

**Council *for* International Development**

*Kaunibera mo te Whakapakari Ao Whanui*

**POSITION PAPER:  
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**



*Cover Photo:* Boys walk away from their weapons ~ Demobilisation Ceremony, Sudan. PHOTO: Stevie Mann, UNICEF

*Photo Page 1:* Girl and bullet-holed building, Angola. PHOTO: Robert Grossman, UNICEF

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## POSITION PAPER: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION



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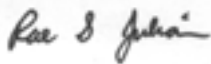
# Foreword

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Violent conflict is a grave concern in today's world. Although there appear to be fewer wars between countries there are more outbreaks of armed violence within countries. CID acknowledges that these are due to many factors, some internal to the country and others caused by external matters such as gross inequalities in world income distribution or perceived discrimination against those of a particular religious belief.

Many development NGOs operate in situations of actual, potential or post-conflict. They must concern themselves with its causes, methods of prevention and the transition from an immediate post-conflict situation to ongoing sustainable development.

The position paper has been developed as a guide to NGOs in their conflict transformation work, whether it is directly in the field, in support of their partners in a violent conflict situation, or through advocacy to raise awareness of the conflict and attempt to persuade stakeholders to address its causes in order to restore peace.



Rae Julian  
Executive Director - Council for International Development



Dutch Marines and Cambodian electoral workers, 1992, Cambodia. PHOTO: Rae Julian

# Council for International Development (CID)

## POSITION PAPER: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the perspective on violent conflict of New Zealand-based NGOs working in international development, especially on the processes around post-conflict resolution, development and peace building. It is intended for use in advocacy and as a guide to those working directly or with partners in an area experiencing or vulnerable to conflict. The focus of the paper is therefore on conflict in developing countries, although most of the principles are universally applicable.

#### What do we mean by conflict?

For the purpose of this paper, conflict is defined as disagreement within a state or between states, which has reached the level of violence (usually armed violence), or potential violence. It may be defined as the opposite of development. In countries and areas where there is violent conflict, at best development is inhibited, at worst it is set back, sometimes for a number of generations. Conflict at this level breaches human rights and stalls democratic processes. It causes economic crises as it impacts on trade and revenue collection and especially since international companies are often the first to abandon a country in conflict. NGOs and government agencies working in the area of international development therefore must concern themselves with conflict: its causes and methods of prevention, and the transition from a post conflict situation to ongoing sustainable development.

We acknowledge, however, that under the more general definition, a struggle between opposing forces or interests, conflict can be a catalyst for development in that it may bring change and promote human rights issues such as freedom of expression. Conflict of this nature, dealt with creatively and non-violently, can be a active force for human development.

#### THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Since conflict is a dynamic concept, it is not possible to produce a definitive list of its causes. Any analysis of the causes, however, must address all levels of society:

At the **global level** it may be caused by:

- A desire for political, religious or ethnic domination;
- Perceived or actual persecution of certain ethnic, religious or political groups;
- Global politics and globalisation policies which appear to exacerbate economic inequality or poverty;
- The linking of corporate, military and political power to achieve common international goals

Afghanistan 2003. PHOTO: WFP



At the **national level** it may be caused by:

- An imbalance of political, socio-economic or cultural opportunities among different groups due to a concentration of power among some of the groups;
- Ethnic or religious confrontations;
- No opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution between groups;
- A lack of democracy and poor governance by the state;
- The absence of an active civil society able to play a meaningful role in national decision-making;
- Colonial legacies.

At a **local level** it may be caused by the same factors as those operating at the national level.

Contributing causes at all levels may include:

- Drugs and illicit trading in drugs;
- The easy availability of small arms;
- Environmental degradation and consequent displacement of communities;
- Massive population flows;
- Human trafficking;
- A rapid increase in transmittable diseases;
- Private sector intervention in potentially unstable areas.

Secondary causes have also been identified<sup>1</sup>. They include unemployment and lack of education that, especially among males, can lead to frustration and organised crime. The effects of globalisation, such as the removal of regulations on the flows of goods (thus undercutting local produce) and finance may also be a cause of conflict.



