



SUMMARY REPORT

8th İSTANBUL MEDIATION CONFERENCE

The 8th Istanbul Mediation Conference was convened on 10 March 2022 with the theme of: "Spotlight on Mediation in a Changing Peace Landscape" under the auspices of H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. This year, the Conference was held as a prelude to the Antalya Diplomacy Forum at the same venue. This created synergy between the two events and highlighted the importance of peaceful resolution of conflicts in view of the ADF's broader theme "Recoding Diplomacy".

H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu hosted the High-Level Opening Session of the Conference. He was joined by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs of Kuwait

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine H.E. Mr. Riad Malki. The Secretaries-General of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) addressed the audience with videomessages.

The High-Level Opening Session was broadcast live on various TV channels and the entire Conference was livestreamed on the official YouTube channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye (@TCDisileri). Throughout the Conference, hashtags #istanbulmediation and

#mediation4peace were widely shared on Twitter.

Since 2010, Türkiye has been co-chairing three distinct Groups of Friends of Mediation at the UN, the OSCE, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Situated at the epicenter of a volatile geography, Türkiye puts the peaceful resolution of conflicts and mediation at the heart of its foreign policy, and the Istanbul Mediation Conference series has a unique place within this endeavor. Organized since 2012, the Conferences bring together leaders, policy-makers, diplomats, practitioners, experts, and academics. They have high policy relevance and fuse theory with practice while raising awareness on mediation globally. The Istanbul Mediation Conferences have inspired a similar conference series at the OIC.

Having been organized against the backdrop of developments in Ukraine, the 8th Istanbul Mediation Conference aimed to put the spotlight on mediation. Along with the High-Level Opening, the Conference brought together a distinguished group of mediation practitioners in a “Masters’ Stage” and highlighted the essential role of women and youth in peace processes with a dedicated panel.

The High-Level Opening Session

In his opening speech, the Foreign Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Dr. Al-Sabah stated the importance of mediation in peaceful resolution of conflicts with particular reference to the UN Charter. He emphasized the centrality of mediation in Kuwait’s foreign policy and the importance of preventive diplomacy to ensure stability, peace, security, and prosperity around the world.

Acknowledging the UN Secretary-General’s four recommendations to overcome the “prevention challenge,” he explained the specific roles undertaken by Kuwait in the conflict in Yemen. Under the hospitality of Kuwait, the negotiations between the parties resulted in five points of understanding and paved the way for the Stockholm Meeting in 2018. H.E. Dr. Al-Sabah gave further examples from Kuwait’s mediation efforts to solve the crisis within the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as the initiative in the Arab League with regard to Lebanon.

Sheikh Dr. Al-Sabah argued that the way to improve multilateralism and mediation was to increase the role of regional and international organizations as well as to draw upon the institutional experiences of countries that have played the role of mediator.

Speaking next, the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine Mr. Riad Malki commended Türkiye's leading role in peace mediation. He expressed that the Palestine question remains the most important test case for peace mediators around the world. He argued that a solution is indeed possible if there is political will.

Mr. Malki expressed that mediation processes should be based on international law, and confidence in the system needs to be restored. This necessarily starts by ending protracted conflicts, and making the system fairer.

Accordingly, the key to establish lasting peace is to ensure equal treatment of all peoples. Likewise, the solution to the question of Palestine requires decisive international action. Any mediation process needs to be multilateral and balanced, and to uphold international law. Moreover, the role of an unbiased mediator should be to eliminate the conflict and not to manage it. Furthermore, there is a need for a binding timeframe to ensure progress and a failsafe mechanism to ensure that if and when international law and previous commitments are breached, there are consequences.

Next, the Secretary General of the OSCE, H.E. Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, in her videomessage, drew attention to the conflict in Ukraine and highlighted that the options for mediation and dialogue had not been exhausted. She

underlined that dialogue was offered by the OSCE, its Polish Chair, as well as other actors including NATO.

She stated that the OSCE had all the necessary tools and the mandate for mediation and dialogue. She noted that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has already been monitoring local ceasefires for years and providing basic needs such as water, electricity, and gas to 6 million people in conflict zones.

She concluded by noting that when parties consent to the process, mediation can be extremely effective. In these unprecedented times, she called for employing all resources at our disposal to help put an end to violence and promote peace and stability.

