



Sharing Best Practices on Conflict Prevention: *The UN, Regional and Subregional Organizations, National and Local Actors*

This report comes as part of IPA’s project, “From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict”, generously funded by the governments of the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Portugal.

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Executive Summary

- The UN does not act alone in conflict prevention. It is important for the UN to identify other actors with comparative advantages in certain aspects of conflict prevention, and to partner wisely with them. These may include regional and subregional organizations as well as local actors such as states or civil society organizations.
- Increased coordination between the UN and regional, subregional and civil society organizations might enable better linkages between national, regional and international conflict prevention efforts and improve planning at the field and headquarters level.
- Regional and subregional organizations offer important opportunities for partnering for the UN, but are quite varied in terms of resources, the political will that they can mobilize, and institutional capacity.
- Development of institutional capacity within nations to manage conflict peacefully can be assisted and encouraged by regional organizations and others. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s High Commissioner on National Minorities may be one example; the work of Organization of African States in democratization and human rights is also instructive.
- UN and World Bank development activities are increasingly being viewed through a conflict-prevention lens; their evaluations may help in not only identifying early warning signs, but also in developing strategies that mitigate the potential for violent conflict. Such analyses and approaches could be usefully adapted by regional and subregional organizations.
- The UN Staff College training course in early warning and preventive measures has sought to develop analytic skills in staff such that early warning can be translated into specific policy guidance. Such training will be available to some regional organization staff; the courses might usefully be adapted by such organizations for their own use.

About this Policy Report

On April 8-10, 2002, with the generous support of the Government of Sweden, the International Peace Academy, in partnership with the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt, held a conference entitled *Sharing Best Practices on Conflict Prevention: The UN, Regional and Subregional Organizations, National and Local Actors*. This report comprises the substantive papers developed to help guide discussions on several key issues. A conference report summarizing and analyzing the proceedings will be published separately.

The primary background paper, by Chandra Lekha Sriram, frames the key issues of sharing best practices and identifying comparative advantages and opportunities for partnership. The paper by Albrecht Schnabel identifies some key opportunities and challenges for partnerships between the UN and regional and subregional organizations in conflict prevention. John Packer gives a detailed analysis of the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, an innovative institution for structural conflict prevention and capacity-building developed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Finally, Augustine Toure discusses the role of local actors and civil society in conflict prevention, with particular focus on their relationship to activities carried out by regional and UN actors.

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Refining Conflict Prevention—Sharing Best Practices and Improving Partnering

Chandra Lekha Sriram

I. Introduction

In June 2001, the UN Secretary-General issued his comprehensive report on the prevention of armed conflict, identifying key challenges in conflict prevention for the UN system, as well as articulating steps that had been taken and were continuing in order to develop more a holistic preventive strategy.¹ A central feature of the report was the recognition that the UN rarely acts alone in conflict prevention, but rather must partner wisely with regional organizations and local actors; further, the importance of structural prevention and capacity-building was strongly emphasized. The activities of the International Peace Academy have sought to build upon these insights and identify opportunities for developing and refining preventive action in these areas.

II. Background

In the 1990s, the failure of international efforts to forestall armed conflicts or to diminish their destructive effects spurred a range of initiatives to examine more closely and creatively the opportunities for, as well as the constraints upon, the international system's capacity to prevent violent conflict. Today, conflict prevention has become a widely used term of art throughout the multilateral policy community, from governments through donor fora to the United Nations' Secretariat. However, while preventive action has many advocates, the details of how and by whom preventive measures are to be implemented at a local, national, subregional, regional, and international level need to be sharpened

further. It is only with the refinement of available tools, and the generation of more comprehensive strategies that address conflict early and offer durable solutions, that a *culture of prevention* can truly begin to take root.²

In 1999 the International Peace Academy (IPA) launched a modest but analytically cross-cutting project on conflict prevention with the generous support of the Government of Sweden entitled *From Reaction to Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System in the New Millennium*. The purpose of the project was to examine key trends in the causes and dynamics of conflict, explore important tools and strategies of preventive actors, as well as to identify key questions for further inquiry.³ *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict* is the successor, multi-year program of work launched in 2000. The aim is to provide operational and practical insights for the development and implementation of conflict prevention initiatives by the UN system and its agencies. The project focuses especially on the importance of stemming violence early through the use of various development and security tools. One of the key observations to have emerged from examinations by IPA and the UN to date is that the UN does not act alone, and frequently is not the best-placed to act; it should thus engage more often, and more consistently, with a host of other relevant actors.⁴ It is vital, for the UN to develop more comprehensive prevention strategies, to partner wisely with the host of actors identified by the Secretary-General in his report on the prevention of armed conflict, including local actors,⁵ national governments, regional and subregional organizations, and international NGOs.

¹ *Prevention of armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/55/985-S/2001/574 (7 June 2001).

² See *Preventing Violent Conflict: Swedish Policy for the 21st Century* (Stockholm: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, May 2001), addressing the steps needed to entrench a culture of prevention.

³ Charles K. Cater and Karin Wermester, *From Reaction to Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System in the New Millennium: International Policy Conference Report* (New York: International Peace Academy conference report, April 2000). David M. Malone and Fen Hampson, eds., *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2002).

⁴ This point is made quite clearly in the recent report of the Secretary-General; see also Chandra Lekha Sriram, *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict: Report of the Security Council Workshop* (New York: International Peace Academy, February 2001).

⁵ Ben Rawlence, *Empowering Local Actors: The UN and Multi-track Conflict Prevention* (International Policy Conference, Report, New York: International Peace Academy, 10 December 2001); background paper by Augustine Toure in this report.

III. Sharing Best Practices on Conflict Prevention: Goals of the Workshop

The purpose of the Workshop was to contribute to knowledge about the roles of regional and subregional organizations, national governments and local actors who operate in tandem with the UN so that violent conflict can be prevented early, and effectively. While the overarching goal was to contribute to the development of a culture of prevention in the international system, the Workshop emphasized two specific goals:

- **Sharing tools and best practices:** The Workshop sought to shed light on emerging and innovative tools and strategies that are being developed by the UN and regional and subregional organizations, and national/local (government and civil society) actors, and critically examine the potential transferability of these across actors and regions.
- **Comparative advantages and partnering:** The Workshop also sought to distill practical policy-oriented and operational suggestions regarding the meaningful interaction of the UN, regional and subregional organizations, and national/local actors in conflict prevention.

