporters. Perpetrators learn that there is nothing to fear for committing crimes because prosecutions and trials rarely take place- especially not with connections in high places. The impact on the society and the insecurity of civilians is devastating¹⁸.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) reached similar conclusions in its 2001 publication on Impunity.¹⁹ Impunity is seen as the major reason for human right violations to persist. Perpetrators of similar violations in the past have often escaped accountability for their deeds. In response to those who claim that the past should be left behind once a conflict is over, the victims of violence are insisting that there can be no justice and no healing of a society unless the truth is told; unless the perpetrators are held accountable and those responsible confess their guilt, ask for forgiveness and give concrete signs of repentance. Truth Commissions and International Tribunals for Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda address these concerns, but other institutions should contribute more to this process of ending impunity as well.

5. The role of women organisations in violent conflict resolution and peace building

The responses of local women's groups in dealing with conflict, rehabilitation and peace appear to be remarkably similar around the world too. The women NGOs are mostly active in trauma counselling, micro-credit, voter education, gender awareness, law reform and political advocacy. The main strategy they choose to prevent conflicts from re-emerging has been to work on fundamental economic and social change. They advocate to pay greater attention to civilian security, e.g. through security sector reforms and greater participation of women in police forces, judiciary system and in peace committees. They stress the need for cost-effective indigenous approaches to provide long-term treatment to traumatized women and children, and ask the international community to make concerted efforts to acknowledge and prevent sexual abuse of women and girls. And finally, they are active in promoting female candidates to run in post conflict elections and in increasing the overall women's political participation.

The earlier quoted USAID research furthermore noted a marked increase in number of women's NGOs in the post conflict era, for which they found four explanations: increased female political participation; disillusionment with existing organisations that lack a gender agenda; post conflict democratisation that provided more political space for NGO work; and large sums of international donor assistance that came in.²⁰ The sustainability of these new women organisations needs further attention, especially with regards to the lack of appropriate management skills and dependence on temporary foreign donor assistance.

conflict and the protection children in deeply divided societies, paper prepared for the World Conference on Religion and Peace Conference "Women, Children and Conflict", Cordoba, March 2002.

¹⁸ ADHOC, LICADO and others: Impunity in Cambodia, June 1999, local advocacy publication.

¹⁹ World Council of Churches, Harper, Charles Ed –Impunity, An Ethical Perspective. Six case studies from Latin America. 1999. WCC publication, Geneva

²⁰ USAID

Another interesting experience to share of women taking initiative and institutionalising conflict resolution and prevention is the Komnas Perempuan (Indonesian National Commission on Violence against Women), that was set up in October 1998 by a Presidential Decree in response to the outcry of Indonesian women's organisations against the sexual assault and violence during the May 1998 riots in Jakarta.²¹ It is an independent body that maintains close relations with the respected National Commission on Human Rights, based on joint interests in promoting a gender-sensitive approach to basic human rights protection.

Komnas Perempuan set three main objectives with the aim to bridge the gaps between the 'government and society': 1) Increase public understanding on all forms of violence against women (=VAW); 2) Create a conducive environment for the elimination of violence by legal and policy reform; and 3) Strengthen the capacities for prevention of violence and in dealing with the consequences of VAW through national, regional and international networks. Its work covers five areas: mapping violence; building expertise on trauma counselling and reconciliation; witness protection; institution building, and training programmes for personnel from government, army and civil society to learn how to deal with and prevent VAW in future.

The Komnas Perempuan 2000 Report on the impact of communal violence on women²² provides a sad but clear example of the complexity of modern civil conflict. Women and girls have been suffering disproportionately in the ongoing violence. In response, KP and Indonesian women's organisations have been undertaking many initiatives, like emergency assistance, set up trauma teams, documented atrocities, campaigned for peace, organised women in conflict areas, and influenced national policies to end the violations. While many issues need to be addressed, Komnas Perempuan systematically stresses two: the victimisation of women and the absence of women at the negotiation table.

