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Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Meeting report

Oslo forum 2010

Annual Mediators' Retreat

Oslo, Norway

June 15–17 2010

What is the Oslo forum network?

A global series of mediation retreats

The Oslo forum is widely acknowledged as the leading international network of conflict mediation practitioners.

Co-hosted by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Oslo forum regularly convenes conflict mediators, high level decision makers and key peace process actors in a series of informal and discreet retreats.

The Oslo forum features an annual global event in Oslo and is complemented by regional retreats in Africa and Asia. The aim is to improve conflict mediation practice through facilitating open exchange and reflection across institutional and conceptual divides, and providing informal networking opportunities that encourage coordination and cooperation when needed.

Sharing experiences and insights

Mediation is increasingly seen as a successful means of resolving armed conflicts and the growing number of actors involved testifies to its emergence as a distinct field of international diplomacy. The pressured working environment of mediation rarely provides much opportunity for reflection. Given the complexity of today's world and the immense challenges in bringing about sustainable negotiated solutions to violent conflict, mediators benefit by looking beyond their own particular experiences for inspiration, lessons and support.

The uniquely informal and discreet retreats of the Oslo forum series facilitate a frank and open exchange of insights by those working at the highest level to bring warring parties together to find negotiated solutions. By convening key actors from the United Nations, regional organisations and governments, as well as private organisations and noteworthy individuals, the retreats also provide a unique networking opportunity.

Where politics meets practice

Participation is by invitation-only. All discussions are confidential and take place under the Chatham house rule. Sessions are designed to permit informed exchanges with provocative inputs from a range of different speakers, including conflict party representatives, war correspondents, outstanding analysts, thinkers and experts on specific issues.

The retreats refrain from making specific recommendations or conclusions, aiming instead to define and advance conflict mediation practice.

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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) is an independent mediation organisation dedicated to improving the global response to armed conflict. It attempts to achieve this by mediating between warring parties and providing support to the broader mediation community.

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Executive summary

The Oslo forum 2010 was held just outside Oslo, Norway from the 15th-17th June. Some 90 participants gathered to exchange experiences and to reflect critically on the practice of mediation.

The variety of participants reflected the growing number of actors mediating armed conflict, ranging from government and private actors to international and regional organisations. Eminent personalities attending included: Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre; Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu; Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Al-Mahmoud; former Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki Al-Faisal; ASEAN Secretary-General, Surin Pitsuwan; AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ramtane Lamamra; and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura. Participants also came from Afghanistan, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Africa, the United States, and the Middle East.

Because of the exceptional variety of perspectives, discussions at the Oslo forum 2010 were particularly rich and animated. Participants delved into many of today's seemingly intractable problems – from strategies for talking to the Taliban, to options for the disputed territories in Iraq, to the political intricacies of the upcoming referendum in Sudan. Reports on the situation in Yemen, Myanmar and Central Asia were also presented at the forum. Conflict-specific sessions were complemented by analyses of unconstitutional changes of government, transnational militants, and the fragmentation of groups in peace negotiations. Several other debates questioned commonly held assumptions about the objective of mediation, the role of justice in peace processes and the desirability of professionalising mediation. In addition, participants discussed practical options for making peace processes more gender-sensitive.

The Mediators' Studio, with Norwegian Minister of the Environment and International Development, Erik Solheim, was a particular highlight of this year's retreat. Lyse Doucet of the BBC invited Mr Solheim to reflect on his personal experience of mediating in the Sri Lanka conflict. The frank and sometimes poignant interview revealed fascinating insights into the challenges of international mediation.

All of the discussions took place in an informal and discreet setting, and were subject to Chatham House rule. This brief report summarises the discussions, and highlights a number of cross-cutting issues. Background material prepared for the Oslo forum 2010 is also available on the Oslo forum website: <http://www.osloforum.org>.

Afghanistan: talking to the Taliban

This session considered the options and implications of talking to the Taliban.

Multiple challenges to talks were identified, including the fear of the local people that talks may result in renewed Pashtun domination and possible concessions on the Constitution, women's issues, and freedom of the press.

When looking at possible structures and interlocutors for such talks, participants stressed that the Taliban are not a cohesive and coherent movement. Some Taliban favour waiting for the withdrawal of international forces, and then engaging with a weakened Afghan Government.

Some presented Hamid Karzai as the most appropriate interlocutor, especially as he cannot be replaced during this critical period. Others argued that the Taliban may not agree to talk to the Afghan Government. Their main demands are to be removed from sanctions lists, the withdrawal of troops, and the release of detainees. Their preferred interlocutor is therefore the US.

Participants noted that talking only with the Taliban is not sufficient to end the violence in Afghanistan. The Taliban are only one part of the insurgency; engaging with others such as war lords and drug barons is also necessary. The Taliban could be a party to a negotiated settlement but ought not to be the only party.