A. Sharing Tools and Best Practices

Myriad tools have been developed and continue to be developed by the UN and regional and subregional organizations in efforts to prevent or contain conflicts globally, or to prevent the spillover of conflicts that can engulf regions.⁶ It is important to bear in mind that the causes and dynamics of conflict may vary across regions, and that increasingly we are seeing regional conflict formations pose particular challenges to conflict prevention.

This means that many tools may not be transferable directly across regions; significant modifications may be required. However, lessons about the utility of specific tools in specific locales should nonetheless help in

designing strategies in other locales. Closer examination of such tools was designed to help develop a better understanding of the virtues and limitations of each, and shed light on where certain tools might be usefully applied in new contexts. Ideally, the various tools described may also form part of a more holistic strategy; in this paper they have been disaggregated for the sake of simplicity.

Training and early warning—from early warning to early action

Preventive action requires preventive **actors**, frequently these are already in place on the ground. For two years, the United Nations Staff College Course on Early Warning and Preventive Measures has been engaged in training staff in conflict prevention; this training has also been applied to specific country cases.⁷ The goal has been to train staff not only to identify early signs of conflict, but also to train them to develop informed analysis with regard to the challenges and risks in a situation and develop refined policy options in response. It is perhaps the most elaborate training course in conflict prevention, but by no means the only one; other actors may find the Staff College course instructive. This course, along with work in developing early warning indicators and revising the UNDP's Common Country Assessment (CCA) and Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), aims at refining early response to early warning. Information that regional and subregional actors have may be of great assistance in further refining early warning.

Mechanisms for early warning and prevention

Efforts at early warning for conflict prevention have been developed within the UN, such as through the training and CCA/UNDAF work mentioned above, as well as in a number of regional and subregional organizations. The two mechanisms referred to here for early warning and prevention are African, but their experiences may be instructive beyond the continent.

Conflicts in Africa over the past decade have been frequent, deadly, and increasingly regionalized, prompting recognition of the need for regional and

⁶ On endeavors by a variety of regional and subregional organizations in this arena based upon extensive consultations and study is the background paper for this conference provided by Albrecht Schnabel. An extended, but slightly dated, survey is *Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in the Political Practice of International Organizations* (The Hague: Clingendael, 1996).

⁷ See the site for the Department of Political Affairs at www.un.org.

subregional responses to violent conflict. In 1993, the OAU (soon to become the African Union) established a conflict prevention mechanism. The OAU mechanism has, in particular, been active in mediating the many conflicts in Africa that were the very reason for its creation. In 1999 the Economic Community of West African States set up the Early Warning Mechanism. The efficacy of both has been hampered by limited resources, and the political challenges of acting in situations where significant conflict is already underway, but they nonetheless represent important innovations that can be built upon and elaborated and important partners for the UN to engage in its own preventive efforts.⁸

Institutional capacity-building

Structural conflict prevention involves creating the conditions in which conflict is less likely to arise, or in which normal social conflicts may be resolved without resort to violence. One key approach is, broadly, institutional capacity-building: providing for means of channeling disputes. This can take the form of, *inter alia*, assistance to rule of law institutions such as the judiciary or constitution, assistance with reforming the security sector, and support for the development of dispute resolution mechanisms.

As the paper by John Packer demonstrates, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has developed an innovative institution, that of the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). Through the use of generally quiet diplomacy, the High Commissioner engages states on problematic issues, whether structural, legal, or even constitutional, which affect minorities and which may give rise to grievances and conflict if not properly addressed.⁹ In the Organization of American States, elaboration of strategy has evolved in the functional area of human rights and democratization. Again, the focus is not simply on possible triggers of conflict, but rather on creating structural conditions that enable grievances to be resolved peacefully. In North Africa the League of Arab States (LAS) and the local UNDP office have also developed a capacity-building project for conflict prevention.

B. Comparative Advantages and Partnering

Roles of the UN

The UN has a broad mandate for the prevention of violent conflict under Article 1 of the UN Charter. Moreover, it has a wide array of departments and agencies that have been working to very good effect to mitigate the sources of conflict and stem the proximate causes of violence. For instance, the UN is often best placed to undertake preventive initiatives. Such initiatives include preventive diplomacy, preventive disarmament, preventive peacekeeping, post-conflict peacebuilding, capacity building and technical support, and activities promoting human rights and good governance. However, it is increasingly understood that conflict prevention is complex and multi-dimensional, and is likely to be most effective with the deployment of different types of strategies and tools across different phases of conflict. The UN may not always be best placed to act preventively in a given situation; moreover at times it lacks the mandate and/or resources (which depend on support from member states and consent of the “host” country) required for effective action.

Roles of regional organizations

Regional and subregional organizations are uniquely placed to affect several factors that are crucial in the prevention of violent conflict. Such organizations can facilitate and help move forward the efforts of the UN system throughout its engagement in a given conflict or potential conflict. Regional and subregional organizations are well placed to act because first, members of regional and subregional organizations may be more willing to *allow* these organizations, rather than the UN, to engage in preventive action. The actions of regional and subregional organizations are likely to be more discreet than those undertaken by the various bodies of the UN, particularly at the early stages of potential conflict. Moreover, regional and subregional organizations may be better placed to act because they are familiar with the actors involved in the dispute and the situation on the ground.¹⁰ In addition, although their interests are not always benign, neighbors frequently

⁸ On the OAU mechanism generally, and partnering with the UN, see Monde Muyangwa and Margaret A. Vogt, *An Assessment of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, 1993-2000* (New York: International Peace Academy, November 2000).

⁹ For more on the HCNM, see the background paper by John Packer.

¹⁰ See Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach, “Mediating Conflict in Central America,” in Jacob Bercovitch, ed., *Resolving International Conflicts: The Theory and Practice of Mediation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 1996), on the role of insiders, particularly in mediation.

have a greater interest in preventing conflicts that could potentially escalate to the regional level. Second, regional and subregional organizations have an important role to play in developing a regional “culture of conflict prevention” through the promotion of democracy, human rights and sustainable development. Third, they can and have been quite successful at longer-term and sustained conflict prevention efforts involving capacity building and technical assistance. In the past few years, this has begun to include election monitoring and broader democratization assistance in several regions.

Linkages across levels—local, national, regional, and international

Perhaps most significantly, regional and subregional organizations may be well placed to serve as a conduit between the international and national/local levels. Meaningful participation at the national and local levels is crucial for the immediate and effective implementation of conflict prevention measures, and there is an urgent need to develop better practices in this area. What is required is an integrated international, regional and subregional approach to conflict prevention that takes the local ownership of conflict prevention seriously.