Systematic documentation on female victimisation and sexual violence in armed conflict collected over the past three years shows that the impact on women of military attacks on civilian populations is far greater than the impact of cross-communal violence. In these 'so called' military zones rape has been used as a systematic tool of torture to intimidate population. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the sexual violence women face in situations of armed conflict is connected to patterns of domestic violence that women face in everyday life during peacetime²³

Secondly, the Report highlights the absence of women at the negotiation table, in spite of the multitude of initiatives, which women have been taking since 1998. When participation happens, it is only because women's groups push themselves upon the decision makers and insist on their voices being heard. "Every single progress in women's involvement is a product of a conscious and targeted struggle against the dominant current". It is unfortunate to have to conclude that a Presidential Decree and a National Commission status does not make it easier to convince politicians, military and civil servants to begin to take gross gender biased human rights

²¹ During the civilian but military supported attack on a Chinese neighbourhood in Jakarta, app. 750 rapes took place, including gang rapes. The independent investigation lawyers' team assembled sufficient proof to bring 193 cases to court, but no law suits were filed. The government and military dismissed the report instantly, while many of the rape victims, mostly young women and girls, were sent abroad to family in Malaysia and Philippines, to cast away the 'shame' they brought on the family

²² Komnas Perempuan, An Indonesian Approach to the Consequence of Armed Conflict. Presented to the Beijing +5 conference in June 2000 in New York.

²³ Idem, p.4

violations seriously. Komnas Perempuan advocates that only continued and concerted international pressure and close collaboration with the civil society will get women systematically involved in the democratisation and justice work to start to put an end to the violations.²⁴

6. Preventing Violent Conflict through Provision of the Right to Development and Human Security

In sum, whether one analyses conflict through academic war data, self-determination movements, impact on women or through responses of women organisations to conflict situations, two main conclusions keep recurring: the relation between deadly conflict, absolute poverty and deprivation of hope for a better future, and the relation between deadly conflict, gender inequity and victimisation of women and girl children. The next paragraphs will look into these conclusions more closely.

It is widely acknowledged that conflict and development or the lack thereof, is closely interlinked.²⁵ Most violent conflicts stem from deeply rooted social and economic injustices often related to identity politics and extended periods of targeted deprivation. Long-term development programmes, accompanied by structural political and social change, are needed to eradicate the real causes of poverty, and thereby also of conflict. The UNDP identifies three global trends that currently aggravate extreme poverty: a) social fragmentation – the widening disparities in income, job and income insecurity and financial volatility; b) the global “uncivil” society – organized crime, HIV/Aids, and environmental degradation; and c) the privatisation of civil conflict.²⁶

Violent conflict cannot be successfully prevented, if absolute poverty and injustice issues are not addressed globally. NGOs have been advocating for absolute poverty eradication through equal opportunity and social justice for decades. This requires a holistic approach, for which all instruments are available. The UN Declaration on the Right to Development was signed in 1986. Targets were set by international community to achieve poverty reduction by 2015 at the UN Social Summit in 1995 and the World Food Summit in 1996. But the financial commitments have lagged behind, and it is unlikely that the poverty reduction targets will be met.

Similarly, the international community needs to review its global concept of security. Security was traditionally defined as state-oriented and military in nature in defence against ‘external’ threats. National security therefore was paralleled with the strengthening of military capacity. Yet for most people in the world, the greatest threats to security come from internal adversaries, resulting in disease, hunger, environmental contamination, or even domestic violence. Since the early nineties a new concept of human security has been developed and advocated. The prime human security objective is to provide to all citizens’ basic food, economic, health, environmental, cultural and political security. As such it advocates new moral obligations, especially for local authorities and the military, and changing policies of equity and distribution

²⁴ *idem*, p7-8

²⁵ Absolute poverty is a state of powerlessness in which people are unable to exercise their basic human rights or control virtually any aspect of their lives. Poverty is almost always caused by human action or inaction. It can be made worse by natural calamities, and human violence, oppression and environmental destruction. But it is maintained by entrenched inequalities and by institutional and economic mechanisms. Oxfam International Strategic Plan 2001-2005

²⁶ UNDP - Human Rights and Human Development, Human Development Report 2000. New York: Oxford University Press.

of resources, which may run contrary to mainstream political economics at both the national and international levels.

Traditional ways of conflict prevention should likewise be adjusted. For instance, early warning, preventive diplomacy and military deterrence, should make way or at least be complemented by so-called “foundational prevention approaches”,²⁷ that are directed at resolving horizontal inequalities based on social, religious, cultural and ethnic identities, which are often breeding grounds for violent conflict. The declaration on the Right to Development, adopted in the United Nations by an overwhelming majority in 1986, sets out four essential principles and clear actor responsibilities to this end. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the declaration on the right to development (1986) states:

*“The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtues of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised”.*²⁸

Firstly, development is an inalienable human right. Secondly, development refers to a particular process, in which all have an equal opportunity to participate in development and in the fair distribution of benefits thereof. Article 8 elaborates by stating that the measures for realizing the right to development shall for all in their access to basic resources, health services, food, housing, employment and in the fair distribution of income. The realization of this right also requires that women have an active role in development process and that appropriate economic and social reforms should be carried out with a view to eradicating all social injustices.²⁹ Thirdly, development is a process in which “every human person and all peoples” are entitled to participate, which provides concrete opportunities to include the needs of children structurally in development efforts. Finally, to provide development to all is the prime responsibility of the states, and action is required on national as well as international levels.

