

SYMPOSIUM REPORT

# The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

15 November 2005  
Lutherse Kerk, Utrecht



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Organized by:

**Centre for Conflict Studies, University of Utrecht  
and  
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# About the Organisers

## *The Centre for Conflict Studies*

The Centre for Conflict Studies (CCS) was founded in 1999 as a result of a joint initiative of Utrecht University and the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) in Utrecht. The Centre promotes interdisciplinary research and education in the field of conflict studies. The CCS offers both a minor Conflict Studies (BA level) and a MA Conflict Studies and Human Rights.

The educational and research efforts of the CCS aim at the understanding of contemporary violent conflict and conflict prevention, management and resolution measures as well as post-conflict peace building and reconciliation. The CCS places emphasis on the critical analysis of the causes, dynamics, and consequences of international and intrastate violent conflict.

## *The European Centre for Conflict Prevention*

The European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) was established in 1997 as the secretariat for the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation. The ECCP encourages cooperation and facilitates the exchange of information as well as advocacy and lobbying activities among organisations involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The ECCP also serves as the International Secretariat of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, which was formed in 2003 with ECCP as the prime initiator. The Global Partnership consists of 15 regional networks of civil society organisations working collaboratively to bring about a fundamental shift in how the international community responds to violent conflict, from reaction to prevention.



# Introduction



**T** This report is the outcome of the symposium ‘The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding’, held on 15 November 2005 in Utrecht. The meeting was organized by the Centre for Conflict Studies, which is part of the University of Utrecht, and the European Centre for Conflict Prevention.

The symposium focused on the roles that civil society play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The meeting was dedicated to Peter Meyer Swantée, the co-founder and long-time board member of the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, who initiated the idea of establishing a Chair on Conflict Studies at one of the Dutch universities. The Chair was established at the University of Utrecht, and it is currently held by Professor George Frerks.

Today more than ever, the involvement of people in working for a better world is much needed. Peace is only possible when all

stakeholders, from the grassroots to the international level, are included in developing and implementing strategies for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Since the nature of violent conflict has changed, wars taking place within states are victimizing civilians on an unprecedented scale. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are in a unique position to assume different roles in prevention, de-escalation, resolution, rehabilitation, and reconciliation. Men and women all over the world have responded to this challenge with creativity and dedication.

In response to the UN Secretary-General's Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (June 2001), in particular recommendation 27, the worldwide conflict prevention and peacebuilding community has linked up to form a Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). The ECCP as the initiator acts as the International Secretariat for the Global Partnership. This has led to a Global Action Agenda on the Prevention of Violent Conflict, the Global Conference in partnership with the UN at the UN headquarters in New York in July 2005, and the publication *People Building Peace II: Successful Stories of Civil Society*. During the symposium, the publication was presented to Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation Agnes van Ardenne-van der Hoeven.

The presentations during the symposium, which are captured in this report, were focused on the particular role that CSOs can play, and on the outcomes of the Global Conference. The meeting was chaired by Caroline van Dullemen, and the speakers included Prof. Georg Frerks, Centre for Conflict Studies, Paul van Tongeren, European Centre for Conflict Prevention, Emmanuel Bombande, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and Minister van Ardenne-van der Hoeven.

We would like to thank the speakers, participants and volunteers for their enthusiasm and input in this symposium.

**Paul van Tongeren**  
Executive Director  
European Centre for Conflict Prevention

**Georg Frerks**  
Director  
Centre for Conflict Studies

# The Contribution of Peter Meyer Swantée to Conflict Prevention

SPEECH BY PAUL VAN TONGEREN



*Peter Meyer Swantée  
(1932-2005)*

**I** I would like to have a moment to commemorate Peter Meyer Swantée who had a great contribution to our work on conflict prevention. About half a year ago, in May, Peter Meyer Swantée passed away.

He was the co-founder and long-time board member of the European Centre for Conflict Prevention and initiated the idea of establishing a Chair on Conflict studies at one of the Dutch universities. Above all, Peter was a very committed, modest and warm person.

Ten years ago, in the mid of the nineties, Peter and I established the so-called informal 'Optimix Group' to discuss the possible establishment of a Dutch Centre dealing with conflict prevention. Peter was a banker and his company was named

Optimix. Because the Centre was still an initial idea and had no name yet, we informally named it the Optimix Group, because we had our meetings in Peter's office. At that time, Peter was also adviser to Médecins sans Frontières and learned from that experience what dramatic results conflicts can have. He therefore was firmly committed to the idea of investing before a conflict breaks out: conflict prevention. That idea was quite new around 1995 and we started discussions about its relevance in meetings with staff members of Medicine sans Frontières, NOVIB, Amnesty and others.

After a large international conference on conflict prevention in Amsterdam in 1997, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention was established, with the help of NCDO.

The best example of the commitment of Peter was the initial development of the Chair on Conflict Studies. He strongly supported the need to link up theory with practice and the need for a university course in the Netherlands specifically focussed on conflict studies. In the beginning we were looking for funding for the Chair, but had not much success. I will never forget the phone call I received once on a Sunday morning from Peter, telling me that it was his 40th wedding anniversary and that he had decided with his wife Joke—we appreciate very much that you are with us today, Joke—to fund the special chair for the first five years. A great gesture. It was a special chair and its birth was even more special. We approached the Board of the Universities in Amsterdam and Utrecht and Utrecht University was very proactive and eager to cooperate with us. Harry Voorma, the dean of the university at that moment, speeded up the process and within weeks we were offered as new and small NGO a beautiful and historic office at Janskerkhof in a 300 year old university building. With Georg Frerks we got an excellent special chair in conflict studies and we are very pleased that the development of the university Centre of Conflict Studies went

so well and that after five years the special chair was transformed already in a regular chair. This is highly exceptional. With professor emeritus Enno Hommes as chairman of the European Centre we had a great and dynamic chairman of the board. In such an initial period it is very important to have a chairman who is decisive and good in strategic thinking. We developed many new projects and Peter and Enno supported the staff in our 'catalyst' role, to initiate new projects. The largest programme, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, will be highlighted today.

