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Background Brief

The Arab revolutions and challenges for peacebuilding

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The Arab revolutions pose a difficult challenge for peacebuilding initiatives in the region. How can non-governmental organizations in the Arab world participate in these social and political changes and help consolidate democratic rule as oppressive political structures are reconfigured into a social order based on social justice, non-violence, and human rights? This paper will try to map the short-, medium- and long-term challenges facing NGOs already working on peacebuilding and what could be a nascent Arab peace movement.¹ It also explores the major institutional needs of the peacebuilding field in the Arab region.

INTRODUCTION

The revolutions reverberating throughout the Arab world pose a series of challenges to the peacebuilding field, which include meeting the need for rigorous analysis of the transformations taking place and the roles that local and international organizations can play in helping to consolidate these fundamentally democratic, grassroots revolutions.

Peace is not just the absence of violence, as John Paul Lederach points out, but is also related to the concepts of justice, mercy and truth. There exists a deep connection between peacebuilding and social justice. An occupied people not in revolt might seem peaceful, although they are not. Violence might not be apparent but is embedded in structural conditions or in social relations that conceal the gravity of the conflict. According to Lederach, relationships are the basis of both conflict and its long-term solution. We cannot understand conflict without looking at the relationships binding individuals to each other and to the institutions within their environment. Peacebuilding seeks to transform existing relations based on power, oppression or misunderstanding into ones based on mutual respect, universal rights and understanding. It is a transformational process that is tied to the positive value of social justice.

Justice, according to Lederach, involves “the pursuit of restoration, of rectifying wrongs, of creating right relationships based on equity and fairness. Pursuing justice involves advocacy for those harmed, for open acknowledgement of the wrongs committed, and for making things right. Mercy, on the other hand, involves compassion, forgiveness, and a new start. Mercy is oriented toward supporting persons who have committed injustices, encouraging them to change and move on.”²

The “Arab Spring” was triggered by police brutality – the case of Mohammad Abu Azizi³ in Tunisia -- but rapidly acquired a democratic spirit. These revolutions did not gain momentum by invoking Islam or nationalism. Slogans such as “justice, freedom, and human dignity” were the main catch phrases taken up by millions. Remarkably, given the decades of sometimes violent repression by Arab dictatorships of their populations, the scope of emergency laws and reach of ubiquitous security forces, the string of uprisings have been text-book examples of non-violent, direct action.

In terms of power relations, the “Arab Spring” also became an act of asserting the ascendancy and sovereignty of the collective, of citizens, and of replacing an elitist, force-backed hierarchical structure with a flatter, more organic form. While reflecting the specific nature of the political struggle in each country, “The people want to bring down the regime”, was a rallying cry used in every demonstration in the Arab world. In Lebanon it was directed at sectarian structures, in Jordan at authoritarian ones and so on.

The broadest common denominator among these demonstrations, according to Gilbert Ashkar, was a grand social coalition against tyranny and corruption.⁴ In effect, the major demands were directed towards dismantling emergency laws and abolishing arbitrary detention, torture and curbing the influence of the security apparatus. Equally important have been the demands for accountable, transparent and participatory governance to hold the corrupt accountable and instating a democratic transparent process.

The beginnings of political legitimacy and the legitimate use of power resides in responding to demands voiced by people in the square, like the ‘agora’ of the ancient Athenians. The slogan’s philosophy is simple and direct, it is the people’s will that matters and what they want is what is legitimate. Peacebuilding encompasses a range of processes and approaches required for

transformation towards more sustainable relationships, governance modes and structures⁵. Accordingly, the question that these revolutions pose for peacebuilding activists and organizations is how they can assist these popular movements in developing and consolidating democratic structures and processes and how to prevent a return of authoritarian control.

Peacebuilding involves the construction of legal and human rights institutions and designing processes of dispute resolution that can prevent future conflicts from arising. Hence, what Lederach calls “sustainable reconciliation” involves a long-term commitment to a *process* that includes investment, gathering of resources and materials, architecture and planning, coordination of resources and labour, laying solid foundations, construction of walls and roofs, finishing work and ongoing maintenance. Lederach also emphasizes that peacebuilding centrally involves the transformation of relationships. "Sustainable reconciliation" requires both structural and relational transformations⁶

CHALLENGES FACING PEACEBUILDING NGOS IN THE ARAB WORLD

The “Arab Spring” unleashed a wave of social transformation that peace activists could only dream of a few years ago. The fact that the revolutions were pursued in the spirit of non-violence shows that those concepts and practices are becoming mainstream and are changing the political culture. The courageous, peaceful movement of people facing oppressive governments is a tremendous victory for the peace movement in the Arab world. Now, the question is how peacebuilding organizations can consolidate this positive opening up of political space and assist in ongoing democratic change