Regional organizations may also engage with other regional and subregional actors in supportive, mediative, or capacity-building roles. This is the case of the “Barcelona Process”, whereby the European Union seeks to support efforts at conflict prevention in the Mediterranean. In another vein, mediators from the Commonwealth of Nations have been active in several African conflicts and in Fiji. Finally, the UN has increasingly developed these linkages, as it seeks to develop regional strategies for prevention, in West Africa and elsewhere, and through initiatives such as the previously mentioned partnering between the LAS and UNDP.

IV. The Papers—Tools and Partnering

The papers that follow, then, address key issues raised by the Secretary-General for preventive practitioners in the UN and beyond, including partnering with regional and subregional organizations, working with local actors in conflict prevention, and quiet diplomacy and capacity-building. While by no means comprehensive, the papers do seek to offer lessons from experience to help guide implementation of the Secretary-General’s recommendations in this area.

Operationalizing Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and Challenges for Regional and Subregional Organizations

Albrecht Schnabel*

I. Introduction

This paper addresses the problems and prospects for preventive activities by regional and subregional organizations in conflict prevention, as well as possibilities for them to cooperate more closely with, and to learn from the practices of, the UN system. It draws upon a series of consultations undertaken by the UN University with several regional and subregional organizations around the world, as well as at UN headquarters in New York. In particular, these consultations highlighted the importance of information and early warning, training, and participation by local actors.

While the demand for conflict prevention mainstreaming is universal, and most organizations are eager to integrate conflict prevention into their daily activities, few organizations understand how and where to implement such programmes. The UN and regional and subregional organizations have much to learn from each others' expertise and comparative advantages. Coordination might be enhanced by more regularized mechanisms for coordination, information-sharing, and task-sharing where several institutions act in the same "theatre".

Specific tools such as early warning and information sharing may be of particular utility. Informational exchange and needs and capacity assessments of subunits within UN departments and agencies, and regional and subregional organizations, and among these actors, should receive much greater attention. Information analysis and policy development would be greatly enhanced by the development of more comprehensive training programs. Such training needs to be provided to greater numbers of staff in the UN, regional and subregional organizations, and should be tailored to the specific needs of the organization or program. Finally, as the paper by Augustine Touré highlights, local

populations ought to be included in consultations regarding the design of prevention programs and may be important for the development of local background research and risk assessment.

II. Background

Regional and subregional organizations are increasingly called upon to lead international efforts – alone or in tandem with the UN – in conflict prevention, conflict intervention, and post-conflict peacebuilding. However, regional and subregional organizations cannot simply be treated as convenient substitutes and alternatives for the inaction of the UN and the larger international community in violence-prone regions that pose no direct threat to the wider international community. Instead, better partnering and/or burden sharing has the potential to result in more effective, better targeted and sustained strategies of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Regional and subregional organizations tend to have a greater stake in the prevention of instability and insecurity among their member states. The problem is that few regional or subregional organizations have the capacity to live up to their potential as regional security providers. This paper highlights some opportunities and challenges in capacity-building and training in risk assessment, early warning and preventive action; and coordination and task sharing among regional and subregional organizations and the UN.

III. The Role of Regional Organizations¹¹

Regional organizations are involved in many activities similar to those of the UN –and are often better equipped than the UN to prevent conflicts. Regional organizations

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¹¹ This section draws on Schnabel, "International Organizations and the Prevention of Intergroup Conflict," pp. 54-56. Please also see David Carment, Abdul-Rasheed Draman and Albrecht Schnabel, *From Rhetoric to Policy: Towards Workable Conflict Prevention at the Regional and Global Levels*, Occasional Paper No. 23, (Ottawa: Centre for Security and Defense Studies, Carleton University, 2000).

are highly motivated to resolve disputes when members of the organization are directly affected. They possess greater local knowledge and understanding, and they are better able to offer carrots (enhance membership privileges when disputes are resolved) or sticks (withhold membership privileges when disputes continue) to co-opt states into compliance with regional and international standards of good governance.

Some regional organizations, particularly in Europe, possess greater financial resources for their tasks than their analogous parts within the UN. Such organizations include, for instance, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The EU contributes to conflict prevention by promoting regional cooperation: its “strength is that of a soft power – by shaping a peaceful environment through the use of political and economic instruments and setting standards on human rights, democracy, and market economy.”¹² The OSCE takes a similar approach, focusing on the low-key promotion of mutual trust, confidence and dialogue. Its main instruments in strengthening stability and preventing violence throughout Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus are arms control and confidence building measures through the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and its many field missions.¹³

Many developing countries (particularly on the African continent) encounter problems that are much greater in magnitude than those experienced in Europe. Despite the advantages mentioned above, most regional organizations in those regions lack the required resources as well as the political will of their member states to become effective instruments for conflict prevention.

Nevertheless, in order to capitalize on the momentum that exists within regional and subregional organizations to mainstream early warning and preventive action, and to facilitate effective coordination and task-sharing, greater efforts have to be made in enhancing organizations’ sustained capacity for prevention.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., p. 25

¹³ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

¹⁴ For recent analyses on mainstreaming conflict prevention within nonstate, state and inter-state actors, see Luc van de Goor and Martina Huber, eds., *Mainstreaming Conflict Prevention: Concept and Practice*, CPN Yearbook 2000/01, (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/Conflict Prevention Network, 2001); particularly the chapter by Annika Björkdahl, “Comparing Multilateral Organisations in Mainstreaming Conflict Prevention,” pp. 105-126.

¹⁵ Participants included the Assistant to the Secretary-General, Representatives of the UPD and Human Rights Divisions and others together approximately 15 persons.

IV. Regional Organizations and Conflict Prevention: Emerging Practices, Opportunities and Challenges

There are numerous regional and subregional organizations that have sought to develop strategies to prevent violent conflict. The available strategies will not be the same, nor should they be, for all organizations. The degree and nature of conflict varies across regions, requiring very different types of responses, ranging from tools such as capacity-building and promotion of human rights and good governance through development aid, preventive diplomacy, and where there is a need to prevent the escalation of conflict, intervention. Similarly, regional organizations have differing resource levels that affect their capacity to engage in sustained and effective preventive action. Sovereignty is a greater or lesser bar to preventive action across regions as well.

The following subsections highlight efforts at enhancing conflict prevention capacity among regional and subregional organizations. They draw upon a seminar series that is part of a multi-year United Nations University research project on conceptual, institutional and regional analyses of conflict prevention activities and strategies, and help to indicate the emphasis of preventive work in four organizations. These summaries are not exhaustive, but rather indicative of the differing approaches that can and have been taken.