Peter strongly advocated the important role the private sector has on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Regularly he joined the ECCP at seminars and conferences to highlight this necessity. He has put the private sector on the agenda of conflict prevention field.

He also brought this vision into action and we visited together numerous captains of industry to discuss how it was in their interest to contribute to stability and prevention of conflicts. However we did not have much success. But we did not give up. His continuous support and energy was a great help for me and the staff.

We also received substantial financial support for the European Centre for Conflict Prevention from the fund within Optimix, dedicated for good causes. Around 2000, there was hardly any budget line for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. There were few foundations, hardly any government, no EU or UN with budget lines or a mandate for this field. The support from Optimix and NCDO was thus crucial for the work and the successful continuation of the Centre. Thank you so much, Ruurt Hazewinkel, Peter's partner in Optimix and who is present here as well.

Peter was also a special treasurer. We were ambitious and highly under-funded. We experienced some periods with financial hardships, but Peter knew that the job had to be done. He had great confidence in our mission and because of his belief and support we could continue our work.

His confidence and commitment was more than great. He contributed in many ways to conflict prevention, such as the special Chair and his commitment for many years in our board. But above all he was a true friend.

*Paul van Tongeren is The Executive Director of The European Centre for Conflict Prevention*

# The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding

SPEECH BY GEORG FRERKS



*Georg Frerks*

**S**peaking at this seminar on ‘The role of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding’ in my capacity as a Professor of Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management, and Director of the Centre for Conflict Studies (CCS) at Utrecht University, it is most opportune first of all to mention the role of Mr. Peter Meyer Swantée and Ms. Joke Meyer Swantée in the birth of this chair and of the Centre. It was their vision to support the academic teaching of conflict prevention issues by facilitating a special chair on this topic. This chair has now become an ordinary chair and has, as such, been recognised and formalised by the university, while the university, at the same time, has approved the appointment of highly qualified academic and support staff for the functioning of the Centre for Conflict Studies.

This has enabled the CCS to offer a programme of undergraduate courses that draws more than 500 students annually. Moreover, the CCS coordinates a highly popular Master's programme in Conflict Studies and Human Rights and the last academic year we produced 22 graduates. This year 29 Master's students are following the programme, which is our maximum limit at the moment. It may interest you to know that this year there were nearly 150 applicants for this Master's programme.

All this shows that Peter and Joke Meyer Swantée have taken a timely and most proper initiative. Allow me, Ms. Meyer Swantée, to say to you personally that we remember Peter with respect and gratitude, and that we shall endeavour to keep his ideals alive by imparting a high-quality programme to our students and by doing research that contributes to a more peaceful society.

### ***People Building Peace***

This then also brings me to today's discussion of 'The role of civil society in peacebuilding'. This afternoon, the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Ms. Agnes van Ardenne, will receive a copy of the book 'People Building Peace II, Successful Stories of Civil Society' (Tongeren et al 2005). It is, as noted by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, a veritable treasure trove, containing 23 chapters with concrete examples of civil society action ranging from reconciliation, awareness creation, dialogue, peace business and arts, to media, youth, and education. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) is not known for producing thin volumes, and, this time again we receive value for our money: no less than 700 pages of text.

It is good that such inspiring examples from so many sectors and walks of life be told and disseminated, because it shows that civil society can and should have a role to play in peacebuilding around the world. It basically shows us many of the perceived advantages that civil society organisations (CSOs)

can have in the field of peacebuilding: namely, being close to people at the grassroots, having knowledge about local histories, possibilities and constraints, formulating upward pressure for change, representing local constituencies and bringing in actors and perspectives that would otherwise remain outside the conventional and elitist domains of power and tradition. I therefore sincerely congratulate the authors, editors and publishers of this volume.

### ***Definitions in a world of diversity***

In the framework of this presentation I cannot deal with all the nuances related to the conceptualisation and definition of key terms. Douma and Klem argue that there are many different ways of looking at civil society. It is generally agreed that civil society refers to a voluntary and non-profit set of institutions, organisations, and behaviours situated between the state, the market, and the family. Some concepts that are used in this connection are clearly political and incorporate notions of dissent and struggle, while others are more normative and idealistic, and generally emphasize the ‘good side’ of civil society. Again others conceive civil society basically as a process where groupings or individual actors organise with the aim to protect or extend their interests, ideologies, and identities (Douma and Klem 2004:2-3). In line with most publications on the subject, I include in the notion of civil society organisation (CSO): a) community-based organisations (CBOs), b) non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and c) informal and non-institutionalised associations or communities. Below I shall mostly make use of the generic term ‘civil society organisation’.

### ***Civil society challenges in the field of peacebuilding***

In their publication on the dynamics and dilemmas of peacebuilding, Douma and Klem further distinguish four ways of talking about CSOs: i.e. a) euphoria, b) conviction, c) examination and d) scepticism. Being an academic, the first and last positions are not shared by me. I am also not naturally convinced that

everything is always alright with local-level initiatives, though I am inclined to look sympathetically at grassroots and civil society initiatives. As an academic, however, I tend to feel that examination and critical (though not necessarily sceptical or cynical) reflection might be the most helpful method to harness the potentials and redress the weaknesses of civil society approaches to peacebuilding. On this occasion, I would like to promote the debate in this particular direction.

I would therefore like to make some observations about eight important challenges and problems we face when dealing with civil society in this sensitive and highly crucial endeavour of peacebuilding.

***Conflict-relation: the ‘rotten apples’ and the problem of staying impartial during or after conflict***

CSOs that work in a conflict context may find it difficult to remain neutral or impartial. Some parts of civil society may, in fact, have been protagonists during the war, ranging from groups that took part in the organisation of violence to those that used more subtle, yet damaging methods. These could include the use of propaganda or hate speech; the formation of support groups for combatants; or the dissemination of ethnically biased and ethno-nationalist messages opposing a pluralistic solution of divisions in multi-ethnic societies. Even if many CSOs did not have any intention to become conflict protagonists, pressure exerted on them during the war may have made it difficult, if not impossible, to remain impartial. There is, therefore, a serious problem of distinguishing at the outset the ‘good apples’ from the ‘rotten’ ones. This is not only an issue of the past, but may remain a problem in the course of working with civil society organisations at present or in the future, as every time escalatory issues emerge past and new conflict dynamics may play both a positive and negative role vis-à-vis the CSOs at stake.