Demonstration. PHOTO: Imogen Prickett 2003

### Some Causes of Conflict in Bougainville, 1987-97

- *Legacies of colonial rule, with Australia retaining ownership of a principal revenue earner - the copper mine*
- *Large scale environmental pollution caused by the mine and income disparity between mainly foreign mine workers and local people*
- *An artificially imposed border, including Bougainville within Papua New Guinea (PNG) while it is culturally and geographically closer to the Solomon Islands*
- *A deeply heterogeneous society with many linguistic and cultural differences*
- *Attempts to impose peace from outside, especially by PNG police*
- *Subsequent divisions in local society between the BRA (Revolutionary Army - separatist) and the BRF (Resistance Force - supporting PNG) resulting in large-scale violent conflict.*

*From Prickett, 2003*

Major conflict is unlikely if all of the following factors apply:

- Participatory democracy and respect for human rights;
- Sustainable and equitable economic development;
- Honest political structures;
- Healthy social and environmental conditions, which make it possible to manage and adapt to change;
- Peace and human rights training and principles available and accepted within schools and the wider community;
- Controls over illegal trade in small arms, drugs and other "conflict commodities", such as timber, oil and diamonds.

## The stages of conflict

The European Union has identified a conflict cycle, which addresses “the recurring nature of many conflicts and their inter-linkages to long-term structural causes”, as summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Conflict Cycle (adapted from Saferworld, *Understanding the EU*)

<p><b>Situation without obvious tension</b>  <i>A country is seemingly stable and largely quiet but causes of potential conflict may be discerned.</i></p> <p><b>Immediate aim:</b> Peacebuilding  <b>Instruments:</b> targeted assistance, democracy building, good governance and civil society, institution building, political dialogue etc.</p>	<p><b>Situation of tension</b>  <i>Conflict in society is apparent - its gravity depends on current events and existing political and power structures.</i></p> <p><b>Immediate aim:</b> Conflict prevention  <b>Instruments:</b> political dialogue, sanctions, deployment of observer, specific measures.</p>
<p><b>Open Conflict</b>  <i>Sustained fighting between forces.</i></p> <p><b>Immediate aim:</b> Conflict management/resolution  <b>Instruments:</b> Political dialogue, observer missions, support for peace initiatives, advocacy of preventive military intervention, peace enforcement.</p>	<p><b>Post-conflict situation</b>  <i>No longer organised armed violence, cease-fire or peace agreement may be signed.</i></p> <p><b>Immediate aim:</b> Conflict resolution/peace building  <b>Instruments:</b> demobilisation and disarmament; repatriation and reintegration; de-mining; post-conflict relief and humanitarian aid; confidence-building measures; conflict resolution initiatives; rebuilding government structures.</p>

The terms used in the table are often interpreted in different ways. Armed military intervention, for example is sometimes referred to as peacebuilding when it would be more appropriately defined as conflict management/resolution. The EU uses the following definitions:

*Peace-building:* activities undertaken over the medium and longer term to address root causes of violent conflict in a targeted manner.

*Conflict prevention:* activities undertaken over the short term to reduce manifest tensions and/or to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict

*Conflict management:* activities undertaken with the objective of preventing the escalation of existing violent conflict.

*Conflict resolution:* activities taken over the short term to end violent conflict, especially achieving an immediate ceasefire, and including the beginning of reconciliation.

In order to encompass and extend all of these activities CID uses another term in this paper, **conflict transformation**. This term includes the three stages of conflict prevention, management and resolution and goes forward to the post-conflict period. Issues such as peacebuilding, reconciliation and reparation are all included within the concept. Conflict transformation, (Prickett, 2003), aims to change the relationships of parties and the structural elements that underlie the conflict.



Child's hand, Sudan. PHOTO: Stevie Mann, UNICEF

## Conflict-Nurturing

Kenneth Bush (2001) describes conditions where external aid nurtures conflict rather than leading to conflict transformation. They include those where:

- Aid resources are used to support armies;
- Aid distribution is perceived to be unfair and to favour certain groups;
- Goods brought from outside are substituted for local resources (especially food);
- The concentration of aid causes inflation of the local currency;
- Resentment is caused by the large salaries earned by international NGO (INGO) staff, and when locally engaged staff are similarly paid in excess of local wages.



Rebel soldiers and a girl, Rwanda.

Conflict may also be nurtured when:

- Small arms continue to proliferate and are readily available;
- Procedures are not put in place immediately to deal with trauma, the issue of child and youth soldiers, and resettlement of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees;
- There are no clear plans to restore the country to self sufficiency, especially through the departure of expatriate military and INGO personnel.

## Terrorism and Conflict

Terrorism is generally seen as a more extreme form of conflict, carried out by small groups of people who may resort to indiscriminate violence in order to publicise their cause or to put pressure on a government or organisation to change its policies. It is often characterised by the deliberate targeting of civilians. Groups who feel marginalised and unable to promote their views by peaceful means especially when they

are from societies where dissent is suppressed and human rights are violated may also resort to "terrorist" measures. There is often a fine line between defining people as terrorists or freedom fighters, which may depend upon the perceptions and political position of stakeholders to the conflict.