In our analysis of such a role we will use Lederach’s integrated framework of peacebuilding to point to short-term and long-term strategies and challenges. Lederach is particularly important because he integrates structural elements and an interactive model that can capture the dynamics of peacebuilding in the Arab world with its multiple layers and players. It is very important that

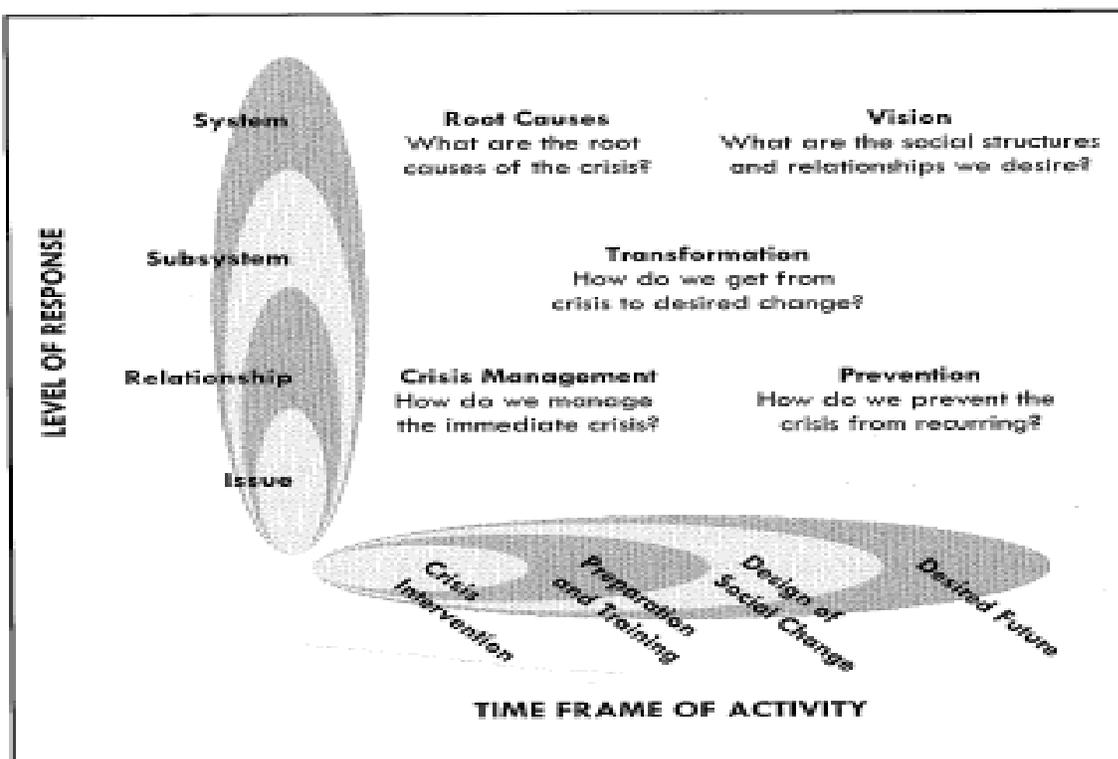


Figure 7. An Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding.

NGOs understand their own capacities, potential capacities and limitations for effecting change. For example, some organizations are best equipped to intervene in short-term crises, while others are best suited to work on long-term strategies aimed at changing structural conditions underlying conflicts.

SHORT-TERM CHALLENGES

Protection of citizens against tyrannical government

Human rights are intimately linked to the dynamics of peace and conflict. The systematic denial of human rights, in addition to continued poor performance of institutions, increases risks of political instability and widespread violence. In situations of actual gross violations of human rights, torture and denial of basic rights, how can we understand the role of peacebuilding organizations? Recent developments in Syria have involved the violent crackdown by police officers and military units on non-violent protestors, resulting in thousands of injured, mass killings, and the arbitrary imprisonment of thousands. In the circumstances, peacebuilding organizations have to keep in mind that the problem is one of minimizing imminent or ongoing violence as well as transformation at a deeper level, which requires upholding social justice, political and civil rights. Interventions cannot be a sedative primarily intended to relax the “conflict.”

Role: *Watchdog -- Promoting universal standards for both government and demonstrators, provide tools of non-violent action, advocacy and reaching out to global opinion.*

NGOs are not political entities, although their work can at times be political in nature. During the Egyptian demonstrations, manuals on non-violent action that were based on previous international non-violent struggles were printed massively and were used by the demonstrators. In crisis situations NGOs should be upholding universal values through participation in advocacy groups, media interventions, and lobbying international organizations to encourage and promote the application of international law and legal protection of civilians.

Sectarian and ethnic violence

The collapse of government structures and the disintegration of state security systems increase risks of sectarian violence in divided societies. Two continuing political transitions in the Arab world are relevant -- the Egyptian case, with its relatively low sectarian tensions and low levels of sectarian violence, and Iraq's descent into what has amounted to an intense civil war between various Sunni and Shia factions.