***Representation or the problem of the democratic deficit.***

Though CBOs and NGOs are often associated with ‘people’s participation’, they are not always democratically established and ruled. Sometimes there are elections for positions or council seats, but often they function on the basis of tradition or cooptation. Many NGOs are in fact family businesses. Some are only a quasi non-governmental organisation (‘quango’), a briefcase NGO (‘bongo’), or a private profit-oriented NGO (my own NGO: ‘mongo’). Thus there is always the relevant question who and what CSOs really represent, and who their constituencies are. Though suggestions have been made to have CSOs registered, or accreditation systems installed to deal with the critical issue of credibility and representativeness, this solution is far from ideal. The role of the state or any body installed for that purpose might be totally counterproductive. Such bodies are frequently established with the sole purpose to suppress oppositional forces and to silence critical voices. Such regulatory bodies therefore tend to disapprove or prohibit all NGOs that dare to disagree with those in power, thereby losing one of the essential assets of the very existence of civil society in the first place.

***Differentiation and variability: the issue of quality and the question of institutional strengthening and partnering.***

NGOs are in practice a highly varied lot (and admittedly that is also part of their attraction). But those differences also may prevail in terms of expertise, experience, financial and project management, and operational efficiency. This leads understandably to a highly variable output in terms of quality. Strategies to deal with this variation are not in place, as funding agencies often seem simply to expect good results on the basis of blueprint approaches. This does not take into account the existing differentiation and the need to design tailor-made approaches in terms of organisational and institutional strengthening and partnering. The acceptance of variability and the explicit design of

ways of dealing with the weaker aspects of CSO performance need to receive more attention in Northern practice.

### ***The nature of the task: peacebuilding?***

The issue of Peace is as controversial as the issue of War. What is the peace person have died and killed for? Different groups in society may have different wishes regarding the peace they want to live in. Frerks and Klem (2005) have documented for the case of Sri Lanka the existence of nine fundamentally different discourses regarding conflict and peace. These discourses elicit people's different experiences, fears, anxieties and expectations. To what degree will peace safeguard their security? To what degree will their grievances be dealt with? What is the required balance between justice and amnesty, between conciliation and impunity, between reform and the status quo, between wealth and equity? Peacebuilding is consequently a highly sensitive affair requiring a triple transition in the fields of security, economy and politics. It is bound to create resistance. Peace is obviously a compromise between different interests and diverging goals and, therefore, has its losers and winners. It creates according to Stedman (2001) unavoidably its own spoilers that try to sabotage its fulfilment. Though civil society can be a strong force in the dissemination of a peace discourse, it is less evident to what degree it can have a meaningful impact on potential spoilers and in painful and controversial processes of transition.

### ***Transparency and accountability***

Transparency and accountability have become the buzzwords of the humanitarian and development sector. I only have to refer to recent articles in the Dutch and international press about the Tsunami-aid or about the use of funds in post-conflict Kosovo to underline this issue. However, the expected systems of accountability may be difficult to replicate in local-level situations, where capacities have weakened due to years of war.

In many cases, moral values have eroded, too. Patterns of corruption and vice have become apparent and an overall criminalisation of society has taken place. Even for genuine partners very serious dilemmas may arise under these conditions. Economies of violence and their underlying logic are an unfortunate fact of life in many conflict and post-conflict situations. Some observers even argue that the levels of violence and crime may be higher in post-conflict settings, as compared to a situation of overt conflict. The title of an article by David Keen (2001) is highly telling in this regard: 'War and Peace, What's the Difference?'

***Impact: measurability, macro issues and power elites***

Civil society initiatives, and especially those in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, have a problem of proving their value. It is always difficult to relate the reduction of tension or violence or the emergence of a more peaceful atmosphere or environment to one singular particular factor or intervention. Conflict and peace are multi-level, multi-actor, multi-causal and multi-faceted phenomena and simple straightforward linkages and cause-effect relationships cannot be observed. Moreover, most developments in this area are highly dynamic, if not sometimes erratic and have their ups and downs, too. In any case they are hard to measure. This leads many observers to question the value of CSO activities, even to the point whether they are successful at all. Observers also point to the fact that grassroots initiatives can impossibly overrule the power-dynamics and power-elites at the macro-level within society. As explained above, the interest of those groups may lead them to act as spoilers. As already mentioned under my first point, it is also argued by some analysts that beliefs in the peace-loving nature of the grassroots are simply naïve, as sentiments at those levels do generally reflect the overall attitudes and tensions within society at large. However, these issues are much debated and here I believe that evidence-based findings can help us to

come to firmer conclusions. Collecting successful stories about peacebuilding is one step in this direction.

### ***Sustainability***

A further issue raised in debates on civil society organisations is the lack of sustainability of their results. Whereas this is already a nearly insurmountable problem under conditions of 'normal' development aid, in war or post-conflict situations it is especially hard to work in a sustainable manner. Many CSOs have lost or are lacking the capacity, resources, networks and facilitating environment to guarantee durable results on the one hand, while peacebuilding efforts in particular, if not by their very essence, need to become sustainable on the other. There are hardly evidence-based insights or lessons learned available in this area, as peacebuilding is a fairly new activity on the 'donor radar', and only recently has serious evaluative work been initiated on this topic.

