

Peacebuilding Centre for the Horn of Africa (PCHA)

The Peacebuilding Centre for the Horn of Africa (PCHA) <http://www.pchasmara.org>

Executive Summary

The Peacebuilding Centre for the Horn of Africa (PCHA) endeavors to develop the capacity and performance of national associations, political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), by promoting institutional forms of action, goal oriented planning and a strategic commitment to sensible policy responses. Often local organizations lack effective structures or basic administrative skills and therefore remain weak, incapable of stimulating social, political or economic change. The Centre, an independent initiative of private citizens from the Horn of Africa, is an affiliate of a non-profit trust fund, the Sudan Strategic Studies Trust (SSST). SSST is registered in the United Kingdom and Eritrea as an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) and is concerned with peace building and stability. While maintaining a regional focus, PCHA will pay particular attention to organizations in those countries undergoing severe crisis, namely Somalia and Sudan.

State policies in Somalia and Sudan have not only bred instability and conflicts but also undermined civil society, its institutions and various organizations, including political parties, trade unions, women's, student's and professional associations. Armed militia groups have been able to galvanize popular support by standing up for their communities' grievances against the historical processes of marginalization and brutal repression by the central authority. Therefore, any future opportunities to reconstruct the collapsed state in Somalia or advance Sudan's hard won Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), consolidate stability and ensure democratic transformation in the entire region, largely depend on the following:

Revitalizing civil society.

Transforming armed protest movements into broad based effective groups capable of addressing popular grievances, inspiring communities and responding to their needs. Indeed, sustainable peace, development and stability in the Horn are linked to an increase in institutionalized collective efforts which are capable of designing programs and strategies that engage their communities. Failing this, protest groups run the risk of becoming tools for fanaticism, racism, instability and chaos.

PCHA is concerned with the following tasks:

1. Offering opportunities for functional training to organizations in the marginalized regions of the Horn through short (2-3 weeks) 'training of trainers' courses and workshops. These programs will be offered to mid-rank activists in indigenous languages. Training will promote technical and administrative abilities necessary for establishing effective bodies of civil society through improved organizational and communication skills, including:

drafting organizational constitutions and by-laws, upgrading office administration and accounting techniques and the use of information technology.

writing briefs, memos/strategic position papers, situation analysis/ critical assessment of policy options.

preparation, participation monitoring elections.

social change, leadership and gender

2. Development of an analytical approach as opposed to descriptive reporting of impediments to development and change. Accordingly, the Centre will:

Publish occasional policy analysis papers on strategic changes in the Horn of Africa.

Issue a bimonthly news- analysis bulletin of important political and economic changes in the region.

3. The Centre will sponsor round table discussions for specialists and invited guests from within the region and abroad. The provision of such a forum for dialogue about peace building, conflict resolution development and long term stability is designed to expose participants to new ideas and perspectives on challenges facing the Horn communities.

Administrative Structure:

The organizational structure of PCHA consists of a Board of Trustees which appoints an executive administration, formulates general policies and approves names of associates and experts. In its initial stage the Centre has three full time volunteers and four associates coordinating a network of experts throughout countries of the region and beyond. During June 2006, following initial registration in Eritrea, PCHA undertook pilot training activities pending completion of administrative, legal and financial procedures.

PCHA Mission Statement

Since achieving independence, African nations have had a long history of civil wars that have wreaked untold havoc on the lives of Africans, destroying their economies, dissolving their political institutions, and undermining the fabric of their societies. It is generally acknowledged that peace is not just the absence of war. If the structures of peace are not well established and even strengthened, civil unrest is likely to smolder and erupt into violence again. The collapse in 1983 of the Addis Ababa accord, which ended eleven years of relative non-violence in southern Sudan, shows that peace is easily reversible if the underlying causes of the conflict are not seriously addressed. Hence, the signing of an agreement is not the beginning of peace, just a step in that direction. After the conflict has been resolved and a settlement reached, there remains the problem of building peace. If peacemakers ignore this final stage in managing conflict, there exists a very real likelihood that the settlement will collapse and violence erupt once again. With peace-building we come full circle, to the stage that preceded the outbreak of hostilities, for there is little difference between peace-building and the preventive measures that might avert violent conflict in the first place.

