

Dear Readers,

The first item in this issue is by Paul Clifford and gives an account of work in Palestine and Israel with civil society organisations. It is followed by something very different: an article by Andrew Rigby on the potential role of sport in addressing conflict. The third and final article represents quite a radical departure from our usual practice. For the first time we are printing an article by someone who is part of a community involved in violent conflict and is writing from that experience and perspective. He is Frankie Gallagher of the Ulster Political Research Group or UPRG, with whom two of our members have worked. We think that what he has written is eloquent and illuminating, reflecting a particular experience and point of view. We recognise that it will challenge the viewpoints of others, who may in turn want to challenge some of its contents. Perhaps it is time to open a letters page in the Review? We would be very interested in your responses.

See also at the end of this issue an invitation to engage in a conversation about CT practice and details of a forthcoming CCTS seminar, on June 5th.

Work in Palestine and Israel with Civil Society Organisations¹

by Paul Clifford, with the help of Sarah Giles and Joan McGregor

Introduction

In September 2004, Responding to Conflict (RTC) began working with civil society organisations in Palestine and Israel. Its purpose was to strengthen their capacity to work effectively, co-operatively and strategically to transform conflicts within each of their societies. RTC aimed at building 'strategy groups' of key civil society actors who were competent in conflict transformation skills, able to contribute decisively to the resolution and management of conflict, the prevention and escalation of violence, and the sustainability of peace processes in the region.

From RTC's wide experience it is clear that civil society can play a strategic role and provide an alternative vision, inspiration and hope, even in the midst of violence, mobilising the general public and influencing politicians and decision makers. Groups and individuals like those RTC is working with can provide a voice for ordinary people, to advocate [for] and support moves towards a just resolution of conflict. They can act as a watchdog against abuses of power and encourage engagement in building the institutions and processes needed to sustain longer-term patterns of peace and justice. When a peace agreement is eventually reached in the Middle East, a great deal will depend on such

¹ Readers who find this article interesting may like to refer to Review 34, July 07 for the report of a seminar entitled 'Designing Peacebuilding Interventions' at which Marwan Darweish and Sarah Giles spoke about this work.

civil society actors if the agreement is to be more than a paper exercise from which the bulk of the population remains alienated. Without the commitment of ordinary people to peace through civil society organisations, violence can rapidly re-establish itself. Crucial roles of civil society include monitoring human rights, mediating in social disputes, ensuring transparency and accountability in governance, and promoting tolerance and communication within and between Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Phase 1 (2004 – December 2007)

With the above thinking in mind, following a 10-month pilot project ending in April 2004, RTC began the first phase of its programme with the objective of helping Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations to build their capacity to act in a more proactive, coherent and strategic way, in order to ensure that the visions, aspirations and concerns of Palestinian and Israeli citizens for a just settlement of the Israel/Palestine conflict impacted effectively on political decision-shapers and on public discourse.

RTC's belief was that progress towards this objective would, in the longer term, enable civil society to make a practical contribution to the achievement of a just and sustainable resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, based on democratic and accountable structures and processes of governance that support the handling and resolution of conflict without recourse to violence.

Key ideas in RTC's rationale for the programme were those of individual transformational change; the integration of conflict sensitivity into organisational programme planning and increasing the multiplier effect. This is what we envisioned:

1. Individuals from organisations working in a range of civil society sectors are trained by RTC in conflict transformation skills, tools and frameworks (individual transformational change);
2. Participants share these analytical and practical skills with other members within their organisations (integrating conflict sensitivity into organisational programme planning);
3. Participants share the tools and skills with the organisations' beneficiaries and grass-roots organisations, in order to apply them directly to community-level conflicts in both societies (increasing the multiplier effect);
4. These constituencies will eventually be sufficiently empowered to exercise a significant impact on public debate and national decision-making processes in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the search for sustainable peace.

The first three years involved building partners' understanding of, and skills in, conflict transformation (e.g. conflict analysis, mediation and negotiation, peacebuilding, intervention strategies, and the link between conflict and development). This would be done at workshops and interim meetings. Partners later applied this learning to specific conflicts within their societies, at the grassroots/community level and within their organisations.

To carry out this programme on its behalf, RTC employed a programme coordinator, Sarah Giles, and put together an international team from amongst its staff and associates, each of whom had relevant experience and skills to bring to the work. The team was headed by Marwan Darweish, (himself a Palestinian), Joan McGregor (from South Africa), Dekha Ibrahim Abdi (from Kenya), Vesna Matovic (from Serbia) and Paul Clifford (from the UK).

Programme partners

In Palestine, RTC began discussions and introductory CT workshops with an existing network of 100 civil society organisations (CSOs) in the West Bank and Gaza, from which a representative [membership-based] group soon emerged. In Israel, RTC began with a series of bilateral organisational relationships, which in 2006 progressed to a partnership with a group comprised of 24 Israeli civil society organisations, both Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Arab. The groups in Palestine

and Israel are now referred to as Conflict Transformation Resource Groups (CTRGs). In Palestine there are 22 members – 12 from the West Bank and 10 from Gaza – and in Israel there is a total of 24.

