



III. ISTANBUL CONFERENCE ON MEDIATION
“The Increasing Role of Regional Organizations in Mediation”
26-27 JUNE 2014
HILTON ISTANBUL BOSPHORUS

Conference Concept

Context

Conflicts today are more complex, are arguably easily initiated or can easily arise sporadically, and may be sustained for extended periods of time, largely due to easier global access to weapons and financing as well as access to recruits. With the end of the Cold War, intra-state conflicts, ethnic and sectarian strife or power struggles of various sorts within countries, often with cross-border implications, have come to the fore.

Consequently, conflicts have significant local, regional and global costs; they feature a curious mix of political, criminal, terrorist and commercial interests, often recur, and impede development in many states. In this climate, in addition to the tendency of internationalization of many conflicts where we see more cases with intervention by external parties, empirical data support the view that conflicts in the 21st century will likely continue to occur more within states rather than between states.

Across the globe, many societies are increasingly faced with a multitude of challenges; thus the risks for conflict both between and within states are manifold.

Against this backdrop, easing tensions before they evolve into conflict or, if conflict breaks out, containing it while addressing the root causes has gained additional significance. The UN considers the prevention of conflict to be a central goal for the international community in the new millennium.

While the question of how to achieve peaceful settlement of disputes between states was long a familiar theme of international relations, managing conflicts of a non-state nature has been a challenge for regional organizations.

Evidence, however, shows that regional organisations are increasingly assuming a more prominent role in conflict management, including in the area of mediation. Indeed, regional and sub-regional organizations, with their geographic, cultural and historical proximity to and information about specific conflict situations in their regions, may have distinct advantages and specific approaches that could contribute to the prevention and resolution of such conflicts.

Emphasized in the General Assembly resolution 65/283 of 2011, the importance of effective partnership and cooperation of international, regional and sub-regional organizations with the United Nations, and with each other, to ensure coherence and complementarity is one of the main tasks that the international community is facing. While almost all significant regional organizations have been showing growing interest in mediation, albeit with varying degrees depending on their mandates, the need for developing capacities and appropriate institutions is widely acknowledged.

Since the UN Secretary General’s Retreat with Heads of regional organizations in January 2010, in New York, there has been an increasing momentum to improve coordination and coherence among regional organizations, with meetings in Vienna organized by the OSCE in December 2010, in Jeddah by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in April 2012 and the League of Arab States in February 2014 in Cairo.

III. Istanbul Conference on Mediation has been designed with a view to contributing to these efforts. In the light of discussions in the previous Istanbul Conferences held in 2012 and 2013,¹ where respectively, the more conceptual aspects of mediation and concrete mediation cases were examined, the Conference this time will seek answers to outstanding questions of how to achieve better complementarity and increased coherence of purpose among the regional organizations and between them and the UN. The Conference will furthermore explore what can be done to reinforce regional mediation capacities as well as to evaluate what is needed to harness local and regional expertise in mediation. The role non-governmental actors can play in supplementing the regional organizations in this process will also constitute one of the overarching questions to be addressed.

Key Policy Issues

- How should the regional organizations formulate policies in mediating and facilitating conflicts in their respective regions?
- What are the minimum policy frameworks and capacities that regional organizations would need to optimize their role in mediation?
- Are there thematic priorities of mediation for each major regional organization?
- Considering the different mandates each regional organization has, what are the limits on the effectiveness of regional organizations to assume greater responsibilities in the peace agenda?
- Do the matters of vision, policy and principles present challenges in forging an effective sharing of responsibilities among regional organizations and with the UN in mediating conflicts?
- In cases where regional organizations and the UN do not share the same vision and objectives; are there alternative models of engagement to work beyond such differences?
- What are the situations in which regional organizations can play a ‘niche’ role and bring added value?
- What is the scope of cooperation between the regional organizations and the non-governmental actors in developing capacity and building expertise in the prevention and resolution of conflicts?
- Are there limits to the desirability of such partnerships from the point of view of regional organizations and non-governmental organizations; and, if so, where are these limits?

Goal and objectives

III. Istanbul Conference on Mediation seeks to bring together representatives from leading regional organizations, government representatives, including the designated focal points from the UN Group of Friends of Mediation, members of prominent expert organizations, other international experts and academics as well as students to discuss the issue of mediation from different angles. The exploration of the role of regional organizations in the prevention and peaceful management of conflicts will be a central theme in the exchanges.

The conference will strengthen the network of personal and professional contacts across a variety of governmental and non-governmental organisations. The meeting will provide space for participants to engage in productive, informal dialogue concerning future patterns of cooperation and partnership among their various organisations and governments. A brief conference report will summarise the main themes and key output of discussions.

¹ For the first Conference check <http://www.peacemaker.un.org/node/1435> whereas the summary report of the second Conference is available at http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/a-67-980-2013-istanbul-conference-summary-report.pdf