

What the Peacebuilding Community Can Contribute to Political Transitions in North Africa and Beyond

Jennifer Milliken

Introduction

The 2011 Annual Meeting of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform investigated the potential contributions of the peacebuilding community to the political transitions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). With some of the MENA revolutions entering into a consolidation phase after periods of rapid change, the question of managing long term transformation processes within states and societies is ever more important. It is in the critical years when revolutions are translated into new political rules of the game that the peacebuilding community has an important – yet so far relatively neglected – contribution to make.

The objective set for the 2011 Annual Meeting was to better understand the tools and assistance required to accompany political transitions from a peacebuilding perspective. Overall, it focused on the practical evidence of peacebuilding activities related to political transition processes to inform domestic and international efforts in this field. Four specific themes framed the deliberations: state-society relations; from political settlement to building peace; ensuring justice, reducing violence; and international support for political transitions.

The Annual Meeting is one of the Platform's main events and brings together a variety of actors from its membership including representatives from civil society, government, international organizations, and academia. The Annual Meeting is conceived to directly support the Platform's main mandates which are to facilitate interaction on peacebuilding between different institutions and sectors, and to advance new knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding issues and contexts.

It is in the critical years when MENA revolutions are being translated into new political rules of the game that the peacebuilding community has an important contribution to make

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions:

THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE | GENEVA
CENTRE ON CONFLICT,
DEVELOPMENT AND PEACEBUILDING

GCSP

Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Centre de Politique de Sécurité, Genève
Genfer Zentrum für Sicherheitspolitik

Impartial, Inclusive, Influential

ii
interpeace



QUNO
Quaker United Nations Office

The best basis for peacebuilding engagement in MENA is constructive accompaniment: lending expertise and advice to locally-shaped and guided plans and processes

The report which follows is a distillation of the main points raised during the day's discussions. Rather than retracing the meeting agenda, it synthesizes the discussions into a consolidated overview accompanied by cases and more detailed explanations given in boxes.

The overall findings of the report are:

It is still too early for most of the Arab Spring revolutions to know whether they are going to lead to political transition, to counter-revolution, or to a slide into enduring violent conflict over state control. The best case from a human security standpoint would be a "rebooting" of state-society relations: the launch of processes to rebuild and recreate trust within and between governments and civil society. Among the most important steps in a rebooting process are upholding human rights, facilitating transitional justice, preventing the collapse of security, negotiating a new republican position for the military, facilitating legal and constitutional, empowering civil society to be heard in politics, and centralizing power in a more neutral state.

The peacebuilding community is accustomed to working in shifting and confused political situations such as one finds today in many MENA states. This makes it well-positioned among international actors to contribute to MENA transitions. Yet peacebuilding actors must recognize that their role in these transitions will likely be limited, and that they will need to reflect carefully on the modalities of their engagement. Peacebuilding organizations often do not have a mandate supporting much involvement in MENA. The peoples of MENA states are also unlikely to welcome large-scale international involvement by outsiders. Peacebuilding has built up its models and practices in situations of protracted conflict; some concepts and tools honed in this setting will not be appropriate for MENA, while others will need informed adaptation to be suitable for countries in the region.

Given these factors, the basis for peacebuilding engagements in MENA should be constructive accompaniment: lending expertise and advice to locally-shaped and guided plans and processes. Constructive accompaniment resonates strongly with the newer peacebuilding model of local leadership. In MENA peacebuilders should follow guidelines of the local leadership model including, for instance, the encouragement of a concept of politics as a genuine reconciliation of political interests, rather than as powersharing; as well as the provision of innovative options, drawing on previous experience in a case-neutral fashion, so that local actors can choose for themselves.

Peacebuilders can be constructive companions to MENA transitions by drawing on their skills in settling conflicts, mediation and mediation support, and the convening of national dialogues. They can also usefully assist through establishing a clearing house for local NGOs in the region, so that funders can identify appropriate smaller partners, and through strengthening south-south dialogues – especially dialogues between civil society organizations in the MENA region. The maturation of the peacebuilding community has also given it valuable experience on what won't work, e.g. lessons learned from the negative results of various disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. In the spirit of constructive accompaniment peacebuilders should pair research-based policy advice with tracking and suggesting innovative solutions.