Palestine

RTC's programme partners are influential senior actors from a range of non-governmental organisations in West Bank and Gaza, nearly all being members of the well-established Palestinian Non-governmental Organisations' Network (PNGO). PNGO is a cluster of voluntary organisations working in multiple human, social, and developmental fields. They are brought together by a unified vision to form a civil and democratic network that strives to support, consolidate, develop and strengthen Palestinian civil society.

Discussions and workshops during the pilot phase reflected the sense amongst Palestinian civil society organisations of being 'under siege' and needing to focus on emergency response, reactive protest, and simply helping communities to cope with impossible conditions day to day. There seemed to be no space left for co-ordination of responses or exploration of positive alternatives for action on cross-cutting issues affecting the whole of the Palestinian civil society. Nonetheless, Palestinian CSOs retained a strong heritage of effective action and cooperation from the first Intifada, when they were actively engaged in nation-building. There was a clear memory of what a strong civil society can look like, and some structures and networks from that period continue to the present time.

Israel

The pilot phase of RTC's programme revealed a fragmented Israeli civil society, with few networks or coalition structures, in which many CSOs working on conflict-related issues were marginalised and had little desire to work together.

The pilot phase did reveal a clear need for organisational capacity building and support to Israeli social change organisations. Our focus was on those whose work challenges the injustices in Israeli society (e.g. the non-existence of the right to conscientious objection; inequalities of rights and opportunities for marginalised Jewish and Arab communities; and the discrimination in contemporary land legislation). We also wanted to support those addressing aspects of the reality resulting from the Israel/Palestine conflict (occupation of the Palestinian territories and the resulting suffering of Palestinian population living there).

In the belief that the conflict transformation approach could strengthen the capacity of these organisations to achieve their social justice objectives, and enable them to clarify their organisation's approach to understanding and dealing with conflict, RTC began working bilaterally with four civil society organisations.

Programme achievements

A mid-term review of the programme's progress was conducted in 2006, with the involvement of an external consultant. During 2007, a Learning & Evaluation project was carried out in partnership with Coventry University, to assess the impact of the new knowledge and skills of conflict transformation on the work of RTC's partners in the region.

Although there are commonalities in the achievements that can be associated with RTC's work in Palestine and in Israel, there are also differences in the progress made with the two groups of partners.

RTC has successfully developed strong working partnerships with the CTRGs in Palestine and Israel, based on trust, openness and mutual respect. Both groups comprise senior level managers or directors of civil society organisations whose sectoral or thematic work reflects the complexity and tension of the wider conflict between Israel and Palestine. Both groups are committed to learning, acting and reflecting together on how the conflict transformation approach can strengthen civil society's capacity to manage conflict effectively and prevent the escalation of violence.

The mid-term review noted the following commonalities between RTC's partners in Israel and Palestine:

- **Need for the programme:** Partners in both Palestine and Israel reaffirmed their belief in the need for the RTC programme and explained its significance in strengthening their capacity as civil society organisations;
- **Trust and commitment:** The trust developed between RTC and partners was acknowledged, as was the continuing commitment by all partners to the programme, despite external political and social developments that require emergency responses by organisations;
- **Responding to the context:** RTC's partners reflected on the social and political changes in Palestine and Israel over the course of the programme to date, and expressed how being a part of the programme had strengthened their ability to pre-empt and adapt to new realities on the ground;
- **Accompaniment and support for implementation:** Feedback highlighted the emerging transition for partners from *trainees* to *implementers*, and the subsequent prioritisation of accompaniment and support by RTC over the provision of CT training.

Other achievements from the first phase:

- Programme partners from Israel and Palestine acted as co-facilitators with RTC trainers at international workshops in conflict transformation, building their skills and confidence in training preparation, delivery and evaluation. (In Palestine, three partners have delivered CT training, in response to requests from international organisations based in the region);
- The programme supported the participation of over 20 individuals from Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations at RTC's international courses in the UK (Working With Conflict, Strengthening Policy and Practice, and the Post-graduate Certificate in Conflict Resolution Studies with Coventry University). Several individuals also co-tutored on the Working With Conflict and the Strengthening Policy and Practice courses.
- In December 2005, RTC's handbook for conflict practitioners, *Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*, was published in Arabic and Hebrew and is being widely used and disseminated by RTC's partners across the Middle East region
- In August 2006, members recognised a growing level of trust and openness amongst the Jewish and Palestinian Arab members, where none had existed earlier. This, they believed, enabled them to: "reveal the 'self' to the 'other'". This was manifested in members' willingness to analyse together conflicts such as the Jewish-Palestinian conflict *within* Israel, the war in Lebanon and the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

During the war in Lebanon, in August 2006, the group requested that RTC facilitate an emergency workshop on how Israeli civil society can respond to the conflict and how to challenge the escalating violence. There was a high level of attendance (22 participants) and the process produced very positive feedback, with many participants commenting that they had come to the workshop dejected, despairing and without hope and were leaving energised and hopeful. The energy and hope came from realising, through the analysis they did, that they were not helpless in the face of the current crisis and that they could develop strategies to address its implications.