A. Organization of American States (OAS)¹⁵

Rather than seeking to mainstream conflict prevention in its regular activities, the OAS is beginning to develop its conflict prevention capacities through its focus on democratization and human rights in the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD). In addition, the OAS has a number of conflict prevention tools at its disposal that range from diplomatic to military and include treaties, arms control agreements and mechanisms that reduce interstate threats.

B. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)¹⁶

The OSCE attempts to be active in all phases of conflict, and in this sense resembles a “security community”. It features several conflict prevention mechanisms: a Conflict Prevention Center, which is part of the Organization’s Secretariat in Vienna, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the good offices of the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. Effective conflict prevention requires the OSCE’s “intrusion” in the domestic affairs of the participating state in question. Nevertheless, despite notable exceptions such “intrusion” is mostly seen as a constructive contribution by an impartial third party.

C. Organization of African Unity (OAU)¹⁷

The single biggest problem facing the OAU is its lack of effectiveness in the management of both inter- and intrastate conflict. This is in part a function of the OAU mandate that, unlike the OAS, strongly precludes interference in state matters. A second and arguably more pressing problem is the Organization’s lack of capacity to carry out meaningful engagement in internal problems ranging from effective analysis to the search for appropriate and feasible solutions. These problems reflect a range of challenges, from lack of infrastructure and qualified personnel, to insufficient funding and poor early warning training. In addition, the endemic weakness of state structures and democratic processes across Africa creates both the opportunity and incentive for outside interference by actors seeking to serve their own interests in a manner that can exacerbate violent conflict. As a result, it becomes extremely difficult for the OAU to muster the necessary leverage and political will to conduct effective conflict prevention.

D. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹⁸

ASEAN is based on a culture of non-intervention and has limited experience in addressing intrastate conflicts. However, the prioritization of harmony and “intergroup

peace” at the expense of early conflict management can be counterproductive to early prevention if there is a potential for violent conflict. Moreover, there are conflicting views among members as to what conflict prevention should entail—from the management of non-violent disputes to ensuring basic needs for the population, and who should undertake such tasks—the government, the military, NGOs, or regional organizations. ASEAN’s response to events in Indonesia (Aceh and Irian Jaya, among others) may provide insights into its effectiveness.

V. Strengthening Capacity and Coordination

Beyond the rhetoric of cooperation among the UN, regional organizations and civil society actors, the relationships need to be pragmatically assessed and understood. Such assessment should inform structures and modalities for more effective cooperation. Coordination offices within organizations should generate and foster interaction between regional and subregional organizations and the UN; among regional and subregional organizations; and among these organizations and national and local actors. Conflict prevention has to be generated, maintained and sustained at the *local* level; or, at the very least, national and international efforts have to be well tuned to local needs and invest (including financially) in local capacity building efforts.

Preventive actors, whether the UN or regional and subregional organizations, must develop in-house expertise and build upon lessons learned from experience. Although difficult to measure, efforts need to be undertaken to determine, evaluate and explain successful and failed preventive action. “Lessons Learned” and “Best Practises” units within regional organizations should be devoted to such analysis. Finally, training in early warning and prevention needs to be expanded, but need not be developed from the ground up. Efforts should be made to integrate conflict prevention training programmes, or specific modules on conflict prevention, into existing training courses on related topics.

¹⁶ Participants included OSCE staff, representatives of a number of member state delegations to the OSCE, local academics and a UNDP representative.

¹⁷ Participants included representatives of the OAU’s Conflict Management Center, permanent representatives, the UN Economic Commission on Africa and individuals seconded from the UNDP.

¹⁸ Participants included research staff at the Habibie Center for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (the local host), a number of UN offices in Jakarta, and representatives of the academic and NGO communities. Consultations also included an extensive meeting with ASEAN’s Secretary-General, Rudolfo C. Severino.

The Role and Work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities as an Instrument of Conflict Prevention

John Packer

I. Introduction

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) was established in 1992 as “an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage” with the task of preventing armed conflict between OSCE participating states. The instrument was created as part of the conceptual and operational development of the OSCE’s notion of “comprehensive security” which recognizes a fundamental link between security and respect for human rights. Respect for human dimension commitments, including respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, is fundamental to achieving and maintaining peace and security in the region. The initial recognition of the interdependence of issues of military and political security and human rights, as well as economic and environmental concerns, was set out in the 1975 Final Act of Helsinki signed in Helsinki on 1 August by the Heads of State and Government of the then 35 states participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This document set out ten basic principles governing behavior both among the participating states, and by governments towards those within their jurisdiction.¹⁹

The role of the HCNM is to focus on disputes involving national minorities that have an international character and that have the potential to cause inter-state tension or to erupt into international armed conflict. The function of the HCNM is to provide “early warning” in cases where he believes that minority-oriented problems might escalate and threaten peace, security, or stability between states and to take appropriate action in order to de-escalate tensions.²⁰ Should tensions escalate, the mandate requires the High Commissioner to warn the participating states in sufficient time to allow for further steps to avoid the eruption of violent conflict.

The HCNM is above all a political instrument and is *not* intended to supervise the compliance by states with their OSCE commitments or international obligations. He does not function as an advocate or ombudsperson for minorities or as recourse for individuals belonging to national minorities: he is a High Commissioner *on* (not *for*) National Minorities. Nonetheless, the subject-matter addressed by the HCNM (i.e. minority issues or issues of an inter-ethnic character) is strongly linked with the human dimension: adequate protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities contributes toward minimizing ethnic tensions that might otherwise threaten to create wider conflict. The High Commissioner therefore pays careful attention to issues of human rights, especially freedom from discrimination, along with respect for minority rights. In this connection, it is important to underline that the HCNM is not concerned merely with minimum requirements; problem-solving often requires going beyond such minimum standards to address the needs of good governance within a democratic society.

The High Commissioner currently follows developments in some 20 OSCE participating states, and is actively involved in over a dozen states, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. He is supported in his work by an international staff of ten advisers based at his office located in The Hague, The Netherlands. Mr. Max van der Stoep of The Netherlands served as HCNM since the mechanism became functional in January 1993 until July 2001. The current HCNM is Mr. Rolf Ekéus of Sweden.

II. The HCNM's Approach

While the mandate of the HCNM has certain explicit restrictions, it nevertheless remains very wide. In particular the High Commissioner enjoys a right of initiative by which, on the basis of his own judgment, problems

¹⁹ The principles – later to become known as the “decatalogue” – are divided into three domains or “baskets”: security (in the sense of traditional military issues); economic and environmental concerns; and the “human dimension”, which includes human rights and humanitarian affairs. Within this framework, the institution of the HCNM is placed firmly in the “security basket”.

