

**OPENING SPEECH BY DR KIM HOWELLS AT THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AND CONCILIATION RESOURCES EVENT: 'PEACEBUILDING WORKS: A BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY'**

I am delighted to welcome you all to the FCO this evening for this event to mark the tenth birthday of Conciliation Resources. It provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the virtues of partnership between Government and civil society in developing more effective approaches to peacebuilding.

Preventing and resolving conflict is one of the Government's strategic international priorities, and is at the core of the FCO's work in much of the world. I hardly need to set out for this audience the rationale for our involvement in work on conflict. There is a moral case: our wish to avoid the terrible human cost involved – lives lost, communities divided, livelihoods destroyed. And there is case based on self-interest: the consequences to the UK of regional instability, economic collapse, refugee flows, and havens of lawlessness in which organised crime or terrorism can flourish.

The title of this event today, 'Peacebuilding Works', is an optimistic one, an optimism that I hope is well placed. I believe the overall decline in armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War can be attributed to a higher level of international engagement, to more preventive diplomacy, and to the increasing sophistication of international responses to conflict, particularly peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

But there have also been significant reverses. There are too many examples of countries relapsing into conflict as international attention wanes. Haiti, Liberia, and East Timor have all shown us the dangers of giving insufficient attention to peacebuilding, and of failing to address continuing causes of conflict.

To avoid these relapses, we need to understand the factors that lead to success. In this context, it is worth mentioning the valuable role that Conciliation Resources plays in bringing together a range of experts and practitioners to increase understanding of best practice in dealing with conflict. Their work to

draw together the lessons of past successes and failures ensures that we in Government are better placed to plan and implement future peacebuilding activity.

I take a broad view of what the FCO's work on conflict should involve. Although our diplomacy most often hits the headlines in the heat of a major crisis, we fully recognise that we need to focus efforts just as much on conflict prevention, and on the long term peacebuilding that will prevent conflict re-emerging.

The FCO has a central role to play in that peacebuilding and conflict prevention activity, and it may be helpful to briefly break down some of the key areas of work in which we are engaged.

First I would highlight the need for rigorous conflict analysis in developing our policies, in particular understanding the potential causes of conflict, and the actors who may seek to exploit these. We want to identify earlier those countries that may be at risk of conflict, and to develop effective strategies to counter the drivers of instability. With its network of Embassies, high-level political access, and the regional expertise of its staff, the FCO is well placed to contribute to this analysis. But of course we only have part of the picture, and we welcome the opportunity to test our analysis against that of others such as NGOs who see different parts of the picture, for example through their work with civil society.

A second key area of FCO work is in our traditional core business of diplomacy and mediation. Participating in peace processes, engaging directly with political leaders, and building international coalitions of support are all central parts of our business. Again, we work best in partnership with others. Dialogue between governments can often be effectively supported by more informal contacts involving civil society, in which NGOs can play a key facilitating role. And understanding the complex dynamics of peace processes is another area where lessons learned in one place can usefully be applied in others. We look forward to the outcome of Conciliation Resources' new project

on 'Sanctions, Conditionalities and Incentives in Peace Processes' as a practical source of guidance on what works.

A third area of focus for the FCO is building international capacity and tools for handling conflict. We are working through a wide variety of organisations, whether it is at the UN in the Security Council or the new Peacebuilding Commission, or at the EU in the development of military and civilian crisis management capabilities. And we also work to ensure this is underpinned by international standards and norms, in areas such as human rights or the management of natural resources, as a means of holding governments to account.

Our work is designed to ensure effective international political engagement, and practical intervention where necessary. We are working with others to develop best practice and practical capability in new areas, such as effective support to the rule of law in countries affected by conflict. And we are also actively working to improve the UK's capacity to contribute, for example through the new Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, or in the work that the FCO is doing with UK police forces to make international policing a core part of their work.

In all these efforts, partnerships and cooperation are key. In recognition of this, as many of you will be aware, in 2001 we established the Conflict Prevention Pools. The Pools were designed to improve joined-up policy making and spending on conflict across Government, recognising the important but distinct roles of FCO, DFID and the MOD.

And outside Government, we are committed to a strong and open partnership with NGOs working in the field of conflict. The collaboration that we have had with Conciliation Resources over the last ten years is an excellent example of what can be achieved. To take just one example, our collaboration on peacebuilding in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict shows how partnership can add value. We have provided financial support, both directly and through the conflict pools. We have helped to improve access by hosting a number of

meetings and study visits involving Georgian and Abhaz officials, journalists and civic actors.

But it is important to note that this is a two-way relationship, a partnership. The FCO has provided funding to support Conciliation Resources' work but we have also benefited through a dialogue on policy that has emerged from Conciliation Resources' first hand and practical experience of peacebuilding.

I very much admire the work of Conciliation Resources and I am delighted to be able to host this event in recognition of its achievements over the last 10 years. Thank you.