### ***War on terror and the problem of 'securitisation'***

Among many analysts there is a fear, correct or not, that the global War on Terror that has been dominating the international political and security agenda since 9/11, is leading to a 'securitization' of development cooperation and peacebuilding activities carried out by civil society organisations. This implies that a 'harder', mainly military logic and approach is taking over, eventually causing a re-militarization of the prevailing approaches to conflict. Such a development would run against the earlier multi-dimensional and developmentalist approaches towards human security. The War on Terror has been criticized due to its unilateral nature, its limited legality or legitimacy and its use (or abuse) of humanitarian and development instruments for purely political gains. Whatever the case, many CSOs face at the moment a dilemma of how to relate to the (UN-led, NATO-led, or 'one-country-led') military presence in their working areas. Some shun away from contact out of fear of

becoming a party in the conflict or due to a more principled stance; others follow the political trend towards increasing (civil-military) co-operation as they feel that a more integrated approach is needed or at least worthwhile exploring. A third category only collaborates if the conditions require it (e.g. when there is, pragmatically speaking, a clear need for protection or logistic support). Fierce debates are now taking place within civil society on the issues and principles involved and there is, as usual, a diversity of opinions. It remains to be seen whether the sector will be able to formulate a coherent answer vis-à-vis this challenge.

### ***Conclusion***

In this contribution I have tried to indicate which challenges civil society organisations are facing in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. I first mentioned that there are widely differing definitions and approaches to civil society and that this is basically reflecting the diversity encountered on the ground. I discussed four types of challenges.

Firstly, I mentioned challenges related to the nature of the organisations. Here I elaborated on the problem of the 'rotten apples', or less dramatically on the difficulty of staying clear from conflict parties and conflict dynamics in a situation of war. The problem of representation or conversely that of 'the democratic deficit' was another issue discussed under this rubric. A last point relating to the nature of the organisations was the differentiation and variability among CSOs, and the need to incorporate this fact into tailor-made approaches to institutional strengthening and partnering. Secondly, I mentioned the difficulty of the task at hand, especially the controversial nature of peacebuilding and the existence of diverging discourses on conflict and peace. Peace is usually a compromise and creates winners, losers and spoilers. In the third place I dwelt on some more procedural aspects of the

peacebuilding interventions that need to be addressed. I raised issues of transparency and accountability, impact and measurability, and sustainability. All those problems are known from regular development work, but acquire a special 'problematique' in situations of war and post-conflict. Finally I discussed the overall context of the work and mentioned the concerns about an environment determined by the War on Terror, and the associated risk of a 'securitisation' of the development and peacebuilding agenda.

Obviously, all those challenges may seriously affect the performance of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that the critical inquiry into the important work of CSOs in those endeavours is continued so as to derive lessons learned and best practices. Publications such as *People Building Peace* can help disseminate those insights and reach the practitioners that are daily struggling to realise a more peaceful world.

*Georg Frerks is The Director of The Centre for Conflict Prevention*

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# Outcomes of the Global Conference

SPEECH BY PAUL VAN TONGEREN



*Paul van Tongeren*

**T** This summer, from 19 to 21 July, we organised a large international conference at the Headquarters of the UN in New York, in partnership with the United Nations Department for Political Affairs. It was the first conference within the UN that was led and organised by civil society. Over 900 Persons from 118 countries worldwide participated; they came from NGOs, governments, and the UN. The issue discussed was the role of civil society in conflict prevention and how cooperation with the UN could improve. What are the roles that civil society can contribute to peacebuilding? What are the roles they play that are complimentary to those of governments?

During the opening session of the conference in the General Assembly Hall, three women discussed civil society contributions that they had been part of:

Katarina Kruhonja, of the Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights in Osijek, Croatia, spoke about the power of listening as a tool for peacebuilding, while drawing upon experience with the Listening Project. This project was implemented by the Centre in multi-ethnic communities in eastern Croatia and Bosnia that had been severely affected by the war in the '90s. During the war, many people were displaced, therefore transforming communities into places where tensions ran high as neighbours were strangers and could have been the killers of your own family. As part of the listening project people went from door to door to listen to over 2000 stories, often giving those persons the sense that, for the first time, "...their suffering and their opinion was important to someone'. Five years after the conclusion of the project, Ms. Kruhonja said that real change is evident in the region, with some of those who were interviewed during the project having gone on to work in their communities on trust-building and peacebuilding.

Thelma Ekiyor, of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), described how WIPNET had grown from a small group of women meeting informally, to an influential voice for peace in West Africa. The 'women's peace activism' which WIPNET has conducted since it started five years ago takes aim at structural forms of violence in West African society, and has made several very real and significant contributions to peacebuilding in the region. Among the successes Ms. Ekiyor counted was a campaign in 2004 for violence-free elections in Guinea-Bissau and a campaign in Accra, Ghana, at the site of drawn-out peace negotiations to end the Liberian civil war, during which WIPNET members pressed all sides in the conflict to reach a settlement.

The opening session was concluded with a keynote speech by the 1997 Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams, who gave a powerful speech on the role of civil society in campaigning and lobbying, based on her experiences with the International

Campaign to Ban Landmines which she helped to found. She emphasised that “If we want to prevent armed conflict we must not only work to demilitarize our planet, we must work to demilitarize hearts and minds as well. Changing the way people think about security and the way people think about peace is fundamental to achieving our goals. The role of civil society organizations in bringing about those changes is essential”.

In his 2001 Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for NGOs to come together to examine their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with the UN in this field. Documenting the role of civil society was one of the key aims of our programme; one result was the publication *People Building Peace II*, which was presented at the conference to Ms. Kruhonja and Ms. Ekiyor, whose stories are captured in the book.

We also aimed to develop a Policy Change Agenda with our demands and recommendations in this field; both for ourselves, and for governments and the UN. In total, fifteen regions worldwide responded to this challenge, hundreds NGOs worldwide have been involved in these processes. Regional conferences have been organized on all continents, from Latin America to the Pacific, and the regions have drafted Regional Action Agendas, which embody the recommendations from the field. These recommendations have been brought together in the Global Action Agenda for the Prevention of Violent Conflict, which was presented during the opening session to Assistant Secretary-General Stedman, who delivered a speech on behalf of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Although the Secretary-General was a strong supporter of the conference, he was not able to attend due to a shoulder operation.

The Global Action Agenda outlines key priorities to achieve a shift from reaction to prevention in the way conflict is dealt

with, from the perspective of civil society. It highlights the guiding principles and values aspired to by endorsing civil society organizations, and outlines the important, and often unrecognized, role civil society organizations can and do play in resolving or diffusing conflict situations.