The situation in MENA

The wave of demonstrations and protests called the Arab Spring actually began in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 in response to Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation. Bouazizi's protest against police corruption and ill treatment quickly spread in Tunisia – and Tunisia's protests, beyond its borders – to create a revolutionary wave in the region. To summarize this wave, to date there have been uprisings or large demonstrations in Bahrain, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman. The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt have fallen to civil society pressure. A civil war in Libya, with NATO eventually backing the rebels, has brought down Muammar Gaddafi's government. Yemen's civil uprising has led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and (after power-transfer negotiations) to President Ali Abdullah Saleh signing an agreement to leave office in February 2012. Meanwhile, Syria (where protests began in February 2011) appears headed into a civil war, as President Bashar al-Assad refuses to relinquish power and the Free Syrian Army, led by defected military personnel, confronts the Syrian Army across the country.

The revolutionary context in MENA owes much to the mistrust, defiance, and alienation which accumulated in Arab societies during decades of authoritarian rule. People took to the streets partly in protest against rising food prices and worsening life conditions (the "bread riots" element). More important, however, for the women and youth who first dared to gather, and for their ability to rally others, have been human rights themes of dignity, respect, and freedom. Protest against state corruption, assimilated to a human right, has also been prominent. This process – of Arab civil societies rising up against illegitimate states – was not forecast by any intelligence agency or think-tank. Yet it should remind us of other revolutionary waves in authoritarian contexts, especially Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s.

These previous experiences suggest that revolution is a "moment" in social time when the rules of the game of politics are publicly challenged. Such extraordinary questioning of political right and power cannot be sustained for long and (assuming the protests aren't broken by the regime) the revolutionary moment will soon give way to a much longer process of transition. Transition is open-ended and long-term. It can lead to a "rebooting" of state-society relations under new rules of the game which ordinary people consider fairer and more legitimate. Or it can lead to counter-revolution, to state capture by new authoritarian or fundamentalist elites, or to a slide into enduring violent conflict over state control.

From a human security standpoint, transitions from authoritarianism ideally create a redefinition of the social contract. This redefinition must be built up over time in political agreements and compromises. Governments and civil society actors need to launch therapeutic and re-engineering processes to rebuild trust and recreate working relations. Among the most important steps are the following:

- 1) Upholding human rights, including bringing transparency to opaque and corrupt state control over resources;
- 2) Facilitating transitional justice;
- 3) Preventing the collapse of security;
- 4) Negotiating a new republican position for the military;

The revolutionary context in MENA owes much to the mistrust, defiance and alienation accumulated during decades of authoritarian rule

A redefinition of the social contract in transitions from authoritarianism must be built up over time in political agreements and compromises

Most revolutionary processes in MENA have not yet even entered the transition phase

- 5) Facilitating legal and constitutional reform (in which the process is as important as the outcome);
- 6) Empowering civil society to be heard in politics, with rights as the basis for claims;
- 7) Centralizing power in a more neutral state, instead of in the hands of one man/family/the privileged in the elite network.

Against this backdrop, we can see how most revolutionary processes in MENA states have not yet even entered the transitional phase. Only Tunisia, which has held constitutional elections, drawn up a provisional constitution, and is creating mechanisms and processes of transitional justice, seems well-launched (see box 1). Elsewhere, Egypt raises the spectre of an uprising which could prove exclusionary and fail to bring radical change; Libya, the prospect of "Iraqization"; and Yemen, a counter-revolution in which President Saleh leaves but the regime remaining largely intact.

Box 1: Transitional justice in Tunisia

Transitional justice initiatives are based on the principle that a sustainable transition to democracy, the rule of law, and peace and reconciliation, cannot be based on a foundation of injustice. Hence, mechanisms and processes are required to address the legacy of human rights violations by past repressive regimes and to restore trust between the state and the people.