Phase 2 (2008 – 2009)

The objective of this second phase is to enable RTC's partners in Palestine and Israel to address some of the sectoral conflicts which threaten to increase fragmentation and violence between different sections of the population, thus reducing the appetite and capacity of ordinary people for peacebuilding at the level of the wider Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Programme challenges

- The internal political and social situation within Israel and Palestine increases the marginalisation of CSOs who are working for peaceful and political change;
- Political factionalism between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza and the West Bank, and Israeli-imposed travel restrictions on Gaza residents, increase separation between the two locations and also prevent travel to and from Gaza for joint West Bank-Gaza workshops;
- Increasing demoralisation over the Israel/Palestine peace processes has devalued the word 'peace' and has created the need for a new understanding of 'peacebuilding';
- International decisions, following the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Authority, resulted in dramatic reductions in funding available for programmes in Palestine during 2006 and subsequently;
- The frequent emergency situations arising in Gaza make long-term planning for change, as opposed to emergency intervention, very difficult;
- Increasing demands on the coordination of the Palestinian group to support, encourage and monitor partners' activities, in order to ensure the sustainability of the work beyond the next 24-month period;
- It took longer than expected for Israeli partners to gain the confidence to *apply* their learning to real actions; in Palestine, participants spent longer than anticipated working as *individuals* within their own organisations to implement learning, rather than moving to more cooperative work;
- In Israel, the transition from bilateral relationships between different organisations and RTC to work within a cohesive CTRG meant that Israeli partners were 'behind' their Palestinian counterparts in terms of conflict transformation training and still need further training at the end of the first phase.

A broader range of Associates will be involved in this phase, drawing on relevant experience from different parts of the world. The first field visit in this phase included the director of a community development NGO in Mindanao, to address particular community development issues raised by the CTRGs. This cross-fertilisation of people and ideas from different conflict areas is seen as an important element in the continuing work.

'Tennis for peace' anyone? Sport and conflict transformation

by Andrew Rigby

Sport as a medium for change: the assumptions

A friend of mine in Israel, a liberal peace-nik, laughed when I told her about my interest in exploring the relationship between sport and conflict transformation. Displaying the cynicism of the idealist she snorted that there were even 'Windsurfers for peace' in Israel, and that whenever she and her husband wanted to avoid going to a peace rally or event but would rather relax, they would decide to go and play 'tennis for peace'.

There does seem to have been a growth in the number of initiatives and projects around the world using the medium of sport to promote peace, co-existence, human rights and sustainable development. The kind of thinking informing such projects was articulated by the Norwegian minister for culture in September 2005, 'We like to see that sport is ... a tool to promote development and peace, in refugee camps, in packed urban slums, or distant villages, sport is a developer of social improvement. A

movement for social change. ... We know that participating in sports can build confidence and teach life skills. ... We know that entire communities can benefit from sport initiatives. Sports movements and organisations represent opportunities for empowerment. If managed well, these movements represent a unique arena for participation and expression. And perhaps most importantly, we know that participating in sports can offer happiness and hope, even when nothing else does.’¹

These assumptions also informed a research project by the Dutch-based funding agency for women, *Mama Cash*, called ‘She’s into sports’, which reviewed initiatives around the world that use sports to empower women and girls. The research aimed to further their understanding of the ways sports can contribute to securing women’s rights and promoting social change, and was premised on the belief that ‘participating in sports is healthy, fun, and, above all an excellent tool for developing self-confidence, allowing talents to blossom, and encouraging equality between men and women.’²

An example of the manner in which sport is used as a medium by which to enhance the capacity of individuals as change agents is the work of the *Association of Kigali Women in Sports*. This NGO organises football competitions and other sporting events, trains women as coaches and carries out various conscientisation programmes aiming ‘to improve women’s social status through the advancement of sports as an empowerment tool for women’s rights, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.’³

Sport is also seen as a tool for character-building, especially for the disadvantaged and excluded of our societies. Thus in Burundi the Burundian Association for Sport and Culture targets football at orphans and street-kids as a ‘tool to integrate them in the community’,⁴ whilst in Atlanta USA there is a ‘Soccer In The Streets’ programme whose mission is ‘To teach less advantaged kids to make positive choices in life so as to better themselves, their families and communities through soccer’.⁵

But sport is presumed to be an effective agent for change not just at the level of individuals, but also one of the best ways to promote co-existence between those that have been divided. One of the best known examples is the *Football for Peace* programme in Israel, funded by the British government. Its website details the programme’s mission and aims:

Football for Peace (F4P), a sport-based co-existence project for Jewish and Arab children has been running in towns and villages of the Galilee region of Northern Israel since 2001. The work of F4P builds upon the experiences of South Africa and Northern Ireland in that it seeks to make grass-roots interventions into the sport culture of Israel and Palestine while at the same time making a contribution to political debates and policy development around sport in the region. Its aims are fourfold:

1. Provide opportunities for social contact across community boundaries;
2. Promote mutual understanding;
3. Engender in participants a desire for and commitment to peaceful coexistence;
4. Enhance soccer skills and technical knowledge.⁶

A similar philosophy informed those Kenyan athletes who, in January 2008, decided to organise a peace run, ‘to promote peaceful co-existence among different communities in Kenya.’⁷ In a similar initiative, World Vision in Kenya has decided to establish sports leagues as part of their long-term plan for peacebuilding and reconciliation. According to their spokesperson, ‘Right now, children are

¹ ‘New Norwegian strategy on sport & development’, 21st September 2005.

