

## Chapter One. A window of opportunity

### 1.1 Current global context

People live in seemingly different worlds and see the world differently. Some align themselves with national and corporate interests and seek protection under their umbrellas. Others find this unfortunate, hoping that it may only be a staging post on the way to a world which is ruled equitably and democratically through treaties and accountable global institutions. Others see a world of massive injustices and double standards built on the economy and politics of globalization.

Wherever people find themselves on the political spectrum, most would agree that at this moment in history the world society is unstable and highly conflictual, and change, for good or ill, is happening fast. And, whatever people's views, it can be convincingly argued that the change is largely driven by globalised economic interests, with governments following behind more or less willingly. As a result, millions are led to expect ever higher living standards, while many more are threatened by a nexus of four core issues: economic injustice and poverty; denial of rights and participation in society; climate change and energy constraints; and armed violence.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Interlinking issues*

These issues are often treated singly, as separate phenomena, whereas in fact they are closely linked. The peacebuilding field has focussed on war and the drivers of war, but wars and organised violence today can no longer realistically be treated separately from other key drivers of human society.

Certainly, amidst global injustice and environmental degradation, war is used as an instrument of domination, and often of resistance or liberation. But the grievances of poverty and marginalisation serve as causal factors leading to war, and war is all too often used to extend economic and political dominance – in other words, for greed.

Whatever war's causes or justifications, its impact is not only suffering and death on an incomprehensible scale, but the further exacerbation of poverty, with all the misery and deprivation it entails: through forced migration, the disruption of lives and livelihoods and the destruction of the infrastructure needed for economic development. Similarly, while pressure on scarce resources and the desire to exploit and control them may be a factor behind violent conflict, war constitutes a monumental waste and diversion of the resources necessary to eradicate poverty. At the same time it destroys, degrades and pollutes the earth, its atmosphere and its creatures. Its environmental footprint is gigantic and goes largely unnoticed by those not immediately affected by it. Yet war continues to be seen as a worthwhile activity, often for the short-term economic and political dividend it brings.

The disregard for the rights and needs of other human beings that is embodied in exploitative systems and in wars is accompanied by the endemic disregard for human rights within societies, whether by factions within those societies or by the governments that supposedly control them. It is ironic how powerful states claiming to act in favour of human rights and democracy show their contempt for both through illegal and immoral acts of war, and through curtailing human rights within their own societies.

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis presented in the following section draws on previous work by an informal group which included Simon Fisher; the full account can be found in Francis, Diana. A project to transform policy, starting in the UK. CCTS Review 35, November 2007. Available at <http://www.c-r.org/ccts/ccts35/review35.pdf>. See also Case Study 7 on p. 36 below.

While violent forms of struggle for and against domination are the order of the day, with the summary curtailment or gradual erosion of individual freedoms that come in their wake, the freedom and power to participate in social and political life are drastically diminished. And in those countries that are relatively safe and privileged, materialism and disaffection combine to allow political participation to atrophy, so undermining the democracy such countries claim as their foundation. Political activism tends in response to manifest more in engagement with single-issue pressure groups, such as in the environmental movements. These are important in themselves, but risk missing the big picture in their attention to specific aspects and symptoms of dysfunction.

### *Changing patterns of power*

Against this background we live in a world order which is in flux, and demonstrably not economically or environmentally sustainable. The global balance of power is changing – it is no accident that the main theme of the 2007 meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos was the ‘shifting power equation’. Big business and high politics agree that the world is becoming more difficult to manage as the unipolar, US-dominated global dynamic gives way to something infinitely more complex and less amenable to domination by any one group or state. Horizontally, key factors such as the rise of India and China, and the runaway dependence on finite energy sources are leading towards a much broader, perhaps less predictable multipolarity.

At the same time the states themselves are losing power to non-state actors. Big corporations individually are more powerful than many small states; INGOs<sup>2</sup> like Greenpeace, Oxfam and Human Rights Watch are getting their key issues on the world’s agenda; inter-governmental organisations such as the EU, World Bank, and even the UN, all maintain or increase their influence. New technologies have empowered many of these actors, and created others, such as the global blogging movement World Have Your Say, which can mobilise and articulate global opinion on issues of the moment. Individual bloggers have discovered a great new ability to exert influence through communicating events directly, as was shown dramatically during the Burma uprisings of 2007. Through these changes, non-state networks of every kind have also gained impact hugely.