Terrorists may also operate across an international arena with members united by fervent beliefs and in reaction to perceived oppression by a much greater international power e.g. Al Qaeda.

Terrorism can only be eliminated by dealing with its root causes. It is important to separate any legitimate grievances and beliefs from the activities carried out and to ensure that relevant United Nations Conventions and Protocols are observed. Denial of the basic human rights of alleged members of terrorist groups, such as the imprisonment without trial of alleged Taliban fighters and others in Guantanamo Bay, is likely to exacerbate the situation.

Anti-terrorist activities or support should not be seen by donors as a substitute for, or as part of, development aid and support, but rather as additional funding. An example is the provision of funding support to build the skills and abilities to meet the future needs and aspirations of potentially "fragile, disenfranchised youth" especially "educated males, who are prime targets for terrorist organisations", as suggested by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (2003). This support is commendable but not if it is only provided to prevent the young people from resorting to terrorism and especially not if it is provided in place of basic education for girls who may not otherwise get to primary schools.

The role of international aid and development in situations of terrorism is necessarily limited. INGOs, in addition to any regular development activities in the countries concerned, may need to provide support for capacity building in areas such as negotiation or counselling. They can play an even more valuable role in advocating with their own governments and through other channels available to them for measures that deal with the root causes of the terrorism.

## CID PRINCIPLES

**Conflict transformation**, especially when external intervention is introduced, must:

1. be **locally owned** - external input is necessarily limited in impact and should concentrate mainly on supporting people or nations to resolve their own problems;
2. be **non-partisan** - attempts to build or preserve peace must accept that all parties have reasons for entering the conflict and have the right to have those reasons heard in a neutral environment;
3. be **fully inclusive** - promoting the values of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, human rights and respect for differences;
4. be based on a **thorough understanding** of the causes of the conflict and the cultural, social, political and environmental setting in which local NGOs operate;
5. be **based on a partnership model** - accepting that outside intervention must be locally supported; with mutual accountability and recognition of the strengths, experience and skills brought to the process by both partners;
6. try to achieve a **holistic approach**, addressing the full complexity of the conflict;
7. promote **capacity building** - supporting the local partner towards self reliance;
8. work through **traditional systems** as far as possible, while recognising that these can also contribute towards the conflict - the status and mana of the systems, however, must not be undermined by the process;
9. stress the **role of civil society** - recognising that change can occur only with the support and involvement of the people and their organisations at all levels, from formal NGOs to community- based organisations (CBOs), faith-based groups, trade union and other professional organisations, including the media;
10. recognise the **gender** components of conflict, especially the role of women as peace-builders in many societies, their particular experiences in conflict situations and their disproportionate representation (along with children) as the victims of conflict;
11. realise that achievement of conflict resolution may be **generational** - sometimes it is only the new generations who can learn to co-exist peacefully;
12. include an **exit strategy** for the phasing out of external intervention and any other measures introduced as part of the conflict resolution process;
13. distinguish the **differing roles of military and humanitarian components** of the process, recognising the need for humanitarian space while sometimes needing a temporary framework of law and order, set up by military and police personnel, to create that space;
14. localise and regionalise responses to requests for support as far as possible - through establishment of national transformation networks which are linked regionally, following a principle of "**neighbourhood support**", which recognises the value of resolving problems before they are allowed to escalate;
15. follow the rules of international law and abide by all relevant United Nations Conventions.

PHOTO: UNICEF



## The Role of Civil Society

The essential role of civil society is often overlooked during processes of conflict transformation. Since alienation, discrimination and a lack of participatory democracy are among the root causes of conflict; no lasting solutions can be put in place unless all elements of civil society are part of the rebuilding process. This inclusion is often ignored when governments work with their officials and seek help from other governments, bringing in military and other law and order enforcers, which may be necessary in order to stabilise a volatile environment, such as that in the



Hairstyling in a conflict zone: women in Sierra Leone. PHOTO: USAID

Solomon Islands. Unless civil society is an ongoing part of the transformation process the result may be further alienation and possible exacerbation of the conflict.

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) describes a number of stages during the process of conflict transformation, which they describe as “from humanitarian relief to development”. Civil society must be involved in all of these stages to a gradually increasing extent:

### 1. Conflict management and resolution:

At these stages the main process is the restoration of law and order, attempts to resolve the situation and the provision of humanitarian relief. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can play a vital role in this, especially when there are issues of different languages and cultures. At times of extreme conflict, however, the main

focus of local CSO members may be on reservation of their own families, especially if male family members are part of the forces of conflict. Families may have had to leave their homes for temporary accommodation, living as internally displaced people (IDPs). While external intervention is often necessary at this stage, it should be seen as a short term benefit.

