

EMERGING NORMS of Peacebuilding in Key Political Institutions

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Response to Maryann Cusimano Love

Having carefully read this fine paper three times now with its extensive footnotes, and now my own 48 footnotes, I readily recommend it to our Catholic Peacebuilding Network and this conference for its unique and serious considerations. The author reminds us that peacebuilding is a huge job. It's a quintessential call to us for second-track diplomacy to be understood and pursued. This paper presents us with an astonishing abundance of urgent opportunities and competing challenges - astonishing for what is missing, astonishing for what Ms. Cusimano Love carefully informs us about our role in the peacebuilding processes, nationally and internationally.

Amidst the crosscutting intelligence, experience and passion for peace present in this room, at this conference today, as witness to a truly vast network of peacemakers, I am asked to respond from the perspectives of Caritas Internationalis investments in advocacy and peace-seeking at United Nations headquarters in New York, Geneva and beyond - amidst all the acronym-specific agencies, organizations and mandated mechanisms. I'm asked to elaborate from a Catholic experience of being at the table where peace, security and development is a hard-to-devour "menu" for many stakeholders within the international community. I do so from the perspective of the still-new UN Peacebuilding Commission(PBC) as we responsibly ask with determination: how it can/might/does/can not seize the opportunity to build sustainable, comprehensive peace to the human family in-need. How can this be advanced in its most local, national, regional and international applications. As well I have in mind the Holy Land, Northern Uganda, Haiti, DR Congo, Colombia and more.

Four enormous challenges underscore everything which MCLove highlights for us:

PRESENCE

PROCESS

PARTICIPATION

PARTNERSHIPS -

and I would reiterate PRESENCE once more.

Peacebuilding is fundamentally about relationships.

The PBC is a new, unique, even historic UN mechanism coming from the only double Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, mandating active engagement to advance peace-filled-potentials called right relationships, noted as pivotal in Caritas Internationalis Peacebuilding Manual. It's even requested in UN circles. Like CPN, the PBC, and its structured support systems, is managed by both quite formal and necessarily informal relationships. After all, it is about peace for peoples, communities, societies, neighbors. The good news is the PBC exists. The less-good news is that it is new (only in its second year of operations), awkward, imperfect and preoccupied with assumptions and expectations from all sectors.

As an intergovernmental process the PBC is unfortunately slow and encumbered.

This is a fact, regardless the good will from many Member States to achieve concrete impacts, results. However, its labored pace invites serious stakeholders like us to break into the process. The Japanese delegate said in response to a question I pressed regarding the role of civil society as partner with the PBC and the process:

"Yes, indeed, please jump in. We need NGOs there with us." Therefore, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network can and must be a more visible presence, challenging and supporting the PBC, cognizant of great underfunded limits, while bringing some "resurrection politics" as MaryAnn describes. Our CPNetwork can be seen offering informed hopes rooted in intelligent charity, derived directly from our sisters and brothers in need of their own peace. We help make it real! We are the windows to urgent realities that too often formal processes neglect, ignore or just do not see.

This means another challenge calls us to accompany the PBC itself with all its predictable bureaucracies by humbly noting that we have incredible, even astonishing, contributions to broaden, deepen and ripen exact peacebuilding opportunities. With resources and sustained relationships on-the-ground, in the region, with history and continuity, we can be the difference MCLove sees missing in the equations to date.

The CPN offers a highly credible window into the worlds of those who seek peace, as well as those who take risks to work for the achievement of such peace, as courageous individuals and local communities.

We can and should write shadow reports. Here's the first NGO report on the PBC written with ecumenical and secular partners. Caritas had a role with it. It was extremely well received by many Member States who serve on the PBC, those who have invested themselves in a results-based process which necessarily advocates for absolute inputs from people and agencies on-the-ground. Again, as MCLove notes not all members, or US actors, are yet comfortable with civil society actors feeding into the process to keep it real. In some case PBC experts are far more enlightened than their respective governments or departments. They must hear from us directly and as a community. We can not remain in the shadows. As Caritas - as a large global Confederation, we, like so many partners and friends here, are working to be present, to be partners, participating as fully as possible in concrete practical ways.

Again, we accompany real people in real places:

Israel/Palestine - recognizing this long search for peace with equal justice for all; as looming and unresolved, always in the news as it is, it is not on the PBC, but it stays on certain agendas because Caritas with key partners continues to witness to the suffering/needs - while diverse UN actors encourage us and other NGOs to keep the conversation alive, responsibly informed and respectful. As Patriarch Sabbah noted some years ago when asked if the US Church does anything to help the search for peace. He replied: "No church in the world has done more to help the Holy Land in its search for peace."

Colombia - As recent as two weeks ago Caritas Colombia and CRS, as members of Caritas Internationalis Colombia Working Group, came as a delegation to the UN, for the fourth year in a row, to open up the regrettably deafening silence around some UN circles to not discuss the crises in this Latin American reality. While Colombia's search for peace is not something which the Security Council is seized of - there are alternate mechanisms through which concrete concerns can be channeled into UN review of urgent, quality of life and development priorities. With credibility on-the-ground, providing for and protecting people, timely, strategic doors open to us as church organizations. More and more UN

executives and program managers encourage faith-based NGOs to the table from policy to programming to conflict resolutions. Human rights are recognized; moral beacons are increasingly welcomed as much more than talking heads. Capacity and commitment resonate with UN.

Northern Uganda - stood as the most child-affected crisis in the world, yet one of the ten least/underreported conflicts in the world in 2005. With the will to act in Gulu, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative with Archbishop Odama came to UN headquarters to ask for help to expand/amplify their voices. A peace-seeking process unfolded breaking down all kinds of traditional diplomatic barriers so that an NGO Working Group evolved alongside a Member States "Friends of Uganda" resulting in essential mechanisms with Security Council and other UN systems so that genuine accompaniment unfolded in the last four years...even as these days all stakeholders hold onto a possible peace agreement after two years of a cessation of hostilities. The process has been instrumental in transforming crises and Security Council discussions into unique opportunities. The faithbased face of peacebuilding has been absolute, unconditionally forgiving. Again, this is astonishing for many while expected by others.

With similar efforts on DR Congo, Iraq with so many refugees and IDPs, Philippines, Haiti, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe - the list of potential candidates for attention of the Peacebuilding Commission after Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau looms large since we know the current protocols will not be capable of addressing these concerns without substantial civil society inputs. The CPN can be prophetic and transformative to not limit the chances for greatly enhanced, deeply informed peacebuilding, rooted in practice.

In conclusion while reading Maryann's paper with as many questions for us and evidences, I recalled a UN discussion with a former African President who said to colleagues and NGOs working on northern Uganda.

"It is a slow process. You have to listen long. You need a language which communicates to the rebels. They too are human beings. I ask myself if I understand them, can they understand me? What words can I use? I'm a Catholic so I ask what would God ask? I refer to my Church, what does Catholic Social Teaching suggest?
I look, I listen, I hope."

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