As a consequence, the UN and its member states have the duty, both individually and collectively, to formulate international development policies and to provide poorer countries with appropriate means and facilities to promote rapid poverty eradication. Such approach could also give new impetus to the poverty reduction commitments made by the international community and furthermore, it should reverse the negative Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) trend of the past decade, when the already limited generosity of the rich world is further shrinking.³⁰

7. Conflict prevention: role of women in peace building,

Given the relation between existing gender balance in the society and the impact of armed conflict on women, it is important to take a closer look at the roles of women in war and peace building. Joshua Goldstein researched this subject for 15 years and in the process “became some what more pessimistic” how quickly or easily war may end. His book explores the two key explanations for gendered war roles: 1) the small, innate biological gender differences in average

²⁷ van Ginkel, Hans, and Edward Newman, 2000. ‘In Quest of Human Security’. In *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Spring, pp.59-82.

²⁸ Sengupta, 2000, I, p.1

²⁹ Idem, p.3

³⁰ The ODA to the Least Developed Countries declined from 24% to 21% of the total aid between 1988 and 1998, while the total ODA (net expenditure) declined from US\$ 53 billion in 1992 to US\$ 41 billion in 1998. (Oxfam International Strategic Plan, Introduction)

size, strength and roughness of play; and 2) the cultural moulding of tough, brave men, who feminize their enemies to encode domination.

In Goldstein's book, the war system emerges as relatively omnipresent and forceful. He concludes that women in their efforts to change the war system must overcome three crucial dilemmas. First, the "if you want peace, work for gender justice" approach is explored. Many peace scholars and activists support this approach, which also helps to unite strategic allies in the peace movement (women, labourers and minorities), but rests on the assumption that injustices cause war. Goldstein concludes that the causality could at least run as strongly the other way.

*"War is not the product of capitalism, imperialism, gender, innate aggression or any other single cause. ..Changes in attitudes towards war and military may be the most important way to reverse women's oppression"*³¹.

Second, women face the major dilemma of gender roles in peace building, when trying to change the war system. Some join the military or armed groups, but thereby usually perpetuate the war system because they have limited opportunities inside the army to enforce change. Alternatively, women often form the core of the peace movement, which may result in feminising peace and in turn could re-enforce militarised masculinity. Third, most women try to be good mothers within the norms of their societies, thereby reproducing gendered war roles. Especially when raising boys mothers face a dilemma: if they raise sons as non-warriors they could some day be overrun by other societies that keep raising warriors. Hence, real peace and real gender equity may both remain generations away .

Whether or not the war system is indeed a core element of the society and is perpetuated by prevailing gender roles, Goldstein argues that war is causing gender injustice, I fully agree that it is important to realise that "to think into the future beyond the war systems requires breaking out of psychological denial regarding the traumatic effects of war on human societies". Social conventions keep war silent in our everyday lives, because it represents trauma. Psychologists like Herman emphasize the gulf between war and daily life:

"The war story is closely kept among men of a particular era, disconnected from the broader society that includes two sexes and many generations. Thus the fixation on trauma – the sense of a moment frozen in time- may be perpetuated by social customs that foster segregation of warriors from the rest of the society."

Future gender sensitive conflict prevention work should thus put more emphasis on bridging these gaps between war, society, upbringing and daily life. Next to absolute poverty, injustice and gender inequity, we need to deal with the impact of trauma and gender roles on perpetuating violent conflict from a realistic perspective. If only because:

*"Confronting war in this way may, in turn, reshape gendered relationships"*³²

On a more immediate response to threats, let's have a closer look at the role of women in current peace building. Pro-active conflict prevention efforts have strongly expanded in scope and popularity over the past few years and are now commonly referred to as peace building. Peace building is a process seeking to transform non-violent attitudes and behaviours to achieve sustainable peace.³³ A recent country study by the Cambodia Peace Building Study Project