### 2. Reintegration

This is the immediate post-conflict stage. The focus is on maintaining basic security while rebuilding infrastructure, housing, water and sanitation, for example as well as ensuring that services such as health and education and transport are restored so that IDPs and returning refugees can return to their communities. It may also be necessary to deal with the emotional and psychological aftermath of their suffering.

Post-conflict trauma must be addressed at all levels, with communities, families and individuals as well as groups who have been specially affected such as child soldiers or widows, in ways that are locally owned and culturally appropriate. The reintegration process should be carried out in partnership between CSOs, local and national government with input as necessary in cash or other assistance from international NGOs and external donor agencies.

### 3. Demobilisation

Demobilisation is another component of the post-conflict period. People who have fought each other bitterly have to learn to live together; young people (usually boys) who only know how to be soldiers have to adapt to civilian lifestyles. Giving up their weapons and accepting temporary resettlement (cantonment) and thus relinquishing their perceived sources of protection is often a difficult exercise to carry out.

Since the people being demobilised may also suffer deep trauma from their experiences, counselling is likely to be needed. Women and girls who have been non-combatants in military camps may also need special attention. While such counselling is a role best performed by people from the same culture who can understand their needs, CSOs and others who plan to provide these services may need training and general capacity-building support.

#### 4. Development

When the processes described above are in place, the focus can return to development, - retraining, assistance in rebuilding sustainable livelihoods, and all of the features of a developing society attempting to live in peace. Children are likely to be especially vulnerable, as orphans, trauma sufferers or former child soldiers. Attention should also be given to conflict prevention training and putting in place ways of identifying and defusing situations that may bring back the causes of the original conflict.

It is important to note that the processes described above are not necessarily linear. Trauma, for example, cannot always be dealt with in the short term, restoration of trust may take generations and funding may not be available immediately post-conflict for the rehabilitation of large numbers of people. Different areas within a country, moreover, may be at different stages of the conflict cycle, which ebb and flow, requiring activities at different levels at the same time.

#### The Role of Women

The role of women in all aspects of conflict transformation is often overlooked. Women make up a very small proportion of those actively engaged in armed conflict and an even tinier proportion of the military decision-makers. Their representation among political leadership is similarly diminutive in many parts of the world. They often make up, however, the majority of leaders of civil society, especially at the community level. Many examples can be found of women's organisations attempting to decrease or de-escalate conflict, from Northern Ireland in the 1970s to Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and Fiji in more recent times.

As solutions are sought and negotiations take place, often only military and political leaders are involved. The voices of women, which may have been strong (but not necessarily effective) during the conflict, are no longer likely to be included - just as civil society in general and their essential role in peacebuilding may be

ignored. If any sustainable outcomes are to be achieved then women, as civil society leaders, as those primarily responsible for the nurturing of the next generation, and as those more likely to seek peaceful solutions to conflict, must be always included in the processes of conflict transformation.

Women are often portrayed as the passive victims of violent conflict and many examples can be found of the violation of women as a perceived legitimate form of violence by opposing parties, such as the rape of ethnic Albanian women in Kosovo and of Shan women by the current Burmese government (SHRF and SWAN 2002), or the taking of Korean and other women as "comfort women" by the Japanese in the Second World War. Many have experienced death of family members. Leslie and Boso (2003) point out that "these (types of) experiences of conflict can have profound impacts on women's sense of identity and mental health"

which may inhibit their ability to participate in development programmes aimed at re-empowerment. Unless their trauma is addressed as part of the process of post-conflict reconciliation, they may have difficulties in participating in the healing process for themselves and others.

The United Nations has recognised the role of women through Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 2000), which places seven obligations on member states to include women at all stages of conflict transformation, including gender training for peacekeepers.

#### ***UN-led Demobilisation in Cambodia 1992-93***

*The four factions in Cambodia all agreed to participate in demobilisation. This was carried out in separate camps, where many previous soldiers lived for the duration of the UN intervention. Very few weapons had been handed in, however, by the time that the Khmer Rouge withdrew from the process, and the camps were used for containment and separation of the factions rather than as a start towards reconciliation. NGOs, moreover, had little input in the process. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that violent conflict between two of the remaining factions broke out again in 1997.*

*Rae Julian, Personal experience, 1992*



Afgahni women. PHOTO: WFP

As Des Molloy reports from Sierra Leone, however, “the implementation of gender mainstreaming in peace processes, including that in Sierra Leone, has suffered from the absence of commitment and political will by the parties to the negotiations, and an unwillingness to address the aspirations of women in the post-conflict arrangements.”

