Workshop summary report

Conciliation Resources (CR) held a workshop to explore the policy dimensions of peacemaking in Somalia. The event was part of our Accord project on Somali peace processes, in collaboration with Interpeace.

Project contributors, editors and advisers met with international policymakers to discuss the implications of project findings for conflict transformation policy on Somalia.

Neither Somali nor internationally led peace processes have delivered an enduring framework for human and regional security for Somali people. Somalis and their international partners need to find a common analysis to understand the nature of the crisis, and how to work together to overcome it.

This Accord project is evaluating different approaches to conflict resolution among Somali and international peace initiatives, in order to inform the development of more complementary and effective peacemaking strategies.

An Accord publication and accompanying policy brief will be published in December 2009.

The Africa Programme at Chatham House generously hosted the meeting.

Discussion topics

- Somali peace processes
- Islam and Islamism
- International engagement

Key messages

- Power-sharing governments established through international mediation do not provide an adequate starting point for constructing a Somali state. A better approach would be to build upon the multiplicity of administrative arrangements that Somalis have already developed, including the rooted regional polities in Somaliland and Puntland.

- International policy would be more effective if it responded to the war in Somalia as an elite and clan-based conflict over power, territory and resources, and a regional struggle for supremacy between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as much as a jihadist insurgency.

- Stable areas of governance in Somalia such as Somaliland and Puntland, and also some parts of south central Somalia, show that Somalis can achieve durable political structures when these are built on genuine reconciliation.

- International mediation should draw on Somali peacemaking approaches: security comes first; inclusivity and consensus are established Somali principles for decision-making.

- Somalis perceive international engagement as ‘foreigners taking sides’ with preferred Somali elites in pursuit of their own agendas. External interventions have had perverse results, incubating new political forces such as warlords and now Al Shabaab that have subsequently become major obstacles to peacemaking.
Somali led peace processes

Many locally led peace processes in Somalia have proved more successful than large internationally sponsored initiatives in improving security and providing a basis for stability, for instance clan-based reconciliation in Somaliland in 1993 and Puntland in 1998. [see Interpeace Somali peace mapping study www.interpeace.org/]

Stable areas of governance such as Somaliland and Puntland and also some parts of south central Somalia show that Somalis can achieve durable political structures when built on genuine reconciliation.

Reconciliation processes in Somaliland and Puntland have created a framework for government and institutions for maintaining law and order. They suggest a specific kind of relationship between society and government, rooted in reconciliation among clans. This implies the need for a fundamental rethink of how governments make peace and the role of government in stabilization. The administrations in Somaliland and Puntland exist because there is peace, not the other way round.

It is important to harness Somali peacemaking experience. But Somali led processes have their limitations. Settlements based on compensation and deterrence work when conflicting parties are evenly matched, but are of less help to the weak and disenfranchised. Somali peacemaking faces greater challenges in south central Somalia due to major structural inequalities, the symbolic importance of Mogadishu – ‘a city for all fought over by a few’ – and the interests of various external actors.

Islam and Islamism

Islam is integral to the Somali social order. It plays an important role in peacemaking and in framing concepts of justice, law and order.

The importance of Islam as a political mode of organization has increased since the breakdown of the state, especially in urban settings. Islamic organizations have made major contributions to law and order (Islamic courts), humanitarian assistance and service provision (health and education).

International mediators have been slow to recognize the significance of Islam and of engaging with religious leaders.

The jihadist response to foreign intervention has a long pedigree in Somalia. Today it has given Islam a new role in political mobilization, especially appealing to the young and dispossessed who have known little but conflict all their lives.

Somalia is not immune to global currents within Islam. Conflict against foreign forces has provided an entry point for external resources and ideas, which continue to fuel divisions in Somali society. Somalis are themselves grappling with these foreign influences.

International engagement

Reconciliation in the main conflict areas of south central Somalia must be the starting point for restoring statehood. This needs to build upon the multiplicity of administrative arrangements that Somalis have already devised, including acknowledging the rooted regional polities in Somaliland and Puntland, which challenge external diplomatic frameworks that approach Somalia as a unitary state.

Statebuilding and peacebuilding are not synonymous. Evidence shows that power-sharing governments established through international mediation do not provide an adequate starting point for statebuilding. The revival of government should not be the sole measure of successful reconciliation.

International models of the state and its relationship to society prioritize the monopoly of force followed by service provision. This misunderstands the deeply problematic nature of the state for many Somalis, following years of conflict and statelessness.

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