The key messages of the Global Action Agenda are i) the need for effective partnerships between local, regional, and international organizations for effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding, ii) the need to promote human security in order to address several of the main structural causes of conflict, and iii) that new strategies are needed improve policy focus and structure resources to achieve these aims. Concrete recommendations on a great number of issues are found in the document, which will serve as a common platform and a resource for campaigning and lobbying initiatives of a diverse network of peace builders around the world. It concludes by highlighting key reforms and tasks that can be implemented by civil society organisations, the UN, regional organizations and governments to strengthen their institutional capacities in order to address the issues identified in the Global Action Agenda.

In a process of three years, we have identified key partners on all continents—fifteen in total. We believe that regional networking is crucial in this field, as a majority of the organisations are small and often only consist of volunteers. Networking is essential, as peacebuilding requires many qualities and capacity, which often are not the requirements that one single NGO can meet. One of our best partners is WANEP, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. Like us, they have existed for eight years now, and they have really strengthened their network both regionally, and in different countries within the region. Looking at the strengths of such partners, it was clear that this call for a conference by the

Secretary-General of the UN actually begged the deeper question: how does the global practicing peacebuilding community exercise a voice when dealing with the UN and other institutions? The fields of human rights, environmentalism and development already have strong international networks which help raise awareness and build solidarity at the very least, but such a network for the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in general, did not yet exist. As a first attempt to begin to meet this need, a network was launched: the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Our aim is to both strengthen the global network and support regional networks. Hopefully, within several years, other networks in the regions will be as strong and sustainable as WANEP is in Africa.

The Conference was by invitation only: we were especially interested to have delegations from all the different organisations that are active within the region and interested to cooperate after the conference to implement the regional and global action agenda.

Most of the 900 participants came from civil society, nevertheless, representatives from governments, UN agencies and permanent missions in New York participated as well. It was a working conference: most of the time was spent in various working groups, workshops and panels.

Another aim of the conference was to improve interaction with the UN, which refers to cooperation on a range of issues from activities in the field to influencing policy of member-states. When we started this program, most NGOs had little knowledge of the UN and did not have much experience working with the UN at the field level. We started a mapping exercise to identify who is working in this field with the different UN agencies and we drafted a policy paper with recommendations about

interaction with the UN. Also, within the last three years we have built relationships with many different branches within the UN. As the Department of Political Affairs of the UN works on the issue of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, they offered official partnership in support of the conference. Governmental support is also increasing through our lobby efforts in New York, where we have visited about fifty permanent missions to the UN from both the North and South. These meetings have indicated a growing and strong interest in a SHIFT towards prevention. Our work also stimulated the establishment of a governmental Group of Friends of Conflict Prevention in New York, which is led by the Swiss and German missions.

The Conference had many outcomes, at many different levels. Besides the already mentioned results during the process towards the conference of a global network, the publication People Building Peace II and the Global Action Agenda the conference itself also resulted in:

- helping to establish a Global Network on Conflict Resolution in schools and peace education, in cooperation with Ministries of Education in several countries;
- an invitation to a Security Council debate on the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes, which took place in September. It was the second time in history that NGOs could address the Security Council. It was encouraging to experience the positive attitude towards the role of civil society in conflict prevention which most of the speakers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ambassadors, maintained.
- increased recognition in several regions by their local government. Several regional initiators, as the tip of the

iceberg of regional civil society, have received invitations from their Ministries of Foreign Affairs to discuss and present their Regional Action Agenda and activities. This program has helped to increase the profile of local and regional NGOs and gave them more prestige.

- furthermore, the continuous lobby effort for recognition of civil society in the mandate of the still-to-be-established Peacebuilding Commission, decided during the World Summit in September, has resulted in mentioning in the latest drafts of the mandate that civil society plays an important role and should be consulted. This was not the case in the first drafts.

A year ago, we were focussed on the process towards the conference, and I doubt whether most of our partners had clear ideas for future cooperation. However, after the motivating process towards the conference and the successful conference itself, we organized a four-day International Steering Group meeting at the beginning of October to decide on concrete short-term strategies. This group consists of the fifteen regional initiators and some INGOs. We discussed the vision, mission, structure and function of the Global Partnership. The International Steering Group decided that the primary function of the Global Partnership is to promote and support the implementation of the regional action agendas and the global action agenda. Furthermore, other specific functions of GPPAC are advocating for regional concerns on the international level, sharing knowledge on best practices and lessons learned, building capacity to implement regional activities, developing capacity of civil society to contribute to early warning and early response, and improving and strengthening interaction between civil society, governments, regional organizations and the UN. Issues that will get special attention include early warning and early response systems and peace education.

The conference in July was a culmination of a long process, but it was also a beginning, a moment for agenda setting and mobilisation of a new civil society voice in conflict prevention. The real work begins now, and we have to put into practice our ideas. Throughout the process, we have struggled to find one or a few 'key messages' that accurately describe and reflect our network. After much deliberation, it became clear to us that our message was actually very simple: People Build Peace. This is because it is PEOPLE who build peace. Peace cannot be achieved alone; we need to work together to BUILD bridges. And PEACE is possible, but action is needed. Therefore, the name of our Global Action Agenda is, indeed, People Building Peace.

*Paul van Tongeren is The Executive Director of The European Centre for Conflict Prevention*

# West Africa Early Warning and Response Network (WARN)

SPEECH BY EMMANUEL BOMBANDE



*Emmanuel Bombande*

**M** Mr. Bombande started his presentation by telling a story to highlight the complexity of peacebuilding in many African communities:

“Jannot was a young man who was absolutely convinced he was a grain of corn. Anytime he saw a chicken, he will run as fast as he could because he thought the chicken would swallow him up. It was obvious that he was mentally disturbed. He was therefore confined to special care and treatment in the hands of the wise village elder with wisdom and traditional healing powers. After six months of treatment, Jannot appeared to have regained his normal self and was therefore cured of his malaise. He told the wise man

he was no longer a grain of corn and did not fear any chicken anymore. It was time according to the traditional healer for Jannot to go back to the community. He therefore made the final preparations and rituals before Jannot left his premises. To the dismay of the traditional healer, Jannot started running again and very fast when he saw the first chicken at the gates of the compound. The healer immediately ran to Jannot and enquired from him why he was running after he had assured him he was no longer a grain of corn. Jannot replied calmly to the old wise traditional healer, I know I am not a grain of corn, but are you certain that the chicken knows that I am not a grain of corn?"

