QUNO
Quaker United Nations Office

"What's Next in Peacebuilding?" Gathering
Quaker House, New York: June 18-20, 2018
Personal Reflection

In June 2018, a group of peacebuilding leaders, including representatives from peacebuilding organizations, think tanks, and donors, met at Quaker House in New York for our annual "What's Next in Peacebuilding?" gathering. This year the sessions were arranged to investigate a central question – What's at the heart of peacebuilding?

With refocused global attention on issues of peacebuilding and prevention, are we any closer to identifying a core set of ideas and approaches, a 'central tendency' of peacebuilding, that can help us to prioritize our actions, our advocacy and our investments? With 35 years of professional peacebuilding experience under our belts since "An Agenda for Peace", can we not only identify 'what works' but go further, to articulate the heart of peacebuilding?

These questions were debated in a series of interactive sessions over three days. What emerged was a thought-provoking snapshot of current thinking from practitioners, donors and academics. At the end of the gathering, participants suggested that the QUNO Director write a short personal reflection on the topic, as inspired by the discussion.

This is my attempt to do so. Any errors and omissions are entirely my own.

Overview

- *Peacebuilding contributes to a change from 'less peace' to 'more peace'.* A peacebuilding action is one that increases peace.

- This can be at any scale, (local community, society, nation, international community), and at any level of development, and can involve internal and/or external actors.

- One participant offered the term 'peace growing' as a synonym.

- Peacebuilding approaches tend to be characterized by certain *perspectives and assumptions* that lead to

  o *Peacebuilding working methods and tools* (the HOW) that may be used in a wide range of contexts, and

  o *Peacebuilding core areas of activity* (the WHAT)

Perspectives and assumptions

- Peacebuilding is about *people*, and the *relationships* between them. Societies are dynamic networks of relationships, informal and formal, on many different scales, that comprise the *social fabric*.

- Peace encompasses a range of factors including *justice and inclusion*. In the same way that violence can be structural and systemic as well as direct, a peaceful society is characterized by *right relationships* and a respect for human *dignity*. Peace includes, but is far more than, the absence of physical violence.

- Peacebuilding includes activities that are proximal to violent conflict as well as those that contribute to peace longer term, that focus on root causes. Violent conflict is often seen as a symptom of deeper issues.

- A peacebuilding perspective sees *peace systems*, like conflict systems, as *complex* and *dynamic*, and as always partly unknown. Peace systems can include both internal and external factors and dynamics

- The change from 'less peace' to 'more peace' is usually a *long term* one (generational), and is often *discontinuous* and non-linear.

- Social, political and economic changes that contribute to increasing peace are more robust and sustainable if they are *endogenous* (that is, if they are owned, implemented and sustained by those impacted) and *inclusive*, (including all those impacted, including minorities, women, youth, and others with limited power and voice).

Peacebuilding working methods – the HOW of peacebuilding

- *Analysis*: Peacebuilding approaches begin with analysis, which, at best, focuses on the factors that contribute to peace, as well as those that contribute to violent conflict. Peacebuilding analysis is produced inclusively, (including those affected), and assumes that peace systems are complex and dynamic. Peace analysis is centred around identifying and understanding endogenous capacities for peace, but also includes consideration of external factors.

- Peacebuilding approaches seek to include an awareness of *context* and *consequences*. At a minimum, peacebuilding approaches seek to *do no harm*. A peacebuilding lens is holistic – how does the action I am contemplating today connect with and impact broader peace dynamics? What's the long-term plan to increase peace, and how does my action contribute to it?

- *Reflective practice*: peacebuilding approaches acknowledge that peace systems are complex, dynamic and not wholly knowable. Accordingly, such approaches are based on reflective practice, flexing and adapting with changing circumstances and understanding, and incorporate mechanisms for *feedback* (including asking people what they want and listening to the responses). Humility is an important element.

- Peacebuilding approaches tend to be open to the possibilities of *transformation* – deeper, non-linear social change – and to the possibility of new, unforeseen outcomes (hope).

- *Integrity*: There is customarily an attempt by peacebuilders to align working methods and objectives: that is, working on peace, justice and inclusion requires that we act peacefully, justly and inclusively. Peacebuilding approaches are non-violent.

- *Inclusion*: Peacebuilding approaches seek to be inclusive, not only by embracing the perspectives of women, youth and minorities in analysis, planning and implementation, but at best, *accompanying* and supporting local efforts.

- Peacebuilding approaches customarily take into account the *different roles* and spheres of activity of *local* as opposed to *external* actors. The most appropriate role for external actors in many cases may be to support and accompany local efforts, and to create a supportive external environment by strengthening external drivers of peace (e.g. external economic and political equality and inclusion)

- *Using a peacebuilding approach increases the likelihood of an action contributing to a change from 'less peace' to 'more peace'*

Peacebuilding core areas of activity – the WHAT of Peacebuilding

- Certain areas of action seem particularly effective in contributing to the change from 'less peace' to 'more peace'::
  - mechanisms for *processing and addressing differences*, grievances and wrongs,
  - increasing social *resilience* (the ability of a society to respond and adapt to change and stress, external and internal), and
  - processes that increase *trust* and *inclusion*.

- Peacebuilding includes actions *proximal to conflict* at any level, including peacemaking, mediation and working directly with individuals affected by conflict, and that directly address the *mechanics* of violent conflict

- Traditionally, peacebuilding has also included actions in *post-conflict* settings that focus on restoring relationships and the social fabric, including trauma healing, restorative justice and truth telling, reconciliation, and dialogue processes.

- Fostering social resilience can include the *institutionalization of peacebuilding working methods and tools,* including through education, and setting up formal and informal processes that address difference and counter exclusion

- More widely, any action – development, crisis response, humanitarian action, education, justice reform…can be a peacebuilding action (that is, can contribute to an increase in the peace). The tests are:
  - Does the action contribute to a change from 'less peace' to 'more peace' according to the peace analysis? Does it do no harm, and is it actively restorative?
  - Does the action utilize peace building working methods and tools?

Andrew Tomlinson, July 2018