### The role of International NGOs (INGOs) and Donors

The primary role of INGOs and donors is to support the conflict transformation process for as long as may be considered necessary by their local partners. The form of support varies according to the nature and extent of the conflict and the strength of the local CSOs. In some countries, such as Cambodia, after many years of civil war INGOs with expatriate workers were necessary to assist with the lengthy process of rehabilitation and the gradual establishment of local CSOs or localisation of INGO personnel who could assume responsibility for ongoing sustainable development. In Fiji after the coup in 2000, on the other hand, the local CSOs needed only funding to carry out their work.

Solidarity or advocacy support for their partners from INGOs working in their own countries or internationally is often also necessary, especially in countries where violent conflict is being actively waged. For example, New Zealand NGOs have been active in such a way with East Timor and South Africa and some currently have solidarity links with NGOs from Aceh, West Papua and Burma.

New Zealand-based NGOs have a particular responsibility in the Pacific, where many have developed special relationships with partner agencies. They are currently providing conflict transformation support in a number of areas, including Bougainville, the Solomons Islands, Fiji and West Papua. They also support similar activities in other parts of the world, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Rwanda.

### The Role of the Military

Many countries experiencing armed conflict situations request external military intervention. This may take a number of forms:

- **Peace Keeping (pre-violent conflict)<sup>2</sup>:** where the presence of neutral military personnel, including military observers, along with imported civilian police and other civilian personnel, such as election observers, is seen to act as a deterrent to violence. The role of any military force is to create buffer zones, “humanitarian space”, within which humanitarian aid and other civilian activities, such as election organisation, can be carried out; or to assist with the process of

### *Conflict Resolution in Indonesia*

*The Catholic Relief Services and their local partner, Yayasan Swarahati, identified the politicisation and radicalisation of religion, along with a political reform process devolving governance to local authorities that led to disputes over the rights to land and natural resources, as key sources of conflict in Banyumas, Indonesia. In response they developed a programme of participatory action research involving members of village councils, which mapped the sources of conflict and the agents and manifestations of conflict in their villages, also considering the role of ethnic or religious factors. In this way they came to understand the deeper structural problems underlying the tensions, such as lack of employment opportunities for youth, inadequate land certification policies or lack of mediation structures for problem solving. Through this research they were able to work with local government to address the core issues, rather than merely dealing with their symptoms.*

CRS 2002

demobilisation and disarmament. They may also have a role in training local military in alternative ways of dealing with conflict. Military observers are usually unarmed and may be used to negotiate and monitor agreements between opposing forces.

- **Peace Making:** which may be part of the conflict management and resolution process. This is usually sought when a country is in a state of armed conflict and all military personnel are usually armed. Rules of engagement are drawn up to determine the level of armed intervention that is permissible, which may range from acting only in self-defence to active engagement when lives are in danger. Under such circumstances, eg Afghanistan or East Timor, the military are not generally perceived to be neutral as they are usually brought in to support the party to the conflict that is internationally regarded as legitimate.
- **Peace Keeping (post-conflict):** this stage may also require a military presence in order to provide protection for humanitarian processes. It follows the cessation of conflict and may include resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and demining as well as various forms of reconciliation and rehabilitation such as amnesties, truth and justice commissions/ public confessions, community courts, community and infrastructure rebuilding activities and peace education.

At all times the expatriate military presence must be seen as temporary, task-oriented and limited in its mandate. Expatriate police may be needed for a longer period but they are also concerned mainly with maintenance of law and order. At all times both police and military activities must be based on respect for human rights, empowerment of local people towards self-sufficiency, provision of victim support and gender and cultural awareness. They will only be able to operate within an atmosphere of trust if these principles are in place.



Baghdad. PHOTO: Red Cross

## CONCLUSION

New Zealand-based international development NGOs cover a wide range of sectors and countries with experience that goes far beyond the bounds of conventional aid assistance. Many work with partner organisations in countries undergoing or vulnerable to violent conflict. Some have staff or volunteers who are currently or have previously worked in areas of conflict transformation. The CID conflict transformation principles are intended as a basis for any work carried out to promote conflict transformation.



PHOTO: Bruce Connew, VSA

Meeting to discuss land dispute, Papua New Guinea

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Palestinian girl, Gaza City.  
PHOTO: Imogen Prickett