This diffusion of power has inevitably undermined the traditional power of the state in many parts of the world to impose its will, on its own people as well as on others. As a sign of this power shift it is instructive to note the remarkable incidence of regime change through civil resistance and popular power over the past 15 years or so.<sup>3</sup>

### *Inadequate responses*

Current approaches by many governments to tackling injustice and conflict remain however rooted in the implicit assumptions of the past and as such are, not surprisingly, often counterproductive. Although the overall number of violent conflicts in the world is relatively low,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There is a plethora of terms to describe the activity of civil society – “a supranational sphere of social and political participation in which citizens groups, social movements, and individuals engage in dialogue, debate, confrontation, and negotiation with each other and with various governmental actors—international, national, and local—as well as the business world” (Anheier, H., M. Glasius and M. Kaldor (eds) *Global Civil Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.4). In this article we use the terms ‘civil society organisation’ (CSO) to denote local and national-level organisations and groups, and ‘international non-governmental organisation’ (INGO) to denote largely Northern-based CSOs working beyond their home country.

<sup>3</sup> For a concise list of civil resistance movements see *Selected Cases of Civil Resistance Since 1945*, available at [http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/civil\\_resistance/map\\_and\\_Timeline.pdf](http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/civil_resistance/map_and_Timeline.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> There were 32 armed conflicts in 2006, a decline from the average of more than 60 in the immediate post-Cold war years. See Harbom, L. and P. Wallensteen, *Armed Conflicts 1989-2006*. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 44, No 5, September 2007.

we need look no further than Iraq and Afghanistan, Darfur, Zimbabwe and Israel/Palestine to see the apparently unquestioning faith which the powerful continue to put in weaponry, and its terrible results for people and the planet. Militarised views of the world still dominate its politics. The capacity and the will of global society to solve conflicts and address injustice peacefully is desperately inadequate in the face of today's need, let alone tomorrow's; the risk of intense conflict arising from the complexity of issues is given scant attention.

International peace practitioners, for their part, and other global civil society players who have peace as part of their remit, remain weak and implicitly focussed on a relatively narrow approach to peace, without full recognition of the interconnectedness and flux of the system. As a result, the strategies they offer tend to be inadequate, in the sense that they merely serve to reinforce the circumstances which gave rise to violence and warfare in the first place.

#### *Positive signs?*

If national power projection and the use of armed violence remain the preferred option of the powerful in dealing with intractable conflicts, it is hard to be optimistic either about the wellbeing of many millions of people in the short to medium-term, or about a successful response to devastating climate change.

Still, things may be starting to change. In many locations and at many levels there is evidence that a search is underway for new ways to address conflicts. Increasingly, for example, the military in the UK and US are saying publicly that wars do not work any longer – even for them.<sup>5</sup> However, there is as yet little sign of more than sporadic, patchy political acceptance of the need for new thinking, let alone systematic planning about how it might be met. Institutional changes at the UN, such as the new Peacebuilding Commission are a start, but they are far from adequate to address the issues we are facing.

There are exceptions to this, notably among Scandinavian governments. There are also some signs in the UK which indicate a hunger in government circles for new insights and models in relation to peace. The civil service has been re-organised to accommodate teams of officials working on conflict issues, especially in the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). DFID recently organised a consultative process in drawing up its new policy document on conflict.<sup>6</sup> A new All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict Issues, dedicated to getting realistic, nonviolent alternatives into the UK policy debate, is beginning to attract attention, if not yet the consequent understanding, in political and military circles.

For the optimists, there are other international signs of positive change. One can point for example to the following:

- *A UN milestone.* In April 2007 the Security Council met to discuss climate change for the first time. It did so, surprisingly, and at the behest of the UK government, in the context of conflict and security and, again surprisingly to many, there was broad agreement that the issue poses a clear threat, perhaps the major threat, to international relations and global stability in the future.
- *Changing international consensus.* International thinking about how conflicts are most effectively addressed has progressed enormously over the past 15 years. *Pace* the dominance of the neo-conservatives in the US, and their allies in the UK in the early years of this century, governments and civil society alike are developing a consensus over some of the key pillars of

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Smith, Rupert. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Penguin 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Preventing Violent Conflict, UK Department for International Development, March 2007. Available at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/preventing-conflict.pdf>

peacebuilding, including the salient importance of early warning and prevention of conflict (i.e. violence), international cooperation and agreement, the effectiveness of peacekeeping, security sector and governance reforms.