² *She Has News*, no. 2, August 2007. The report is accessible at <http://www.mamacash.org/page.php?id=896>

³ Felicite Rwemalika, www.changemakers.net/en-us/node/2221 (15 January 2008)

⁴ Burundian Association for Sport and Culture, www.changemakers.net/en-us/node/2427 (15 January 2008)

⁵ <http://www.soccerstreets.org/> (22 February 2008)

⁶ www.football4peace.org.uk (15 Feb 08)

⁷ M. Herborn, ‘Sport offers hope for future reconciliation in Kenya’, *Play the Game*, 14th January 2008. Accessed at http://www.playthegame.org/News/Up_To_Date/sport_offers_hope_for_future_reconciliation_in_Kenya_1401001.aspx.

hearing messages of division and conflict, and we fear seeds of discord are being planted. ... These leagues will allow tribes to come together and find common ground by participating in organized sports.’⁸

In at least one case sport has been hailed as having a central role to play in holding a country together. Thus, according to a report in *Vanity Fair*, the initiative whereby the Ivory Coast national football team played one of its African Cup of Nations qualifying matches on 3rd June 2007 in the northern centre of Bouake achieved ‘what five years of combat and negotiations could not: an apparent end to Ivory Coast’s civil war.’⁹ It had been Didier Drogba, one of the best strikers in the world and a charismatic national figure in Cote D’Ivoire, who had made the suggestion that the game against Madagascar should be played in the capital of the rebel north. The players in the national team came from all over Ivory Coast, and it would seem that their cooperative spirit acted as an example to the rest of the country. The ‘Elephants’ won 5-0, and later Drogba confessed, ‘It was the best thing that’s ever happened to me. It was more than soccer. To see everyone come together like that, only for a game. It shows how soccer can unite people. Sports in general can do this. Maybe only sports.’

In voicing such a view Drogba was echoing the views of another African hero-figure, Nelson Mandela, who said, ‘Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sport can awaken hope where there was previously only despair. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand.’¹⁰

Sport and conflict transformation: some questions and queries

In the remainder of this short article I want to raise some questions about the assumptions underlying these programmes and initiatives that use sport to promote co-existence, empower individuals, and help potential deviants (particularly the young) become responsible members of their communities.

Sport can help make peace at the macro-level

Maybe in the case of Cote D’Ivoire the national football team does constitute ‘the fragile glue that holds a disparate nation together’.¹¹ But just as sport can unite, it can also divide, it can rekindle old rivalries, and in extreme cases can be a causal factor leading to the outbreak of bloody conflict. There is historic enmity between such teams as Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic, with each one used as a symbol by competing sectarian tribes within the city and beyond, particularly in Northern Ireland. There was even a ‘football war’ between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, so-called because the six-day war was preceded by violence at the international match between the two countries,¹² whilst in Mogadishu in July 2006 militia men shut a cinema showing the German-Italy semi-final of the World Cup, provoking protests that led to the killing of two people.¹³

Moreover, sport can be used to bolster oppressive regimes. The Nazis used the 1936 Olympics in Berlin as a means of promoting national socialism. When Brazil won the World Cup in Mexico in 1970 the military regime could bask in the reflected glory, as could the Argentinian junta after the national team won the 1978 World Cup. Dictators over the centuries have used sporting occasions and sports programmes to divert critical attention away from the regime as part of their strategy for holding onto power.

⁸www.worldvision.org/worldvision/pr.nsf/stable/20080212_kenya_sports_leagues?Open&lid=sports_leagues&lpos=day_txt_sports_leagues (22 February 2008)

⁹ A. Merrill, ‘Best foot forward’, *Vanity Fair*, July 2007. Accessed at <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/07/ivorycoast200707> (23 November 2007)

¹⁰ Nelson Mandela, speaking about the work of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation at the inaugural awards in Monaco in 2000.

¹¹ M. Gleeson, *The Independent*, 16 May 2006.

¹² See R. Kaupuscinski, *The Soccer War*, London: Granta, 1990, pp. 157-184

¹³ Reuters Alertnet, 5 July 2006.

In other words, at the macro-level of national (and international) politics, sport can be a medium for division and oppression just as surely as it can be an emancipatory and unifying force.

Sport can promote co-existence in divided societies

Can sport promote convivial relationships across the lines dividing communities? Can it act as a bridge? It is obvious that the British government believes the answer is 'yes' – otherwise why devote so many resources to running football camps for Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Arab kids in northern Israel? Such programmes are based on what can be called the 'contact hypothesis', that inter-group contact under certain circumstances and conditions can bring about attitude changes which can result in a reduction of tensions and the promotion of more harmonious relationships between those that have been divided. The assumption is that by such contact stereotypes are broken down and prejudices challenged as members of what we once viewed as anonymous homogenous categories are revealed to be identifiable human beings with their own idiosyncrasies and cross-community commonalities.

There are several problems with this assumption or working hypothesis. First of all I can vouch for the fact that contact can serve to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes rather than erode them. Secondly, there is the presumption that the attitude change achieved during the contact-situation will be generalised towards other members of the 'out-group' beyond the actual encounter. But many of us have had experience over the years of groups in Northern Ireland and elsewhere being taken on 'residential away breaks' where they mix in safe surroundings with those from across the divide, only for them to return to their own communities and be re-immersed once more in the group prejudices and taken-for-granted images of the 'other'.