²⁰ For the purposes of this paper, and in light of the fact that both HCNMs have been male, the HCNM will be referred to in the masculine gender.

can be taken up in those situations meriting involvement. Crucial to the timing of involvement is the independent status enjoyed by the HCNM: his involvement does not require the specific approval of the Senior or Permanent Council²¹ or of the state(s) concerned. This enables quick and independent work.

As an independent actor the HCNM may establish direct contacts in order to collect information “from any source”, including government representatives at the highest level. In addition he has the right of freedom of movement within any participating state, allowing for significant “intrusiveness” into the affairs of states. The mandate and right of action derive from the OSCE idea of “co-operative security”, which builds on a conception of “comprehensive security” and entails the active and on-going co-operation of all participating states with and through OSCE institutions and mechanisms with a view to achieving and maintaining common security.

Nonetheless, the HCNM is not completely independent: he is ultimately *accountable* to member states through the Chairman-in-Office, with whom he may consult prior to an on-site visit and to whom he reports confidentially on findings and overall progress in a particular situation. The mandate is carefully formulated to avoid any suggestion that the Permanent Council can give instructions to or overrule the HCNM, but the High Commissioner cannot function properly without the political support of states. Close institutional links with the political bodies of the OSCE and the collective support of participating states provide the necessary backing to encourage implementation of his recommendations.

The HCNM enjoys wide access to information; as a balance the mandate prescribes a *confidential* manner. The discreet, low-key, and confidential approach is designed to gain trust and co-operation from all parties, and it also helps avoid inflammatory statements that public attention sometimes provokes. The commitment to confidentiality is intended to keep matters within the internal governmental framework of the OSCE as a whole, but it does not preclude the HCNM from working in co-operation with other international bodies, such as the Council of Europe and specialized agencies of the United Nations, as is often the case.

The HCNM makes recommendations through a formal exchange of letters between himself and the Foreign Minister of the relevant state(s). These recommendations are regularly made public, after they have been presented and discussed in the Permanent Council; thus quiet diplomacy is backed by some ultimate public accountability. The current and previous HCNM have also tried to be sensitive to the desire of governments to know more about the activities of the HCNM, and so have demonstrated a willingness to keep interested parties and others informed about activities, at least in general terms. Occasionally, the HCNM issues public statements or press releases that he believes may be helpful in a particular situation, e.g. expressing support for the adoption of particular legislation or his views about a particular event.

While the mandate prescribes accountability, impartiality and confidentiality, it does not prescribe precisely the approach or the means through which the HCNM is to fulfill the mandate. While the lack of clarity could give rise to debates over formal powers, it also allows for great flexibility in the functioning of the High Commissioner, which has proved critical to the mandate’s successful implementation. The HCNM seeks to analyze and approach problems through the OSCE concept of “comprehensive security”— addressing the *root causes* of the problems encountered. The comprehensive security approach treats peace and security as dependent upon the realization of “justice”, including respect for human rights.²²

The overall approach adopted and promoted by the HCNM in order to protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities – and so contribute to the peaceful and constructive resolution of tensions and disputes involving minorities – is one of “integrating diversity”. Broadly speaking, this means that persons belonging to minorities should be given adequate opportunity to maintain and develop their distinct identities, while at the same time participating in and making a contribution to the wider society and respecting the territorial integrity of the state. Integrated diversity goes hand in hand with “good governance”, whereby governing institutions are committed to act in the interests of their whole populations by creating comparable conditions and opportunities for all to pursue their own develop-

²¹ The forum of representatives of OSCE participating states that meets weekly in Vienna.

²² The rationale for placing these concerns in the “security” basket is that there is a risk that when human rights and minority rights are not respected, they may give rise to grievances that generate conflict.

ment and fulfill their own aspirations on an equal basis with others.

A. The HCNM's Techniques

As the mandate does not prescribe precisely the means through which the HCNM is to implement the mandate, the actual working methods were largely developed by the first High Commissioner, Mr. van der Stoep, during his term from 1993 to mid-2001. The current HCNM, Mr. Ekéus, committed as he took office to continue, and build upon, this established approach.

Early warning and early action depend on reliable information; information-gathering and analysis are therefore fundamental to the effectiveness of the High Commissioner. With the assistance of his advisers, the HCNM collects and analyses information from all relevant sources, including wire services, the internet and other media, government representatives, independent experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and secondary sources (such as journals and reports). He also maintains contacts with OSCE missions and receives information through internal OSCE channels. Based upon such information, the HCNM identifies situations that may fall within the mandate. Where appropriate, he then establishes contact with the relevant actors and arranges an initial visit to the country and location concerned in order to gain a better understanding of the situation, and the positions of the parties. In the spirit of providing assistance to participating states within the framework of co-operative security, the staff of the HCNM has also increasingly maintained direct contacts with governmental officials and others. Increasingly the Office of the HCNM has received requests for assistance, including legal advice and counsel, which states find practically helpful and politically useful; it helps them to avoid unintended mistakes or the accusation that they have violated their commitments.

The HCNM seeks to assist all parties involved, taking a non-confrontational and non-coercive approach, and seeking to work with them to find solutions to sources of tension. While the HCNM is an instrument of "short-term" conflict prevention, aimed at defusing tensions which are likely to spark imminent conflicts, the HCNM also aims to encourage ongoing dialogue and co-operation between the parties and to establish lines of communication that will endure in the long term. The recommendations encourage the parties to take concrete steps to address underlying issues of contention and so

lead to a sustainable de-escalation of tensions. Continued engagement serves to ensure that appropriate follow-up is taken by the states concerned and the OSCE as a whole.

To protect ongoing efforts and avoid accusations of bias, the HCNM seeks to maintain impartiality, which is not to be confused with neutrality. The High Commissioner may identify himself with positions held by any of the parties that he considers to be credible and viable in advancing the conflict prevention process. The HCNM is an impartial actor without vested interests or partiality towards any party; assessment of competing claims and opposing positions is based on a commitment to international standards and OSCE values.

The HCNM seeks to find the best solution that is likely to be accepted by both parties. The HCNM relies upon the international legal standards to which the state concerned has agreed to provide a framework for dialogue and for his eventual recommendations; this enables the development of solutions based upon pre-existing norms and protects against unsubstantiated accusations of arbitrariness.

