

CONFLICT AND POVERTY

Keynote Address by Gareth Evans, President, International Crisis Group, to Plenary Session “Tackling Conflict, Fragility and Insecurity: Creating the Conditions for Effective Poverty Reduction”, DFID Conference on Future of International Development, London, 10 March 2009

I don't think anyone needs to be persuaded now about the existence of a basic interrelationship between poverty and conflict, captured in the familiar mantra that there can be 'no security without development, and no development without security'.

If one were in an argumentative mood, it is certainly possible to argue about the extent to which poverty, as such, causes deadly conflict. If severe economic deprivation was by itself a direct cause of violent conflict or mass atrocities, the world, with a billion people still living on around a dollar a day, would be even more alarmingly violent than it is now. But it is not very plausible to suggest that there is no connection at all: as Paul Collier for one has persuasively argued, there is every reason to accept that economic decline, low income, and high unemployment are contributing conditions, either directly by fueling grievances among particular disadvantaged or excluded groups, or indirectly by reducing the relevant opportunity costs of joining a violent rebellion - or quite probably both.¹

When it comes to the other side of the coin -- whether deadly conflict causes poverty and immiseration -- I don't think anyone would argue at all. Some may grow fat on the profits of war, but many more suffer unconscionably. Paul Collier calculates that civil war tends to reduce growth by around 2.3 percent per year, so the typical seven-year war leaves a country around 15 per cent poorer than it would have been.² The World Bank estimates that countries that have endured a war take an average of 11.1 years to regain pre-conflict per capita income levels.³

And there's pretty obviously a feedback loop involved here, what Collier calls the 'conflict trap': particularly when countries are poor to start with, prolonged violence can create the conditions in which further violence is almost inevitable unless quite dramatic action is taken to break the cycle. Wars directly damage critical infrastructure, investor confidence, and social capital; money is shifted from productive investments into military budgets. Individuals are driven from their homes, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria thrive among military personnel and vulnerable populations. Together, these effects cripple the

¹ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are failing and what can be done about it* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 20. See also, Karen Ballentine, “Beyond Greed and Grievance,” pp. 261-262, 280, citing Charles Cater, “The Political Economy of Conflict and UN Intervention: Rethinking the Critical Cases of Africa,” both in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman eds., *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

² Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, p. 27

³ World Bank, “Global Monitoring Report 2007” (2007), p. 44-45. Available at: www.worldbank.org/gmr2007

ability of already-marginalized countries to develop, creating a trap in which countries repeatedly fall back into civil war, despite attempts to escape.⁴

This session asks us, in effect, how we can contribute to effective poverty reduction by tackling conflict, fragility and insecurity. For present purposes I will steer clear of definitional issues about what constitutes a ‘fragile’ state – or for that matter a ‘failing’, ‘failed’ or ‘phantom’ state; nor will I try to address the many kinds of non-conflict related human insecurity that are involved in living in a state that satisfies one or other of these descriptions. I will focus simply on summarising, in abbreviated form, what I think – from my nearly ten years now with the International Crisis Group -- we now know, or should have learned, about how to prevent and resolve deadly conflict and mass atrocity crimes.

Preventing Conflict Outbreak

The first rule for preventing deadly conflict is *don't start it*—certainly not in defiance of either international law or common sense. There are circumstances in which there will simply be no alternative to taking coercive military action, to respond to real and immediate cross-border threats (as in the case of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991), and – in the case of man-made internal crises of the kind we confronted in the Balkans and Rwanda and elsewhere so often in the last decade – to do so in the context of the principle of the ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) endorsed by the 2005 UN Summit.⁵

But such action should only ever be undertaken in the most serious cases, as a last resort, and in circumstances where it will do more good than harm. It should certainly not be assumed that R2P requires the use of coercive force, even in the most explosive situations. Kenya at the beginning of 2008 is a case in point, with the violence and ethnic cleansing being stopped not by sending in the Marines but by Kofi Annan's diplomatic mediation.