A multi-track approach would be most effective. It is necessary for the Afghan Government and the international community to agree on any 'red lines' which should not be crossed during negotiations. Some participants argued that the UN should play a facilitation role, but noted that the conflict parties may not agree to this.

A regional and broader international process should complement any dialogue between the Government and the Taliban. This may encourage regional powers to be constructive rather than obstructive, e.g., by providing investment and trade opportunities, and/or venues for talks about talks. However, doubts were raised that the Pakistani security establishment would not yet react favourably if the Taliban were to engage in talks. Given the Taliban's dependence on Pakistan for safe havens, Pakistan's acquiescence may be a prerequisite for talks. The session also noted the destabilising influence of the Afghan situation on other Central Asian countries.

Overall, participants stressed the urgent need for a common vision of the future for Afghanistan. Any talks should be guided by a vision that addresses the priorities and concerns of all involved. Some participants felt that foreigners have too many visions for Afghanistan, and Afghans not enough.

Sudan

The Sudan session was marked by frustration at the current pace of negotiations between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM (Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement) to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Some of the main issues are border demarcation, voter registration, wealth-sharing and security arrangements. Their resolution is particularly urgent given the coming referendum on

independence for the South. The Darfur conflict is also extremely significant. Participants also discussed the administrative, logistical and legal challenges that the referendum would present. Participants stressed that a technically flawed referendum could threaten recognition of the result.

Some argued that the priority of the parties to the conflict ought to be to establish a broader political vision for post-referendum Sudan in order to clarify the status of North and South Sudan after the referendum. In the case of secession, for instance, this could include provisions for dual citizenship, open borders and wealth sharing. However, the recent limited negotiations between the main conflict parties are significantly hampering the creation of such a vision.

While some participants argued that the international community should tackle delays in negotiations, others suggested that external actors are part of the problem. There is an alarming lack of coordination between international actors, and their differing agendas have hindered a coherent approach to assisting the conflict parties. One participant suggested a coherent strategy could be developed by establishing an international contact group. Others suggested closer cooperation with the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan, led by President Mbeki.

There was a general feeling that time is running out, and that existing deadlines will be difficult to meet. As it generally accepted that the referendum cannot be delayed, and that a vote for Southern secession appears inevitable, there are fears a new civil war will break out. Participants concluded that all parties ought to redouble their efforts to prioritise unresolved issues, improve coordination, and foster a better relationship among the Sudanese parties.

What's in store for Iraq's disputed territories?

This session examined the general political context in Iraq, before addressing the issue of the disputed territories.

Participants felt that the last elections in March 2010 marked a turning point for Iraq. The results made a split in the Shia block official, and significantly increased the influence of Sunni Arabs in Iraqi politics. The Kurds have lost a significant number of parliament seats, though they are still needed as a third party for a potential coalition. Sectarian politics are still prominent, and the notion that Iraqi nationalism will keep the country together is unrealistic. The planned withdrawal of US troops also comes at a sensitive time, fuelling fears of a security vacuum.

Participants examined the situation in the disputed territories against this background. A high-level task-force for dialogue, established as a result of a UNAMI report, made some progress with confidence-building measures. However, the task-force has taken no real decisions, because they were awaiting the outcome of the elections. Now that the elections have passed, there are high expectations that its remit will extend to more difficult political discussions, such as revenue sharing and reform of the Peshmerga.

Participants noted that there were too many conflicting visions for the Governorate of Kirkuk. Various possibilities for the status of Kirkuk were examined, including as a province under Baghdad, incorporation into the Kurdish region, special status, or linking Kirkuk legally and

practically to both Baghdad and Erbil. The debate addressed whether there might be space within the Iraqi constitution to divide competencies. This could include a dual reporting/nexus model, as in South Tyrol (Italy) or Brčko (Bosnia). Participants anticipated difficulty in establishing law and order, and security.

Participants also examined the potential connections between negotiations in the various disputed territories. For example, the discussion explored whether trade-offs in Nineveh might raise expectations of concessions in Kirkuk. They also noted that confusion over the status of Kirkuk has hindered dialogue between communities in the region.

Considering the wider region, participants argued that Turkey has now adopted a more balanced and comprehensive approach to Iraq than in the past. Participants agreed that there is a deepening economic integration between Northern Iraq and Turkey, with Turkey being its largest trading partner and investor. One participant also advocated a formal regional framework, like the contact group in the Balkans in the late 1990s. Such a group should involve neighbours such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey.

Militants without borders?

This session looked at militant groups operating in and across Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel. Participants examined links between these groups, and considered reasons for their successful recruitment.