Through the practice of exchanging written letters with the Foreign Minister of the relevant state, the HCNM provides analysis of the situation and offers specific recommendations for its resolution. These recommendations articulate often sensitive issues at the source of tensions, and are designed to provide a framework within which governments and minorities can address legal, policy, institutional, and procedural issues. They typically refer to specific policies and administrative practices and are precise and detailed. They are not intended to apportion blame, but rather to make constructive contributions to both analysis and resolution of sensitive issues.

The HCNM has increasingly undertaken (or encouraged others to undertake) projects on the ground that directly address the sources of disputes, aiming to reduce inter-ethnic tensions either by providing frameworks within which problems may be solved or by solving issues themselves. In the latter category, for example, have been educational projects that range from producing new school textbooks or providing legal aid to establishing a new university. Most projects are small in financial terms, but may close important gaps. The number and size of such projects have increased in recent years.

B. Cooperation and Support For the Work of the HCNM

While independence is fundamental to the role, the HCNM does not, of course, act in isolation but works closely with the political bodies of the OSCE as well as the collective support of participating states, and is working closely with regional organizations and some parts of the UN system. Cooperation with NGOs is still limited, though they have served as useful sources of information.

The HCNM maintains close coordination with OSCE member states through briefings to the Permanent Council, and maintains relations with the Chairman-in-Office, *inter alia* through the submission of strictly confidential reports that serve as sources of early warning. The office also cooperates with other OSCE institutions, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, and the missions in various states.

Links with other international organizations, including parts of the UN and its agencies, the European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe (CoE) have helped to promote the HCNM's work and avoid duplication. The HCNM shares common goals with UNHCR, and has also consulted with UNDP and other development actors. The HCNM's ties to the EC and CoE help to ensure that consistent messages are sent, particularly regarding treatment of minorities, and the HCNM has also provided advice and assistance to the EC.

C. Recurrent Themes and Issues

While the specific issues of concern and the dynamics of government-minority relations vary considerably from country to country, a number of issues have arisen repeatedly in the course of the HCNM's work. Frequently, tensions arise from a real or perceived lack of opportunities for minorities to participate effectively in political decision-making processes. In addition to the issue of political participation, questions of identity and the right of an individual, acting alone or in community with others, to develop his/her identity frequently arise. Education and use of language are frequently sources of concern. Problems arise when members of national

minority groups believe they are being discriminated against, either in terms of capacity to preserve and develop their own identity and culture, or of enjoying an equitable share of the state's resources (including economic goods), for example, through access to government jobs or contracts. Questions of citizenship have also arisen in a number of states, particularly where states have sought to exclude non-citizens from entitlement to minority rights. The HCNM has also addressed concerns involving national minorities in the areas of media (especially the electronic media) and migration. In addressing these recurrent themes and issues, the HCNM has invited groups of internationally recognized independent experts to elaborate general recommendations that he has subsequently endorsed and which have enjoyed considerable support from OSCE participating states.²³

III. Transferability and Adaptability of the HCNM's Approach

There has been increasing recognition of the value of the institution of the HCNM outside the OSCE region. Among others, the UN Secretary-General has called for all European states to heed the advice of the HCNM and for other continents to adopt a similar mechanism. In December 1999, an international seminar was held in Lund, Sweden, to consider the possible transferability of at least some elements of the HCNM institution or approach to other regions, subregions or the United Nations level.

While the existence of the institution of the HCNM is a product of a particular European history and set of processes, including importantly regional integration processes, there are evidently universally applicable aspects to the work of the HCNM. The HCNM is unique in that the OSCE has allowed it to develop in a flexible, dynamic fashion. The requirement of confidentiality has encouraged confidence in the instrument, allowing politicians the space to adjust policy away from the glare of the public spotlight. Despite the unique history of the institution, similar tools may be feasible elsewhere; there are indications that this may be beginning, at least at the subregional level. It is

²³ These include: *The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* (1996); the *Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities* (1998); and the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life* (1999). In further elaboration of the Lund Recommendations, the HCNM engaged with the ODIHR and International IDEA in the elaboration of *Guidelines to Assist National Minority Participation in the Electoral Process* (2001). The HCNM is currently examining issues of national minorities and the electronic media in cooperation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the help of independent experts.

precisely the efficacy of the HCNM as an instrument of quiet diplomacy, confidence and capacity-building that might make it an appropriate instrument to adapt to other contexts.

The HCNM is thus far a unique instrument of conflict prevention, whose approach is still evolving. The institution is characterized by its discreet but pro-active approach that is value-based and problem-solving in nature. The HCNM has been described as an “insider third party”: an insider in the sense that they have worked actively and closely with all parties while, at the same time, maintaining some of the characteristics of an

external actor including the ability to bring pressure to bear. The HCNM has also been described as a “normative intermediary” assisting states in meeting their international obligations and commitments with a view to contributing to the maintenance of international peace and stability. Much of the work is facilitative mediation, based on a strong adherence to democratic values of effective participation, good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. There would seem to be scope to at least attempt to adapt this experience and approach elsewhere in the world to the benefit of many.

Moving Towards A Culture of Prevention: Bringing in Local Actors

Augustine Touré

I. Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between the UN and local actors in conflict prevention, the relationship between regional and subregional organizations and local actors, the potential for regional and subregional actors to serve as conduits between the two, and to offer some perspectives on various regional tools and efforts at prevention in Africa. It argues for the need to include local actors in conflict prevention, both collaborating with them and building their capacity, but also including their concerns and expertise in strategies developed by the UN and others. It argues that regional and subregional actors may have an important part to play in such global strategy, in support of local actors and also in linking them to the UN, although this capacity has yet to be fully tapped.

II. Conflict Prevention in Africa— Challenges and Responses

A. Regional Initiatives

The persistence of violent conflicts in Africa has forced a movement away from ad-hoc approaches to conflict prevention, to a more institutionalized approach by the UN and by numerous regional and subregional organizations in Africa. As the continent finds itself dotted with violent conflicts in nearly every of its regions so also have we witnessed the emergence of regional arrangements devoted to conflict prevention. Examples of such regional arrangements include: the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Mechanism on Security, Conflict Prevention and Management; the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defense and Security; and the Organization of African Unity's prevention mechanism. Other regional actors such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), in

the greater horn of Africa, and the East African Community (EAC), are also dealing with conflict prevention although in a comparatively less concrete institutional framework.²⁴

The tools of prevention in the form of institutional mechanisms developed by African regional organizations are nearly all in their embryonic stages and not fully developed and lack the requisite capacity to adequately deal with the complexities of conflicts. Thus, they have frequently looked outside of the continent - to the West, for logistical support, training and funding. But there is increasing recognition by regional organizations of the need to also look within for solutions to their conflicts. African regional organizations are becoming more involved in facilitating political processes including dialogue and negotiations in member states experiencing conflicts. Such facilitation has taken place through the support of national conferences, the brokering of peace talks, and even military intervention as in the cases of ECOWAS's action in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Regional organizations have been increasingly attentive to the role of good governance in prevention and specifically to the recognition that democratic systems of governance can significantly ameliorate the effects of instability, and may be central to peacebuilding.

