



CONFERENCIA INTERNACIONAL PARA PROMOVER LA RESOLUCION DEL CONFLICTO EN EL PAIS VASCO
GATAZKAREN KONPONBIDEA SUSTATZEKO NAZIOARTEKO KONFERENTZIA EUSKAL HERRIAN
CONFERENCE INTERNATIONAL POUR PROMOUVOIR LA RESOLUTION DU CONFLIT AU PAYS BASQUE

Remarks by Kofi Annan

International Conference to promote the resolution of conflict in the Basque Country San Sebastián, Spain 17 October 2011

Your Excellencies, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me say how happy I am to be here today.

I am in San Sebastián on the invitation of various individuals and non-governmental groups who have organized this International Conference to promote the resolution of conflict in the Basque Country.

I wish to thank them all for their courage and for making this event possible. My thanks go to Lokarri, Conciliation Resources, the Berghof Foundation, NOREF, the Desmond Tutu Foundation and the Contact Group.

I am here in a personal capacity. I am here in the name of peace and friendship. I am here to encourage the end of Europe's last armed conflict.

I know there has been so much shared history and so much shared pain over the conflict in the Basque country. But you now have the shared hope of a new beginning.

I hope that you will embrace it, firm in the belief that enmity between people does not, and cannot, last forever.

Some of us here have had a life-time's experience trying to resolve conflict.

Over the years, I have been involved in various peace-making efforts, not all of which have been successful, but many have stood the test of time.



And I wish to stress that each conflict is different.

Each conflict has its own particularity, born of its own local history, culture, and quite often religion and ethnicity.

But while there may be no “one size fits all” solution to armed conflict, I have learnt some enduring lessons which I wish to share with you today.

The first is that resolving armed conflict is a difficult task and a long process. There are no easy answers, and very few uncontested ones.

I have also learnt that, by its very nature, making and building peace must be deeply rooted in local communities and local identities.

Finding a peaceful settlement must be your process.

Those who live with conflict understand the dynamics better than any international player.

Those who live with it must be involved in the effort to end it. They must also see the benefits that justify the compromises and sacrifices involved.

Outsiders can of course encourage and support your efforts - as we are doing here today.

But making peace ultimately requires the firm commitment and extraordinary courage, on the part of all sides, to ensure a permanent end to violence.

It also requires the determination and imagination of all parties to seek solutions, and build trust between communities who have been at loggerheads for decades.

Without such leadership and commitment, peace will neither take root nor endure.

I have often seen how the difficulties encountered at the last stages of conflict are usually the most difficult to overcome. The stakes are high but so are the rewards.

That final step could be challenging, even frightening, but eminently rewarding. Yes, it is difficult - psychologically and in practice.

No one should ignore the injustices of the past, or the lessons of history. But too often I have seen that one person’s history has been another person’s myth.

And yet, time and again, I have been privileged to witness acts of courage as leaders have refused to be prisoners of history.

Ladies and gentlemen, to make peace, violence must be replaced by dialogue and politics as the means through which communities relate to each other and settle their differences.

It isn’t easy but I remain a stubborn optimist that when parties to conflict have travelled a long way down a peace process, they are capable of securing a final settlement.



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In doing so, they herald an end to the tragedy of lives lost and families devastated throughout the years of violence.

So it is in honour of those lost, and our responsibility towards future generations of children yet to be born, that you must strive to build a lasting peace.

I have also seen - most recently in Kenya - that building a durable peace requires tackling the underlying causes of conflict.

The people in those fractured societies must be helped to work together to reconcile, heal, and build strong institutions rooted in democratic governance, respect for human rights and the

rule of law.

And in this task, all actors of society must play their part: government, local authorities, religious leaders, business, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, women and youth groups, academia and the media.

Finally, because the road to peace proves long and hard, I have also learnt it is essential to manage public expectations.

The various elements of peace-building -- transforming suspicion into trust, turning promises into deeds, re-crafting State institutions, promoting national reconciliation and healing, reforming economies and building cohesion -- can take years or decades to accomplish.

During that time people's hope, and their faith in the process, need to be sustained.

Ladies and gentlemen, a sustainable peace is of course more than the absence of war.

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I had the profound privilege of leading the organization from the 20th century into the 21st. In doing so, I became deeply aware that humanity knows no divisions.

Each of us yearns for dignity, security, opportunity and a voice in how we are governed.

Peace belongs not only to states or peoples, but to each and every member of those communities.

Peace must be made real and tangible in the daily existence of every individual in need.

Peace must be sought, above all, because it is the condition for every member of the human family to live a life of dignity and security.

Thank you.