The second rule of conflict prevention is to *understand the causes*: the factors at work – political, economic, cultural, personal – in each particular risk situation. The basic point about conflict is that it is always context specific. Big overarching theories – whether cast in terms of clash of civilizations, ancient ethnic enmity, economic greed, economic grievance, or anything else – may be good for keynote speeches and royalties, and may also be quite helpful in identifying particular explanatory factors that should certainly be taken into account in trying to understand the dynamics of particular situations. But they never seem to work very well in sorting between those situations which are combustible and those which are not. For that you need detailed, field-based case by case analysis, not

⁴ Summary drawn from Colin H. Kahl, ‘Book Review: Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy’ by Paul Collier et al (World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003), PECS News, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Spring 2004, p. 6. Available at: www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/PECSnews.pdf

⁵ See generally Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All* (Brookings Institution Press, 2008). Many of the conflict prevention and response lessons summarised in this address are there discussed at length.

making assumptions on the basis of experience elsewhere, or what has gone before, but looking at what is under your nose, right now.

The third big lesson we have learned about conflict prevention is the need to fully *understand the conflict prevention toolbox*, and be prepared to apply flexibly as circumstances change the whole range of possible measures, that can be deployed to deal with high-risk situations: political and diplomatic measures, legal and constitutional measures, economic and social measures, and security sector and military measures as the case may be.

The crucial thing is to recognise not only that each situation has its own characteristics, and that one-size spanners don't fit all, but that each situation is likely to require a complex combination of measures, the balance between which is bound to change over time as circumstances evolve. Burma/Myanmar is a good example of a need for a fundamental rethink of the right tools to apply, with the longstanding Western focus on coercive sanctions bearing, in the absence of comparable regional pressure, no obvious fruit in changing the military regime's inward-looking, undemocratic, authoritarianism. Although I am an old anti-apartheid campaigner for whom 'constructive engagement' has long been an almost obscene expression, I have been persuaded by Crisis Group's field analysis that re-engagement through major programs of development assistance, and opening up trade, would not only make life less miserable in the short term for Burma's people, but do more than coercion alone to change over time regime behaviour.

The fourth rule is to *be prepared to commit the necessary resources*, governmental and intergovernmental, when and where they are needed, and particularly at the early prevention stage, where any investment now is likely to be infinitely cheaper than paying later for military action, humanitarian relief assistance and post-conflict reconstruction - something the international community is still much better at talking about than doing.

Preventing Continuation: Conflict Resolution

When efforts to prevent the outbreak of conflict fails, the task becomes that of preventing its continuation, i.e. conflict resolution – hopefully achieved by peacemaking negotiations rather than the use of overriding military force. In this context, again, there are a number of lessons we have painfully learned about what makes a successful peace accord.

First, peacemaking requires, as does earlier conflict prevention effort, the *commitment of serious diplomatic resources*, both in quality and quantity, at whatever level is most likely to bring success -- through the UN, through a regional organization, through a particular government initiative, or sometimes through second-track or unofficial mechanisms.

Second, successful peace negotiating requires *creativity and stamina, and a willingness to work with all the players that matter*, however ugly their past behaviour may have been, or stated principles or ideology continue to be.

A third lesson we have learned is that *peacemaking is not an event so much as a process*, and signing the agreement is not the end of it. The critical need is to generate commitment to, and ownership of, the peace by the warring parties: so their commitments are not just formal, but internalized, and will stick. That takes, in turn, real skill and commitment on the part of those mediating or otherwise assisting the negotiation.

Fourth, we know that any peace accord must *deal with all the fundamentals of the dispute*: all the issues which will have to be resolved if normality is to return. One of the most fragile of the peace agreements currently in place is that for Kenya, for precisely this reason: the Annan negotiation, while producing an effective political fix at the top, through a power-sharing agreement which stopped the initial violence, left completely unresolved the fundamental underlying causes of the explosion of ethnic violence, including land distribution, economic disparities and inadequate constitutional and legal protections.