In narrating this story, Mr. Bombande sought to explain that whereas working to promote dialogue was essential in making peace, creating the space for dialogue to take place was very complex. It is not just about dialogue but ensuring that communities and leaders trust a dialogue process and that engaging in dialogue can be assuring. There can be mutual respect, trust and confidence and that there can be hope that while dialogue itself is not a solution, there is reassurance amongst stakeholders that peace is possible. This keeps hope alive; it minimizes violence and helps to overcome the root issues causes underlying violence. The processes of dialogue when well facilitated helps actors to overcome their fears and establish trust which then enable them to deal adequately with the tangible issues underlying violence. In the African context, peace has no meaning and it is not even possible when community relationships that are broken as a result of conflict is not addressed.

Civil society has the unique role to accompany communities at various levels to build such trust because in many situations, governments and politicians are not trusted by the communities. As a matter of fact, many politicians are perceived

to be part of the problem. Civil society can play a mediating and accompanying role that supports the communities to overcome their own suspicions and mistrust and this is the only way they then share and own the process of building their own peace. It is also for this reason that peace cannot be brought from outside. It has to be nurtured from within the community and owned within the community for it to become sustainable and viable.

Mr. Bombande is the executive director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), which was founded in 1998. WANEP is a regional network organization with over 400 organizations working in collaborative peacebuilding. The Regional Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana with national offices in twelve West African countries except Cape Verde, Mali and Niger. The capacity to respond to conflict effectively depends on the recognition and analysis of underlying issues. The objectives of WANEP include harmonizing peacebuilding activities in West Africa through networking and coordination of WANEP activities; strengthening the capacity of peacebuilding organizations and practitioners in West Africa; increasing awareness on the use of non-violent strategies in responding to conflicts in West Africa; developing a conflict prevention network in West Africa to monitor, report and offer indigenous perspectives and understanding of conflicts in West Africa; developing the justice lens of peacebuilding to create understanding of the impact of truth, justice, and reconciliation on peacebuilding in West Africa; and building the capacity of West African Women to actively and visibly participate in peacebuilding processes at all levels.

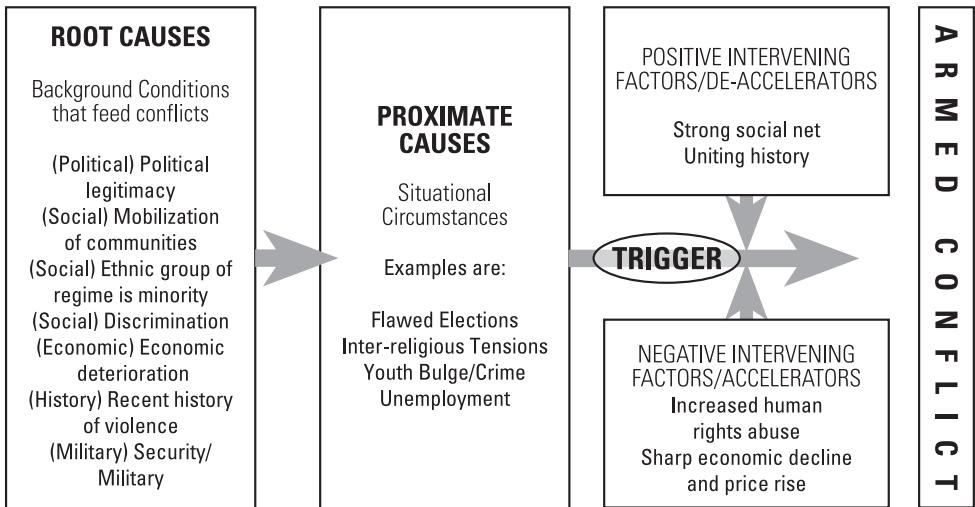
The focus of the presentation was the WARN program: the West Africa Early Warning and Response Network. WARN was established in 2002, and its goal was to institutionalize the culture of prevention in West Africa through an appropriate and effective early warning and early response mechanism. Early

Warning is a process of reading specific indicators as signals and patterns of signals, and translating those patterns into some kind of anticipation of the likelihood of the emergence or escalation of violent conflict. Its function is to enhance three goals, namely i) prevention, ii) mitigation, and iii) preparedness. Mr. Bombande noted that during the Liberian Civil War, it became common knowledge among village market women that anytime the young combatants were seen buying lots of cigarettes, sugar and other commodities, it was a signal that preparations were in place to attack communities and townships. The challenge was how to translate such information at community level into evidence based scientific analysis for regional leaders to act promptly and to prevent attacks and violence. Engaging policy makers to act on time with such information as a response to prevent conflicts is what gives Early Warning some credit. Early Warning therefore without Early Response is has no value and can be totally redundant. WARN focuses on enhancing human security by detecting and preventing conflicts that could turn violent.