³¹ idem, p.412

³² idem p.405

³³The term "sustainable peace" refers to a situation characterized by the absence of physical violence, the elimination of political economic and cultural forms of discrimination a high level of internal and external legitimacy, economic self sustainability and a prosperity, which enhances the constructive transformation of conflicts. From: Cambodia Peace Building Study Project - *Peace Mapping: A study of Peace Building*

identified eleven predominant areas of work that range from peace marches, education and exhibitions to conflict resolution, demobilization, civil disarmament, and trauma counselling and anger management. But while the activities in peace building increased in number, the report concludes that the effectiveness is limited as: “..individual peace efforts routinely lack access to resources and support, lose the benefits of lessons learned and can be prone to isolation.”³⁴

John Paul Lederach, a renowned Mennonite peace builder, concludes in his review of 20 years of peace building efforts that there is hope for future improvement, if three gaps can be overcome. The first gap Lederach identifies is lack of vertical integration of peace initiatives. Relationships of respect and understanding between higher levels of leadership with community and grassroots levels of leadership and vice versa are not developed. Most peace building work, particularly in the field of conflict resolution has been aimed at improving relationships by getting counterparts of relative equal status to meet with each other. The emphasis on this type of dialogues has fostered mainly horizontal relationships and lacks responsive and coordinated relationships up and down the levels of leadership in a society affected by protracted violent conflict.³⁵ It seems that the ability of women to build these vertical links is further hampered by the lack of representation of women at higher levels in the society and the gender bias in war and peace work, strengthening at least the image of feminine peace and masculine militarism.

The second gap deals with the lack of structural transformation to bring the much-needed social and economic justice required for sustainable peace to last. Lederach observes that though peace processes may have delivered a reduction of direct violence, they have rarely attained the aspirations of desired structural change. Hence, third parties need to reorient their investment (including funding, research and practice) and no longer be negotiation centric only, but focus on developing practices to create collaborative non-violent processes of structural change. In the previous paragraphs the need to implement the Right to Development and shift to Human Security was already highlighted. Here it is particularly important that women organisations analyse carefully the local culture and practises vis-à-vis gender roles in upbringing, violence and peace building and contemplate on changes in the larger context too, next to seeking the much need socio-economic justice and redress for the affected minority groups.

Lederach’s last gap refers to the limitation of seeing peace as an end product, and not as a dynamic, ongoing process of transformation. The word resolution lends itself to suggest the goal is to end something not desired. To conceptualise peace as process will help to make parties commitment to permanence of relationship building³⁶, which will in turn help to facilitate the structural transformation process. There are several interesting initiatives that can be furthered and promoted. The Macedonian NGO/ICRC moral development project trains high school students in resolving moral dilemmas and understanding the value of co-existence and is a powerful tool to tackle the impact of political violence. The Mindful Mediation work of the renowned Quaker Peace builder John McConnell and the Buddhist Research Institute in Bangkok, uses Buddhist mediation approaches based on the four noble truths: the response to greed, hate, anger and delusion and mediation skills and the kusala-mula³⁷ and could prove every effective in overcoming trauma and mistrust in societies that suffered from communal violence.

Initiatives in Cambodia, a local NGO working group report, Phnom Penh 2001 p.1.

³⁴ Ibid, Preface.

³⁵ Lederach, JP - Justpeace, the challenge of the 21st century. 1999. In: People building peace, European Center for Conflict Prevention, Utrecht, 1999, p.30

³⁶ idem, p.31-34

³⁷ McConnell, J.A. - Mindful Mediation, a handbook for Buddhist peacemakers. 1995. Asian Books, Bangkok.

Given the importance of religion and the status of religious leaders in communal life in poor societies, there is a special opportunity and responsibility for religious institutions to contribute to this field too.

Lastly, I would like to draw your attention to the work of Nat Colletta, the founder and former director of the World Bank Post Conflict Reconstruction Team. His work on peace building likewise highlights the importance of vertical linkage and structural transformation, but adopts an integrated good governance, social capital, corporate response and social cohesion perspective. Colletta stresses the importance of analysing the relationship between social capital and the cohesiveness of a society³⁸, to better understand the emergence of violent conflict.

‘Social cohesion is the key intervening variable between social capital and violent conflict, the degree to which vertical (a responsive state to its citizenry) and horizontal (cross-cutting, networked relations among diverse communal groups) social capital intersect, the more likely a society will be cohesive and thus possess the inclusive mechanisms necessary for mediating/ managing conflict before it turns violent. The weaker the social cohesion, the weaker the reinforcing channels of socialization (value formation) and social control (compliance mechanisms). Weak societal cohesion increases the risk of social disorganization, fragmentation and exclusion, potentially manifesting itself in violent conflict.’³⁹

Two main features of social capital deserve special attention of peace building NGOs, for their potential to fuel the fire of hostility. If the vertical relations are characterized by inequality and an unequal distribution of power and opportunity, the state capacity to manage civil conflicts reduced sharply. The lack of organizational integrity and synergy of the state, or poor vertical social capital, are often key causes of conflict. On the other hand the lack of horizontal relations between different groups in a multicultural society can erupt into hostilities if one group is seen as monopolizing resources and power to the disadvantage of the others. And if within these groups, high levels of homogenous social capital bonding occur, differences in access to resources and power may further aggravate tensions between those in control and those excluded.