In his videomessage, the Secretary-General of the UN Mr. António Guterres said that the unbearable suffering caused by armed conflicts from Ukraine to Yemen, and from Syria and Myanmar to Ethiopia, compels us all to stop the violence and turn to dialogue. Using the regional and international mechanisms available to us, we need to better promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. Yet, geopolitical divides and the regionalization and fragmentation of conflicts are hindering efforts to find peace.

He highlighted that new technologies, the climate crisis, and emerging domains of potential conflict such as

the malicious use of cyberspace show us the gaps in our governance structures. He repeated his call for "A New Agenda for Peace" which includes investing in prevention, strengthening regional capacities and ensuring women's full and meaningful participation in peace processes.

In closing the High-Level Opening Session, H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu underlined the crucial role of the Istanbul Mediation Conference series that has become a traditional platform to discuss peace mediation with leaders, practitioners, and experts. He expressed that diplomacy was the art of restraining power and the ability to find peaceful solutions. He stated that achieving lasting peace and stability does not require the non-existence of conflicts. Instead, it requires the ability to cope with and solve them in a peaceful manner, and the best way to do this is mediation. It was with this understanding, Mr. Çavuşoğlu added, that Türkiye had just gathered the Foreign Ministers of Ukraine and Russia in Antalya.

H.E. Çavuşoğlu highlighted that the number of conflicts is on the rise globally, and that around 2 billion people live in areas affected by conflicts. The conflicts are also getting more complicated, and the international system, unfortunately, cannot adapt to this increasing complexity. The most recent example of the international

system's inability to adapt was the war in Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that conflicts bring about humanitarian tragedies, harm international stability, and cause distrust against the international system. Time and again, we see the eruption of so-called frozen conflicts into full-fledged conflicts. He argued that it was the solutions that were frozen, and not the conflicts. He expressed that the international system could do much better than containing the crises and managing their consequences. From early-warning to conflict prevention and peace mediation, the diplomatic toolkit must be updated and used to its full potential, since "the cost of war is always greater than the price of peace, and because wars have no winner, and peace, no losers."

It was with this understanding, he said, that Türkiye announced the "Mediation for Peace" initiative in 2010 together with Finland. Türkiye's efforts at the normative field are supported by 4 UN General Assembly and 3 OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Resolutions on mediation. He commended the contributions of the Istanbul Mediation Conferences to the development of the conceptual framework for conflict resolution and mediation.

Session I: The Masters' Stage

This first panel, which brought together senior mediation practitioners, was moderated by the Executive Director of the European Peace Institute (EPI), Michael Keating. Structured in a conversational format, the session brought together Miroslav Lajčák (EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues), Jeffrey Feltman (Former U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa), Ján Kubiš (Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya), and Betty Bigombe (Special Envoy of Uganda to the Peace Process in South Sudan).

Drawing upon their experiences, the panelists in this session discussed lessons learned from different processes, and the important characteristics of both mediators and mediation processes. Highlighting the importance of having clear goals to begin with, they emphasized the importance of defending the process itself rather than the conflicting parties' positions. They noted that impartiality should prevail over neutrality. Parties must know where the mediator stands and the principles he/she follows. Patience, empathy and being a good listener are crucial characteristics of a mediator.

Discussing the drastic changes in the conflict landscape, the panelists underlined that because messages are spread in mere seconds in today's world, there is also the opportunity to intervene quickly. However, what is lacking is not the methods or the ability to detect the looming crises, but the political will, intention and the skills to prevent conflicts. The panelists gave the example of Myanmar and the Rohingya crisis, stating that the signs of a crisis were clearly visible in 2016 but no steps were taken by key actors. The panelists agreed that the optimal time to intervene is before the dispute becomes violent. Timing is also important during mediation since putting significant pressure on the conflicting parties to bring them together at the negotiation table by the right actor generally succeeds at the early stage.

While international organizations have the clearest mandate, the right toolboxes, and the legitimacy to engage in mediation activities, unfortunately they seem to be incapable of doing so. Instead, individual states have needed to assume the responsibility to mediate at their own risk. Additionally, the toolkits that the representatives of states and the international organizations possess differ greatly, which can serve as either a catalyst or an inhibitor with regards to the situation at hand.

The panelists pointed out that the “Mediation for Peace” initiative as well as the Groups of Friends of Mediation that Türkiye co-chairs have helped a great deal in putting mediation high on the international community’s agenda. They have also increased capacity and awareness in the mediation community itself. They also praised Türkiye’s key role taking the lead to end the war in Ukraine.