Sectarian violence in the Arab world is not purely a religious issue. In Iraq or Lebanon or Syria, the politicization of religious identity is striking. Peacebuilding interventions in these contexts

have to take into consideration that violence is not necessarily stemming from religious intolerance and cannot solely be resolved with inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue. In Iraq the politicization of Shiite and Sunni identities, extensive patronage systems, fluid factional alliances and a lack of effective state structures have all helped fuel sectarian violence. Finding political solutions that address “governance” issues related to sharing resources, political influence and communal representation become essential to any workable solution.

Role: *Direct response, alliance of community leaders, religious leaders, and grassroots movements. Defuse tensions through mass demonstrations for tolerance, community appeals and media campaigns.*

Example: The Arab Group for Christian Muslim Dialogue⁷ can be seen as an interesting peacebuilding initiative that brings prominent Arab Muslims and Christian religious scholars, community leaders and intellectuals from various political and social backgrounds into an ongoing communal dialogue. The group engages people in faith in dialogue, but focuses on practical and political issues related to sustaining a pluralist culture of tolerance, rather than being confined to theological debates. Such kinds of groups can be effective in intervening in direct actions to end sectarian disputes. It is precisely because of its traditional makeup: i.e. not experts on peacebuilding but community leaders who have influence in their respective communities and can affect change directly. Due to its diverse make up and its connections to different political parties and religious communities, the Arab group was capable of keeping dialogue channels open in Lebanon in times of crisis such as during the sectarian tensions in 2008 when military clashes occurred between Hezbollah and pro-government forces. The group also intervened after the church bombing in Egypt in 2005, bringing Muslim and Christian leaders to Cairo. Because of its makeup it is capable of accessing community and political leaders and influencing the public discourse.

MEDIUM-TERM CHALLENGES

Another challenge facing peacebuilding organizations and CSOs in the Arab world is the tension between their supposed neutrality and their political responsibility. In complicated situations where democratic structures have not been consolidated and where the social body is systematically oppressed by state and foreign actors, the transformation of conflict becomes a fundamentally political activity. Medium-term challenges are therefore related to how to go about supporting the consolidation of transparent governance and participatory democracy to the point where differences and conflicts are being negotiated in a legitimate and functional political structure that recognizes and protects individual and human rights.

In this regard, peacebuilding organizations such as women’s, human rights and even development organizations can be seen to have converging medium-term goals. Legitimate, participatory government is valuable in its own right as a component of and contributor to political stability, economic development and protection of human and individual rights.

Engagement in these struggles brings civil society organizations into politics as they enter the public debate regarding the shape of the constitution, nature of governance and new social contracts binding citizens to their state.

With the collapse of autocracies, NGOs have greater space for action and new opportunities to use participatory methods to formulate and persist in demanding reforms that would have been impossible to envisage in the past. Broad coalitions with other civil society groups on progressive agendas such as women rights, judicial reforms, and other sensitive political reforms should be initiated.

The consolidation of participatory democracy

The Arab revolutions have resulted in some stunning initial successes in achieving more liberties and in claiming greater space for political activism. Within this new space some of the challenges are to raise awareness about the political process, democracy, electoral processes, and constitutional reform and to help raise the standards of political debate.

Consolidating participatory democracy involves awareness-raising related to concepts of citizenship, political participation, rule of law, and responsibilities and rights. In addition, organizations need to play bigger roles as watchdogs, working with other civil society forces to ensure that the political process is going smoothly both in terms of seeing that basic liberties are being protected and that transparency is being practiced.

It is apparent from the Arab experience that while civil society organizations and groups can survive and sometimes make some headway under authoritarian rule, they cannot really thrive in the absence of democracy, tolerance of competing views, and the rule of law.⁸ It is equally apparent that healthy democracies cannot exist without their own healthy civil societies that at times complement the work of the state and at times acts as a counterbalance against indifference, inaction or tyranny.

Building a vibrant and healthy civil society involves awareness raising, community organizing, assisting unions, education, artists, cultural and political groups in order to create entities that actively participate in and substantially contribute to formal and informal democratic processes, as well as to a more general supportive environment for democracy. After these Arab revolutions, if civil society is incapable of organizing itself, the void will be filled by the authoritarian state and the old relations of power will re-emerge. To prevent that happening major reforms are needed to create the political and economic conditions for the rise of a strong civil society. Non-governmental organizations are an integral part of Arab society, are probably the best organized during these sensitive times and hence have a huge responsibility to act to organize and empower people in the pursuit of broad public social, political and economic change.⁹

Organizations need to work on these specific issues:

Constitutional amendments: freedom of association and human rights

The exercise of freedom of association has been at the heart of the struggle for democratic governance all around the globe. Freedom of expression and conscience cannot be exercised or defended without the basic right of freedom of association. The continued existence of emergency laws that negate people's rights to freedom of assembly and the formation of organizations, unions and meetings of political or cultural nature contribute to states of perpetual instability.