But the same social dynamics that enable actors to engage in integrative relations or linkages for positive end-outcomes can also result in the formation of groups with very negative effects, such as youth militias. Strong social dynamics and bonding within these groups, primarily manipulated and mobilized by the armed groups, enables the groups’ success. The negative effects of this strong social capital are evidenced through exclusion; hate propaganda, repression, and eventually slaughter. In sum, violent conflict is triggered by the presence of strong exclusionary bonds combined with a lack of horizontal and vertical bridging links. Hence, peace building initiatives should work simultaneously on good governance, decentralization and participation, and responsible market penetration (vertical axis), as well as on empowerment, bonding and bridging horizontal among and between different communities (horizontal axis), which will strengthen civil society, mutual trust and social cohesion and thereby the conflict prevention ability of the society as a whole.

³⁸ Colletta, NJ and Cullen, ML - The Nexus between violent conflict, social capital and social cohesion, WB Working paper, 2000, p.4.

Social cohesion refers to two broader intertwined features of society: the absence of latent conflict whether in the form of income/wealth inequality; racial/ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of polarization; and the presence of strong social bonds-measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity; the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (civic society) and the presence of institutions of conflict management, e.g., responsive democracy, an independent judiciary, and an independent media”,

³⁹ Colletta, 2000, p.24-29

8. Recommendations

My first recommendation is to start implementing the Right to Development worldwide without further delay. According to this UN Declaration, eradication of poverty and human security are the prime duties of the states (rich and poor) and action is required on local, national as well as international levels. Good governance, social justice and gender equity are essential prerequisites to make the RtD work. Immediate post conflict law reform is required to end discrimination on base of gender and race and provide equal access to productive resources and participatory forms of (self) governance.

The second recommendation is to promote proportional representation of women and children as serious partners in all political, development and peace building efforts. Not only because it is their moral and legal right, but also because it will make conflict prevention work much more effective. But women's roles in society translate into having a better-trained eye for community and household interests and the well being and protection of children. Empowering women and children to implement positive programmes for conflict prevention and reconciliation is of paramount importance. Increased participation of women in politics is furthermore an important step to reduce the gender blindness in policy making, law reform and

The third recommendation is to build local capacity in conflict prevention awareness and mediation skills at grass roots level in general and for women organisations in particular. It is of utmost importance to have South-South networks emerge and prosper. This will enable local NGO staff, who work on conflict prevention and rehabilitation under extremely difficult circumstances, to share their experience, learn from each other's successful approaches, to blow off steam and get re-energized. Working in conflict resolution can be a stressful, traumatising and lonely job. Female professionals are often totally absorbed when dealing with traumatized victims and war atrocities, so much so that many burn out, withdraw from the NGO work and are in need of trauma counselling themselves, because the problems of the victims are a close call home. Their hardships need to be acknowledged and their well-being nurtured. They are the bravest and most precious resource without which much of this work cannot be done.

The fourth and last recommendation is to transform the culture of violence by developing alternative approaches to promote peaceful co-existence, moral development and common human values that can pave the way for genuine justice and reconciliation in divided societies. I have tried to describe how prolonged deprivation of hope and exposure to war and political violence erode the fundamental human values to the point that it threatens the core value that unites us all: human dignity. Human dignity is the inner driving force that enables humans to strive to survive and accomplish⁴⁰. It is also the last value that any human wants to lose. And our own dignity is conditional upon our ability and willingness to extend the scope of human protection and security to others.

Peace is more than an end to conflict. Peace building is an ongoing process of transformation towards a state of peaceful co-existence that is based on three assumptions: irreconcilable differences and intractable conflicts must not be permitted to escalate into total conflict; all human fate is ultimately indivisible; and that helping people see the human face of others is an indispensable prelude to human action.⁴¹

⁴⁰ van Ginkel, Hans, 2000. 'In Quest of "Human Security"', in *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, no.1 Spring, p.79.

⁴¹ Weiner, E. Coexistence work: a new profession, in *The Handbook of Interethnic Co-existence*, p.13