B. UN Initiatives and Local Actors

Notwithstanding this policy challenge, the UN has demonstrated its conviction and willingness in moving toward a culture of prevention by establishing peacebuilding offices in societies emerging from violent conflicts. The purpose of these peacebuilding offices is primarily to consolidate peace, promote reconciliation, and strengthen democratic institutions. By strengthening democratic institutions the likelihood of societies resorting to violence in resolving their conflicts is greatly reduced over time as these institutions become more accountable, transparent and increasingly accessible to

²⁴ Simon Chesterman and Francis Kornegay, *Southern Africa's Evolving Security Architecture*, International Peace Academy Conference Report (New York: IPA, December 2000); Comfort Ero, Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, and Augustine Touré, *Towards a Pax West Africana: Building Peace in a Troubled Sub-region*, International Peace Academy Conference Report (Abuja, Nigeria, IPA, September 2001).

the population. Other concerns that these peacebuilding offices seek to address include human rights and economic development - issues that have been at the heart of many African conflicts. The UN has several peacebuilding offices in Africa and more are being planned.²⁵ The first was established in Liberia in 1997 at the end of that country's civil war that began in 1989; there are two others in Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic.

The results of the UN peacebuilding offices have been mixed. For example, in Liberia, the UN office has not worked closely with civil society actors, and stopped short of actively promoting human rights. In contrast, the UN's peacebuilding office in Guinea-Bissau has worked closely with civil society actors to pressure the government on human rights issues. However, a significant factor undermining the effectiveness of the UN's peacebuilding offices has been their predisposition to deal with state actors rather than listen to the more contentious and vexing issues raised by civil society. Balancing the concerns of civil society against the government's other political interests without being implicated in domestic political intrigue is a challenge peacebuilding offices will continue to face.

Local actors are vital in building a culture of prevention and ensuring durable peace; the UN peacebuilding offices need to build upon their strengths and initiatives and not try to reinvent the wheel or offer ready-made prescriptions that may not suit the local context. In order to build stronger partnerships with civil society actors, the UN needs to identify in a given context who the relevant actors are, their existing capacities, strengths and weaknesses. It needs to engage local actors in broad consultations on how their capacities can be enhanced, and work with them in achieving this. While it seeks to build the capacity of local actors, the UN must also seek to better integrate their views and insights into its policy development process. Further, in order to firmly establish a culture of prevention, the UN should not only engage in peacebuilding and national reconciliation activities in societies emerging from conflict, but also in societies that are relatively stable but where fault lines have begun to appear.

²⁵ See www.un.org/peace/ppbm.pdf on the peacebuilding support offices.

²⁶ Report of the Secretary General on the Prevention of Armed Conflict, UN Doc. A/55/985-S/2001/574 (7 June 2001).

²⁷ Ben Rawlence, *Empowering Local Actors: The UN and Multi-Track Conflict Prevention*, International Peace Academy Conference Report (New York: IPA, December 2001).

²⁸ For recent analysis of myriad approaches to conflict prevention, see Fen Hampson and David Malone, eds., *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2002).

C. Local Actors in Multidimensional Conflict Prevention

However, UN and regional initiatives taken alone are not enough: conflict prevention is a multidimensional exercise involving several levels of diverse actors – international, regional, subregional, and national. Developing an effective culture of prevention entails placing local actors at the center of prevention strategies, cultivating a local sense of ownership of the process, strengthening and harnessing their organizational capacity and above all, reflecting their broad concerns through relevant policy measures.²⁶

Thus even as a host of preventive actors, including regional organizations, seek to build institutional mechanisms that will deal with conflicts in a much more structured and coherent way, they must simultaneously give due attention to the myriad concerns of civil society, a critical stakeholder in conflict prevention. Conflict prevention strategies risk failure if they do not sufficiently take account of input from diverse local actors.²⁷ Given that each conflict has its own dynamic, identifying what works in a particular context is an important component of prevention.²⁸ Lessons about best practices in context can be derived through robust engagement with local actors with specific experiences and knowledge about a conflict, the actors, and preventive attempts. Thus, while there may be a host of other factors impacting on the efficacy of conflict prevention strategies such as political will, resources, and institutional capacity, the real issue for many practitioners is how to both learn from the experiences of, and be responsive to the concerns of, civil society actors, and develop implementable and intelligent policy measures.

Very often, the concerns of civil society are ignored – usually with disastrous consequences. These concerns usually do not find their way into the policy making process which they are meant to inform and influence. National governments see civil society as a nebulous conglomeration and often do not seriously engage with it. The UN, though recognizing civil society/local actors as critical stakeholders in conflict prevention, in practice focuses far greater attention on state actors than on

helping local actors seriously build their capacity. As a result support for civil society activities is left to donor institutions, whose projects are frequently driven by their own interests and are short term, quick-results oriented. These institutions are not inclined to invest in the long, drawn out process of conflict prevention.

Civil society groups can complement the efforts of the UN and regional organizations through their work in numerous peacebuilding activities, ranging from human rights advocacy, civic education, and mediation to training and research. Community based organizations (CBOs) are also emerging and play important roles in prevention. The importance of the involvement of CBOs in prevention lies in the fact that local communities are often the theatres of conflict. Thus grounding prevention activities in local communities can be of tremendous value.

D. Between Local and International— Regional and Subregional Organizations as Conduits

Regional and subregional arrangements are well placed to serve as conduits between local actors and the UN in conflict prevention. Regional and subregional organizations may have a comparative advantage over external actors precisely because they are based in the region itself. States belonging to formal regional political institutions have much in common - in terms of economic development needs, challenges to peace and security, etc. They tend to have more at stake in conflicts in their regions than external actors. They also enjoy the advantage of being more knowledgeable about the region's problems – often a useful element when managing conflicts of a regional nature. The UN, frequently developing policy at a significant distance, may lack similar expertise and interests, and could benefit from the strengths of regional actors in this respect.