The challenges and dilemmas of transitional justice are rooted in the contrasting needs of punishment and stability and reconciliation. For example, how can a new government purge state institutions of those officials who cooperated/worked with the former regime (punishment), without losing institutional memory or triggering sabotage and retaliation (stability)? How can yesterday's torturers and dictators be given a judicial due process they denied their victims (punishment), without prompting popular cynicism and engendering frustration (reconciliation)? Tunisia's government and civil society have organized themselves early and extensively to address these questions. To illustrate:

- Criminal prosecution has been launched against the former president, his wife, and her family, as well as other senior officials;
- A National Independent Commission on corruption and embezzlement has been created, together with a National Commission on Investigation to examine the abuses recorded from 17 December 2010 (when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest at government harassment and humiliation) until the achievement of its mandate;
- Initial compensation has been paid to the families of those killed during the uprising;
- The Tunis Center for Transitional Justice has been established by human rights activists and civil society actors to root the mechanisms of justice and equity in the Tunisian state, unveil the truth about past human rights violations, and contribute to national reconciliation;
- The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women is taking the lead to ensure that gender-based violence and other human rights abuses are included in transitional justice processes.

The Tunisian process is hardly complete (security sector reform is still pending, and there is not yet a mechanism for reparations). Nonetheless, this stands as a robust early engagement by literally hundreds of NGOs, scholars, and government actors to bring justice and renew social trust in Tunisia. By comparison transitional justice in Egypt has not yet been as robust. While Mr. Mubarak and members of his family have been put on trial, the military has been able to avoid examining systematic human rights violations. They have also been able to limit human rights debate solely to the crimes committed against the 2011 protestors.

Only Tunisia has drawn up a provisional constitution, and is creating mechanisms and processes of transitional justice, seems well-launched

Outsiders are encouraged to become involved in MENA by the promise of political change combined with the tenseness and lack of closure. They are also responding to the economic losses and humanitarian problems created by political upheaval and potential civil war. Yet MENA is a problematic region for international involvement. One of the primary goals of Arab nationalism was the end of Western interference in the Arab world. This dimension of MENA's political culture is now carried in the discourse of the region's Islamic movements. Civil society in MENA remains suspicious of outsiders who backed ruling cliques on security and resource supply grounds, and wary of having their country turned into another Iraq or Afghanistan. The Arab Spring also restored national pride, with democratic protesters in Egypt and Tunisia portraying their countries' rulers as alien to a nation they plundered and humiliated. In short, there is a legacy of local distrust, on the one hand, and external paternalism (and demonization), on the other hand. External involvement itself may need to be redefined in order to make it constructive in the MENA political processes.

The peacebuilding community: What role in MENA?

The peacebuilding community is apriori well-positioned as a group of international actors to contribute to MENA transitions. Peacebuilding organizations are accustomed to working in shifting and confused political situations on many of the same tasks transitional societies must face, such as transitional justice, security sector reform and the protection of human rights. Peacebuilders also have skills in mediation, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and constitutional and electoral assistance which are directly or indirectly relevant to transitional contexts. And peacebuilders generally adopt a long time horizon. This is crucial: only if contributors understand that durable change will take years, even decades, can they hope to anticipate the twists and turns in societies making a transition from authoritarian rule.

Yet while peacebuilding actors may have a role to play in MENA transitions, the role needs to be recognized as limited, and to be otherwise framed in a careful fashion. There are three basic reasons for this:

- 1) Peacebuilders may have a limited or no mandate supporting involvement in MENA: This applies partly to the United Nations, where the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) is fairly narrow and the design and focus of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Support Office limits an active role in most MENA situations (see Box 2). But other peacebuilding organizations will also need to consider whether they are authorized and able to expand the scope of their activities from protracted conflicts to situations of regime transformation
- 2) Locals will likely not want extensive assistance from outsiders, including members of the peacebuilding community: As discussed earlier, the peoples of MENA will not likely welcome large-scale international involvement. Nor should they require it: these are not and hopefully will not become situations of exhaustion after decade upon decade of conflict, destruction and displacement.

