

Mediation for peace: A means toward a better world

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A year and a half ago Turkey and Finland decided to launch a new initiative called “Mediation for Peace.”

Our aim was threefold: to raise awareness within the international community of the importance of mediation as a means of conflict prevention and resolution; to help build mediation capacity both within the United Nations and also in regional organizations, which are often most well-placed to assume such a mediating role in their own area of responsibility; and to enhance the level of coordination among different actors of mediation with a view to minimize unnecessary duplications and complications.

Because, after decades of using various forms of mediation, sometimes with great success and sometimes with less, mediation has to date remained a largely ad-hoc effort lacking clear guidance, a systematic framework and the necessary resources.

Yes, every conflict situation has its own peculiarities and one cannot speak of a one-size-fits-all approach to mediation. And yes, any mediation effort should be flexible enough to take into account the specific circumstances of each conflict. That said, in a world where we are faced with an increasing number of conflicts and a proliferation of actors trying to mediate them, we cannot overlook the need to agree on certain principles of conduct and coordination.

In our own mediation experiences, for instance, we found ourselves on many occasions in the midst of different actors trying to serve the same purpose, but without any coordination, thus often leading to duplication and at times to confliction. In this regard, it should also be noted that it is no longer only the states that mediate, but track-II actors such as nongovernmental organizations, civil society institutions and even business communities are also increasingly present in this field, which is a welcome development, but amplifies the need for better coordination.

This is why in September 2010 we came together with a select group of countries and regional organizations that are active and experienced in this field to form a group of Friends of Mediation that will work together toward these goals. We were quite pleased to see the level of enthusiasm on the part of our friends who have quickly embraced the idea and lent their unreserved support to its objectives. Thus, at the end of our first meeting, we agreed to move on first by adopting a resolution at the U.N. General Assembly and creating a somewhat legislative framework for our efforts.

We were also enthused when the consultations on the draft resolution drew more than 100 members of the United Nations and allowed for a lively and constructive debate on different aspects of mediation. The level of interest proved to us once again the timeliness and the necessity of the initiative. At the end of long hours of discussion, we cleared the minds of

everyone that mediation is not meddling in others' internal affairs, but assisting them to reconcile their differences through dialogue. That it is all about helping the parties to a conflict reach a common vision for their future and agree to work together to attain it. And that local ownership, inclusiveness, impartiality, accountability, legitimacy and reconciliation of peace and justice are the key words for any successful mediation. And that increasing the number of women as chief or lead mediators, in the spirit of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, peace and security), is a necessity that would help enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.

As a result, the resolution on "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention and resolution" was adopted at the General Assembly last June by consensus. To the surprise of many, it was the first-ever resolution on mediation adopted in the United Nations. However, better late than never, as it finally laid the ground for a more systematic effort to be exerted in order to enhance the mediation capabilities of the international community. To this end, it made all the necessary calls for the allocation of more time and resources in this direction and asked the U.N. secretary-general to develop guidance for more effective mediation taking into account the lessons learned from past and ongoing mediation processes.

In the rather short period of time since its adoption, the resolution has already managed to generate significant interest in the issue. As clear evidence, the president of the U.N. General Assembly has designated "mediation" as the top priority for the ongoing 66th session of the assembly. The member-states and non-state actors have also embraced the idea and started doing more to build capacity and improve coordination.

This commitment came out strongly when we co-chaired the second ministerial meeting of the Friends of Mediation five months ago in New York. All 33 participants (25 states and 8 international organizations) expressed their full determination to take the initiative forward with practical steps and help the secretary-general in developing the guidance for effective mediation. To this end, they agreed to establish a network of focal points to improve coordination among them and organize several workshops and meetings to help the regional organizations build capacity and exchange experiences. They also declared enhanced engagement with track II actors as a priority.

At the meeting Turkey also made the offer to host a regional U.N. Center of Mediation in Istanbul and encouraged the others to consider taking similar steps in order to extend the reach of the U.N. and to reinforce its central role in conflict prevention and resolution. Such centers could be highly useful in providing U.N. training to future mediators and allowing for a focused discussion on mediation related issues.

In any case, after having drawn attention to mediation and put it under the spotlight, we now have to start implementing our pledges by taking concrete steps. After all, our world is still fraught with many actual and potential conflicts. Even in places where we had been able to contain hostilities, danger of relapse to conflict remains high. Therefore, it is imperative that we begin increasing our effectiveness in the area of mediation sooner rather than later.

To this end, an important conference is organized in Istanbul on Feb. 24 and 25, with the participation of a large number of representatives from the U.N., regional organizations, NGOs and academia. Along with the focal points of the members of the Friends of Mediation,

whose number has now exceeded 35, we will also be joined by our colleague the Brazilian foreign minister and the president of the General Assembly.

Under the theme of “Enhancing Peace through Mediation: New Actors, Fresh Approaches, Bold Initiatives” the Istanbul Conference on Mediation will provide a platform where all involved in mediation could interact with each other and share their experiences and insights, thus enhancing their understanding on different perspectives of conflict resolution and peace building.

We are confident that the conference will bring out new ideas for effective mediation and help us in pursuing our goals with renewed commitment. After this conference we will continue organizing similar events to follow up on its conclusions and address different aspects of mediation.

Turkey and Finland are two experienced countries in mediating conflicts and reconciling differences. We have so far carried out active mediation efforts in the field ranging from the Middle East to the Balkans, the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. We feel that now is the time to carry our national experiences and those of our partners to another level, where they can help the international community as a whole to establish a sound framework and a pool of relevant capabilities for effective mediation.

The Mediation for Peace initiative and the Istanbul Conference on Mediation offer an opportunity to re-energize our efforts in this direction. It made an encouraging start and has the right mix of states and regional organizations. Together, we believe we can make a difference by increasing peace through mediation.

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