Some explained this to be a consequence of widespread poverty, such as in Somalia. Others argued that even though groups like Al Qaeda exploit local grievances, they build their recruitment around global issues. For instance, some Saudis first went to Afghanistan to fight Soviet invaders, and later the Americans, only being recruited into groups after their arrival. Furthermore, it was argued that the radicalization and sympathy for the Taliban in Central Asia was not due to poverty or lack of democracy.

The discussion covered different strategies for dealing with militant groups. In Indonesia, for instance, the focus has been on de-radicalisation by establishing law and order, and empowering moderates.

Another strategy could focus on preventing further mobilisation and recruitment, including the identification of militants that are willing to quit. Young recruits especially become quickly disillusioned when their expectations do not match the realities of belonging to a militant group. These groups encounter problems of internal discipline and are subject to infiltration. This encourages distrust of comrades, leading some to yearn for a way out. However, the international community has not been willing to offer exit options.

Participants also explored whether it might be useful to identify criteria for the successful relocation of militant groups. One expert argued that Al Qaeda creates several safe havens by making Jihad an ideology that is locally appealing. Al Qaeda can then relocate to a different haven if they are driven out of an area (as happened in Sudan). This also allows them to attack the 'American power' on several fronts.

Militant groups have settled in some places but not in others with seemingly similar conditions. Drawing lessons from countries such as Bangladesh, where groups have not yet gained a foothold, could be instructive. One participant warned against a strategy focused on ejecting these groups from individual countries, as this only encourages them to network and thereby internationalises them.

In contrast to Al Qaeda's plan of action, the international community is responding in a scattered and incoherent manner. There seems to be no concerted exchange of intelligence to meet the challenge.

A fairly clear distinction can be made between the networks in Afghanistan. A sensible strategy would be to distinguish between core Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda's international affiliates and the local affiliates. Some may be more willing to talk than others. By treating them as a homogenous group, the international community may have ignored significant entry points for dialogue.

Mediating with these groups was viewed with scepticism. Participants pointed out that most militant groups regard NGOs and international groups as infidels, and so dialogue with them might be unacceptable.

Violent transitions of power: democratic catalyst or power grab?

Democratisation is inherently destabilising, as it is about changing power constellations, and finding channels to express a desire for change. Depending on the context, this may or may not involve manipulation or violence at some stage. This session examined recent governance-related conflicts including coups d'état and other illegitimate attempts to seize or retain power. The discussion considered how mediation can manage and resolve violent transitions.

Participants wondered whether coups were about to replace elections in some countries. For example, in Mauritania, the parliament voted to endorse the military coup because there was no constitutional provision to impeach the president. In other cases, the manipulation of elections seems to be replacing classical coups d'état.

Events in Thailand may mark a significant step in changing a bureaucracy that does not allow for popular consultation. As the country is deeply divided, elections could very likely have become violent. Therefore, it is a success of sorts that Thailand has managed to avoid immediate elections allowing the situation to calm.

On the other hand, democracy in Honduras has consolidated over the past twenty years, and yet the institutions were unable to accommodate demands for greater political participation. Mediation by the Organization of American States (OAS), Brazil and later the US was very creative, but ultimately failed because there was little support for it across the region. Observers fear that Honduras could set a precedent for other countries to follow.

These concerns mirrored experiences from the Philippines. The non-violent expulsion of Marcos in the in 1986 has become a source of national pride, and has been said to have inspired the ousting of President Estrada in 2001.

Participants agreed that mediation in governance-related conflicts needs wide cooperation. Acknowledging that mediators can achieve little if other actors are counter-acting, one participant suggested coordinating the international response through international contact groups. Apart from the recent positive example of ECOWAS in Guinea, participants agreed that swift regional action is rare. Intervention is particularly difficult if legitimate regimes try to stay beyond their initial mandate and/or seek a change to the constitution to retain power.

To address these challenges, regional organisations in Africa and Latin America are beginning to enact Charters of Good Governance and other instruments based on the principle of non-acceptance of governments installed by force. However, there are few clear sanctions available and it seems common practice to push for elections, thereby possibly legitimising the coup. Participants expressed scepticism about the role of bodies like the United Nations Security Council, considering both the delays in reaching agreement on action, and also more general concerns about legitimacy.

Who decides what interventions are necessary, and how long an intervention should last? Should such intervention be military, political or humanitarian? Where are the most effective entry points? How can democracy be sustained when it is being abused? How can we anticipate and prepare for such incidences?

The discussion remained inconclusive, but participants argued that the international response to election violence needs to be reassessed. The international community was criticised for its frequent focus on ending the violence quickly, even if this involves uneasy power-sharing agreements as in Kenya and Zimbabwe. There was also criticism of the international community's desire to avoid alienating allies – as arguably seen in Afghanistan.

