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Introduction

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Introduction

Abstract

Excerpt

The papers brought together here represent a part of the work of the IPRA (International Peace Research Association) Commission on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building that met during the 1994 Conference of the International Peace Research Association at Malta to address the issues of peace building in crisis areas. The focus here is particularly on new approaches to peace building, including United Nations reform and civil society innovation. After fifty years of UN peace building efforts, it is clear that the UN cannot function effectively without the involvement of civil society in each conflict region. How the UN, member states and civil society can interact effectively is an important new question for the peace research community, and these papers offer some fresh thinking on the subject.

Keywords: *Centre for International Peacebuilding, conflict-resolving community, peacebuilding, problem-solving skills, United Nations (UN), violence*

INTRODUCTION TO RETHINKING PEACE BUILDING

Elise Boulding

The papers brought together here represent a part of the work of the IPRA (International Peace Research Association) Commission on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building that met during the 1994 Conference of the International Peace Research Association at Malta to address the issues of peace building in crisis areas. The focus here is particularly on new approaches to peace building, including United Nations reform and civil society innovation. After fifty years of UN peace building efforts, it is clear that the UN cannot function effectively without the involvement of civil society in each conflict region. How the UN, member states and civil society can interact effectively is an important new question for the peace research community, and these papers offer some fresh thinking on the subject.

In the opening paper Kevin Clements first notes the widespread violence of the contemporary world but then, rather than framing his discussion of peace building in the context of what the UN can and can't do, offers a broad critique of the conflict-resolving community. He notes its tendency toward "conservative conflict resolution," using a mechanical formula-based approach, accompanied by an avoidance of issues of necessary social and economic change. This leads to a discussion of the alternative approach of conflict transformation, which builds on spontaneous peace-building processes already at work in civil society and (surprisingly) in state systems as well. While a predominantly adversarial political culture leaves little room for conflict transformation, Clements is arguing for the commitment of the peace research community to the widespread development of interactive problem-solving skills in local to global settings that will strengthen nascent peace cultures. He sees the UN primarily as a potential coordinator of the many governmental and nongovernmental sources of peace building.

"Two Faces" is an unusual paper based on two different but complementary sets of life experiences. Brigadier General Michael Harbottle co-founded with his peace activist wife, Eirwen, the Centre of International Peace. This paper draws on their two different experience worlds. The Brigadier General highlights the ambiguities of the role of the UN forces in peace keeping, peace making and peace building. He points out that the concept of peace building is new to the UN military and that changes need to be made both in the UN Charter and in UN thinking, in order to move away from purely military peace keeping toward the potential complementarity of peace keeping with peace building. He urgently recommends special training for joint civilian-military operations. Eirwen Harbottle describes how she moved from working with the World Disarmament Campaign to the strongly hands-on approach of the Peace Centre through her observations of East Europeans and Africans in action, seeing how much actual "peace and confidence building" was generated at the grassroots level. She gives some of the flavor of that approach, from rehabilitation of damaged children and damaged environments to the inspired project of the musical *Peace Child*, which became a vehicle for involving children round the world in local peace building. Eirwen concludes with a reaffirmation of the importance of the spiritual base for all peace work.

Moving to a direct focus on unarmed intervention in crisis situations, L'Abate counters the conventional argument that nonviolent unarmed forces can only be effective in small-scale conflicts by giving a number of examples of effective unarmed interpositioning in larger-scale conflicts. At the same time, he points out that the UN in these larger conflicts is often ineffective, sometimes even contributing to the escalation of conflict. L'Abate argues that the possibility of reducing armed conflict in the future may depend on further development, training and deployment of unarmed nongovernmental peace teams to de-escalate and redefine armed conflict situations.

In the concluding paper, Reychler develops further the idea of nongovernmental involvement in peace building through the concept of field diplomacy, or non-traditional "Track Two" diplomacy. This represents a proactive rather than reactive response to conflict, developed because of the lack of necessary skills and resources among states in an overloaded international system. Reychler spells out the characteristics of field diplomacy, which involves long-term commitments in the field, multilevel engagement, and the development of new skills of conflict transformation based on knowledge of the cultures of the contending parties. The recurrent theme of the importance of civil society comes once more to the fore.

With the new tools and approaches offered in these papers, the idea of peace building through conflict transformation becomes increasingly concrete. The challenge now for scholars, practitioners and activists is to develop a working agenda to translate the potentials identified here into actuality.