The WARN program is integral to WANEP's Capacity Building Program which seeks to strengthen the institutional capacities of the national networks, their member organisations and their programming through training on the various thematic areas of WANEP. In implementing these programs, WANEP is actively engaged in a Partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). WANEP is the implementing partner with ECOWAS on ECOWARN which is the Early Warning program that is operationalizing the ECOWAS conflict prevention mechanism. To make this partnership effective, WANEP established a Liaison Office in Abuja in 2003, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ECOWAS in 2004. Several joint activities ranging from consultations to training between civil society organizations and ECOWAS have been organized. WANEP participates in security debriefings at

ECOWAS and is often invited to share civil society perspectives on emerging issues of conflicts. The process of designing a database for peace and conflict monitoring has now been completed. The methodology has a major focus on research to expose the nature, causes, and consequences of conflicts, thus providing the impetus for appropriate response. It relies on open sources for the gathering of data and information, compares these sources and cross checks for reliability while ensuring quality analysis of the information before it is forwarded to ECOWAS through the Observation and Monitoring

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR WARN



Centre. The analytical framework for WARN is as follows:

Whereas the example from West Africa clearly demonstrates that early warning is beginning to be effective at the regional level, it is important to link it with the global level so that international influences and pressure is brought upon decision makers who exacerbate violent conflicts. In the context of West

Africa for example, it is well known that French influence on Togo could help to build peace or maintain the conditions for destabilization. How does early warning from the regional level engage the international level through the European Union, the United Nations and other international agencies to build such bridges and employ international pressure to positively influence change that can sustain peace at national levels? The United States has similar influence on Liberia.

Mr. Bombande concluded by thanking CORDAID for their support which has sustained WANEP as an organization. He stressed that if WANEP as an institutional was weak, it could not be in a position to implement such regional programs. He thanked the ECCP for their leadership in the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and hoped in that in the coming year, there will be progress to develop an early warning program within the GPPAC framework in order to build the necessary bridges from regional to international levels.

*Emmanuel Bombande is Executive Director West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)*

# The World's Banlieues

SPEECH BY AGNES VAN ARDENNE-VAN DER HOEVEN



*Agnes van Ardenne-van der Hoeven*

**T**he suburbs of France are all over the news. Since two teenagers died in Clichy-sous-Bois near Paris, the banlieues have been the scene of street violence. Some people have said that a few rainy nights could keep the angry young men off the streets and bring the crisis to an end. But as the interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has recognised: there is more to the civil unrest than hooliganism. When quiet has returned to the streets, something needs to be done to address the social and economic inequalities that people living on the outskirts of France's cities face every day.

## ***The Thalys to Africa***

Thanks to the Thalys, Paris is only four hours away from here. Imagine that it could speed past Paris, to the south of France, across the Mediterranean, and on to Africa. Leaving the old continent behind, we enter a brave new world, where poverty is

rife and violence is often just around the corner. The Horn of Africa, where a new war is brewing between Ethiopia and Eritrea and where a fragile peace between the north and south of Sudan is still in the balance. Uganda, where ninety-five per cent of the population in the north have been uprooted by the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army. Congo, the heart of Africa, where a civil war has claimed millions of lives. According to the recent Human Security Report, Sub-Saharan Africa is the most violent region in the world, experiencing more conflict-related deaths than all other regions combined.

Don't get me wrong, there is also a lot of good news coming out of Africa. For instance, fifteen countries have shown an economic growth rate of more than five per cent in the past decade. Long-running, bloody conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan have come to an end. Rich countries have made unprecedented political and financial commitments to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals and with them peace and prosperity in Africa. But if the West fails to meet its commitment to more and better aid, and Africa fails to fight corruption and improve governance, the good news will soon be old news. Without a strong foundation of long-term sustainable development, many African countries will fall back into violent chaos. In the short run, security is a precondition for development, but in the long run the reverse is true—development is a precondition for security. When societies are torn apart by poverty, corruption, predatory states, environmental degradation and HIV/AIDS, tensions will at some point run too high and will escalate into renewed conflict. Studies have confirmed this link between development and security. Each percentage point that the economic growth rate drops adds a percentage point to the risk of conflict.

According to Foreign Policy magazine, no fewer than two billion people currently live in unstable states, with the risk of chaos or

even war; both in Africa and elsewhere. Take, for example, Haiti, which has been torn apart by an ongoing political crisis, or Nepal, where the deadliest conflict in Asia has already killed some ten thousand people over the past few years.

### ***The banlieues of the world***

Unstable or fragile states are the banlieues of the world. We need to put them on the path to sustainable development, not just for humanitarian reasons, but also because it is in our joint interest. Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Rwanda and Liberia confronted the world with human rights abuses, humanitarian disasters, regional conflict and migration flows. And we have learned that failed states harbour terrorists. “If we have learned anything from September 11,” wrote New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, “it is that if you don’t visit a bad neighbourhood, it will visit you.” Keeping countries away from the brink of war and starvation through conflict prevention is not just better for global security, it is also much cheaper. Civil wars in developing countries cost the world about 100 billion dollars a year, more than our combined annual expenditure on development aid.

### ***From reaction to prevention***

The international community has recently recognised that we cannot afford to go from one crisis to the next, putting out fires. We need to work on long-term solutions that will prevent fire from breaking out in the first place. This is what the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change wrote last year. I quote: “Meeting the challenge of today’s threats means getting serious about prevention; the consequences of allowing latent threats to become manifest, or of allowing existing threats to spread, are simply too severe. Development has to be the first line of defence for a collective security system that takes prevention seriously.” End of quote. Two months ago, at the UN summit, world leaders acknowledged that development, peace and security, and

human rights are interlinked and reinforce each other. Even today, most people would associate the word conflict prevention with last-minute diplomacy and solemn Security Council resolutions. But when the people in suits are crowding the halls of the UN building to negotiate their way out of an imminent conflict, the hour of prevention has long passed. Today, I will briefly outline three unorthodox strategies that truly address the root causes of conflict at an earlier stage, long before the diplomats arrive on the scene.

### ***Civil society's role in conflict prevention***

But first let me say a few words about civil society's role in conflict prevention. The diplomats do not usually get involved until things have really started to go wrong. NGOs are often there long before, when there is still plenty of time to put things right. Civil society organisations have an important advantage when it comes to conflict prevention. Because they are independent, flexible and close to the people, they are in an ideal position to strengthen social networks, build confidence between different population groups and sound the alarm when the first signs of violence appear.