When Egyptian civil society organizations faced the massive flow of actors from the international community arriving this year, they reportedly decided to establish criteria to choose with which to work

Some Libyan civil society actors have reportedly told international actors that money is not a first priority—their is not such a poor society—what they really need is external expertise

- 3) Peacebuilders will need to adapt their concepts, approaches, and tool kits to transitional contexts: Peacebuilding has built up its models and practices in situations of protracted conflict. Some concepts and tools honed in this setting will not be appropriate for MENA, while others will need an informed adaptation to be suitable for countries in this region.

With a carefully-framed role the peacebuilding community could contribute substantively to MENA transitions. The best way forward is via an approach of *constructive accompaniment*, in which local actors and groups have the lead in their political transformation, and external actors such as peacebuilders lend their expertise and advice to locally-shaped and guided plans and processes.

Box 2: What role for the UN in MENA transitions?

The United Nations has relied largely on existing authorizations and programming tracks in responding to the Arab Spring. These will not make the UN a major peacebuilding presence in MENA, as the Peacebuilding Commission and the UN Inter-agency Framework Team for Coordination on Preventive Action illustrate.

- MENA states have not requested the engagement of the *Peacebuilding Commission* and are not likely to. None of the MENA countries is eligible for regular funding from the Peacebuilding Fund. The one window which could potentially be tapped is the Fund's Immediate Response Facility, able to disperse up to 3 million USD without further approval. Immediate Response Facility funds could support MENA during the early period for a short period of time (before export revenues and unfrozen assets start flowing again) because it can react quickly. It could support civil society, police reform, and consensus building processes, especially at a grassroots level. UN entities within the Peacebuilding Architecture have been giving low-key and behind-the-scenes policy advice on international norms and issues like youth and women, elections, traditional justice and reconciliation. It is difficult to do more without requests or clear mandates.
- The *UN Inter-agency Framework Team for Coordination on Preventive Action* was involved in the MENA region before the Arab Spring began with projects to build societies' mediation capacities. In the current context Framework Team agencies are seeking to expand on this work and to transpose to MENA its experience in creating "infrastructures for peace" in other regions. This means that they may, for example, provide political campaign training to local NGOs; facilitate interreligious and interethnic dialogues; disseminate conflict-resolution information; and encourage knowledge exchanges within and across the region. Framework Team agencies can only go where they are invited, though, and they already have heavy demands on funding and staff for development and environmental work in MENA. These factors will inevitably limit the extent of the preventive action work undertaken by the UN in the region.

The UN's mandate limitations stand in contrast to the more expansive mandate of the European Union (EU). Together with NATO, the EU has been the most visible among the multilaterals in the Arab Spring processes in MENA. There is colonial and post-colonial history behind the EU's involvement, as well as substantial economic and security interests. There is also a Mediterranean policy architecture: the bilateral hub-and-spoke relations of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the multilateral framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). The European Commission decided in early 2011 to focus action in MENA through the ENP. It is now a funder of MENA governments and international and local NGOs through a new Civil Society Facility, the Governance Facility and the Comprehensive Institution Building programme. Also of note is that the EU is currently working on establishing a European Endowment for Democracy aimed at political party development.

Constructive accompaniment precludes having outsiders set or drive political agendas. Peacebuilding organizations can nonetheless choose to support civil society groups which are more inclusive—provided that peacebuilders are careful not to select only those groups which “speak like us.” Women are still rarely included at the negotiating table in peace talks, and women’s groups tend to be given short shrift in judicial and security sector reform processes. It would be an error to repeat this in the context of the Middle East and North Africa, where women have been at the forefront of the Arab Spring (see box 5 for further discussion). Faith-based groups in the Middle East are not all identical or unified (younger members of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, for example, have challenged their leadership to democratize the movement as a prerequisite to building a pluralistic civil state in Egypt). To contribute constructively to MENA’s political transitions from authoritarianism, peacebuilders will need to consider how Islamists, too, might be part of the new, transformative, political culture.

Peacebuilders must be careful not to select to support only those groups which “speak like us”

How can the peacebuilding community accompany constructively?