Some degree of contact between local actors and regional organizations already takes place. In Southern Africa, SADC currently has an NGO division at its Secretariat in Gabarone. In the horn of Africa, IGAD included the participation of civil society actors in the Djibouti round of peace negotiations for Somalia. And in West Africa, ECOWAS' Observatory and Early Warning Stations will draw on support from civil society. Similarly, the recent establishment of the UN's West Africa Office in Dakar, Senegal, should serve as an important clearinghouse where activities in the region can be coordinated.

However, the relationship between regional and subregional organizations and local actors in Africa has been an uneasy one. Many civil society actors have little or no confidence in the ability of African regional organizations to seriously address conflicts and human rights abuses. African regional organizations are often suspicious and distrust civil society actors, which are frequently regarded as little more than fronts for opposition groups domestically challenging the very governments that comprise these organizations. There is nonetheless significant potential for improvement in relations between local actors and regional organizations, and for enhancing the capacity of both in conflict prevention. Such potential may be realized through building on existing avenues of cooperation between the two. This may be achieved by providing access for local actors to regional organizations' information and analysis, and through translating the concerns of local actors into relevant policy choices. Such coordination can have further preventive impact where it is also carefully coordinated with the relevant UN bodies. A carefully coordinated network involving diverse actors – regional and subregional organizations, local actors and the UN, might help to improve analysis of and response to impending conflicts, and also prevent these actors from sending mixed signals.

III. Towards a Culture of Prevention –Local Actors, Regional Actors, and The UN

A successful culture of prevention entails the multi-level and multi-dimensional work and initiatives detailed briefly here. While institutional initiatives are important, it is also vital to recognize that a successful culture of prevention can be achieved only when people are placed at the center. Institutions can be built, strengthened, and their organizational capacities enhanced, but if the real concerns of peace and security held by the people are not addressed and taken seriously by policy makers, the risk of failure is heightened. This requires, then, the development of strategy that involves local actors, builds their capacities to prevent conflict locally, and draws upon their insights and concerns to develop strategies at the regional and international level. Regional and subregional actors are an important link between the international and local levels and should play a greater role in developing holistic strategies for prevention.

Final Observations: Sharing Best Practices, Sharing Responsibilities

Chandra Lekha Sriram

The aims of this Workshop were twofold—to share best practices in prevention, and to further elaborate the sharing of responsibilities in prevention. There are myriad tools, and myriad actors with differing comparative advantages. There are also more than enough challenges to go around. One goal was thus to improve the tools available to any and all actors through an examination of several key ones available. The Workshop sought to consider which tools are transferable, and how they may need to be adapted to new contexts. It also sought to identify better modes of linkage and partnership amongst organizations through a refined understanding of their advantages and of the experiences of partnership to date.

Elaborating such lessons is a key element in the development of integrated preventive strategy. It is also vital to developing better practices to prevent conflict early, and

over the long term, through the use of a broad range of tools by myriad actors. The adjoining background papers developed for the Workshop elaborated upon certain key issues. The background paper by Albrecht Schnabel elaborated upon the various comparative advantages and capacities of regional organizations in conflict prevention. John Packer, examining the work of the HCNM, discussed a key tool of conflict prevention—institutional capacity-building. Augustine Touré discussed the relationship between regional organizations and local actors in prevention, and the intermediating roles that these organizations may serve between local actors and the UN. These papers, taken together, helped to guide the discussion, and focus attention upon key issues highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report—partnering with local actors and regional organizations, and the importance of acting early through structural prevention and capacity-building.

About the program

From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict

Program Associate: Dr. Chandra Lekha Sriram

Program Officer: Zoe Nielsen

Senior Program Officer: Karin Wermester (on leave)

Duration: September 2000 – June 2003

While preventing violent conflict has many advocates at a general level, knowledge about how it is to be done, under what circumstances, when, and by whom, remains significantly underdeveloped. This is partly a problem for analysts, whose techniques for assessing volatile situations and potential remedies need to be sharpened. It is also a significant problem for organizations and institutions, whose practices, cultures, and styles of decision-making, and whose systems of learning and accountability, often inhibit effective responses to the complex environments in which conflict may turn violent.

In 2000-2001, IPA conducted an initial research and policy development project entitled "From Reaction to Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System in the New Millennium." The project aimed to determine the degree of consensus and discord in recent research on conflict trends and causes of conflict and peace, and to use these findings to help shape policy and action on conflict prevention within the UN system. We drew several conclusions from this initial work, including recognition of the urgent need to address the developmental aspects of conflict prevention. In light of this, IPA launched a three-year project entitled "From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict." The goal is to find opportunities to strengthen the conflict prevention capacity within the UN system. The project devotes considerable attention to structural prevention, emphasizing the role of development and capacity-building.

The profile of conflict prevention has been raised by the publication of the Secretary-General's report on the subject in June 2000. The development of this report engaged broad sectors of the UN community, including member states. IPA contributed to the advancement of the concept prior to the report by holding a number of workshops and informal discussions, including a Security Council workshop. The project is organized around three interrelated components: policy development, networking, and research. Policy development involves briefings, workshops, conferences, and policy fora bringing together the UN and New York-based policy community with international experts and practitioners to discuss research findings and present new ideas. We seek to build networks of expert practitioners in the UN system and among the UN, member states, and relevant NGO personnel and academics in order to sustain and increase involvement in preventive efforts. More information on program events and all of the program reports are available on the program website at <http://www.ipacademy.org/Programs/Research/ProgReseConf_body.htm>.

IPA's research aims to identify the most appropriate tools, actors, and strategies for a range of preventive actions to be undertaken by the United Nations. Case studies of preventive action were commissioned on the following nine countries: Georgia (Javakheti), Burundi, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Fiji, Kenya, East Timor, Colombia, Tajikistan, and Liberia. In order to develop cases that are both rigorous and as policy-relevant as possible, consultations have involved the UN system and its agencies, research institutes, civil society actors, experts, and others, developing guidelines for authors to give priority to the policy insights gained from cases. An edited volume of these cases will be published in 2002. A policy report on lessons from the case studies was disseminated to the UN and the larger policy community in the spring of 2002. The report presents ideas on best practices and policy recommendations for a wide variety of situations and identifies cooperative potential among UN actors, regional and subregional organizations, member states, NGOs, civil society, and the business community in preventing violent conflict.

The prevention project has developed two meetings to examine the role of regional and subregional organizations. A workshop held in April 2002 with the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt sought to share best practices on conflict prevention and examine collaboration and cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organizations at a working level to distill practical policy-oriented and operational suggestions. A senior level conference to be held at Wilton Park, UK, will build on insights from the workshop and focus on further steps that can be taken to strengthen the role of regional and subregional organizations in conflict prevention.



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