This is why in 2001 the UN Secretary-General, in line with the conclusions of the Cardoso report, called upon civil society to play a more prominent role in conflict prevention. And you have heeded that call, with a little help from the Netherlands. We are one of the main donors of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, initiated by the European Centre for Conflict Prevention. I subscribe to many of the recommendations that came out of last July's Global Conference on conflict prevention, such as those stressing the importance of a shift from reaction to prevention, the responsibility-to-protect principle and a regional approach to conflict. Another outcome of the Global Partnership is the publication you presented today: *People Building Peace II: Successful Stories of Civil Society*. Not

some high-minded theoretical treatise, but a down-to-earth guide on what works and what doesn't. Like the Athwaas Initiative in the battered Kashmir region, which brings together Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women to work towards peace by initiating programmes for democratic participation and expressing the concerns of women to policymakers. And the Baku Bae movement in Indonesia, which has started up a dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities in Maluku and which has even led to joint community watches on the road between the Christian and Muslim areas.

As civil society organisations take up the challenge of conflict prevention, they will find the Dutch government by their side. We already coordinate our activities and search for synergy with civil society through existing forums on Sudan and the Great Lakes region. Currently, we are in the process of setting up similar platforms for Afghanistan and Burundi. Let me mention a recent success of our cooperation with civil society: during the Liberian presidential elections, the first since the civil war, we funded the NGO Search for Common Ground. This NGO relieved social tension during the elections through radio broadcasts in sixteen local languages. The programmes featured debates between the candidates, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and former soccer player George Weah, and gave callers the opportunity to denounce any irregularities live on the air.

### ***Three unorthodox strategies for conflict prevention***

Up to now, I have mainly focused on who could get involved in conflict prevention: diplomats, NGOs, religious leaders and so on. Let me now focus on what can be done to put a country on the path to sustainable development and away from violent conflict. I will now briefly discuss three unorthodox strategies.

First, the spread of democracy and respect for human rights. Often, dictatorships are credited with maintaining stability and

preventing conflict by crushing tribal, ethnic or political dissent. This is incorrect. Of the forty-nine poor countries embroiled in civil conflict in the 1990s, forty-one were dictatorships. And global terrorist organisations find a safe haven in autocratic countries, like Osama Bin Laden once did in Sudan. Democracies, both rich and poor, maintain stability by allowing people to fight out their differences with words instead of weapons. This makes promoting democracy a viable strategy for conflict prevention. Since democracy also has a superior track record when it comes to jumpstarting development, I have consistently supported democratic institutions and accountable, legitimate governments in developing countries. For instance, we support elections, such as this year in Burundi and next year in Congo, by investing in hardware like computers and voter ballots, by educating voters and by training political leaders and the police. Clearly, there is more to democracy than elections. We need a free press and an active civil society to keep it alive. Civil society organisations, standing side-by-side with the people, can provide information, promote reconciliation, and encourage refugees to return to young democracies emerging from conflict. For example, the Netherlands funds Radio Benevolencia, an NGO that broadcasts successful programmes on themes like conflict resolution and justice in Rwanda and Burundi.

A second strategy for conflict prevention I want to highlight is environmental management. Unfortunately, many people still view strong environmental policies as a luxury the poor simply cannot afford. This is incorrect. Environmental degradation in poor countries can lead to social tensions, which can degenerate into conflict. We have seen this in Darfur. Darfur illustrates how social relations can reach boiling point because of population pressure and a fragile environment. A decade ago, this lethal combination even acted as one of the catalysts for genocide in Rwanda. More such conflicts lie just beneath the surface, as

about 1.4 billion people, almost all of them in developing countries, are confronted with environmental fragility. Rivalry over water in particular will be a major source of dispute. By 2015, nearly three billion people will live in water-stressed countries. All in all, working on water and the environment is not a hobby for rich environmentalists, but a vital strategy for conflict prevention in poor countries. The Netherlands has long supported the successful Nile Basin Initiative, through which nine states work peacefully together to manage water resources. We are currently preparing similar programmes to promote sustainable development in the Congo basin and the Great Lakes region. Here, particularly in the absence of a strong government, civil society organisations like SNV and the World Wide Fund for Nature will play a vital role in reaching out to communities and in building the capacity of people and institutions. More in general, the Netherlands spends 0.1 per cent of GDP on the development priorities of water and environment.

A third unorthodox strategy for conflict prevention which I would like to discuss here is post-conflict reconstruction. I call it unorthodox, because most people only associate reconstruction with cleaning up the mess after the damage is done. This is not true. Post-conflict reconstruction is also conflict prevention. After an armed conflict, there is a forty per cent chance that hostilities will flare up again in the first year. Countries usually move away from this conflict trap step by step: the chance of another war declines only by a single percentage point each year. In many respects, the cost of war is high. It normally takes about two per cent off a nation's GDP. Not just cars and government buildings are destroyed, but also roads, bridges, airports, hospitals, farms and the houses in which ordinary people live. War leaves people desperate for peace. But if the source of conflict remains, and if peace brings no dividend, people will once again resort to war, often as a means of survival.

In war-stricken countries, the Netherlands is promoting reconstruction efforts through an integrated policy. Guiding a country through the no-man's land between war and peace requires a wide range of foreign policy instruments, including humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, private sector development, security sector reform and the return of refugees. That is why, when drafting our new policy paper on post-conflict reconstruction, I invited the Ministries of Defence and Economic Affairs to join me round the table. As a follow-up to this joint policy paper, we will design country-specific reconstruction strategies and work through a new coordination forum to streamline our activities. And cooperating with the private sector and civil society will remain a priority of this integrated policy. Civil society organisations working with the people on the ground while conflict still rages are in a good position to help them when peace finally breaks out. To give them a voice in the planning and decision-making involved in reconstruction. In Sudan, Pax Christi, funded by the Netherlands government, has long been actively involved in mobilising local civil society organisations and religious leaders for peace.

### ***Conclusion***

For me, and for other Dutch ministers, the link between security and development will remain an important policy priority. In fact, tomorrow morning I will open a conference on the role of faith-based organisations in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. For most secular NGOs, cooperation with these organisations is still unknown territory. But, as I have argued today, we should not shy away from unorthodox methods to find peace. To be continued tomorrow.

*Agnes van Ardenne-van der Hoeven is Minister for Development Cooperation*