Gordon Allport and others have established that mere 'contact' on its own is not enough to change attitudes. For positive change to take place four conditions are necessary.

1. Parties to the contact situation should enjoy equal status both within and outside the encounter.
2. Parties to the contact should have common goals within and outside the encounter.
3. The contact situation should involve and require inter-group cooperation rather than competition.
4. Parties to the contact should have the endorsement and active support of relevant authorities and opinion-leaders within their respective communities.¹⁴

As I review this set of conditions I am reminded of the analysis offered to me by someone with a long history of organising Israeli-Jewish/Israeli-Arab dialogue groups: 'The Israeli-Jews participate so that they can sleep at nights, the Palestinians participate so that the Israeli-Jews cannot sleep at nights.' Certainly in the context of the type of community relations pertaining within Israel the conditions are just not conducive to positive and enduring attitude change on the part of participants in 'co-existence through sports' encounters.

One more point before moving on. I would hope and expect that proponents of sports camps and other such initiatives to promote co-existence through attitude change in divided societies would not claim that this is all that is needed in order to heal the fractures. One of the many tools we have acquired from Johan Galtung has been the A-B-C (attitude - behaviour - context) triangle. It reminds us that to focus solely on promoting attitude change without addressing the need for appropriate transformation in the structural/institutional context and associated patterns of behaviour between the conflicting parties is the imbalanced approach of the 'A-fundamentalist' who seeks pacification rather than peace.

¹⁴ See A. Evaldsson, *Grass-roots reconciliation in South Africa*, Goteborg: Goteborg University, School of Global Studies, 2007, especially pp. 60-86.

Sport as a medium for education in civic values & character-building

A number of claims can be made relating to the significance of sport as a tool for the transmission of appropriate life-skills to people, especially young marginalized individuals. Let me just touch on two of them.

i. Sport 'builds character' – participants acquire particular attributes such as confidence, capacity for teamwork etc.

Unfortunately, as Andrew Guest has observed, 'For every sportsperson with high self-esteem, good cooperative skills, and the character of a leader, there is another sportsperson experiencing depression, dealing with accusations of selfishness, and engaging in drug use or cheating as a way of getting ahead.'¹⁵ Just as sport can teach you self-confidence, participants can also learn how to (and expect to) fail. As one of my friends snarled at me as I gloated after our side had beaten his in our weekly flood-lit football game some years ago, 'Rigby, you are a lousy loser but you are an even worse winner!' Reminded of this another friend recalled his feelings after I had defeated him in a game of crown green bowls: 'It wasn't that you gloated, but that you were smug and condescending and thoroughly nauseating ... I remember it well ... I don't think I've played bowls since.'

ii. Sport provides an alternative 'outlet' or distraction from deviant activities.

This is the thesis that sport provides people with positive ways to spend their time which would otherwise be spent in anti-social behaviour. But doesn't targeting particular types of people (young inner-city dwellers for example) as needful of the distraction of sport reinforce stereotypes of marginalized people as threatening? As Guest observes, 'When a child ... who already derogatively recognises him or herself as a "ghetto kid", learns that they need to be distracted so as not to commit crime, the child develops a conception of him or herself as a threat. Development through sport ideas often unintentionally, and unnecessarily reinforce that self-concept.'

Sport and conflict transformation: The challenge

Where does this leave us? Sport is popular and it can touch and move people in ways that continue to surprise and amaze those impoverished people who are immune to its appeal. But it is not a 'force for good' anymore than it is a 'force for evil'. The challenge for theorists and practitioners is of course to identify those conditions which enhance the potential for constructive change that can be channelled through sports activities wherever and whenever they take place.

¹⁵ A. Guest, 'What exactly does sport do?' Accessible at www.sportanddev.org/en/articles/thinking-both-critically-and-positively-about-development-through-sport/index.htm (15 November 2007)

Our hope for years to come¹

A story from a section of the Loyalist community in Northern Ireland who are trying to live in peace, by Frankie Gallagher

Peace – the ultimate goal: to boldly go where no one has gone before. It sounds like something out of Star Trek, and at times I have thought achieving peace was as distant as the light years in the movie. But sitting where we are sitting at present in Northern Ireland, with an Assembly up and running, politically inspired violence virtually non-existent, the situation is very different from when I set out on this journey. It's not perfect but it is a lot better with, dare I say it, hope for the future. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go.

Looking into the abyss

I got into this process over twenty years ago: the 22nd of December 1987 to be exact. I was at home after a tired night out, attending community meetings and trying to organise local people to take action on a myriad of social issues. I was just into bed when a knock came at the door. It was a local commander of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and he was in a terrible state. He said, 'John McMichael² has just been murdered by the Provisional IRA. There will be hell to pay for this'. You could feel the rage in the air. The Ulster 'troubles' had taken us to another precipice. We were looking into the abyss, again!

I knew the Loyalist community would not let this go. There would be action taken. That usually meant someone on the other side was going to die, probably more than one. It was the politics of an eye for an eye, which was blinding us all.

At this stage in our troubled past I wasn't very confident that things were ever going to change. It was depressing. I was told that I would be required to attend a meeting at short notice, so I should be ready to go.

