
The Future of Peace Efforts

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Conflict and war have plagued the world since the dawn of mankind. Although modern history is no exception to this, the relatively recent emergence of international organizations represents a glimmer of hope. These organizations have the potential of becoming effective tools to promote peace throughout the world. Yet, there is still much that must be done for this potential to be fulfilled.

Three years ago, on the 350th anniversary of the Peace of Westphalia—an event that marked the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe—I was asked to give a lecture at the Wasa Ship Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, comparing that peace with the Dayton peace negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As I began to study the history of the Peace of Westphalia, I was astonished at the similarities between these two wars and the ensuing peace negotiations. In both cases, greedy warlords wanted to prolong the war for their own benefit, countries were left in economic ruin, soldiers showed a complete lack of morality in their actions toward civilians, and there was endless suffering for women and children, who are always the main victims of any war. Furthermore, after both Westphalia and Dayton, there was an unwillingness to honor the conditions of the peace agreements. New wars broke out in Europe after Westphalia, and there has been an endless struggle to keep the peace on track after Dayton. The drama of Kosovo has not made things any easier.

The similarities are thus shocking, but a key difference is the increased role now played by the international community. Today there are a number of international organizations with the capacity to intervene, including the United Nations and the OSCE. Additionally, these organizations can draw legitimacy from a number of international human rights agreements ranging from the Geneva Conventions to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and many others. The importance of this difference cannot be overstated. These organizations can truly change the character of peace efforts.

In the following paragraphs, I will address four issues that could make the international community's peace efforts more effective. In so doing, I will turn to

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my personal experience. I served as U.N. Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the former Yugoslavia from 1995 to 1998. Thereafter, I functioned as the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 18 months. These positions enabled me to assess the effectiveness—or lack thereof—of international peace efforts today. They also drew my attention to ways in which such efforts can be improved. Part of the answer lies in four important areas: narrowing the gap between international decision makers and grassroots level actors in conflict areas, highlighting the role of women in peacekeeping operations, clearly dividing the mandates for the many organizations involved in any one peace effort, and promptly bringing indicted war criminals to trial in order to promote reconciliation.

NARROWING THE GAP

Decision makers in post-conflict situations must fully understand the problems on the ground in order to correctly address them. One of the obstacles to peace work after a conflict is that the distance between the victims of war and those who decide their future is much too wide. Unfortunately, the decision makers in Washington, New York, Brussels, Vienna, and many other capitals have little understanding of the extent of the suffering occurring on the ground.

I have personal experience of this. When I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) between 1991 and 1994, I did so as Minister of Defense of Finland. I relied on generals, other ministers, and experts of all kinds for the “best” briefings one can imagine. At that time, I was naïve enough to believe that I had an entirely correct picture of the situation. However, not until I began my work as Special Rapporteur did I understand anything about the real disaster. I visited the victims of the war in villages destroyed by shooting, fire, and explosives. There I listened to the refugees and internally displaced persons as they cried on my shoulder. I met children who had witnessed their own parents' deaths and who had lost their legs after stepping on landmines. I spoke with women who were victims of one of ethnic cleansing's most evil tools—namely mass rape. I personally experienced the deep sorrow of the mothers of missing persons when mass graves were opened and they tried to identify the badly rotten bodies. It was difficult for me to endure, and I did not even have to look for my own sons. For them, the relatives, it was more than they should have had to stand.

Something I learned during those years is that a friendly word, even in a foreign language, a simple caress, or a kiss on the cheek is worth much more than any amount of money. I also learned to appreciate the care and love people show toward one another even in the worst of circumstances, and that is how I was able to continue. Life after wars is not just mass graves, and raped women and children. It is not just executions and torture. There is a lot of care. There are women

who try to unite survivors with their families, football clubs that take care of juniors suffering from war traumas, and young people attempting to live normal lives regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or race.

I have sometimes had the feeling that the international community is afraid of the people it is trying to help. In Bosnia, it was very rare that high-ranking members of the international community had any contact with local people outside of their duties. These officials need to realize that getting acquainted with locals need not entail a compromising of their impartiality. Moreover, personal knowledge of the needs of local people is essential when directing peacekeeping or reconstruction efforts.

My experience with the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia taught me a great deal about human beings in all their inhumanity. It also taught me that international peace efforts need to have a human face. It is much easier to build bridges and roads, reconstruct industries and houses, than it is to reconstruct the souls and feelings of human beings. But infrastructure on its own is not sufficient to rebuild societies.

INVOLVING WOMEN

My years in Yugoslavia taught me an important lesson about the power of women. I have become a strong advocate for the role of women in peacekeeping operations. It is important to involve women at every stage of any peace effort. They carry important messages that must be heard before conflicts arise or escalate. Women are usually well informed, and must be taken more seriously. Often, they are the only ones who are truly cognizant of the needs of families and children. Therefore, their input is vital to the success of peace missions.

Although numerous women are engaged in international peace operations, their influence is limited and they are not entrusted with leadership roles. I was only the second woman, after Dame Margaret Anstee in Angola, to work as a Secretary-General's envoy leading a U.N. mission. There are currently 61 such envoys and not one of them is female. The same situation exists in other international organizations.

