

Catholic Peacebuilding and Emerging International Norms and Practices of the UN and Other International and Governmental Bodies

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Thank you for your invitation to be here with you today, and thank you for all the work you do to build peace. I'm going to make 4 points today: 1)the world is witnessing an explosion of new peacebuilding institutions. 2)But these institutions face severe capacity and normative gaps. 3)Religious and Catholic peacebuilding can help bridge both the capacity and normative gaps. 4)Catholic and other faith-based groups have a historic opportunity to transform and influence international and local politics now, by practicing what I call Resurrection Politics.

1)The good news is that the world is witnessing an explosion of new peacebuilding institutions: the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Fund; the World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, and numerous new peacebuilding units in national governments, including in the U.S. Departments of Defense and State.

Sadly, the impetus for creating these new institutions is a series of failures to build sustainable peace and break what Paul Colliers' and the World Bank have dubbed "the conflict trap." For the UN, the failure of UN mediated peace agreements to stick and prove durable, and the reassessments of UN peacebuilding strengths and weaknesses as part of the UN 60th anniversary World Summit and UN reform projects, led to the creation of the UN Peace Building Commission, and the associated UN Peace Building Support Office, and UN Peace Building Support Fund. For the U.S. Departments of Defense and State, failures and struggles with post conflict reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan led to the creation of new units responsible for post-conflict reconstruction. All these organizations have determined they need to create new and more robust institutional capacities to build peace. States and IGOs including the UN were addressing only a portion of the conflict cycle, and did not have adequate capacities in building sustainable peace or post-conflict reconstruction. The conflict trap is pervasive: Roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years. Conflict is particularly hard on the world's poor. 80% of the world's 20 poorest countries have known conflict in recent years. The silver lining is that these failures created interest in launching new institutions focused on building sustainable peace, breaking the conflict trap, and doing better work consolidating the peace after negotiated settlements and better work in post-conflict reconstruction. Building peace requires more than blue helmets and negotiators.

2)Unfortunately, these new institutions suffer from severe capacity and normative gaps. None of the new institutions have adequate resources to effectively pursue their missions. The peace they seek is constrained by state sovereignty, national interest, and short time horizons. The kind of peace they seek emphasizes construction of material and state infrastructure (roads, bridges, prisons), and thus differs from Catholic and religious norms of peacebuilding.

3) However, the good news here is that religious and Catholic peacebuilding can help bridge both the capacity and normative gaps in ways that go beyond states, and that make peace more sustainable. Catholic and religious organizations have strong track records in peacebuilding and currently have opportunities to influence and expand the peacebuilding norms and practices of these institutions as they develop. International norms don't exist or emerge from a vacuum. Norms don't exist merely in the minds of individual leaders, practitioners, or scholars. For norms to become real in our world, to affect social and political change, they must be institutionalized in organizations and their practices. Over the centuries, religious organizations and the Catholic Church in particular have strong track records in helping shape and institutionalize international norms, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which celebrates its 60th Anniversary this year, to the abolition of slavery and the Geneva Conventions.

In terms of capacity, much of the UN, IGO and state efforts at peacebuilding focus on rebuilding state institutions, and use processes focused on state actors (security sector reform, judicial reform, etc.). This approach is necessary but incomplete. In a world where state sovereignty is often weak or worse, sometimes predatory, this approach to peacebuilding is problematic. For many of the world's most vulnerable, sovereign control is either absent or predatory. Nearly one third of the world's population, two billion out of the more than six billion people on the planet today, live in failed or failing states, absent the conditions of law and order, which make human development possible. According to Freedom House, over two billion people live in 43 countries where the state deprives them of basic human rights and freedoms. The worst of these states, like Sudan today or Rwanda in 1994, are predatory, killing their own people in genocides. Turning primarily to state actors to build peace is thus highly problematic. Of the 17 major armed conflicts going on in the world today, all are civil wars. In most cases of conflict around the world, states either do not have the capacity to build peace, or they may be the ones perpetrating the violence.

Religious organizations in general and the Catholic Church in particular are not constrained by state sovereignty in their approaches to peacebuilding, but have rich social networks across societies available for use in building peace: schools, hospitals, international relief and development organizations, local community groups, etc. These social networks can vastly expand the capacity to build peace, beyond the venues possible by reliance on state actors.

Religious organizations and the Catholic Church can also help bridge normative gaps. For the Catholic Church, the fundamental dignity of human life (not the interests of the state) is the paramount value from which all others flow. Due to the dignity of the human person and the social nature of humanity, it is necessary to protect and promote human dignity and the common good. Catholic organizations, including CRS and Caritas Internationalis, emphasize the principals of right relationship, the common good, sustainability, in pursuing a peace akin to "Shalom." They do not view state sovereignty as the only, right, or predominant human organizational form. This leads to practices of peacebuilding which emphasize personal and community level reconciliation and repair, as well as the creation of robust sustainable international and national institutions capable of serving the common good, over long time horizons. In contrast, UN, IGO, and national peace, stability, transition, and reconstruction operations often focus on peace as a cessation of violence, often based on superior military and political force, not right relationship and communal reconciliation. The principles of state sovereignty and national interest predominate, leading to practices of peacebuilding over short time horizons, focused on state level actors, and on the functions of rebuilding material infrastructure – roads and bridges, rather than persons and communities.