- *Increasing impact of negotiation in ending wars.* Since the 1990s more wars have ended through negotiated settlements than victory: between 2000 and 2005 negotiated outcomes were four times as numerous as victories.<sup>7</sup> However, it must not be forgotten that the longer-term success of these negotiated outcomes is as yet unknown, and inevitably fragile, as the case of Sudan currently illustrates.

Underlying this apparent momentum is what Gareth Evans, President of International Crisis Group, describes as: “the huge upsurge in activity in conflict prevention, conflict management, diplomatic peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding activity that has occurred over the past fifteen years, with most of this being spearheaded by the UN itself (but with the World Bank, donor states, a number of regional security organisations and literally thousands of NGOs playing significant roles of their own).”<sup>8</sup>

But as yet, the peacebuilding message seems too muted, weak and fragmented to capitalise on these potential advantages. Peacebuilders are failing to make the political waves necessary to convince others, and perhaps even themselves, while globalised corporate power exerts ever more undemocratic control over the essential components of peace. Now that the political window may be opening, and an opportunity knocks, will we be unprepared and divided? What can we do? What have we to say?

## 1.2 Making choices

The authors of this paper came into this field at very different points in time, but with similar values. We believe that peacebuilding and conflict transformation have the potential to offer viable alternatives to costly, ineffective and often highly destructive ‘top-down’ methods of dealing with conflicts and their causes. We have seen this peacebuilding paradigm begin to prove itself in practice, little by little, evolving from its foundations in disciplines such as philosophy, political science, social psychology and international relations, and in a variety of religions, providing an invaluable source of insights and innovative approaches, both at policy and practice levels. Some of its achievements are summarised in Chapter 2 below.

But we also see that the peacebuilding community is stunted by a variety of factors, among which are a lack of clarity – or is it consensus? – about values and goals, the often incoherent, short-term manner in which goals are implemented, excessively deferential attitudes to those holding political power, organisational rivalry, and a shortage of competent practitioners. Peacebuilding and development organisations alike seem to be failing the challenge.

Pioneered up until now largely by a small section of global civil society, working through a variety of groups, organisations and networks, the peacebuilding community is faced with a choice:

- It can continue as now, largely irrelevant to the big picture, atomised yet effective in patches, here and there, operating largely at the behest of governments and in isolation from various economic interests.

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<sup>7</sup> Human Security Brief 2006, Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia. Quoted in Barnes, Catherine. Bridging the gap – Improving UK support for peace processes, Conciliation Resources, June 2007, p.11. Available at [http://www.c-r.org/our-work/practice-policy/CR\\_Bridging\\_the\\_Gap\\_Working\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.c-r.org/our-work/practice-policy/CR_Bridging_the_Gap_Working_Paper.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Evans, Gareth. Conflict Prevention: Ten Lessons We Have Learned, Toronto, February 2007. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4653&l=1>

- Or, it can respond to the current opportunity, revisit its basic assumptions and values, and look actively and ambitiously for ways to achieve its potential as a source of legitimate, tried and tested alternative approaches to addressing the world's conflicts.

This paper argues that the peacebuilding community – all those who see themselves as working for peace, justice and development – needs to start getting its own house in order. It needs to have further conversations about 'peace writ large', a term introduced but not substantially explored by Collaborative for Development Action (CDA).<sup>9</sup> Whose peace are peacebuilders working for? Is such work regarded as 'transforming' – seeking ultimately to challenge the unsustainable, unjust status quo and bring about profound change towards greater justice and wellbeing? or is it essentially 'technical' peacebuilding, focussed on project-bound locations and time-scales and trusting that the bigger picture will look after itself (which it surely will do, after its fashion)?

In beginning to address this and related questions, there will be much more than to say to the wider world, and much that can be done to extend the scope of peacebuilding into three key areas of global power:

- Wider civil society, locally and globally, concerned with interrelated issues such as rights, democracy-building, economic justice, humanitarian aid and environment;
- Governments and intergovernmental institutions such as the UN;
- Commerce and business, both local and global.

Chapters 3 and 4 of this paper set out to ask questions and suggest some options for what needs to be done in the impending multiple crises going forward.

What follows in Chapter 2 below is a brief, inevitably impressionistic overview of the main achievements of the field. It does not try to do full justice to what has been achieved in the relatively short space of time since late 1980s. It does, however, name some of the key elements which now need to be built on purposefully, with wisdom and courage.

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<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on Peace Practice, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004. Available at [http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/manual/reflectingonpeacepracticehandbook\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/manual/reflectingonpeacepracticehandbook_Pdf.pdf)