



# PLURALISM AND PEACEBUILDING

## THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF PEACE AND CONFLICT

Conflicts are more fragmented than ever. Systematic exclusion and marginalization increasingly underpin many contemporary conflicts. They last longer, are more deeply identity-based, and engulf wider segments of society. These new dynamics need to be considered more centrally in peace processes.

The peace processes have also fragmented. No longer linear and logically-sequenced, peacemaking has become part of a multifaceted paradigm with a much larger number of actors. Numerous processes occur simultaneously, sometimes without coordination or connection. A formal mediation effort involving only certain groups may be taking place with little or no coordination with parallel reconstruction and redevelopment programs. Both these processes may also fail to account for a social movement that is growing in strength and popularity. Such a disconnected approach has very real consequences for the effectiveness of peacemaking.

Against this backdrop of fragmentation, the international community, particularly the traditional powers in the West, have less leverage to exert influence on peace processes. While this poses challenges, new opportunities are emerging as many in the peacemaking community begin to reconsider the traditional – and often narrow – approaches to peacemaking.

Understanding the need to include different voices – particularly of women – around the peace table has gained ground in the last 10 years. Discussions around women’s inclusion have recently expanded to a wider conversation about pluralism, which offers a more comprehensive and sustained way to address exclusion. However, progress has been limited. The changing nature of conflicts and peacemaking offers an opportunity to focus on how a pluralism approach can strengthen peace processes.

Pluralism is an ethic of respect for diversity.

In a pluralistic society, the dignity of each person is recognized, and everyone feels like they belong.

## HOW PLURALISM CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MORE SUSTAINABLE PEACE PROCESSES

The inability or unwillingness of societies to positively engage with their ethnic, cultural or religious diversity is at the heart of many contemporary conflicts. The recent United Nations-World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report notes, “Many of today’s violent conflicts relate to group-based grievances arising from inequality, exclusion and feelings of injustice.” Economic inequality increases the risk of conflict. Political exclusion increases this risk even further. Group inequalities have contributed to conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Chiapas and Sudan, among many others.<sup>1</sup> In countries where violent conflict is not a risk, inequality and exclusion translate to political and physical insecurity. Addressing horizontal (group-based) inequalities and exclusions in diverse societies is the key to preventing violent conflict and advancing more durable, lasting peace agreements.

1 Stewart, Frances (ed). 2008. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pluralism seeks to address inequalities and exclusions in society, which strongly correlate with markers of difference, including ethnicity, religion, language, gender and indigeneity. Advancing pluralistic societies requires a focus on institutions – what we refer to as the “hardware” of pluralism – as well as norms and attitudes – the “software” of pluralism.

Today more than ever, pluralism needs to be at the very centre of peacemaking. There is a great deal of scope for re-imagining engagement in a peace process – not only for mediators, but for all the areas of expertise, dialogue and support that go into making peace. All of this work should be predicated on a valuing of diversity, both during the peace agreement and as the basis for long-term implementation.

Recognizing that inequalities and exclusions happen across political, economic and cultural domains, often in simultaneous and inter-connected ways, the Global Centre for Pluralism offers the following tools and resources that take a holistic approach to navigating the many decisions involved in advancing pluralism. They can help to understand the complex root causes of conflict and thus potentially build a more nuanced agenda for peace talks.

- **Global Pluralism Index:** designed to provide a holistic assessment of the state of inclusion in a society and illuminate pathways to address the drivers of exclusion.

Based on the 15-indicator **Index Assessment Framework**, the Index can be used as a conflict analysis tool to identify the underlying sources of inclusion, exclusion and marginalization in society. With its holistic focus, the tool can highlight which groups are facing social, political and economic exclusion, the role of different actors in advancing or hampering pluralism, levels of trust amongst people and societal attitudes towards different groups. Applied at the early stages of peace process design, this tool can be a useful “baseline” about the state of inclusion and exclusion for conflict parties, as well as mediators and advisors. It can also inform the development of benchmarking and monitoring for peace process implementation.

- **Pluralism Lens on Diversity:** a publication that builds understanding of how pluralism can be applied by a wide range of actors working to promote more just, peaceful and equitable societies.

Based on six years of commissioned research, engagement with practitioners and working with the recipients of the **Global Pluralism Award**, this publication presents the essential building blocks of pluralism. It explores what can be learned from different responses to diversity around the world, how pluralism intersects with various fields of practice and how to support a long-term commitment to inclusive societies that respect differences.

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## CANADA'S OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

Canada's role globally and domestically will be determined by trends in peace and conflict around the world. It is incumbent on Canada to be an engaged, innovative leader in the field.

Experts participating in a roundtable at the Global Centre for Pluralism on March 6, 2020 offered important recommendations for Canada, including:

- **Be deliberate and purposeful.** Canada needs to signal a renewed, deliberate commitment to peacemaking. It is important that Canada have a long-term vision for how to support peace processes worldwide, and that we are intentional in those engagements to make the most of

resources and partnerships. We need to rebuild our networks in the broader peacemaking community. This commitment must stand the test of time, and changes of government. A multi-party approach will enable Canada to engage more strategically, with the longer time horizon necessary to have real impact in complex peace processes.

- **Embrace complexity.** The field of mediation is crowded, fragmented and complex. A singular process where one country is in the lead is increasingly rare. This should not be a deterrent. It is important to acknowledge and embrace the complexity that underlies conflict in all of Canada's engagements. The nuances of each context are extremely important and we need to have a well-rounded and granular understanding of where we are engaging. This could be achieved by supporting longer-term efforts and building on areas where Canada has been actively engaged in the past (e.g. in humanitarian or development assistance activities).
- **Draw on existing experience.** Canada can play an important role as a leader on the substantive elements that build a peace process and peace agreement. Canada's experience navigating complex issues of federalism, natural resource management and the treatment of indigenous diversity at home have afforded us some lessons, which may be helpful as we work with partners in other countries. Making pluralism central to our contributions to peacemaking around the world plays to a particular Canadian strength, since pluralism is core to Canada's identity. Pluralism is also a natural extension of Canada's existing commitments and work on women, peace and security and our Feminist Foreign Policy.
- **Seize the opportunity to be transformative.** Canada is well-positioned to be an innovator in the field, particularly in the area of respect for diversity and inclusion. We are at a point of global disruption with the fragmentation of conflicts and peacemaking. Within that, there is an opportunity to try new things. To seize this opportunity, Canada can set itself apart with a transformative approach to peacemaking focussed on building towards pluralist outcomes. Many non-governmental organisations are already advocating for greater inclusion, or for new approaches to peacemaking. It is important that governments join these organizations to make this change. Canada could lead the way at the multilateral level.
- **Build and deploy expertise more effectively.** Beyond funding institutions, Canada has an opportunity to make the most of the country's particular strengths and expertise. Canada could be more effective by focussing on efforts to build the capacities of the various actors involved in a peace process. This could be most impactful when connected to active, ongoing processes.
- **Utilize and build existing Canadian capacity.** There is an enormous amount of Canadian capacity in this field. Many individuals and institutions in Canada and abroad are engaged in this work. They would be amplified by the Canadian government identifying, tracking and using their resources and supporting their work.

Ultimately, as we look at the situation globally and the challenges that face us, it is important to consider what opportunities we must seize as Canadians to transform our world.