Restricting the work of civil society organizations has been a pattern practiced globally by many governments through repressive laws that restrict their work, financing and internal governance. Arab civil society should use this time of change to entrench guarantees of liberties as part of the transition to healthy democracy. The International Center for Not-for Profit Law (ICNL)¹⁰ has mapped a typology of legal barriers facing civil society organizations worldwide. Many of these barriers exist in the Arab world.

1. Inability or extra difficulty in registering and acquiring the advantage of a legal personality: It is generally hard for Arab civil society organizations to register as legal entities and there are limits on freedom of association. Processes involve state security, social affairs or other government ministries and are intentionally difficult.
2. Inability to receive foreign funding or to raise domestic funding: In order for organizations to receive foreign funding, they are generally required to get the written approval of a government ministry. This is used as a coercive measure against organizations that do not toe the line or transgress the limits of the politically permissible.
3. Arbitrary termination or dissolution: Governments in the Arab world have extraordinary powers to terminate or dissolve an organization they deem a threat to national security or having a foreign agenda. The terms of dissolution are intentionally ambiguous.
4. Inability to advocate or work on certain issues: NGO laws prohibit associations and organizations from engaging in political activities. Organizations and NGOs are pushed legally to play humanitarian or social development roles rather than engage in political debates or mobilization. Governments have the ability to shut down an organization if it finds its mandate similar to a political party or if the issue targeted by the organization has a particularly political bent. This makes the work of NGOs hard as peacebuilding organizations are pushed towards limiting their activities to inter-faith dialogue or projects that are not intended to foster structural change at a legal or political level.
5. Governments have the ability to monitor the actions of NGOs: Even after proper registration, governments have the ability to check, oversee and interfere in the internal activities of NGOs. Governments can examine an organization's records anytime the security apparatus deems it necessary, therefore breaching freedoms of speech and association.

6. Imposing criminal penalties on activists and members of NGOs: Governments are still capable of imposing penalties and sending activists to jail due to their organization's work. Huge fines in addition to prison sentences can be meted out to the founder or manager of an association if it "threatens national unity" or "public order" or "the civil peace". This is a major constraint on organizations working on human rights and peacebuilding.¹¹

There exists deep connections between human rights, peacebuilding and social justice and each are separately and jointly affected by arbitrary governance, intentional interference and unjustified security crackdowns.

Role: *Advocate for the respect of human rights, amending constitutions to reflect the sacredness of freedom of association and expression.*

Be part of a broad coalition of NGOs and political parties and unions who have an interest in fighting for basic rights. Spread awareness of human rights as an integral part of peace education. Engage in setting standards.

Political movements: A dangerous vacuum

Decades of autocratic governance have decimated homegrown political movements in the Arab world. One of the striking aspects of the "Arab Spring" has been its leaderless nature. This was probably one of the reasons the regimes did not know how to respond. At the same time, it poses a dangerous situation for democratic strengthening in the medium-term. Cases definitely differ between countries. Tunisia, for example, has a strong civil society, unions and syndicates and a high rate of education compared to Egypt or Libya.

The current political vacuum is generally being filled by Islamic parties, which tend to be better organized than their secular rivals. However, democracy requires a diversity of parties, collective action groups and organizations. How can we see the role of civil society organizations in this political environment and what is their place? While non-governmental organizations would compromise perceptions of their neutrality or broad inclusivity by engaging in coalitions with political parties or movements, they can play a critical role in building the capacity of labour unions, syndicates and other civil society organizations to deal with the substance of political issues and contribute to better-informed dialogue.

Role: *Build capacity of labour movements, syndicates and social movements through: 1) awareness raising, 2) training courses on transitional justice, governance and human rights. Promote and engage in broad coalitions regarding specific issues such as constitutional amendments, women rights, criminal prosecution of members of the old regimes and institutional reforms.*

Accountability in governance

The revolutions have led to an unprecedented call for accountability in governance. In fact, demonstrators in Egypt and Tunisia are still calling for a legal process that investigates corruption, brutality and torture and holds officials accountable. In the struggle to found stable societies that have strong political and democratic institutions, the necessity of forging an honest and credible judiciary system is indispensable to establishing a “just” society where people understand that their rights are protected.