We bury our dead and the call comes

The call came the day after John's funeral. I had to go to a well known social club on the outskirts of Belfast. When I got there I was escorted up the stairs into what must have been a committee room. The room was filled with people, some that I recognised but mostly strangers. I waited in the wings making small talk and drinking tea. You could feel everyone was nervous; there was a tension in the air you could cut with a knife. Then the door opened up and a group of about ten people came in and sat at a prearranged top table. They introduced themselves as the Inner Council of the UDA. My heart was in my mouth. What were they going to say? I knew the rage in the Loyalist community had continued to grow. I thought, 'This is it! We are all going for it. Our community has had enough of being murdered while our own Government stands by and does nothing'.

A man at the head of the top table began to speak. He thanked us all for being there and promised not to keep us away from our families for too long. I thought this was it but didn't know what to expect. To my total surprise and relief, he stated that we were there as a result of John being murdered and that we could not let him, his work or his memory die in vain. He said the Inner Council was determined to produce ten John McMichaels. His work and leadership would continue. We (all of us in the room) were chosen to develop the way forward.

¹ We refer readers downloading this article from the CCTS website to the introduction to this issue (number 37) of the Review, which explains its context and origins.

² John McMichael was a UDA Brigadier who was the first to present a new image for Loyalists: 'clean-cut', articulate, educated; a risk-taker who evoked debate on crucial issues and looked towards a political rather than a military future.

Have the terrorists won?

I have described this moment because at that terrible time in our history I thought the Provisional IRA terrorists had won and that we were delving deeper into the abyss and then, out of one of our darkest hours (of which there were many), there was a light of hope still shining in my people. There were still those at leadership level who had the courage to rise above our collective adversity and seek something better for our children. I didn't know it at the time but that is where my search for peace started. Thinking of John when the going gets tough is a source of energy for me to this day – and, believe me, my community and I have needed it.

The School of Hard Knocks and the University of Life

It was some years before I understood that what we were working at was conflict resolution and transformation: identifying problems that lead to violence and finding solutions to them. We should have been dealing with the causes of the conflict, but what we were doing was nothing more than fire fighting. We were banging our heads against a brick wall. We had no resources, no strategy and no hope. It always seemed that my community was excluded from any solution or process that would enable us to plan better and achieve more sustainable outcomes. We have jokingly referred to this work as going through the School of Hard Knocks and progressing on to the University of Life. It was a bit of a laugh but sadly it was true. We never got help from anyone and were excluded by those who were 'in the know'. Education and training were a luxury and when we did manage to get on courses or were invited to seminars or conferences, you could easily spot us. We were stuck in the corner, like the proverbial pariahs.

Critical mistakes

This situation continued until the run up to the Belfast Agreement – also known as The Good Friday Agreement – in 1998 and the decline of the Ulster Democratic Party³ which began shortly after. This party was set up by the UDA, to contest elections in a post-conflict era, capitalising on the feel-good factor that peace should bring.

It was evident to some of us at that time that one of the failings of the UDP was that for a number of reasons they moved too far away from their membership and lost their base support. This was a serious mistake, if the aim was to try to move a whole people on and out of conflict, especially when that people had an armed group attached to it. You need to constantly look over your shoulder to check that the people are still with you. It doesn't work any other way.

It was after this, during 1999 and 2000, that another series of meetings was organised, much as had been done over a decade before, and it was decided to revive the Ulster Political Research Group, an ad hoc group formally set up in 1978 that would not contest elections, but would give political analysis to the UDA and identify ways of achieving a sustainable way forward that would contribute to a lasting peace, using community development methods and good practice as a change management mechanism.

A false dawn?

With the 'yes' vote of the Belfast agreement, press and media began a new round of documentaries talking of the 'end game'. It was a difficult time for my community because the press and media hype at the time had a very destabilising affect; it eroded what confidence existed.

There was all the political talk of no winners and no losers, but you tell that to a community that has seen all the concessions going one way, Sinn Fein getting stronger, and knows that Provisional IRA men and women, murderers in the eyes of my community, are getting elected. It appeared that the British Government, Irish Government, the Americans and the international world were assisting their success.

³ The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) is not to be confused with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) founded in 1971 and led (until his forthcoming retirement) by Rev Ian Paisley.

In contrast, our community had no help to build any capacity at all and were being constantly demonised and criminalised by the press and media, in what can only be described as well organised coordinated attacks.

Being left behind

Our community was feeling left behind. The basis for the way forward in this new political dispensation for all the people in Northern Ireland was a 'Shared Future', based on inclusivity and equality. My community couldn't see or visualise this new 'Shared Future'. There was no one breaking our doors down to include us. If this was what they called peace, I'd hate to see what they meant by war!

The UPRG continued to move forward under extremely difficult conditions and at considerable personal risk, with elements in the UDA continuing to break the ceasefire. This period saw three Loyalist feuds, with more than a dozen people being shot dead, and interface violence appearing to ignite under what can only be described as very suspicious circumstances.

Zero sum politics

After some debate about the current situation, we all agreed that there were those in the Irish Republican community, and some Loyalists, who wanted to keep the violence going. It was our analysis that they wanted to destabilise my community so that we couldn't or wouldn't be allowed to participate in developing a peaceful way forward. These actions were not Machiavellian, or the work of MI5 or the British and Irish Governments. They were taken by local people who had their own agendas – agendas that didn't include us. We call their approach and behaviour 'zero sum politics' – as long as we were doing badly they thought they were doing OK, instead of wanting to improve the lot of the whole community, regardless of political or religious beliefs.