The current focus on preferring even bad elections to other forms of government change is sending the wrong signal to those developing electoral cultures. Ultimately, this may strengthen those advocating alternative political models, which is highly problematic in the current geopolitical climate. Some stressed that how governments come into power is too important to be left to technical experts alone.

Dialogue despite division: securing agreement with fragmented parties

Participants explored the dilemmas faced by mediators in conflicts with divided parties or where there are several conflict parties. The discussions focused largely on the tension between inclusivity and progress: should the mediator strive to include all conflict parties in negotiations or should the mediator focus on making progress with those willing to participate?

Some participants argued that there was little point pressing forward with an agreement without the buy-in of all parties. They stressed that a bad agreement could be worse than no agreement. Moreover, a non-inclusive process may lead to a resumption of violence.

There was also criticism of over-emphasising the importance of a comprehensive agreement, rather than focusing on the quality of the process. In the Philippines, the focus is on resolving

problems over a long period, rather than rushing towards incomplete or shallow agreements. Related to this, there was some criticism of favouring ‘constructive ambiguity’ in agreements, rather than dealing with difficult issues.

Others stressed that it is necessary to make progress in peace negotiations to build momentum and trust. It is often not possible to involve all parties at the beginning; however a process with even a limited number of parties may eventually grow to include others. Also, initial agreements can serve as a foundation for dealing with more difficult issues and parties at a later stage. This may of course lead to a re-negotiation of the agreement afterwards, as happened in Northern Ireland.

Similarly, one participant noted that non-inclusive agreements do not preclude dialogue with parties outside the process. In some situations, it may be necessary to hold talks with the fragmented groups separately from the main process. For example, in Darfur, inter-rebel talks were held separately from the negotiations with the Government of Sudan. These negotiations resulted in two peace agreements that do not include all parties, but that are seen as an incremental step towards a further, more inclusive agreement.

Participants agreed that, while inclusive processes are the ideal, it is sometimes necessary to settle for less to initiate a process and to keep it alive. However, it must always be acknowledged that any process without the main parties is incomplete. Every effort should be made to include them at a later stage or in a different process.

Strategies for gender-sensitive peacemaking

This session considered the many and varied ways of improving the gender sensitivity of peace processes and peace agreements. The discussion focused mainly on how to assist women already involved in the peace process, and on how to ensure a gender perspective on specific agenda items.

Several participants noted that female negotiators are usually representing political parties, and do not necessarily prioritise gender issues over their other political demands. These women, and others on the mediation team, therefore need support from gender experts and civil society to bring in a gender perspective. Improving links between these two groups is likely to be more effective than a sole focus on increasing the number of women at the negotiating table.

Political divisions between women can also hinder an effective gender strategy. It can be helpful to assemble women from different parties outside the formal peace talks, so that they can agree a common gender strategy. This approach worked well in Kenya, and could be replicated elsewhere.

Some participants stressed that the inclusion of women in peace talks has a powerful transformative effect on attitudes to women, citing examples from Afghanistan, the Philippines and Chechnya. Others warned against relying on formal participation to ensure a gender-sensitive process, as this can reduce gender concerns to little more than a box-ticking exercise.

One participant gave an example of including token women in committees in the Darfur process. Another noted that mediators often cannot insist on increasing the number of women in each delegation. In some urgent, confidential, or closed negotiations, participation is so limited in general that the inclusion of women is not possible. Nevertheless, participants agreed that these were not reasons to leave gender issues aside, but rather to look for complementary ways to address gender concerns.

Participants also highlighted options for enhancing the gender sensitivity of specific agenda items in negotiations, such as justice, disarmament, governance structures etc. The sub-committee on gender issues in Sri Lanka was noted as a useful tool for considering and including gender issues. In Cyprus, although excluded from much of the process, women provided gender-sensitive language to address specific agenda items in the peace agreement. This echoed one mediator's suggestion that gender concerns should be raised with parties when discussing specific agenda items, rather than trying to force the inclusion of gender as a separate item. Another participant argued that AU and UN mediators should be obliged to consider gender issues as part of their mandates.

Participants recognised that, despite many obstacles to ensuring gender sensitivity, there are a growing number of models and strategies available to mediators. There was optimism that, if these already successful strategies can be implemented more consistently, there could be real progress in ensuring more gender-sensitive peace processes.

Reality Check – The objective of mediation

This session stimulated debate on the objective of mediation processes by presenting a simplistic and provocative proposition: 'Mediators are called to end the violence, not to transform society'.

Those arguing against a transformative role concluded that mediators should not be overly ambitious. One participant suggested that mediators need to master the basics before tackling more ambitious goals. For example, in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008, the international community failed the basic test of achieving a ceasefire. Also, international mediators should not be the ones to decide how a society should be transformed.