Role: *NGOs working on peacebuilding have a duty in any post-conflict period to rectify relationships and uphold justice through encouraging a national process of truth finding. This would prepare the ground for reconciliation and long-term sustainable peace. Organizations working on peacebuilding should provide their experience in transitional justice, restorative justice and reconciliation by acting in the capacities of educator and bridgebuilder between the different parties.*

Transparency in governance

Accountability in democratic systems is provided, in part, by regular, free and fair elections. Civil society organizations are faced with medium-term challenges to monitor and make sure that elections that provide opportunities for political alternance are being held. Civil society, through organizing and sustaining various types of public interest groups, can play an integral part in monitoring electoral structures and processes and in advocating for accountability. Public meetings can be an effective tool in encouraging citizens to express their opinions and in helping them articulate their expectations of government. Open, public councils and traditional deliberative meetings in villages, cities and neighborhoods should be encouraged. Organizations working on peacebuilding and conflict transformation should encourage these forms of assemblies, town hall meetings and public debates, to assist citizens in identifying and articulating their needs, in developing better understanding of the political process and enhancing communication between governments and people.

Role: *Encouraging accountability and upholding social values as standards that officials have to hold to is essentially “community organizing”. NGOs at this time need to intervene with churches, mosques, municipalities and neighborhood committees to forge a sense of ownership both on local and national levels. Through these local committees organizations have an awareness raising role in introducing to communities concepts of good governance, elections, political standards and democracy. Furthermore, they can have a facilitative role in bringing elected officials and community representatives into open consultative dialogue processes.*

Transitional justice

Transitional justice refers to a process of political transformation where justice is upheld as a necessary stepping stone for social healing, repairing what is otherwise a broken justice system and rebuilding social trust. Healing, repairing and rebuilding trust prepares the ground for a more peaceful and democratic future. At the heart of the notion of transitional justice is a process in which rectifying social relations does not solely depend on the application of criminal justice. The main aim is to enable a society's transition from a state where human rights violations were considered common and normal into a community of justice, where social relations are based on a new model of respect for human dignity.

Arab societies are clearly facing a period of transition where many questions regarding the abuses of the old regimes are emerging. Should officers who committed gross violations of human rights be prosecuted? What kind of legal process should be put in place to deal with police brutality in the past decades? Mechanisms for transitional justice that investigate truth, provide public acknowledgements and reparations are necessary for reconciliation.

There exists a deficiency of restorative and transitional justice experiences in the region. Morocco has experience in enacting a truth-finding commission to investigate the "bullet years", a term given to the years between 1956 and the 1990s. However, that process was not complete and still has many problems. The lack of such a model puts more responsibility on peacebuilders in transition countries such as Tunisia, Iraq, and Egypt. For example, following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqi tribunals were marked by political manipulation and a lack of transparency. The process of "de-baathification" remained problematic, as the commission judged people not according to their past actions but according to Baath party membership. Lebanon has not been able, in more than 20 years since the end of the civil war, to start a process of truth and reconciliation. Memories and myths arising from the civil war memory are still taboo and cannot be publicly and systematically investigated or challenged. Clearly, there exists a regional need to strengthen such processes and to benefit from comparable international experiences such as South Africa and the former Yugoslavia.

As has been noted previously, the Arab revolutions were specifically directed against the brutality of the regimes, emergency laws, and torture. Demonstrations until today in Egypt demand accountability and the pursuit of legal remedies against participants in the old regime. It is quite clear that people feel that huge injustices have been perpetrated against them. Bypassing critical processes of seeking justice will contribute to long-term instability.

Role: *NGOs working on peacebuilding are required then to lend their expertise in this field to developing frameworks for transitional justice that involve truth-finding commissions, reparations to victims and institutional reforms of security sectors to ensure that such violations cannot and will not be repeated.*

LONG-TERM CHALLENGES

Sustainable peace involves a set of developmental goals that include poverty reduction, institutionalization of democratic practices and processes, and the protection of civil liberties and human rights. These converging agendas require collaboration between different development agencies, NGOs and political parties.¹² The Arab revolutions are a step towards a better future in the Arab world; however, the region has a complicated set of developmental challenges that if not properly dealt with will produce long-term instability and conflicts. In the final analysis, if democratic governance fails to respond to the severe developmental challenges facing the Arab world, the region will continue to move in circles. This section will try to summarize the main connections between the quest for peace and the developmental challenges facing the Arab World.

Developmental and environmental challenges

The Arab World is witnessing a structural economic crisis of sporadic growth, high unemployment and the persistence of poverty, which all contribute to human insecurity. Arab countries grew by less than 0.5 per cent annually between 1980 and 2004. The majority are service-based economies and depend on either tourism, other low value-added industries or oil. Industrial, manufacturing and agricultural sectors are weak.¹³ According to the Arab Human Development Report (2005), the average unemployment rate for the Arab world was about 14.4 per cent of the labour force, 8.1 per cent higher than the average rate globally. Unemployment is still growing at a rate of 1.8 per cent annually.¹⁴

