Just, inclusive and sustainable peace: Political considerations

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Preface to presentation (1)

- Tens of thousands more people are dying in armed conflicts around the world, even as the overall number of conflicts falls. How can we explain this? The rising death toll is due to an "inexorable intensification of violence" from three sources: state-based conflict, conflict between non-state actors, and one-sided killings of civilians.

- Sixty-three armed conflicts led to 56,000 fatalities in 2008, whereas 180,000 people – more than three times as many – died in 42 conflicts in 2015 (up from c.125,000 in 2014). To put this in perspective, the death count in organised violence has not exceeded 100,000 since 1994 when the Rwandan genocide took place.

Preface to presentation (2)

- What explains the numbers? They reflect the extremely violent fighting in **Syria** and **Iraq** and increasing deaths in **Afghanistan** following withdrawal of western combat troops. In addition, the **Israeli-Palestinian** conflict killed 2,500 people in 2015, mostly civilians, while fighting in **Libya**, **Yemen** and **Central African Republic** also contributed to the rise in overall deaths.

- In sum, the last five years have seen a dramatic increase in organised violence, especially in the Middle East, and if this trend continues an already very dire situation will rapidly become much worse. On the other hand, in the earlier post-World War II period there were many years with large wars and genocides which resulted in much higher death tolls. Even the exploding violence in the most recent years does not contradict the trend that overall levels of organised violence are declining, albeit unevenly. What can faith leaders and FBOs do to help develop the appropriate political frameworks for 'just, inclusive and sustainable peace.'

Focus of the presentation

- How do FBOs affect peace-making and what is the impact of the relevant political contexts?

- What is the role of FBOs in helping bring about just, inclusive and sustainable peace in societies with serious conflicts?

- Where do FBOs fit in a peace-making context where government, civil society and, often, external actors play significant roles?

Religion and peace-making

- FBOs may actively attempt to end conflicts and to foster post-conflict reconciliation between warring parties.

- Not a new phenomenon but gaining increased attention.

- Today, religion's role in helping resolve conflicts and build peace is crucial component in helping achieve improved human development.

- FBOs and religious individuals' significant roles in trying to resolve conflicts, including: Quakers in Nigeria's civil war (1967-70), WCC in Sudan's civil war, John Paul Lederach (involved in conciliation work in Colombia, the Philippines, and Nepal, plus countries in East and West Africa); and Protestant/Catholic leaders in Northern Ireland.

Religious peacemakers

- Religious peacemakers are more likely to be successful when they:

➢ have an international or transnational reach

➢ consistently emphasise peace and avoidance of the use of force in resolving conflicts, and

➢ have good relations with all those in involved in a conflict situation.

Faith and secular peace-making

- While religious peace-makers may have special role to play in zones of religious conflict, their peace-building programmes not necessarily confined to addressing religious conflicts.

- Their efforts may closely resemble those of secular peace-makers, yet their faith orientation will help shape peace-building and the techniques they use.

- Peace-building agendas are diverse, ranging from high-level mediation to training and peace-building through education at the grassroots.

- Peace may be promoted most efficiently by introducing peace-building components into more traditional relief and development activities.

What is 'special' about religious peacemaking?

- Faith-based initiatives can positively contribute to peace-building in four main ways, by providing:

➢ emotional and spiritual support to war-affected communities.

➢ effective mobilisation for their communities and others for peace.

➢ mediation between conflicting parties.

➢ focus and conduit in pursuit of reconciliation, dialogue, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

But not all is necessarily rosy …

- Religious peace-making activities may be rather narrowly focused on specific conflicts, inevitably constraining prospects for wider and more comprehensive impacts.

- Two factors in particular may limit potential impact of such efforts: (1) failure of putative religious peace-makers to understand and/or enact their potential peace-building roles within a local community, and (2) lack of ability of putative religious peace-makers actively to exploit their potential strategic capacity.

- As a result, the impact of religious peace-makers may be limited and positive effects limited.

What do we know and what do we not know?

- There is now a vast body of literature and evidence on links between religion, conflict and peace.

- But there is not (yet) a clear-cut model or theory for the relationship between these phenomena, nor are there simple recipes for promoting peace or avoiding war.

- However, this should not lead to the pessimistic conclusion that all is relative and contextual, nothing matters and nothing can be done.

- What does emerge clearly from the literature is that religion does matter in both preventing and resolving conflict, and in making and building peace, but it needs time to analyse the complex interplay and specific articulations of religion in each individual context.

A critical approach is necessary

- Necessary to take a critical approach to the notion of religion, that considers which aspects of the constellations of meanings associated with it are at play in each case.

- Shaped by history, politics and context-dependent, religion is also culturally loaded, with shifting meanings that can include, e.g., sacred scriptures, rituals, communal identity, norm-setting institutions, focus on a deity, or on inner self.

- No evidence to indicate that any particular religious tradition is, by virtue of its theology, more prone to violence, more likely to lead to conflict, or better suited to help deliver peace.

Political contexts of religious peace-making

- What political contexts are most conducive to peace-making?
- The political aftermath of serious conflict is an important component in peace-making: it helps greatly to have an open and interactive political environment in order to develop a just, inclusive and sustainable peace.
- But when a post-conflict political context is in place, religious actors are often sidelined, with secular political actors – e.g. governments and political parties – taking over.
- Evidence suggests that democracy is the best context for conflict resolution to develop into settled condition of peace (e.g. Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Colombia).

Conclusion

- The relationship between religion, conflict and peacebuilding is neither static nor one-dimensional.

- It is crucial not to try to impose secular Western parameters on post-conflict scenarios or to insist that democracy is the only context that peace-making can take place.

- Contextual variables (historical, political, socio-economic, cultural) affect peace-making.

- No country's situation is identical to another: even a successful peace-maker able to negotiate peace in one country may not be able to do so in a different country, with its unique historical, political, socio-economic, cultural facts.