Proponents of a transformative role argued that mediation is a process, a series of actions and events. One of its objectives is to stop conflict, but this should not be the only one. If the peace is to last, mechanisms must be developed to address the root causes of a conflict. Peace processes should not end when an agreement is signed, as this is only the beginning of the process.

Participants agreed that every conflict is different, and hence the objective of mediation might vary from case to case. In Rwanda, for instance, the most important and urgent step was to stop the genocide. On the other hand, in El Salvador, mediators resisted pressure from the US for an immediate ceasefire, fearing that this would have prevented the structural changes demanded by civil society.

A recurrent theme was that mediation should at least establish a foundation for longer-term change. One participant thought it may be dangerous to focus on stopping the violence in the short term, as this can impede transformation in the longer term.

Participants shared their experience of the Kenyan conflict at the beginning of 2008. They agreed that the discussion of root causes was for the Kenyans themselves, and not for the mediation panel. The mediation process was originally planned as an arrangement between two political parties to end the violence. However, participants agreed that the structure of the process could have changed at a later stage. For example, there could have been an agreement on broader national buy-in or a structure for a national dialogue.

Participants emphasised the need to use different tools for the different stages of a peace process. Furthermore, the person starting the mediation might not be the best person to continue. The following stages can be done by others.

Examining the situation in Afghanistan, some participants argued for reducing ambitions and setting priorities. The urgent need in Afghanistan is not to transform society as a whole, but to fight corruption and establish law and order. Other participants disagreed, and stressed that setting aside transformation is not an option under the circumstances.

Overall, the discussion questioned the assumption that transformation is a vision that has to be imposed from the outside. Participants noted that it is the society itself that decides to make peace and chooses which directions it should take. The session concluded that there is often an unrealistic expectation of how quickly agreements can be implemented, and that longer-term support is clearly necessary. We might have to accept that the business of transforming a society may take six generations, and that a peace agreement is only one element in a much longer process.

Reality Check – Justice

This session examined whether including justice issues in peace talks threatens the overall process, or is essential for the sustainability of the process. Participants responded to the deliberately simplistic proposition: ‘Negotiating justice is not in the interests of parties and thus puts the peace process at risk’.

Proponents stressed that striving to include provisions for international criminal accountability in peace agreements is likely to derail a peace process. Mediators have no control over international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), so they cannot provide any guarantees or use it as leverage in talks. Conflict parties may also seek to prolong the conflict, either to increase political pressure to suspend an indictment or to prevent their arrest. Negotiation of these issues is thus almost impossible, and can lead to indefinitely stalled peace processes.

Participants offered the examples of the LRA process, which has effectively broken down over the indictment of Joseph Kony, and the Sudanese peace talks, which have been threatened because of the indictment of Omar Bashir. Others noted that peace agreements in Sudan, South Africa and Guatemala may not have been possible if the conflict parties had feared international prosecution.

Conversely, other participants argued that justice is essential for the sustainability of an agreement, and necessary for a country to make the transition to peace. One participant questioned whether reaching the Bonn Agreement was worthwhile, when one considers the state of Afghanistan today. While ‘sacrificing justice for peace’ may have been useful to reach agreement, the presence of warlords and other unsuitable candidates in powerful positions is now a huge problem. Similarly, another participant argued that the indictment of Slobodan Milošević in the Balkans was not a threat to the process, but rather demonstrated his unsuitability as a peace partner in the first place.

Another participant argued that mediators often don’t have a choice of whether or not to include justice issues. The conflict parties themselves often demand justice – albeit for the other side. Moreover, the issue of justice does not simply disappear if it is not dealt with in the formal process. Instead, it threatens the process in unpredictable ways. Other participants stressed the importance of timing: it may not make sense to include justice issues in the initial round of talks, as it is too contentious. Mediators should start from points of common agreement. However, later stages of mediation should include justice issues, or the process will break down anyway.

Acknowledging that international criminal accountability is only one aspect of justice, participants then moved on to explore a range of other options available to mediators and conflict parties. One participant outlined the experience of Colombia, where reduced sentences were given to those who cooperated fully with the truth commission, and to those who used their assets to compensate victims. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not involve acrimonious prosecutions. Also, in Northern Ireland, while convictions were not always possible in domestic prosecutions, the process itself brought some healing to victims. Others suggested that vetting candidates for positions of power, including the police and army, can be extremely effective.

Overall, while there was some disagreement on how to deal with criminal accountability, participants acknowledged the importance of preventing those guilty of crimes from committing them again. They also stressed the need to provide some healing and closure for victims by having these crimes acknowledged and examined. While recognising that full justice is probably unlikely in conflict situations, participants were broadly positive that more flexible and creative approaches could be possible in future.

Reality Check – The professionalisation of mediation

This session examined the pros and cons of professionalising the mediation of armed conflict. The discussion was provoked by a deliberately simplistic statement: the professionalisation of mediation depoliticises peace processes, and thereby limits the leverage of mediators over the conflict parties.