Fifth, any successful peace accord must *get the balance right between peace and justice*. This is a lot easier said than done. The South African truth and reconciliation commission model, with its amnesties for the perpetrators of even serious crimes, is widely admired, but in other cases sustainable peace will not be possible without significant retributive justice: i.e. the visible trial and punishment of those most guilty. What is clear is that the people of every country, whether it's Cambodia or Rwanda or East Timor or Liberia, have to resolve what works for them. There is sometimes a case to be made for peace taking precedence over justice, but only in the most exceptional cases where there is clear and unequivocal evidence that there will be a major peace dividend – and that is not the case for now in either Uganda or Sudan, the two most currently controversial cases.

Sixth, the terms of any accord, and the method of its enforcement and implementation, must be *sufficiently resilient to deal with spoilers* – those who would seek to undermine or overturn it. That has been a constant problem in most of the peace settlements in Africa and elsewhere that have not held, or which remain incomplete – as happened before in Rwanda and Angola for example, and is happening now in the Congo.

Seventh – and this follows particularly from the last point – a peace accord to be successful must have the *necessary degree of international support*: with all the guarantees and commitment of resources that are necessary to make it stick. And this leads us to the last set of lessons I want to discuss, necessarily very briefly in the time remaining.

Preventing Recurrence: Post Conflict Rebuilding

The biggest lessons of all about the handling of conflict that we have learned in recent years - not least from Rwanda (where the 1994 genocide, taking 800 000 lives, followed the Arusha peace deal just a year before), Angola (where the 1991 Bicesse Agreement to end the war in was followed by a relapse into bloody conflict for another decade with another million or more lives lost), Haiti, Afghanistan and now Iraq -- is the critical necessity of effective post-conflict peacebuilding, to ensure that the whole weary conflict cycle does not begin again.

One of the things we now understand most clearly about conflict is that the countries and regions most likely to lapse into it are those that have been there before. There is not a straight line sequence between the anticipation of conflict and attempts to prevent it breaking out; the resolution of conflict, by negotiation or force, when it has broken out; and post-conflict peacebuilding. Rather there is a cyclical process, in which each post-conflict environment contains the potential seeds of the next round of destruction. In recent decades nearly 30 per cent of negotiated settlements have broken down in under five years.

What follows from that is that far more effort has to be put into consolidating the peace after it has been won. Sustainable peace cannot be guaranteed just because a diplomatic peacemaking initiative has apparently been successful, or because a clear-cut military victory has apparently been won. The conflict containment structures and capacities that need to be applied in a post-conflict environment, to prevent violence recurring, are essentially exactly the same as those that need to be applied in fragile, failing or failed states to prevent violent conflict breaking out in the first place. The focus in each case must be on structural prevention – building institutional structures and processes (military, political, legal, economic and social) which are capable of relieving non-violently all the crucial stress points that arise between individuals and groups.

The responsibility to rebuild a society, in the aftermath of war or mass atrocity crimes that have torn it apart, has four interrelated but distinct dimensions, achieving security, good governance, justice and reconciliation, and economic and social development.

The first and most basic lesson to be drawn from our by now considerable experience of postconflict peacebuilding in the post-cold war world is that these multiple objectives have to be pursued more or less simultaneously: physical security may always be the first priority, but it cannot be the only one, and, in particular, recreating—or creating—a viable justice system and respect for the rule of law, and the governance preconditions for economic development, deserves higher priority than it usually has been given.