This is a common problem in conflict transformation processes, where different groups or factions coming out of conflict seek to maintain power and advantage over their adversaries, even former allies, when peace and prosperity returns. Governments, especially fledgling governments that emerge as a result of a peace process, must guard against this. It has the potential to pull everything and everyone back years. Peace must be built on the maxim of inclusion, especially of those who are marginalised or isolated.

Lost out again!

By the time we had exposed those destabilising elements (and we are still identifying them) and set up the necessary structures to deal with them, the agenda had already been set for the post conflict period ahead. We had lost out again! This was a costly loss in terms of conflict transformation: to be able to be part of setting the agenda that would give my community the necessary buy-in to feel part of the new future. Once again we would be playing catch-up; once again we would appear the bad guys!

From defending to mending

The UPRG, with the now full support of the UDA membership, continued to work against the odds, but by this time we were feeling sidelined, left behind, thinking that we were not important – mere pawns in a bigger game, the problem child. We came to realise a number of important things: that we needed to manage change and all the challenges that would come with it; that we were in a place we didn't want to be in – we needed to transform ourselves and it; and that being reactionary left us open to exploitation and meant we were easily destabilised. We had to move from a position of defending all the time and learn to be proactive, set goals, measure progress, strategise. Above all we had to begin to mend the damage, hurt and pain that had been inflicted on our people, not just by our enemies but sometimes by our own people. We had to move from a position of defending to mending.

Facing the challenge to manage change

So in 2004 a small team of UPRG members was set the task by the UDA, with the knowledge and experience we had gained so far, to identify a way forward again and engage the British Government to seek its support. We had a clean sheet to work from, but we were clear that if we were to achieve anything, make progress, our own government would have to be the key to kick-starting the process. We knew that the Irish Government would be willing to assist us but that our community would not countenance help from what at that time in the process was still viewed as the enemy. Whatever we did we would make sure that when we looked over our shoulders there would still be people there with us. We could not make the fatal mistake the UDP had made. It would be a waste of time.

After conflict comes criminality

Talks continued with whoever would talk to us. When we made progress and took a few steps forward there would always be something that happened, some violent incident on the interface or a leak to the press that would knock us back a few more steps. We soon realised that there were criminals in our own ranks, not just those who saw opportunities for their own constituencies but some who were prepared to go to any lengths to stop progress. They could see that if we made any headway they would lose their power base and in some instances that power base was very profitable. It was clear there were those who engaged, during the conflict, for political reasons but there were also those, albeit a minority, who engaged for criminal reasons. The next two years saw us working to identify those criminals and deal with them, and indeed that continues to this day. At the same time we had to demonstrate to our own Government, to the international world and most importantly to our own community, that we were sincere, that we could manage the process and that we could deliver.

The dogs in the street have learnt new skills

A major issue or barrier to successful transformation is the negative use of the press and media by those who have learnt the art of counter-insurgency techniques over the years of conflict, whether they be security forces, opponents, the dogs in the street or whoever. There are still those who peddle these skills and use them to criminalise and demonise my constituency and community. The problem is that this legacy of the past, this tactic or war, is still being used in peacetime, in the most discriminatory way, to halt forward movement and progress. This kind of attack doesn't just hit its target but stigmatises a whole community and reinforces the 'bad people' syndrome, destroys community confidence and most importantly prevents people giving the essential support that is required for this community to move on into a new future. It destroys trust, prevents social capital being built and makes social cohesion impossible.

The last piece of the jigsaw

Against all the odds the UPRG began to make headway. The UDA leadership demonstrated a large degree of cohesion and this had a stabilising effect on the whole political scene. This progress cannot be underestimated. This was the largest paramilitary organisation in Europe at one time, and the most unstable and anarchic. We were beginning to see the fruit of years of work, to become proactive, stop being reactionary, set goals, measure progress and strategise. It was all coming together, the DUP were preparing to go into Government with Sinn Féin in a power sharing assembly at Stormont and the UDA was offering to develop strategies for peace. It would prove to be the last piece of the jigsaw. This is what the Ulster Unionist party couldn't deliver through the UDP and what made the Belfast agreement incomplete.

Leverage for peace

It was on this basis that the UPRG went to the British Government and put it to them that they needed to support this progress and help the UPRG and UDA to consolidate that progress. We believed we could convince the UDA to engage with all necessary structures if the government would support the UDA in a structured strategy to end all Para militarism, and all that came with it. The only thing that we couldn't deliver would be decommissioning. They would need to talk to the UDA directly on that subject. What we could deliver was a stable community and participation of this constituency in

efforts to build peace through meaningful engagement at all levels. This in turn would create a positive political climate for the DUP and Sinn Fein to form a power sharing assembly.

Our Government Says NO

If this had been ten years earlier, resources and support would not have been a problem – in fact they would have broken our arms for such a suggestion! Sadly the offer was turned down. We couldn't believe it. Their explanation was that the governments could no longer do the things they did ten years ago: the Belfast agreement and 9/11 had changed everything for good. They had indeed done more for the Provisional IRA and UVF but things had changed forever.