Participants quickly agreed that professionalisation was required to improve the response to violent conflict. They welcomed the recent trend for establishing mediation support units, but stressed the need for a careful balance between technical aspects of mediation, understanding the parties and conflict dynamics, and firsthand experience in confidence building.

Mediation by its very nature is political. There was wide consensus that the diversity of issues involved requires technical expertise, but that this should not mean becoming academic or over-bureaucratising processes. However, participants' perspectives differed on what exactly a balanced professionalisation ought to entail, and on how to connect technical expertise with the wider political process.

The first challenge is to find the right person for a particular job – often at very short notice. Given the complexity of today's conflicts, it is highly unlikely to find a single individual with all the necessary qualities. The best option, therefore, is to create teams that combine a range of skills. Selecting the best team should go beyond expertise to include also pooling resources across organisations. Whoever leads such a combined effort should be chosen because they are best placed, rather than to impose particular views.

Ideally, the mediator should be able to influence the parties because of his or her experience and prestige. Team members, by contrast, can bring specific technical expertise. In practice, however, many participants find it difficult to establish cohesive teams. Mediators often inherit or are assigned a team. This does not help to build trust within a team. Experts often lack practical experience of peace processes, and this further hinders effective communication between high-level mediators and their teams and advisers.

Some participants felt that a team's role should be limited to providing background information and facilitating the mediator's work, arguing that mediators should remain strictly political facilitators. Others felt strongly that it was equally important for a mediator to have some technical expertise to know when to draw on his team or when to bring in external stakeholders. Yet other participants regarded too much knowledge as a hindrance, as it may encourage the mediator to manipulate or impose views on the process. Generally, however, technical knowledge was viewed as a benefit, but not one that should come at the expense of political understanding.

There was consensus that the mediation of armed conflict is not yet a profession, given the absence of a shared language, code of conduct, or even a basic shared understanding of what constitutes mediation. Indeed, some argued that mediation should not become a profession in itself.

Some participants voiced bewilderment and concern at the recent proliferation of mediation training courses, which focus on 'how to' manuals and heavily draw on lessons from economic or civil mediation. In particular, one participant criticised the assumption that mediators are disinterested and neutral. Mediators are not and cannot be neutral in an absolute sense, given their appointment by political bodies.

Participants agreed that there is a growing body of knowledge and emerging best practice of immediate relevance. However, many felt that this knowledge is not being properly applied. There remains a disconnect between analysis and practice even within individual institutions. Participants generally agreed that this was not a question of professionalisation versus amateurism. Professionalisation includes not only technical but also process-related expertise, and should start with clearer mandates for mediators.

Conclusion and reflections

The discussions at the Oslo forum 2010 were particularly wide-ranging, covering many different conflicts and phenomena. Nonetheless, a number of themes recurred across sessions and topics.

One such theme was the emergence of new mediators and new types of mediation, with traditional superpowers no longer having a monopoly on mediating armed conflict. Different mediators bring different comparative advantages, and thus the key to improving the global response to armed conflict is finding ways to combine these strengths. Some participants criticised the failure of international institutions to take into account this new reality. For example, participants stressed the importance of non-state actors having access to the UN Security Council, and for greater recognition of the legitimacy and capacity of local and regional organisations. Participants also argued that mediators need to move away from carrot-and-stick methods towards a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach.

Another notable feature of several sessions was an attempt to reconcile the best strategies for securing an agreement and ending the violence, with the sometimes-contradictory strategies for a longer-term transition to peace. Some questioned the tendency to see peace agreements as the ultimate sign of success. They argued that negotiations must include difficult issues such as political reforms, justice measures or gender-sensitive provisions, even if this slows down the process. This is particularly evident in cases like Aceh and Northern Ireland, where long and difficult negotiations eventually led to real solutions. Conversely, in Afghanistan and Kenya, even though agreements have been reached, several difficult issues remain unresolved.

Mediators need to be more patient and understand that conflicts cannot be neatly tied up in the short time usually allocated by the international community. Indeed, there is evidence to support this view. Until the late 1990s, peace agreements more or less lived up to the expectation of reducing violence. Recently, however, violence frequently continues after the signing of an agreement, albeit violence of a different nature. Especially in Latin America, successful peace agreements have been followed by large-scale violence from gang activity, organised crime and trafficking.

On the other hand, many participants were cautious about extending the mandate of the mediator to include overly ambitious and unachievable objectives. Given that the transition to a peaceful and stable society will require a generation or two (or six, as one participant argued!), it is not realistic to expect that individual mediators can guide the process through to its conclusion.

Participants argued that sometimes initiating a less-than-ideal process can create the momentum for a better process. This may mean a series of incremental agreements, as in Darfur, or a limited renegotiation of an agreement, as in Northern Ireland.

