2014 is a year of milestones for Conciliation Resources. Twenty years ago we set out to join the then small community of organisations offering international support to people working on the frontlines for the transformation of armed conflict. I am very proud to see how far we have come and what our partners and staff have achieved and the creative and respected work we continue to do.

This is also the 25th edition in our Accord series. I can remember in the mid-1990s when we first set out to publish an online series on how violent conflicts are brought to an end and the initiatives people have taken to “make peace” – we faced a great deal of scepticism. The web was still quite new and we were advised that an electronic publication freely available was a daft business model. At the time there was very little material available for those who wanted to know how others did their peacebuilding – which was not yet synonymous with the multifaceted work of our field. Yet we knew then what we still know now – that there is an enormous need and appetite to learn from the experiences of people working for peace across conflict contexts.

I often cite a visit we made to the Netherlands offices of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines when we were first thinking of launching Accord. On their shelves were fully-stuffed magazine files closely following the Guatemalan peace process, with older boxes on processes in South Africa and El Salvador. Faced with seemingly intractable conflicts many have felt the urgent need to learn more about peace initiatives. We recognised that this was a global challenge.

This edition of Accord is an effort to respond to fundamental questions of how to be more effective in ending and preventing wars and building sustainable peace. It builds on our very first cross-cutting thematic issue on public participation in peacemaking, published 12 years ago. Then, as now, we were grappling with the question of ownership. So you want to help move your country out of war, crisis or military rule, or to challenge unjust power relations? You want to be part of local and national processes that redefine a future based on nonviolent politics, rights, and justice? How do you do it? What worked (or didn’t work) for others and what can we learn from them?

As my colleague Laurence Broers once said about us, we are an organisation “led by enquiry”. Our approach in the Accord series is not just to document and publish, but to listen and ask. This is has been at the heart of our methodology for Joint Analysis Workshops – key activities in Accord and other Conciliation Resources projects. The idea is simple: bring together around one table people who are wrestling with real and immediate issues in their own conflict context, people who have met and overcome obstacles, and people who bring historical and theoretical perspectives and a talent for new thinking.

We are in an interesting and significant moment for the field of peacebuilding where we are seeing really innovative efforts to find “new ways to end old wars”. Conciliation Resources has had the privilege to play supporting roles in a number of processes in recent years, from the constitution-making process in Fiji to the Social Forum in the Basque country, or the peace processes in Colombia and the Philippines.

We are all very excited about this edition of Accord and the contribution it will make to the essential and ongoing conversation about legitimacy in peace and conflict transformation processes. This is also the first Accord downloadable as an e-book. The articles and case studies are the results of the hard labour of many expert people from inside and outside Conciliation Resources – but the delivery of this publication and the careful and creative way it has been crafted is thanks to our very talented Issue Editor, Achim Wennmann, and the very able hands of our Head of Accord and Series Editor, Alexander “Zand” Ramsbotham.

I always say this, but this one really is worth reading cover to cover. It makes an important addition to an important series, which we hope still acts as a deep and rich resource for peacebuilders and policymakers alike.

Andy Carl
Executive Director and Co-founder of Conciliation Resources and Accord