Constructive accompaniment will resonate as a concept within the peacebuilding community, especially among those groups applying the newer model of local leadership of peacebuilding programs. Organizations like Interpeace, Peace Direct, and the Quaker United Nations Office are examples of international NGOs in the foreground on conflict resolution initiatives as developed by people within their own communities. The message of local leadership advocates is that peacebuilding must move away from the model of outsiders planning peacebuilding activities which local people are then expected to implement. Local actors may not be better policymakers than their external counterparts. Experience has nonetheless shown that externally-driven political settlements are usually unsustainable. Local leadership can be more effective because it typically has longer staying power, more moral authority, and a greater ability to convene on the ground. Local peacebuilders also typically have better practical knowledge and connections, useful in creating contextually-appropriate programs and in carrying those out in shifting conditions (see box 3 for an illustration).

A useful guideline for MENA transitions: adopt and encourage a concept of politics as a genuine reconciliation of political interests, rather than as powersharing

As peacebuilders have developed the local leadership model, they have established some guidelines which will also be useful in the MENA transitional context. Among these is to *adopt and encourage a concept of politics as a genuine reconciliation of political interests, rather than as powersharing.*

Powersharing has largely dominated in peacebuilding thinking and practice to date. Yet it is coming to be questioned as limiting and potentially problematic. One issue is that a powersharing model is an elite-based vision of politics. Too often powersharing limits or excludes public participation in the process and substance of the arrangements being discussed. Powersharing thus can encourage a top-down peace which doesn’t last or only lasts under conflictual and repressive conditions.

Box 3: Locally-led security sector dialogue: The case of Envision Zimbabwe Women's Trust

The case of the faith-based women's NGO, Envision Zimbabwe Women's Trust, is a good illustration of the importance of practical knowledge and connections and the innovative potential of a local approach. Envision Zimbabwe was launched in the aftermath of the violence around the 2008 national elections. It seeks to promote gender equality in all spheres of life, and to encourage tolerance and a culture of open dialogue on Zimbabwe's development issues. It also makes one of its main objectives to fight against a culture of violence in Zimbabwe through promoting healing processes and encouraging reconciliation for both victims and perpetrators.

Among Envision Zimbabwe's anti-violence programs is one aimed at dialogue with the security sector. The police should be leading in finding solutions to violence in Zimbabwe's society. But they are too often part of the problem or an actor which civil society cannot anyway trust. The mistrust is actually on both sides: the police expect to be badly received in the communities where they have robbed and beaten up people under government orders. But how to engage security forces that feel alien to the communities where they serve? Envision Zimbabwe came up with the creative idea to reach out to senior police officials through connections formed in the liberation struggle days. These generational relations enabled members of the NGO to have less antagonistic discussions and, eventually, to convince senior officials to test mediation and violence reduction workshops under the auspices of the Centre for Defence Studies at the University of Zimbabwe.

The first workshop was reportedly very difficult, as everything appeared off limits for discussion ("We cannot talk about that"). So Envision Zimbabwe carried out only basic exercises aimed at getting people more comfortable and concentrated the course on mediation skills. The workshops are still ongoing, and Envision Zimbabwe is still meeting with engaged security actors. Now, however, they are discussing how they might work together in different communities in the country.

Second, powersharing is linked in theory and practice to democratic governance and the holding of elections. Yet Western-style democracy is not necessarily the best system of government for every place and time. The rightness of a set of political arrangements should be discussed by the communities that are setting new rules of the game for their state. They should be enabled to consider whether a federal system is best for their context; whether majority-based, or proportional representation is appropriate, etc. Customary and traditional modes of governing may be more effective and better accepted in many contexts, and these should be able to be included in new constitutions and beyond in legal and political structures.

Along with the guideline to conceive politics as a genuine reconciliation of interests, peacebuilders are learning from their local leadership experiences to seek to provide innovative options so that local actors can choose for themselves. The innovation element in this guideline points to the need to go beyond cookie-cutter solutions, to proposing solutions drawing on previous experience in a case-neutral fashion. Canada's federal system, for example, is heavily referenced in peacebuilding work in Africa. It may not be the best example for these states, however, or for MENA countries. Why not look towards the experience of countries like Iraq, Iran, or Malaysia, which have more similarities in political, religious, cultural, and economic terms to Egypt or Libya than does Canada?