Participants also noted that while mediated agreements are unlikely to be transformational on their own, they do have the potential to lay the foundation for a successful transition to peace. For instance, any political reforms or institutions agreed during negotiations should allow for the resolution of future problems. Moreover, while political reforms may increase the risk

of violence in the short term by creating a diversity of loser groups, new evidence confirms that countries with functioning institutions are less prone to relapse into violence after an agreement.

This requires a structural change in how mediation processes are organised. For example, in Kenya, the negotiations could have included provisions for a future structure that would have allowed for broader national buy-in. Similarly, there are structures that could allow for greater inclusion of women in peace negotiations.

Overall, participants felt that the international community has made remarkable progress in the past fifteen to twenty years in tackling conflict globally. There is now a greater understanding of the dynamics of conflict, the skills and processes necessary for achieving peace and the requirements for a transition to longer-term stability. Participants were nevertheless conscious that putting this knowledge into practice remains a challenge, and were therefore particularly appreciative of the opportunity to learn from the practical experiences of others at the Oslo forum.

Looking to future Oslo fora, many participants hoped to discuss whether to and how to establish rules for mediators, and how to better understand the role of non-state actors. Particular concerns here included the need to address extremism, and coping with risks to peace and security emanating from the worldwide economic crisis. The referendum in Sudan and the situations in Lebanon, Iraq and Somalia also warrant further discussion.

The next annual gathering of conflict mediators and key peace-process actors will take place in June 2011. We look forward to your feedback and ideas throughout the year, and to including these in the development process.

Oslo forum 2010 agenda

15 Tuesday June 2010

- 16.00 – 17.30** **Welcome and opening plenary**
Welcome by Mr Martin Griffiths, followed by a discussion between Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prince Turki Al-Faisal and Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, moderated by Lyse Doucet
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- 19.30** **Reception and formal opening dinner hosted by Minister Jonas Gahr Støre**
-

16 Wednesday June 2010

- 09.15 – 10.00** **Reality check – A choice of provocative discussions questioning common assumptions**
The objective of mediation | Justice | The professionalisation of mediation
-
- 10.30 – 12.30** **Two parallel discussions for participants to choose from**
Afghanistan: talking to the Taliban | Sudan
-
- 12.30 – 14.00** **Informal buffet lunch**
-
- 14.00 – 15.00** **The Mediators' Studio**
-
- 15.30 – 17.00** **Two parallel discussions for participants to choose from**
Militants without borders? | Dialogue despite division: securing agreement with fragmented parties
-
- 17.30 – 18.30** **A choice of up to date situation reports**
Myanmar | Central Asia | Yemen
-
- 19.30** **Informal dinner**
-

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Thursday
June 2010

9.30 – 11.00

Strategies for gender-sensitive peacemaking

11.30 – 13.00

Two parallel discussions for participants to choose from

Violent transitions of power: democratic
catalyst or power grab?

What's in store for Iraq's
disputed territories?

11.30 – 13.00

Informal buffet lunch

15.00 – 16.30

Closing plenary

19.30

Boat excursion with dinner

List of participants

Ambassador Kåre R. Aas

Norwegian Ambassador to Afghanistan

Secretary Annabelle Abaya

Secretary, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Philippines

Mr Mariano Aguirre

Managing Director, Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre (NOREF)

Dr Abdul-Karim al-Eryani

Presidential Political Adviser, Yemen

His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al Faisal

Former Saudi Arabia Ambassador to the United States; Chairman, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies

Ms Loulouwa al-Rachid

Senior Analyst on Middle East and North Africa, International Crisis Group

Minister Ahmed Al-Mahmoud

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar

Mr Murad al-Shishani

Analyst on Islamic Groups and Terrorism

Ambassador Hiruy Amanuel

Regional Director for Africa, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Ms Ngozi Amu

Political Affairs Officer, Mediation Support Unit, UN Department of Political Affairs

Ms Louise Arbour

President, International Crisis Group; Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Reverend Trond Bakkevig

Chairman, Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre (NOREF)

Mr Marcel Fortuna Biato

Foreign Policy Adviser, President's office, Brazil

Mr Dag H Nylander

Norwegian Special Envoy to Colombia

Ambassador Vegar Brynildsen

Norwegian Special Envoy to the Philippines

Professor James Clad

Senior Fellow and Professor of Near East and South Asian Studies, National Defense University; Former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia

Ms Sarah Cliffe

Special Representative and Director, World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development, World Bank

Mr Patrick Cockburn

Correspondent, The Independent

Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey

Ms Lyse Doucet

Senior Presenter and Correspondent, BBC

Lt General (Rtd.) Asad Durrani

Former Director General, Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan

Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim

Deputy Minister for International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa

Mr Alejandro Eder

Political Adviser to the Higher Commissioner for Peace, Colombia

Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström

Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Sweden

Ambassador Azouz Ennifar

Deputy AU-UN Mediator for Darfur

Minister Jonas Gahr Støre

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Ms Fatima Gailani

President, Red Crescent Society, Afghanistan

Ms Elissa Golberg

Director General, Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada

Mr Romain Grandjean

Middle East Project Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mr Martin Griffiths

Director, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Ambassador Pekka Haavisto

Member of Parliament, Finland

Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer
Norwegian Special Envoy to the Middle East

Ambassador Tore Hattrem
Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka

Ms Priscilla Hayner
Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former Director, International Center for Transitional Justice, Geneva

Mr Vidar Helgesen
Secretary-General, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; Board Member, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Dr Antje Herrberg
Senior Adviser, Crisis Management Initiative

Mr Adam Hinds
Team Leader, UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

Ambassador Mona Juul
Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN

Dr Muhiddin Kabiri
Chairman, Islamic Revival Party, Tajikistan

Ambassador Bjørn Janis Kanavin
Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Norway

Ms Irene Khan
Board Member, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former Secretary-General, Amnesty International

Ms Carla Koppell
Director, The Institute for Inclusive Security; Director, Washington Office, Hunt Alternatives Fund

Professor Radha Kumar
Director, Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia University, New Delhi

Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra
Peace and Security Commissioner, African Union

Ambassador Satinder Lambah
Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of India

Ambassador Yahaya Lawal
Director, African Affairs, Organisation of Islamic Conference

Mr James LeMoyne
Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Ms Clare Lockhart
Director, Institute for State Effectiveness

Ambassador Ellen Løj
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia

Ambassador Jorunn Mæhlum
Special Envoy for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Reconciliation Process in Zanzibar, Tanzania

Mr Youssef Mahmoud
Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad

Dr Ram Manikkalingam
Director, Dialogue Advisory Group

Mr Ian Martin
Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Nepal

Mr Staffan de Mistura
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Afghanistan; Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Iraq

His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad
Personal Envoy of and Special Advisor to His Majesty King Abdullah II, Jordan

Dr Thant Myint-U
Former Head of Policy Planning Unit, UN Department of Political Affairs

Dr Joyce Neu
Senior Associate, Facilitating Peace; Former Team Leader, UN Standby Team of Mediation Experts

Baroness Nuala O'Loan
Roving Ambassador and Special Envoy to Timor-Leste and on UNSC Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security, Ireland

Ms Ingrid Ofstad
Norwegian Consul General to Juba, Sudan

Ms Susan Page
Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, United States

Dr Katia Papagianni
Head of Mediation Support Programme, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mr Geir Pedersen

Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Dr Surin Pitsuwan

Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Sir Derek Plumbly

Chairman, Assessment and Evaluation Commission, Sudan

Mr Jonathan Powell

Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Sir Kieran Prendergast

Special Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former UN Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs

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Mr Ahmed Rashid

Author and journalist, Pakistan

Dr Ying Rong

Vice President and Director, South Asian Studies Center, China Institute of International Studies

Mr Carne Ross

Executive Director, Independent Diplomat

Professor Barnett Rubin

Director of Studies, Center on International Cooperation; Special Adviser to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Ambassador Salim Ahmed Salim

Former Secretary-General, Organisation of African Unity; Former AU Special Envoy on the Darfur Conflict

Undersecretary Rafael Seguis

Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Philippines

Ambassador Andrea Semadeni

Special Envoy for Sudan and the Horn of Africa, Switzerland

Mr Michael Semple

Independent Analyst; Former EU Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan

Ambassador Svein Sevje

Norwegian Ambassador-designate to Israel; Former Norwegian Ambassador to Sudan

Mr Xan Smiley

Middle East and Africa Editor, The Economist

Dr Javier Solana

Honorary President, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former High Representative for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

Minister Erik Solheim

Minister of the Environment and International Development, Norway

Mr Tomas Stangeland

Acting Deputy Director General, Peace and Reconciliation Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Lt General (Rtd.) Lazaro Sumbeiywo

Chief Executive Officer, Moi Africa Institute; Special Adviser to the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General in the Great Lakes Region

Professor Din Syamsuddin

Chairman, Muhammadiyah, Indonesia

Ambassador Tore Toreng

Special Envoy of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Nepal

Dr Michael Vatikiotis

Regional Director for Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Ambassador Francesc Vendrell

Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Former EU Special Representative for Afghanistan

Dr Margaret Vogt

Deputy Director, Africa Division1, UN Department for Political Affairs

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European Affairs Correspondent, Le Temps

Ms Teresa Whitfield

Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation; Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

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Director General, Department for Regional Questions and Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

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Presidential Adviser on Foreign Affairs; Former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Indonesia

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