The persistence of high unemployment and structural poverty will continue to be a major long-term challenge. According to the AHDR, 20.3 per cent of the Arab population was living under the poverty line by 2005. This amounts to 34.6 million people living on 2 dollars a day or less. For example, Lebanon and Syria had 28.6 per cent and 30 per cent poverty rates, respectively, while Egypt and Yemen's poverty rates were 41 per cent and 59.5 per cent, respectively.¹⁵ Analyzing impoverishment using the Human Poverty Index (HPI), which takes into consideration longevity, knowledge and standards of living, we find that insecurity "undercuts health, education, and standards of living, all of which puts in question the effectiveness of the state in providing and ensuring access to the basic necessities of life."¹⁶

The region is also facing mounting challenges when it comes to food security and climate change. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Arab world witnessed an increase in the number of those facing malnutrition from 19.8 million in 1990 to 25.5 million in 2004.¹⁷ Climate change, particularly increased desertification and general scarcity, has the potential for negatively affecting millions in the future.¹⁸

The persistence of low human, economic and social indicators and the shrinking of the middle class have important consequences for the region. Persistence of poverty, lack of development and environmental pressures can all contribute to political and social crises that threaten long-term social and political stability. A thriving and expanding middle class is necessary for building a healthy political system that is democratic, accountable and able to prevent or mitigate destructive conflicts.

War, occupation and military intervention

The Arab world is still witnessing extensive and ongoing conflicts that involve foreign military intervention, occupation and the denial of basic rights such as self-determination. The occupation in Palestine denies Palestinians their basic right to self-determination and freedom. The continuation of the occupation, the existence of the settlement movement and settlement policies demonstrate the viability of conquering land by force; something that became illegal under international law after World War II. At the same time, actions taken by Arab-led regimes such as Khartoum's military campaigns against southern and Darfuri opponents and allegations of ethnic cleansing and genocide pose extreme political challenges to an Arab peace movement in terms of lobbying, advocacy and inter-Arab coalition building to oppose such abuses. The threat of sectarian violence and religious civil wars is also present in Iraq, Lebanon and now Syria. This extreme volatility is contagious and can have major spillover effects.

The continuation of military campaigns, regional political instability and occupation spark resistance and cycles of violence and counter-violence. Such events are detrimental to human security in the region and development efforts. Violence results in massive displacement of people across borders (such as the case of Iraq), puts economic and political pressure on neighbouring countries and destroys the social fabric of local communities. At the same time, military threats and continued militarization is used by Arab governments to justify abrogating the rights of individuals under the pretext of fighting terrorism or protecting national security. Episodes of violence also result in the militarization of local communities, bringing social problems such as child soldiers and violence against women, in addition to the destruction of infrastructure, educational systems and the creation of long-term sectarian and inter-communal hatred.

Role: *In any long-term intervention, NGOs working on peacebuilding in the Arab world have to work on building regional frameworks for collaboration. The Arab League is an example of a regional institution that can -- if the political will can be generated -- play an important role in political and economic stability in the region. Increased dialogue and understanding between and among governments and non-governmental actors of common security needs in the region is essential to building stability. NGOs have to look at long-term regional solutions to issues such as increasing water shortages, border conflicts, economic integration and climate change.*

ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

Networking, cooperation and integration of peacebuilding priorities

While many experts tend to use the acronym MENA as shorthand for the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab revolutions have given rise to new terms – first a “Jasmine Revolution” in Tunisia and then an “Arab spring” for the entire Arab world. This popular usage points to the redefinition of a socio-political zone that is both interactive and diverse.¹⁹ This interconnection between Arab revolutions should be reflected in expanding and upgrading connections among peacebuilding organizations and initiatives across the region. This will necessitate overcoming the deficit of interaction between civil society organizations within each country and across the Arab world -- a reflection of the extreme fragmentation of initiatives by NGOs and other issues such as competition for funding and a lack of donor coordination. The fragmentation extends to relations between peacebuilding NGOs and other sectors such as labour unions and different social movements. The lack of communication between isolated initiatives leads to duplicated interventions and rarely allows for learning processes to occur and be shared. Peacebuilding work is not benefiting from cross-fertilization and revitalization, nor are organizations building up a stock of documented experiences and lessons learnt to increase effectiveness and push the field forward.

Establishing broad peacebuilding coalitions is necessary to attain the critical mass needed to influence policy agendas of regional and international players. For example, in Lebanon, where civil society is relatively well established due to the marginal freedom of expression under the sectarian ‘democratic’ system, during 2005-2006 a pattern of sectarian mobilization stoked fears of another full-blown civil war. Civil society responded by forming the Khalas campaign, a broad coalition of organizations opposed to a resumption of violence that acted as an advocacy group to influence political decision making and popular opinion.²⁰ The movement was a relative success as it managed to mobilize thousands and reintroduce a different discourse to the polarized media. The campaign was criticized, however, for its inability to effectively shape a viable solution to the crisis. Nevertheless the campaign showed that NGOs could mobilize collectively for a specific ‘political’ cause, especially when peace is at stake.²¹

To move ahead with cross-regional coalition building, there is a need for redefinition of the priorities of organizations operating in this area and to reassessments of allies and networks. This requires more work on cross regional exchange programs that can bring activists and experts together in a process of exchange.