Internal conflicts are neither self-igniting nor irrational. Most postcolonial regimes in Africa lacked a sense of purpose other than to stay in power. Their track record of economic decline, famine, violation of human rights, and political decay points out that they made little or no effort to create a stable social order. Often ruling elites were made up of self-seeking cynics with no vision for the future of their countries. They perpetuated their power by maintaining the inherited structures and policies of the colonial state, by manipulating ethnic loyalties, and by trampling on the economic, cultural, and political rights of marginalized communities. In so doing they nurtured the seeds of conflict. Hence, leadership had often played a key part in either causing the outbreak of violence or in preventing its occurrence. We might expect to find that leaders have had a similar impact on the process of peace building. Nelson Mandela stands out as one of the leaders who have been successful in transforming intense and violent conflict into peaceful relationships.

Conflict in Africa may well be inevitable, as one astute observer noted, but civil wars are not. Political leaders do have a choice, either to weave together often diverse peoples into a cohesive society, and thus strive for a stable social order, or to exploit ethnic and cultural differences in an attempt to hold onto power. It is to the policies and practices of the ruling elites that we must look for the roots of civil war. The damage caused by negative and destructive elite manipulation of clan consciousness contributed to the inability of civil society to rebound when Siyad Barre fell from power. In Liberia, similar policies implemented by Samuel Doe led to the overt tribalization of politics and the militarization of society. Again, in Rwanda, Habyarimana's favoritism towards and dependence on his Bushiru Hutu clan led to the destructive consequences with which we are all too familiar. If unchecked, the tensions generated by various forms of factionalism and elite rivalry will continue to bedevil a nation and threaten its stability even after a civil war has apparently ended.

While there are many reasons for why social conflicts emerge, a recurring one in human history is a desire for social change. Often this desire for change is fueled by the disadvantaged groups of a society. The Horn of Africa, no stranger to chronic conflict, is no exception. More often than not, conflicts in the countries of the Horn are examples of out cries against social injustices by diverse movements that have turned into attempts to institute social change by using arms to challenge the status quo of relative deprivation and marginalization.

Negotiated settlements are notoriously unstable. Concerned about the possible effects of an agreement on their security and even their very survival, one or both parties may abandon the peace option and take up arms again. On other occasions, failure to achieve objectives at the bargaining table may send the parties back to war. In still other instances, the commitment of the parties to negotiations may not be genuine but a temporary tactic, designed to win time to

recuperate and rearm before re-launching a military offensive. Agreements, however solemnly agreed on, are therefore precarious and easily overturned. It is this feature that explains the on-again, off-again talks in Monrovia; the collapse of the Arusha Accords of 1993 for Rwanda, where Habaryimana accepted the arrangements for transition with great reluctance, and the more extreme members of his party, not at all; and the eventual breakdown of the Addis Ababa agreement for Sudan in 1983, once Nimeiri had established an alliance with the Islamic absolutists in the north and insisted on imposing the Sharia law throughout the entire country.

Signing a peace accord is not the end of the peace process but merely a way station along the road. Though such accords are an important, even essential part of that process, there remain a number of critical steps that war-torn societies must take in order to ensure that peace has firmly been established. For some, the emphasis is on designing a program for the demobilization of soldiers and insurgents and their reintegration into civilian life. For others, the task of promoting peace and rebuilding society is much broader in scope, involving a complex set of measures that include consolidation of peace, provision of emergency relief, and establishment of the political, social, economic, juridical, and psychological foundations of sustainable development. Whether dictated by an internationally sanctioned settlement or undertaken by the victorious party, peace-building is likely to include many tasks -development of a political system that offers all groups effective participation in governance, holding of open and free elections, reform of the civil service, institutionalization of respect for human rights, demobilization of military forces and their reintegration into civil society, elimination of surplus weapons, and social and economic rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Peace-makers ignore at their own peril the significance of this phase, which has been termed "peace-building." A flaw in the settlement, lack of resources, or failure to monitor implementation may bring the collapse of peace and the resumption of civil war. Clearly if the concept of peacebuilding is to be useful, we need to be able to distinguish it from normal political activity and everyday economic development. While the instruments used in both sets of activities may be similar, the context of a country just emerging from a lengthy and destructive civil war is quite different and thus requires a different response.