Session II: Women and Youth in Peace Mediation

The second panel addressed the role of women and youth in peace mediation. Moderated by Janne Taalas (CEO of CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation), the panel brought together Hind Kabawat (Deputy Head of the Syrian Negotiation Commission’s Geneva Office), Esra Çuhadar (Senior Expert on Dialogue and Inclusion at the U.S. Institute of Peace), Bineta Diop (Special Envoy of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security), Maria Raczyńska (OSCE Special Representative on Youth and Security), and Jayathma Wickramanayake (UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth).

The panel focused on the value of inclusion of women and youth in peace mediation processes. Twenty years after the landmark UN General Assembly Resolution 1325, panelists discussed the current state of inclusion, the ongoing challenges, and the ways and means for

overcoming them. They also addressed methods to more effectively engage youth in resolving or preventing conflicts.

Panelists emphasized that inclusion of women in mediation processes is not just a matter of promoting diversity for its own sake. Rather, their inclusion has been shown to increase the effectiveness of mediation processes and the durability of peaceful outcomes. There are success stories such as Libya but also failures such as Afghanistan.

Women and youth need to be included at all levels of the mediation processes – both present at the negotiating table and listened to as stakeholders. Women are often highly affected by conflicts in their communities and have a strong motivation for conflict resolution. They frequently have a particular ability to bring together their communities to solve problems. However, inclusion of women still faces direct and indirect resistance – from mediators and governments who are not sure how to implement it, and sometimes from male colleagues who may subtly exclude women from substantive roles in the process. Some ways in which women mediators have overcome these challenges include pushing traditional boundaries, building a coalition of insiders, and demanding transparent and specific procedures for decision-making. The

number of women mediator networks is increasing.

Inclusion of youth is also crucial. Because of their growing numbers and their energy, young people can make a difference in either direction in any conflict. Panelists stressed that those in power need to make sure young people have the knowledge, security, financial support and empowerment to participate in peacebuilding. Social media can serve as a virtuous cycle – if a particular issue receives large-scale interest on social media, more young people will then be reached, who will in turn increase the visibility of the topic on social media. When young people are passionate about a topic, they often use their energy for good outside the virtual world. Young people need to be supported to gain knowledge, real life experience and ability to create links. This panel and students' participation at the Conference contributed to these.

Wrap-Up

The two moderators, Michael Keating and Janne Taalas, closed the Conference by sharing their key takeaways in a conversation with the Master of Ceremonies, TRT World's Elif Bereketli.

Mr. Keating and Mr. Taalas thanked Türkiye for providing this opportunity to come together to talk about mediation – especially at such a moment when

conflict prevention and resolution are more needed than ever.

Both moderators expressed the shock that Europe – and the world – have felt in recent days: "Peace cannot be taken for granted anymore," and "war is back as a way to resolve differences in the world."

They pointed out that much was said during the Conference about the attributes of mediators including deep knowledge of the matters at hand and high emotional intelligence. But the fundamental requirement is one of trust. How mediators are assigned is less important than being trusted by the negotiating parties. The agency of women is fundamental, in society and politics as well as in mediation. Progress has been made since UN Security Council Resolution 1325 but what is currently needed is a political push for action.

The mediation ecosystem is complex, full of new tools and parties trying to engage in mediation. What is needed now is focused strategy.

Finally, they mentioned the increase in the use of digital tools – both for causing conflicts and for solving them. We need to better understand technology and how it is used for conflicts, in order to fight disinformation, while taking advantage of the positives to engage in conflict resolution.

Final Words

In its 8th edition, the Istanbul Mediation Conference brought together around 200 participants from over 40 countries. This included 3 Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 5 Secretaries-General, Deputy Foreign-Ministers, 10 Special Representatives from 6 international organizations, more than 50 representatives of academia, and 25 think-tanks from around the world.

As Minister Çavuşoğlu came and addressed the Conference immediately after bringing together the Russian and Ukrainian Foreign Ministers, the Conference put the spotlight on mediation at an historic moment. Both the timing of the Conference and the synergy with the ADF has brought additional interest and visibility.

Participants commended the relevance of the topics discussed in the Istanbul Mediation Conference and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to putting the spotlight on mediation.