Regional research programs and knowledge production on conflict resolution and peacebuilding

The region is desperately in need of critical thinking in the field of conflict resolution and strong academic programs and research institutes, which can consolidate the knowledge of peace practitioners and help create a knowledge base of research, best practices, and training materials. The region is still a consumer of knowledge or research work done in Europe or the United States. Homegrown research institutes are essential to building sustainable movements that can evolve through shared lessons and debate. The region needs in-depth studies of local conflicts,

social structures and political context surrounding major conflict spots. This requires university programs that draw on psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and conflict resolution experts to build locally-informed knowledge and expertise.

Programs focused on peace and conflict responses are not present in Arab universities. Some universities, in collaboration with civil society organizations, have implemented conflict resolution trainings. However, these sporadic events have not been complemented by sustained academic attention or the establishment of specialized departments. The region requires a set of particular skills in grassroots research that would give practitioners a better understanding of the conflict environments they are working in. There is also a need for analysis of local peacebuilding practice within the larger contexts of international relations, international development and aid. Better basic research should foster greater programming effectiveness and accountability by providing baseline information against which outcomes can be measured.

Capacity-building and technical assistance²²

Organizational capacities are generally not studied in the region. The sporadic nature of training programs and the lack of coordination among practitioners have resulted in a patchwork of skills and practices. This, however, does not mean that the peacebuilding field is not developed. There are organizations and peace movements that have been working in the region locally for decades and have a long history of civil engagement, training and research. However, no regional mapping of the capacity of organizations in this field has been done. This lack of information results in overlap of training projects and international training programs. Some local organizations have the capacity to prepare and conduct their own training programs instead of translating and using manuals from international organizations.

Many organizations understand these challenges and have already started working on them. For example, the Lebanese Permanent Peace Movement has been trying to update its organizational capacity through developing a “Peace Academy”, which consists of a training institution, specialized in updating training manuals, conducting training courses and consolidating local training techniques and skills.

A recurring problem is reliance on project-by-project funding from international donors, rather than longer-term, institutional support that would provide financial stability and space for long-term planning and programmatic focus.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Arab people have chosen the path of democracy, freedom and human dignity. Their recent revolutions have asserted the triumph of universal values and principles (and silenced the “Arab or Islamic exception” culturalist discourse).

Now, the basic challenge facing the indigenous peacebuilding movements in the Arab World and the international organizations working there is how to help strengthen the nascent social movements with tools for change. This requires extensive work on building the capacity of local organizations. In addition it requires a political realignment. Organizations working under oppressive regimes were overwhelmingly constrained by repressive laws, arbitrary coercion and intimidation; with the collapse of the regimes, these movements and organizations have greater space for action and work. This requires departing from old ways of working such as classical inter-faith dialogue or facilitative roles into more assertive roles of pushing for constitutional and political reforms and standing up for social justice. The new reality is being shaped by new social forces, political movements and youth groups that are definite allies in the battle for participatory government and long-term development.

Based on the prior analysis we conclude the following:

- Organizations should lobby for new NGO laws which will allow organizations to advocate freely without legal and governmental obstacles. This involves abolishing financial monitoring and approval requirements for foreign funding.
- Peacebuilding organizations should participate in broad social coalition-building to defend freedom of association and constitutional amendments abolishing emergency laws and eliminating subjecting civilians to martial law and military tribunals. Democratic consolidation requires putting pressure on military councils, governments and regimes to enforce promised reforms.
- Raising awareness to democratic process, elections, rule of law and democratic governance is essential to any work on consolidating democratic transitions. This should be done through:
 - Awareness-raising campaigns regarding civil and constitutional rights.
 - Workshops in universities, schools and neighborhoods.
 - Enabling open, public forums for political debate that encourage a culture of accountability from candidates, political officials and political party representatives.
- Arab countries are witnessing a political transition that requires indepth work on transitional justice using international models. Organizations should push for:
 - Establishing truth-finding commission to investigate police brutality, regime corruption and acts of violence.
 - The prosecution of those involved in human rights abuses during past regimes. This strengthens the rule of law by sanctioning those who committed crimes by virtue of their power. Organizations have to lobby for timely, transparent and fair trials.
 - Organizations have to promote and contribute to the institutional reform of the police, the army and the judiciary. Security sector reform is an integral part of transitional justice that involves ensuring that such abuses will not occur again. Organizations can contribute through training workshops for security officers that include human and civil rights curriculum.

