

SUMMARY

1st International Congress on Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace

The rise in the importance and influence of ICT in conflict mediation and transformation processes marked the debates at the *1st International Congress: Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace* organised by the UOC's Campus for Peace and Solidarity. The ability of new technologies to open up new spaces for dialogue and negotiation and the use to which they can be put in the field of conflict resolution has had a bearing on many of the projects presented and debated at the congress.

The former Director-General of the UNESCO, Federico Mayor Zaragoza was confident that the use of new technologies would aid the creation of a participative democracy. In his keynote speech, Federico Mayor Zaragoza denounced the lack of quality in western democracies and stressed that *justice has been replaced by large-scale patronage*. The former Director-General of the UNESCO showed his support for the publicising of conflicts to mobilise public opinion. Federico Mayor Zaragoza stressed the potential of ICT to help develop a democracy guided by universal values to negotiate the culture of violence.

The former Director-General of the UNESCO issued another warning when he pointed out that a significant part of the world – the developing countries – is tired of waiting. This situation was confirmed dramatically by the Iraqi association leader Basil Albadri, who stressed that Iraq is tired and exhausted following years and years of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship, with the complicity of the United States, and after more than 3 years of American military intervention.

Basil Albadri is a member of the LAONF network, which brings together various organisations that promote the culture of peace in Iraq. Thanks to the intervention of NOVA – one of the NGOs present at the congress – Basil Albadri was able to leave Baghdad for a few days to explain the climate of fear in which his network operates. In Baghdad, Basil Albadri emphasised that almost all activities have to be carried out in secret. The Iraqi association leader described the projects that his network runs to try and transform the armed conflict. One of which is particularly interesting due to its simplicity within this climate of war: a few weeks ago, the LAONF network – which means non-violence in Arabic – sent a letter to the Baghdad Parliament in which it urged Congress to prohibit violent games for children.

Following the various papers on the possibilities offered by ICT to open up new channels in the realm of conflict transformation, the organisers of the 1st International Congress on Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace have searched on the internet for the context in which the network led by Basil Albadri operates. Among the great deal of information about Iraq, we found some counters that have been set up by a number of NGOs to display the cost – in human lives and in millions of dollars – of the war in Iraq. We recommend visiting www.iraqbodycount.org, the fatal victims counter that NGOs have set up in collaboration with reporters and journalists in an attempt to gain or re-establish credibility in the media.

The other counter, <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/Cost-of-War/Cost-of-War-3.html>, is a US counter of the financial expense accrued – second by second – for the war in Iraq. As well as being updated online, it also offers the chance to compare the costs of

the conflict with the budgets for socially acceptable activities such as education and healthcare.

Both of these counters show the power that ICT has in the process of the construction of participative democracy called for by Federico Mayor Zaragoza.

The director of the *New Zealand Centre for Conflict Resolution*, at the University of Wellington, Ian Macduff spoke of the results of the use of ICT in armed conflict negotiation processes, attributing the capacity to create new spaces for dialogue to the internet and to other forms of electronic communication. The internet technology promoted by Ian Macduff is a physical and virtual space that facilitates education tasks to construct the capacity for commitment in dialogue and negotiation. In his paper, "*From Digital Deals to Cyber Citizens: ICT, Online Dispute Resolution and Civic Dialogue*", Ian Macduff summarised the work of a number of NGOs using very elementary technological tools, such as mobile telephones, internet radio with the broadcasting of podcasts and the posting of blogs and websites, in some cases trilingual (in Tamil, Sinhalese and English, with a view to including Arabic shortly). Ian Macduff pointed out that using these relatively simple technological tools, conditions have been achieved to bring Sri Lanka closer to reconciliation.

In the more practical field, other organisations took part in the Congress to speak of their experiences in peace processes in armed conflicts. This is the case of the director of operations Helsinki's *Conflict Management Initiative*, Meeri Jaarva, who told how they protocolised and standardised the peace process of Banda Aceh, in Sumatra. These negotiations coincided with the arrival of a strong injection of international financial aid because of the tsunami, which devastated part of the coastline of Sumatra, in Indonesia.

If the international community was mobilised after the tragedy of the tsunami, it was certainly, in large part, thanks to the images of the aftermath of this natural disaster. Despite the displays of trust in ICT, Ian Macduff recognised the weaknesses and weak points of the net and highlighted the case of Burma, where the authorities decided to cut off internet communications at the root when the information posted on it threatened the stability of the regime in light of the challenge from the Buddhist monks.

The paper by the director of the University of Wellington begged the question: *IS A MEDIATION PROCESS POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE PROXIMITY AND FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONS DEMANDED BY PEACE PROCESSES AND NEGOTIATIONS?*

Perhaps other elements besides the technological ones will be required. Dietrich Fischer, director of Austria's *European University Centre for Peace Studies*, recalled this when he pointed out that the best intervention to bring an end to the cold war was the Fullbright grant awarded to the adviser of Mikhail Gorbachev years before the Soviet leader laid the former Soviet Union to rest.