What the government did do though, in recognition of the need to continue this vital work, was to suggest a series of meeting with the Social Development Minister at the time, David Hanson MP, together with his civil servants, to see if we could come up with a way in which the Loyalist community could buy into the new changes and strategies the government had embarked upon, in particular its Neighbourhood Renewal programme. This seemed possible, owing to the fact that Loyalist communities were, by and large, in the top ten per cent of the most deprived in Northern Ireland. It was in these areas that the most killings took place. It was from them that the most ex-prisoners and ex-combatants came. They were the front line. The social conditions in which these people lived were a major reason why they got involved in violent conflict in the first place, and deprivation was what Neighbourhood Renewal was designed to address.

It has always been our analysis that the UDA was a community response to political instability and that if we achieved political stability then the UDA would be absorbed back into the community from whence it came. It was different from a typical military organisation with central structures and control. This was one of the reasons why it was so chaotic. It was a reflection of the feelings in the community it came from and was a community organisation. Normal military approaches to demilitarisation didn't apply. Thinking that they did has been *the* big mistake that peace builders, governments and politicians have made for years. The UDA must be dealt with by social means.

After two years of negotiating and debating with the Government on the way forward, the Civil servants agreed to develop a community development project that would deal with the myriad of social ills that impacted on this community. In the round, this community was identified and labelled as 'Hard to Reach': hard to reach because they are the last bastion of resistance to a united Ireland and the Provisional IRA. They are also the community who followed when the call came from our political leaders, in particular the Rev. Ian Paisley. They were always told to resist any change – it was a Government plot to sell us out – and have nothing to do with Human or Civil Rights: they are Irish Republican weapons to destroy us. But as we all see in the real politics being played out, the politicians moved on without this community. They have been left behind.

Of course the truth is that human and civil rights are the very components required for any community to play a role as equals in the 21st century. My community will be playing catch up, again.

Some people don't want peace?

The meetings with the civil servants eventually bore fruit. It was agreed to fund a community development project entitled Loyalism in Transition and it would be a project contributing to the overall conflict transformation of the Northern Ireland society. It came to be known as the CTI or Conflict Transformation Initiative. We were warned that, come devolution and the appointment of a local minister, it would be challenged, especially if the Minister for Social Development was a member of the SDLP, an Irish nationalist, middle class and Catholic political party.

As 'sod's law' would have it, the Minister appointed for Social Development was Margaret Ritchie, a member of the Catholic SDLP. Within days of getting into office she announced that it was her intention to 'pull' the project, unless the UDA decommissioned within 60 days.

She fulfilled her promise on the 31 October 2007. The UDA never decommissioned. Members of the UPRG met the Minister to relay the fact that this was a community development project and not a 'money for guns' exercise, and was certainly not a UDA project.

A member of staff from the project took the case to court to apply for leave for a judicial review of her decision based on four points. The Judge found that the Minister had a case to answer on all of those points and reinstated the project for full hearing. The Minister has requested the postponement of the Judicial Review three times and the full hearing will be held sometime in June 2008.

Is my section of the Loyalist community going to be allowed to play a part in building a new, peaceful Northern Ireland or does the existing process need losers and are we the losers?

The story continues...

CCTS SEMINAR, THURSDAY JUNE 5th, 2008

10am – 4pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, NW1 2BJ.

WHOSE WAR, WHOSE PEACE?

We often talk about 'stakeholders' in an armed conflict or a peace process, but not all those who have an interest in the conduct or ending of a war participate in the fighting. Those who get a 'seat at the table' are usually only those who did. They are likely to pursue their own interests in negotiations and while they have the power to bring the fighting to an end the terms they set for the 'peace' may exclude other interests and thus not provide the basis for a stable future that meets the needs of all members of society.

So whose peace will it be? Who has the moral right to be considered a stakeholder? How in practice can undue powers be curbed? How can all those who have a right to be considered get a voice and be involved in building the future?

These questions are fundamental to our work for conflict transformation. They inevitably involve us in intricate political and moral issues. This seminar will relate key ethical and political concepts to experience and provide an opportunity for participants to explore the implications for their own work.

Our guest paper-writer and presenter will be Oliver Richmond, whose primary area of expertise is in peace and conflict theory, and he has recently finished a book project on concepts of peace and their implicit usages in International Relations theory (*Peace in International Relations*, to be published this year by Routledge). In 2005 he published a book entitled *The Transformation of Peace*, in which he examined the conceptualisation of peace, and in particular the construction of the 'liberal peace', in post-conflict zones. He has been involved in fieldwork in Cyprus and Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Nepal and Kashmir, as well as in the Eastern Congo region.

Oliver's paper and its presentation will be followed by plenary and group discussion in what we hope will be a lively and stimulating day. Please write to ccts@c-r.org for further details and to register.

Just wasting our time? An open letter to peacebuilders

Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina have just published an article overviewing the achievements and limitations of the peacebuilding field. They identify a number of steps which could help realize its full potential, at a moment which they describe as "a window of opportunity" for peacebuilders. The article can be found on the Internet at www.lettertopeacebuilders.ning.com and can be downloaded in full or in parts. Readers are encouraged to respond via the group website, where comments can be shared and discussed.

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