- The next phase of peacebuilding in the Arab world requires building broad coalitions that can set regional targets and work together towards achieving them. This requires strengthening of existing coalitions and supporting nascent networks.
 - Regional organizations such as the Arab League should be reformed to play a bigger role in peacebuilding efforts.
 - Regional NGO exchange program should be set up to create a space for dialogue between regional organizations working on similar topics.
- Support for national campaigns involving direct action for change that bring a diversity of organizations and forces together, including other types of NGOs, unions, social movements and citizens around common sets of goals.
- Regional peacebuilding research programs should be supported to increase local understanding of violent conflicts and lift the capacity of organizations working in the field. This could be done through:
 - Supporting local research institutes or research components in projects intended for implementation. Project implementation should be part of the learning process.
 - Support university programs on peacebuilding in order to create an academic depth to the field which can support initiatives with cross-cutting research from the field of international relations, sociology and development studies.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In the view of the author, for Arab NGOs the seeds of an “Arab peace movement” lie in their understanding of and involvement with grassroots interests and concerns, which also reflects the non-violent, impoverished and democratic nature of the popular uprisings. Arab organizations working on peacebuilding must start looking at themselves as part of one vibrant movement, rather than as separate entities working on fragmented projects.

² Lederach 1995, p. 20

³ Mohamed Bouzizi was a Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010 following police brutality. This sparked wide demonstrations in Tunisia and led to the ousting of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the Tunisian dictator who ruled for 23 years

⁴ Check Al-akhbar: <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/15106> Ashkar says: "The situation differs from one country to another. If we look at the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, then to the other countries, we see a broad social front, addressing two key elements: tyranny and corruption. These two elements are the lowest common denominator among all. We note that where there exists corruption but tyranny is not deep, movements spread, but did not possess the same momentum as the movements in Egypt and Tunisia. This applies to Morocco, for example, there, the sense of the existence of tyranny does not prevail, because the king made some changes towards democracy, and allowed certain freedoms, albeit limited, and announced the beginning of some reform steps. Demands in Morocco ask for political change and constitutional monarchy, but without the same momentum as in Egypt or Tunisia. Accordingly, there is a broad front of all those affected by tyranny and all those affected by corruption. The front, which suffers from corruption, a non-politicized (to some extent), suffered injustice and poverty, and moved side by side with an affluent class that is not disturbed by corruption as much as they want to see the end of tyranny. This class is liberal in the political sense, may be it wants to achieve some form of social reform, but it does not stand with neo-liberal economics. Its members aspire to democracy and freedom to the level of what they believe as fitting modern times. Those are modernists. There is also a wide crowd of the marginalized and the poor and the unemployed, disaffected with corruption and their social status, and understand that there is a correlation between tyranny and corruption"

⁵ An Agenda for Peace, 1992

⁶ Lederach, 1997, 20, 82-83

Figure 7. Lederach, 1997, 80

⁷ Check Arab Group for Christian Muslim Dialogue: <http://www.agmcd.org/files/preface.htm> “And they were aware that people of faith, following the dictates of their respective beliefs, must form an alliance to fulfill their obligation toward their Arab nation and homeland, an alliance to help foster national unity and to strengthen a sense of belonging to one nation embracing all its citizens no matter their religious affiliations, helping them transcend confessional or clannish partisanship so that, all together, they might work for the nation as a whole.”

⁸ ICNL, April 2007, volume 9, Issue 2, 34

⁹ ICNL, April 2007, volume 9, Issue 2. 63-71

¹⁰ Agati, Muhamed 2007

¹¹ ICNL, April 2007, volume 9, Issue 2, 65

¹² Peacebuilding Academy

¹³ Arab Human Development Report, 2009, 9

¹⁴ Ibid, 10

¹⁵ Ibid, 11

¹⁶ Ibid, 11

¹⁷ Ibid, 12

¹⁸ Ibid, 3

¹⁹ In an article in Al-Akbar newspaper Fawaz Traboulsi says [translation by author]:

“On the contrary, it involved a re-consideration of the concept of «the people», including the definition of community as a mass of forces, interests and groups, unmatched and differentiated, forming in a certain historical stage on the will of one and a common historical goal. It is a vision far removed from the arguments of globalization colored by uncertainty and suspicion towards all that has to do with patriotism, nationalism and the need to publicly herald the demise of «nation state». Fourth, accompanied by the recovery of the argument will of the people, is the bringing of the identity of the Arab region to the forefront, in the face of a series of identities imposed from the outside. Such as geo-strategic identities, like the «Middle East», large and medium, new and older, integrated in North African or non-integrated, as well as its integration in the Islamic world or Islamize is. Thus, the region was redefined as «Arab» again and the world started speaking of «Arab revolutions» or «spring Arab», to describe the tracks that we're talking about.”

²⁰ For more information check <http://www.khalass.org/>

²¹ Abdelatif, 2007

²² Peacebuilding Academy

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