Other contributions came from the area of religions. The representatives of the various Buddhist traditions insisted on its globalising principle: *if I change, the world changes*. The director of the House of Tibet, Thubten Wangchen noted that we live in a world with a great deal of aggressiveness, nerves, tensions, ill humour and hate. The solution, he said, must come through the word and non-violence, citing the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Be that as it may, and in a more prosaic field but with the same globalising aim that inspires the Buddhists, the congress was shown some applications of the possibilities of ICT in creating virtual learning spaces. One of these is the *Virtual School for Latin America and the Caribbean* with which the United Nations has connected 24 countries with a forecast of 5,000 students for this year. This United Nations Development Programme tackles conflict from the point of view of democracy and human knowledge.

Another example of innovation is the **police conflict network** project. Lluís Paradell, Deputy Inspector of the Mossos d'Esquadra (the Catalan police force), proposed that conflict generators be included in this network, which in more conventional and assuredly more repressive language we would call *criminals or offenders*. The head of this force is convinced that the use of this network will improve the ability to gather, interpret and analyse information; reducing the level of conflict. This and integration into the network of these "criminals" as peace generating elements is one of the factors that created greatest expectation among the various projects presented at the congress.

The congress also offered the opportunity for first-hand knowledge of the tools for the creation and administration of a public peace policy in the country. **The Catalan International Institute for Peace**, presented by Xavier Badia, was of particular interest as it was the first public institution of this type that is independent from the government; designed to find a space between governmental authorities, universities and the civil society.

Of the initiatives from the Catalan government in the field of peace management, the Director General of Development Cooperation, David Minoves highlighted the collaboration with Guatemala's Attorney General's Office in recovering the historical archives of the Guatemalan police as an essential element for recovering the historical past in this Central American country.

The relationship of ICT with political organisations and their management was also tabled at the congress. The secretary of the Bureau of the Catalan Parliament, Rafael Luna, presented a **political conflict network** project where the aim is to involve the political groups to analyse their internal conflicts and external power management conflicts.

Other contributions to the debate on the peace culture were the presentations of the *JM Delàs Peace Studies Centre's* "**BBVA without arms!!**" - an awareness campaign against the financial institutions with investments in the arms industry. Its representative, Jordi Calvo, called for *corporate social responsibility campaigns to go beyond social marketing*.

It was noted during the congress that there were many mediation and peace transformation initiatives on the Internet. **The legal regulation of mediation network** was presented, which is promoted by the professor of law of the University of Cantabria, Llorenç Prats, who asked for the collaboration of the experts in conflict management to share knowledge and expertise on conflict transformation in the Spanish context.

The projects presented also included the **project for the implementation of a conflict mediation, prevention and alternative management unit at the Catalan Healthcare Institute**, promoted by Rosa Heras and Eva Monge. This project has already been

started in two areas of Catalan public healthcare in collaboration with Catalan Healthcare Institute managers.

The **law, mediation and reconciliation network**, was presented by researcher Marta Poblet, who works on reparative justice. Another of the mediation projects presented was the **Catalan government's Family Mediation Centre**, which uses technological elements to promote its activities. Its director, Anna Vall was pleased with the increase in mediation services over recent years and with the results obtained. A significant element is the low cost of its services, namely 180 euros, payable by both parties, for 9 hours of mediation that may help (and it appears to do so a great deal) in the transformation of a family conflict. This is the case if users do not have the right to legal aid; as if they do, it can work out free of charge.

By contrast, wars are increasingly more expensive and affect the civil population ever more. This observation was made by the senior manager of the Spanish Red Cross in Catalonia, Manuel Górriz. Another of the observations of his organisation is that there are more fatal victims caused by armed conflicts than by natural disasters. According to their numbers, in the 1990s, 2,300,000 people died as a result of war, whereas barely a quarter, 600,000, died from as a result of disasters.

The size of these figures leads us to consider the cost-benefit analysis. This was the case when *World Security Forum* representative Darrin Wood explained the privatisation – or outsourcing – of the war in Iraq. Darrin Wood provided information about the mercenary agencies operating in Iraq in attack, protection, information and military intelligence work. According to his figures, 700 mercenaries have died this year in Iraq without American society having been scandalised in the slightest.

When the costs outweigh the military advantages it is obvious that the conflict needs transforming. This may be when conflict resolution is required, which has to help us live in permanent disagreement, but without violence.

Despite the trend towards the professionalisation of peace and conflict management organisations, the *Somos Uno* (We Are One) association caused a surprise thanks to its simplicity and efficiency. It is dedicated to the fight against child prostitution in Thailand, which was presented by its director, writer José Luís Olaizola. With a very basic structure, *Somos Uno* has provided an education for hundreds of Thai girls at risk.

The International Congress on Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace closed with the paper from Nelsa Curbelo, director of the *Ser Paz* (Be Peace) organisation, which works in the Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil with armed gangs of youth. Nelsa Curbelo described the hierarchical and almost militarised structure of the gangs and defended situational crime prevention techniques for transforming gang violence. The specific experience of a *peace neighbourhood* – an area of 49 blocks of homes in Guayaquil, with 5 active gangs and more than 1000 families involved – has led to a spectacular fall in violence, the cooperation of the authorities and the commitment of the gang leaders in the conflict transformation process. Nelsa Curbelo was pleased with the results obtained in the promotion of micro-businesses for young people and their commitment on short technical study courses, especially IT.

The International Congress on Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace closed with the declaration of the intention to hold another meeting in 2008, where the advances that

have been made in the fields of conflict mediation, resolution and transformation will be observed.

“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

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