The rightness of a set of political arrangements should be discussed by the communities that are setting the new rules of the game for their state

Peacebuilders should provide innovative options for governance that draw on previous experience in a case-neutral fashion

Canada's federal system may not be the best example for MENA countries

The options element in the guideline puts the emphasis on making proposals and suggesting programs in the plural. No international actor can deliver the answer for governance in a post-conflict or a transitional setting. Peacebuilders can be quite useful, however, in laying out a range of options for local actors to consider and debate.

Peacebuilding's maturation has brought innovation in settling conflicts, mediation and mediation support, and the convening of national dialogues (among other areas of creative advance). These are sets of skills which peacebuilders could usefully transfer to the MENA context under a constructive accompaniment approach. The peacebuilding community could also contribute in MENA through establishing a clearing house for local NGOs in the region. A clearing house would enable funding agencies to identify appropriate smaller partners, and not only to give support to large NGOs, able to mimic INGOs but not necessarily suitable (geographically, thematically, or socially) for undertaking projects in a certain area.

Part of the knowledge exchange implicated in constructive accompaniment is to ask local actors what kinds of support they might need. Box 4 provides a look at the kind of answers now coming from women's groups in Libya. Notable in the Libyan case is the request of women's groups for cross-Arab capacity building.

A clearing house for local NGOs in the region would help funding agencies to identify smaller partners more suitable for undertaking projects

Box 4: Constructive accompaniment: The case of the women's movement in Libya

Women were visible in all of the Arab Spring uprisings as initiators and leaders in the earliest stages of the MENA revolutions. Many gained an enormous sense of empowerment from accomplishing feats of support and protest that nothing had prepared them to undertake. As revolution has given way to struggles to establish new rules of the game, though, women in the Arab Spring countries risk being ignored in stabilization efforts, and shut out of political reframing processes.

Women in the Arab Spring countries risk being ignored in stabilization efforts and shut out of political reframing processes

The case of the women's movement in Libya provides a good example of what outside support might contribute as a partial corrective. Women's groups like the NGO, Women for Libya, helped to ensure that supplies and medical assistance reached Libyan fighters, including arranging for ships for transport. The participants in this supply effort have a strong determination to take charge of their lives and to participate as enablers of change in Libyan society. They could benefit from outside assistance of certain kinds, including the following:

Quick-access funding for practical initiatives: women's groups in Libya are working on a series of small-scale projects (e.g., widows' support, rape crisis centers) which would make a significant difference for the condition of women in their country. The funding which has been promised by the international community is not reaching down to the community level yet though, and Libyan funds still mainly aren't available, at least to these civil society actors. Quick-access funding, which accepts a high risk of project failure, would be appropriate in this context to keep up the momentum for women's empowerment.

Quick-access funding, which accepts a high risk of project failure, is needed to keep up the momentum for women's empowerment

Mentoring for working with the international community: most of the newly-created Libyan women's NGOs have no experience with grant applications or contacts with potential donors, much less project design or reporting. They could benefit from a project mentorship program, especially one creating linkages across the MENA region so that groups can learn from one another.

Capacity-building for legal and political engagement: the lesson of Egypt for Libyan women is that they must ensure that women's rights are explicitly included in a new Libyan constitution. Yet, for most, before they can enter the constitutional debate they need training in legal concepts and help to overcome the cultural expectation that women will not make themselves visible. Cross-Arab capacity-building would be the most effective to give Libyan activists confidence to engage.

The peacebuilding community has a responsibility to discourage harm

Strengthening south-south dialogue and, more narrowly, dialogue among civil society organizations in MENA, is a good means to respect cultural and political sensitivities. It is also exemplary of how participants can develop innovative, case-neutral solutions. For these reasons, many groups are asking for such assistance (another example comes from organizations involved in the Tunisian transitional justice process). Peacebuilders have built up experience in facilitating regional exchanges and inter-evaluations in protracted conflict situations. This experience could be very helpful in MENA, where south-south cooperation is quite new.

