



IV. ISTANBUL CONFERENCE ON MEDIATION

“Surge in Diplomacy, Action in Mediation”

June 30, 2017

CONCEPT PAPER

There is increased awareness of the need for a holistic and integrated approach towards peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution. The Fourth Istanbul Conference on Mediation aims to make a timely contribution by exploring the potential of mediation for the achievement of sustainable peace, which requires the elimination of existing and potential sources of violence.

Since the establishment by Turkey and Finland of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation, substantial progress has been achieved in raising awareness on mediation and promoting its effective and wider use. More and more states are convinced of the benefits of mediation. Multiplicity of actors carry out mediation efforts. Steps are being taken to make mediation an increasingly institutionalised and professionalised field of action. The work of the UN Organization and the UN Group of Friends of Mediation have been highly instrumental and the publication of the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation was a milestone development in this regard. A similar Friends Group has also been set up at the OSCE, co-chaired by Turkey, Finland and Switzerland. Several other regional and sub-regional organizations also play significant roles in the promotion of methods, culture and capacity of mediation as an alternate instrument of peaceful prevention and resolution of conflicts.

There is a consensus that attaining positive peace requires a comprehensive vision. UN Secretary General H.E. António Guterres expressed this understanding at his inaugural speech: “humanitarian response, sustainable development and sustaining peace are three sides of the same triangle.” His initiative, titled “the Surge in Diplomacy for Peace”, as well as efforts to increase the linkages and coordination between three pillars of the UN aims to give a momentum to the efforts to build sustainable peace.

Similarly, the UNGA Resolution A/70/1, titled “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” stipulates that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.” The UNSC Resolution 2282 (2016) reinforces that vision by stating that “development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.” This comprehensive understanding was also at the heart of the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, held in İstanbul in May 2016.

In this framework, the IV. Istanbul Conference on Mediation would ask the questions: How relevant is mediation in the overall agenda of the surge in diplomacy and sustainable peace? How can we increase the use and effectiveness of mediation as a tool in this regard? Can the horizons of international mediation be expanded in order to include broader spectrum of contemporary tensions?

Elaborating these questions, the Conference aims to:

- a) Assess the effectiveness of mediation in addressing the changed nature of today's conflicts and global tensions and draw the appropriate implications for the further strengthening of existing norms, policies and practices;
- b) Examine or take stock of the contributions of current and emerging mediation practices/experiences at the local, national and regional levels in advancing the causes of sustainable peace;
- c) Explore how "mediation for peace" (and not only mediation for resolving conflict) could better advance the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's "Surge in Diplomacy for Peace" initiative and the UN "Sustaining Peace" agenda as well as the objectives of "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative;
- d) Discuss the national, regional and international policy implications (e.g., educational, legal and financial) for promoting a "mediation for peace" agenda.

The Conference will comprise three expert level sessions, which will explore the following aspects of the topic:

1. Assessment of the Field: Successes, Challenges and the Way Forward

The expert community of mediation operates on a dynamic terrain. Mediators face greater challenges in their mediation efforts as the world keeps changing and conflicts get complicated.

While welcoming the achievements in the field of mediation so far, self-reflection, review and appraisal of experiences including assessment of successes and failures must be done continuously. Furthermore, only through innovative discussions and exchanges can we bring mediation more in line with the realities and necessities on the ground.

Considering the lessons learned from concrete cases, the Fourth Istanbul Conference would review initially what facilitates and hinders success in mediation efforts.

By stimulating exchanges on best practices and experiences, the Conference aims to set the stage for innovation in the field of mediation practice and research.

2. The Contributions of Mediation to the "Peace Continuum"

Conflicts emerge and are resolved in a continuum. The UN Secretary General has set out a vision for peace which involves: "a comprehensive, modern and effective operational peace architecture, encompassing prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term development—the peace continuum".

Mediation's relevance in the full conflict cycle, including in prevention as well as in early stages of conflicts and the post-agreement processes, needs further discussion. A related concern is strengthening the complementarity and continuity among measures taken at different phases of the conflict cycle and what role mediation can play in this regard.

The Fourth Istanbul Conference on Mediation would promote an innovative and ground breaking discussion on these topics with the aim of exploring the potential contributions of mediation to the UN Secretary General's "Surge in Diplomacy for Peace" agenda.

3. Potential of Mediation in Broader Spectrum of Tensions

The drivers of contemporary conflicts proliferate and prevention as well as the role of mediation needs to be explored within a broad spectrum of contemporary tensions.

Various kinds of political, social and religious animosities, including xenophobia and racism, etc., are in ascendancy all around the world, creating problems for healthy national and international order. Hardly any country or society seems totally immune to these tensions.

Despite the rising salience of this issue, the role of mediation in dealing with the tensions based on such animosities is a less researched topic in the study of mediation so far. Closer scrutiny and enhanced discussions are needed on how mediation can be utilized, especially at the community level, in addressing such tensions for the sake of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Facilitating an interactive dialogue on this topic, the Fourth Istanbul Conference aims to contribute to the use of mediation in a much broader spectrum of contemporary tensions. As such, it also seeks to draw policy-relevant findings by exploring the potential contributions of various forms of domestic mediation, such as community and peer mediation, to conflicts or tensions based on political, social and religious animosities. Such findings may also support national ownership, which is one of the preconditions of success in peace processes and as important as local efforts in mediation.

Furthermore, elaborating the possible areas of action at different levels, the Conference will also address the complementarity between the work of the “Mediation for Peace” and “Alliance of Civilizations” initiatives within the UN as well as the role of regional organizations. An idea, for instance, would be, in addition to the already existing work on including women more in the mediation processes, to develop at UN and regional or trans-regional organizations guidelines for culturally sensitive mediation training and training for peer and youth mediators as well as building regional and local capacity to address youth inclusion and culturally sensitive mediation.