There are some other general lessons as well that, obvious as they may seem, appear not yet to have been fully absorbed—and certainly not yet fully acted on—by all the relevant international players:

- Sort out who should do what and when—immediately, over a medium transition period, and in the longer term—and then allocate the roles and coordinate them effectively, both in relevant capitals and on the ground. Afghanistan is a case study in what not to do in this respect.
- Commit the necessary resources, and sustain that commitment for as long as it takes.
- Understand the local political dynamics and the limits of what outsiders can do.
- Have an exit strategy, and one that is not just devoted to holding early elections as soon as possible, as important as it obviously is to vest real local authority and responsibility as soon as possible.

- Don't confuse an exit strategy with an exit timetable; be prepared to stay, subject to local consent, as long as it takes, recognizing that more peacebuilding mistakes have been made by internationals leaving too soon and doing too little than staying too long and doing too much.

There is one other more fundamental lesson, which should have been learned in Iraq after 2003 if nowhere else, that is worth internalizing at the outset by anyone in the peacebuilding business: imposing a peace settlement and democratic institutions of governance on a state and people ravaged by war and atrocity crimes is highly unlikely to work. What is crucial is to somehow win a much deeper understanding among the major parties to the conflict that they have shared interests, a common vision, and must learn to live and work in collaboration with each other. This is much easier said than achieved, even with sophisticated special programs designed for this purpose, but if it is not part of the mindset of peacebuilders from the outset, the whole process is very likely to end in tears.

Preventing and Resolving Deadly Conflict: The Case for Optimism

The little bit of good news I have to offer you in conclusion, is that many of these lessons do seem to be being learned, and – for all that continues to go horribly wrong -- we are, overall, in fact getting much better at preventing and resolving deadly conflict. The evidence comes from the statistics that have in recent years been meticulously compiled, drawing on the best available worldwide data (not much of which is available from UN or other official sources) by the Human Security Report team now working out of Simon Fraser University in Canada, and published in successive reports since 2005, and summarized in a *miniAtlas of Human Security* published in 2008.

Since the early 1990s, despite all the terrible cases we all remember, and all the terrible cases still ongoing in the Congo, Darfur, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, there has been an extraordinary *decrease* – around 80 per cent in each case -- in the number of serious conflicts (defined as those with 1000 or more reported battle deaths in a year), the number of episodes of mass killing, and the number of people dying violent battle deaths. Though a number of significant new conflicts have commenced, and a number of apparently successfully concluded conflicts have broken out again within a few years, many more conflicts have stopped than started.

In the case of battle deaths, whereas most years from the 1940s through to the 1990s had over 100,000 such reported deaths – and sometimes as many as 500,000 – the average for the first years of this new century has been fewer than 20,000. For wars in which states, as distinct from non-state groups, are one or more of the actors, for every 30 people killed in 1950, only one was killed in 2005. Of course violent battle deaths are only a small part of the whole story of the misery of war: 90 per cent or more of war-related deaths are due to disease and malnutrition rather than direct violence, as we have seen, for example, in the Congo and Darfur. But the trend decline in battle deaths is significant, and hugely encouraging.

Even more encouraging is the analysis which lies behind these figures. The dramatic decline in wars and battle deaths is partly explained by the end of the era of colonialism, which generated two-thirds or more of all wars from the 1950s to the 1980s; and of course the end of the Cold War, which meant no more proxy wars fuelled by Washington or Moscow, and also the demise of a number of authoritarian governments, generating internal resentment and resistance, that each side had been propping up.

But, the best explanation is the one that stares us in the face, even if a great many don't want to acknowledge it: the huge upsurge in activity in conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict peacebuilding activity that has occurred over the last decade and a half, a good deal of it being spearheaded by the UN itself, but very significant roles being played by a number of regional organizations, major NGOs, and certainly individual states like the UK – which has been an international leader particularly in developing joined-up institutional structures and processes to maximize the impact of every development dollar spent.

So those of us who have been devoting large chunks of our professional and personal lives to preventing and resolving deadly conflict – and doing so not least because of the huge contribution that can make to reducing poverty and all the misery associated with it -- my final message is clear, simple and I hope encouraging: we are not all wasting our time.