There are risks associated with some of the tools usually promoted in post-conflict settings

Lastly, the peacebuilding community has a responsibility to “discourage harm” in MENA by recognizing the risks associated with some of the ‘tools’ usually promoted in post-conflict settings. While disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs are an important part of security sector reform and peacebuilding, they can also have negative impacts that need to be understood so that harm is minimized. DDR will be a huge issue in MENA: Yemen is one of the most heavily armed countries in the world on per capita measures; Libya has more than 200,000 fighters to demobilize. DDR research, however, indicates that there are problems with many of the disarmament approaches used in the past in peacebuilding initiatives. Gun buy-back programs, for example, have been regularly undertaken as a solution for getting the most dangerous weapons out of circulation. Program evaluations have found that cash incentives for turning in weapons can actually encourage trafficking while the most highly-valued and dangerous arms remain available. Weapons collection projects also fail when people consider the situation they are in to be unstable or unsafe. They are simply not ready to give up their guns in such a context.

DDR research indicates that there are problems with many of the disarmament approaches used in peacebuilding initiatives

While recognizing the importance of DDR, peacebuilders can also learn from innovative initiatives that aim at preventing arms misuse and incidents. In a project undertaken in Somaliland, for example, researchers learned that most of the post-conflict violence involving weapons was unintended violence, stemming from the mishandling of firearms (including children taking weapons left unattended to shoot at the goats of neighboring clans). The project obtained good results not by seeking to remove the weapons – something which was unacceptable in the community – but rather by broadening out the project’s focus to the community safety level: e.g., giving training on firearms safety and conflict resolution; destroying items which the community no longer wanted. Thinking outside of the box like this will be equally necessary in the uncertain and often tense situations of communities in the MENA region, and shows that community level arms control programmes can improve security locally while waiting for the conditions for more comprehensive DDR to be met.

Conclusion

The revolutionary wave has not yet crested in the Middle East and North Africa. Countries like Tunisia seem to have successfully entered a transition phase of social healing and the rebooting of state-society relations. The situation in most others is far from clear. Will people power bring down more authoritarian governments, or will the regimes be able to keep the lid on unrest? Will counter-revolutionary movements succeed? Will struggles over political power lead to civil war? We can make informed guesses, but for now they remain just that: guesses.

The peacebuilding community is well-positioned to contribute in shifting and confused MENA political processes to helping local actors rewrite the rules of politics and power in their states. The best way forward is via a concept of constructive accompaniment. Under this concept local actors lead in deciding how to reengineer their state and to punish past wrongs and create reconciliation. External actors give support through providing some funding, proposing innovative and case-neutral policy options, training and mentoring, and developing capacity--especially through south-south cooperation. They also advise on what has not worked so well in past peacebuilding interventions, so that local peacebuilders don't have to make the same mistakes.

A number of potential projects and programmes flow from this characterization: for example, a clearing house of smaller MENA NGOs so funders can make better choices as to which local actors to support; a programme to facilitate cross-Arab civil society dialogues; or training for MENA civil society groups in how to work successfully with the international community. The peacebuilding community should equally consider the research it will need to undertake to play a useful role in MENA. Lessons learned on what not to do in DDR, innovating in peacebuilding's constitutional toolbox, and widening the reference cases for policy advice are all research projects with hands-on relevance for any future peacebuilding work in political transitions in MENA and beyond.

The best way for the peacebuilders to contribute to political transitions is via a concept of constructive accompaniment

Annex: Programme of the Annual Meeting 2011

Welcome and introduction to the programme

Scott WEBER, Director-General, Interpeace, Geneva

Kassym-Jomart TOKAYEV, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

Ralf HECKNER, Deputy Head, Political Division III, United Nations and other International Organizations, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern

Panel 1: State-society relations

Strong state-society relations are generally recognised to be a fundamental ingredient for a lasting peace, security, and prosperity. But what are the tools which exist to build such relations? The panel investigates the entry points and practical tools for strengthening state-society relations, including strategies to strengthen the local ownership of change processes.