Imagine a country where a significant percentage of the population has died and even a greater number has been forced to leave their homes, farms, and villages in search of safety; where people live in constant fear for their lives; where communities have been weakened or destroyed and families splintered; and where children have been orphaned and often pressed into military service. Add to this cost in human terms (what one author described as 'a global disaster') economic losses measured in terms of the expenses incurred in running a war; the disruption to agriculture, mining, and industry; the lost opportunities for economic growth (estimated by one Organization of African Unity study at 2 per cent per annum); and the destruction of its physical and social infrastructure.

The new leadership assuming responsibility for governing a country at the end of a civil war must thus not only address the underlying causes that gave rise to the civil war in the first place, but do so when it is further handicapped by tens of thousands of displaced persons, a shattered economy, a fragmented society, weak and ineffective political institutions, and many demobilized combatants from both sides searching for alternative forms of peaceful employment.

Not only can peacebuilding be understood as a phase in the conflict cycle and as a long-term process, it can also be seen as a set of challenges facing war-torn societies. Countries emerging from a long period of civil war are confronted by a number of problems that must be dealt with successfully if the recurrence of war is to be averted. While the particular shape of the policies and programs developed to respond to those problems may differ from one country to another, there is a set of challenges with which each country hoping to regain peace and stability after a period of civil strife must contend in order to revive a country's economy, to rebuild its society and to restore its polity. Hence, the basic steps often include bringing an end to generalized fighting, demobilizing and disarming the warring factions, and creating a general environment of trust and confidence; building a set of institutions and political arrangements that assure the establishment of a political process that is open, inclusive, and able to cope with conflicts in a peaceful manner rather than through resort to arms; fostering reconciliation among previously warring communities and thus helping to build a sense of community and common identity; and, finally, eliminating abject poverty and gradually easing the economic inequalities that may have been at the heart of the conflict.

Likewise, social change and stability cannot be achieved in the Horn unless core political and civil society organizations are strengthened to address the grievances of their communities, respond to their needs and thereby become credible vehicles for social change and democratic transformation. However, long term conflict reduces the effectiveness of those organizations. Despite their struggles in the field, if the armed movements in the Horn want to move passed the stage of armed conflict/ movements/ change they need to make the transition to effective civil society organizations. This transition is a key part of conflict resolution yet is often neglected by the concerned regional and international institutions. Lastly, building peace is a long-term, complex, multidimensional process during which the previously warring parties lay down their arms, learn to manage their differences without resorting to violence, develop a common set of goals and common identity, move towards the creation of a just and more equitable society, and rebuild relationships that have broken. The ultimate objective of this process is the achievement of peace, not just 'negative peace' or the mere absence of armed conflict, but movement towards differing layers of 'positive peace', including the cultivation of political processes and institutions that can manage conflict without resorting to violence; the reconstruction and development of a national economy which addresses the underlying issues of regional inequalities; and the rebuilding of society on the basis of justice and reconciliation;

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Monday, 28 February 2011 15:19 - Last Updated Monday, 23 April 2012 13:19

i.e. a condition in which the human security of a country's population is assured.

Based in Asmara, Eritrea, the Peacebuilding Centre for the Horn of Africa (PCHA) aims to fill the void of limited opportunities for effective capacity building and strengthening of indigenous social and political organizations of civil society in the region. This task entails providing training for trainers and support for conflict situations including, but not limited to conflict resolution techniques, negotiations trainings, organizational and office management, research and development, gender and leadership training. The skills building offered will empower local and community based organizations to resolve their differences through non violent means, develop a common set of goals and a common identity, and move towards the creation of a just and equitable society.

PCHA looks forward to working with similar organizations concerned with the region and its development, stability and human security to help nurture the bases of a permanent peace.