Religious organizations and the Catholic Church focus more on restoring right relationship and reconciliation among persons and communities. I'd like to correct a common misperception of Catholic and religious ideas of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not only an individual or spiritual practice, but is also societal and political, occurring at all levels and structures in society. Reconciliation refers to a variety of means to achieve right relationship. Rather than a convenient forgetting of wrongs done, reconciliation requires an expansion of the concepts of justice. In transitional justice situations, generally states, IGOs, and human rights and international law NGOs emphasize punitive justice, who has committed crimes and ought to be tried and jailed by which institution. In contrast, the Church expands our ideas of justice beyond only punitive justice, to concepts and processes of restorative justice, distributive justice, and structural justice. This is necessary to make an immediate and direct difference in people's lives, and to help to stop the cycle of violence and retribution, especially as refugees and internally displaced persons return. Right relationship and reconciliation are necessary if peacebuilding efforts are to have any probability of long-term success. Secular NGO peacebuilding organizations can help to expand the social and economic space of restoration to include non-state actors and infrastructure, and individual and community repair from medical services to trauma-healing. But religious peacebuilders expand the practices of repair further, to include souls, spirits, community and social relationships, utilizing tools and methods of restoration not available to secular peacebuilders, such as religious rituals and symbols, forgiveness, reconciliation, and penance rituals and symbols. Restoration must be thought of and practiced more expansively. Bodies, minds, spirits, and relationships must be repaired, as well as roads, bridges, public health systems, and state governing structures.

4) Why do Catholic and other faith-based groups have a historic opportunity to influence and transform international and local politics now? Because of the rising power of ideas and social networks, or what we in academia call transnational advocacy networks. Now all of us here know that global faith networks, and the advocacy efforts of faith based groups is nothing new. Were it not for the efforts of faith-based Abolition networks globally, slavery might still be legal. But what is new is the number and power of these networks in a global age. In a global information age, ideas, values, symbols, and civil society networks matter. Thus religious networks, and the Catholic Church, have rich resources able to reframe political spaces. We have powerful ideas, and we have rich networks with which to spread these ideas. Faith-based groups in civil society coalitions have radically altered the national and international political landscapes on issues as diverse as international debt relief, international aid and trade for the poor, global poverty relief, the international campaign to ban landmines, and trafficking in human persons, to name just a few success stories in the last decade. This is what I call resurrection politics. All of these efforts were deemed politically "dead on arrival" at first, yet religious actors and networks brought these issues to life, reframing these issues via effective global networks and normative appeals to deeply held moral convictions. Resurrection politics is a politics of life and hope, taking issues thought previously dead on arrival, raising them up onto the agenda, reframing issues with values and powerful images, and thereby changing the political space to include those previously marginalized by drawing on the language and symbols of faith. The information revolution has led to an increase in people power, and I submit, new advantages for faith-based groups who make up for their lack of money or munitions with the power of their principles and their savvy ability to spread ideas, springboarding from their social networks. Practicing resurrection politics is particularly important in peacebuilding, addressing some of the conflicts deemed most deadlocked and hopeless around the world, reframing the political space by infusing norms and activating networks, widening the political space to include previously marginalized persons.

This is the challenge before us, articulating and practicing resurrection politics, a practical politics of peace, a politics of life and hope, both within and across our faith communities and political institutions, and building institutions that will support a practical politics of peace even in the face of terrorism and religious conflict. Religious organizations are important partners in peacebuilding. They have effective local and international social networks which can help bridge the capacity gaps of other peacebuilding institutions and can move peacebuilding beyond the architecture of often fractured or weak states. And they can help expand and strengthen the norms of these new peacebuilding institutions by focusing on the dignity of the human person and the needs for reconciliation and repair of individuals and communities.

One final caveat: How should the UN, IGO, and states best partner with religious organizations? I recommend to you a terrific report entitled "Mixed Blessings," by CSIS, the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. The report recommends the need for greater education and professional training for government and IGO personnel to develop professional expertise on the role of religion in conflict areas. We train diplomats and bureaucrats in politics, economics, languages, etc., but give them no training in religion. Instead we must also train them to better understand religious actors and religious dynamics in conflict, positive as well as negative. What works best is letting religious actors be religious actors, and looking for areas of common interest and activities to promote. Some examples are the US Agency for International Development's support of the Catholic Church's three year peacebuilding program in Burundi, from reconciliation work to training and peace education. Or the UN Development Program's support of interreligious dialogue in Mindanao, the Philippines. Or when the World Bank funded educational programs by Islamic educators in Mindanao on issues from corruption, political participation, to human rights.

The negative examples are when Governments or IGOs or the UN try to convene religious actors to garner support for particular political agendas, or try to either promote some religious actors or ideas over others for particular political agendas, or promote secularization at the expense of religious traditions as the solution to conflicts with a religious dimension. The "Mixed Blessings" report focused primarily on U.S. government actors engagement or poor engagement with religious actors (and offers some negative examples of those activities gone awry in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa), but the lessons learned apply equally to the UN and IGOs. Rather than trying to manipulate each other or change the other in our

image, religious actors, IGOs, and the UN need to learn more about each other's strengths and limitations, and how we can each contribute our unique capacities in the common quest for peace.

Holy See Side Event

Peacebuilding: A Role for Religion

United Nations

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