It is for practical reasons that I advocate an active role for women in peace efforts. Many times, for whatever reasons, it is easier for victims to talk to women than men. Both Dame Margaret and I have had the same experience. Therefore, it is important to make significant efforts to involve more women in greater numbers in leadership positions.

Some progress has been made in this area. I am pleased that the United Nations has finally understood the value of including women in peace efforts. At the end of May 1999, the Lessons Learned Unit of the U.N. arranged a seminar in Windhoek, Namibia titled "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace

Support Operations.” This event, which was attended by a variety of participants, including Dame Margaret and me, culminated in a Windhoek Declaration—the Namibia Plan of Action. Thereafter, on October 31, 2000, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 calling for the broad participation of women in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. In the resolution, there are calls for member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels—national, regional, and international. The resolution also calls upon the Secretary-General to implement a strategic plan of action, and to appoint more women as special representatives and envoys. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the resolution will be implemented.

ALLOCATING RESPONSIBILITY

Having addressed the need for women to be involved in peace, I will now turn to an even more pressing problem—the organization and leadership of peace missions. In such efforts it is essential that there is a clear allocation of responsibilities to avoid overlaps in authority. My experience in BiH clearly demonstrated this need. As a result of Dayton, different international organizations were given responsibilities that were partly concurrent. For example, the United Nations was initially given responsibility for monitoring the local police. This was later changed to encompass the training of local police and the assessment of the judicial system. The OSCE was to handle elections, and IFOR/SFOR was responsible for security and cooperation with the national military forces. The superpowers, or those who wanted to be superpowers, also had their own special envoys representing their respective governments, the EU had its own mission, and hundreds of NGOs were involved in different efforts. This chaotic arrangement was negatively affected by the absence of an overarching supervisory authority. On top of this, special envoys from different countries dropped in now and then with their demands, creating problems that those who were working in Sarajevo had to clear up. Furthermore, tensions still persist between different international players who aim to be the “Bold and the Beautiful.”

Before the Kosovo mission began, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked those of us involved in the U.N. Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina to give our views on the Kosovo mission based on our experience. I stressed a few important matters of relevance to this issue. First, there needs to be one boss with significant authority over all the international organizations involved in the peace effort. Second, the local people themselves have to take responsibility for the future of Kosovo and for its institutional framework. Third, the rule of law must be implemented and followed so that international criminals, organized crime, drugs, smuggling, and trafficking in women can be stopped with legal means.

I cannot stress enough the importance of a clear organizational structure

encompassing the various international and national actors engaged in peace efforts. Without a well-defined structure, the funds employed will be needlessly squandered, hindering the effectiveness of any peace effort.

CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY

The advent of international criminal tribunals can play an important role in the future of peace efforts. So far, there are some encouraging examples. The tribunal at Nuremberg played a significant role in trying to heal the wounds of World War II and the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have already proven that they can be instruments of reconciliation.

For a long time, the tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was strongly criticized for only bringing criminals of less importance to The Hague. Today, this is no longer true. Momcilo Krajsnik, President Karadzic's right hand man and a former member of the Tripartite Presidency, was brought to The Hague last autumn. Former president Biljana Plavsic voluntarily went to The Hague after learning about the sealed indictment against her. She is the first woman to be tried there, and she showed a great deal of courage and responsibility by handing herself over to the court. Of course, everybody expects that her example will be followed by the so-called big fish, former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic included. Although his recent arrest was an important step forward, he must be brought to The Hague to be held accountable for the crimes he has committed not only against the Serbian people, but also against the people of Croatia and BiH.

Many of us are placing a lot of hope on the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which can come to play a very important preventive role. It is necessary that future warlords know that a time of accountability will come for anyone who breaks the rules of humanity. In rare cases, such as in South Africa, a truth commission may be a better solution. The essential factor is that the victims of war need to feel that they can rely on justice, giving them a fair chance for real reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Above, I have shared with you some of the most important lessons regarding the future of peace efforts that I have taken with me from my experiences in the former Yugoslavia.

I did not lose my interest in the region when I ended the mission. On the contrary, I still closely follow what is happening there. I can see that the international community is still underestimating the terrible amount of hate amongst the people, a hate that has deep roots in history, in ethnicity, and in religion. It is visible in Kosovo, Macedonia, and even in Bosnia and Herzegovina more than

five years after Dayton. Improving on international peace efforts today is more relevant than ever. Give leadership a human face, involve women in decision-making, avoid messy mandates, and guarantee justice to those who have suffered most. Last but not least, listen to the people. They know better than anyone how they want to shape their future. And do not forget—women are very much people!

I have been an optimist all my life and I am often asked if I truly believe there can be peace in the Balkans. My response: do you really believe that I could have left my dear family behind while living alone in Sarajevo for 18 months without believing in peace? But I also understand that the achievement of peace requires sincere efforts from everyone involved—especially international organizations. Hopefully, we will make more progress over the next fifty years than we have over the past three hundred and fifty. ■