Moderator: *Keith KRAUSE*, Director, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

Peacebuilding in the MENA region: Entry points to strengthen state-society relations

Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould MOHAMEDOU, Associate Fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), and Visiting Professor at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

Peacebuilding and societal transformation

Patrick HAENNI, Institut Religioscope, Fribourg

Locally-led peacebuilding: Strengthening local ownership

Scilla ELWORTHY, Founder of Peace Direct and the Oxford Research Group, London

Panel 2: From political settlement to building peace

When political settlements are reached, they are usually the work of months – if not years – of negotiation and dialogue between various stakeholders. They do not materialize out of the blue but are hard work behind the scenes. This panel asks members of the mediation community: What are the lessons of uniting different stakeholders into collaborative and inclusive-enough coalitions for political transitions? What record exists about the performance of specific tools to strengthen such coalitions? And, what are the necessary steps to transform short term political settlements into processes that foster lasting transformations?

Moderator: *Bernardo AREVALO DE LEON*, Deputy Director-General, Research and Development, Interpeace, Geneva

Lessons from negotiating political accommodation

Gerard MCHUGH, President, Conflict Dynamics International, Boston

The role of unofficial intermediaries in political transitions
Andy CARL, Director, Conciliation Resources, London

Women as change makers in the Arab Spring
Inge RELPH, Founding Board Member, Arab International Women's Forum, London

Panel 3: Ensuring justice, reducing violence

This panel explores the challenges of nurturing a *sustainable* peace in North Africa, and what strategies exist to address them. The panel focuses specifically on the challenge of ensuring justice and the reduction of armed violence, and explores the evidence of the performance of particular programmes and initiatives in this field.

Moderator: David ATWOOD, Associate Fellow, Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Transitional justice in Tunisia
Youssef MAHMOUD, Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute, New York

Small arms and armed violence: The challenges ahead
Nicolas FLORQUIN, Senior Researcher, Small Arms Survey, Geneva

Local perspectives on justice and violence: Community evidence from Zimbabwe
Chiyedza NYAHUYE, Board Member, Envision Zimbabwe Women's Trust, Harare

Panel 4: International support for political transitions

International support can be a critical element in assisting political transitions to have positive long term effects. While most transition processes are driven by local stakeholders, international support is especially critical at the moment when the excitement of rapid change subsides, and issues such as job creation, dispute resolution, or institution building surpasses the capacities of local governments. This panel reviews the evidence of the multilateral peacebuilding tools available to the United Nations and regional organizations to strengthen political transitions in the MENA region.

Moderator: Fred TANNER, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Geneva

The experience of peacebuilding tools of United Nations peacebuilding architecture
Henk-Jan BRINKMAN, Chief, Policy, Planning and Application Branch, Peacebuilding Support Office, United Nations, New York

Architectures for peace and political transitions
Gay ROSENBLUM-KUMAR, Senior Secretary, United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, New York

Closing discussion and remarks

Jonathan WOOLLEY, Director, Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

Achim WENNMANN, Executive Coordinator, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Geneva

About this paper

This paper is a distillation of the main points raised during the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. The Annual Meeting took place at the International Environment House No.2, in Geneva, 2 December 2011. All views expressed in this paper relate to the interventions made during the 2011 Annual Meeting. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rapporteur, or the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. This paper is also available at <http://www.gpplatform.ch>.

Jennifer Milliken is Program Director of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, and CEO of Milliken Strategy & Communications. She acted as the rapporteur for the Annual Meeting.

About the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is an inter-agency network that connects the critical mass of peacebuilding actors, resources, and expertise in Geneva and worldwide. Founded in 2008, the Platform has a mandate to facilitate interaction on peacebuilding between different institutions and sectors, and to advance new knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding issues and contexts. It also plays a creative role in building bridges between International Geneva, the United Nations peacebuilding architecture in New York, and peacebuilding activities in the field. The Platform's network comprises more than 700 peacebuilding professionals and over 60 institutions working on peacebuilding directly or indirectly. As part of its 2012-2014 Programme, the Platform provides policy-relevant advice and services, ensures the continuous exchange of information through seminars, consultations, and conferences, and facilitates outcome-oriented peacebuilding dialogues in five focus areas. For more information see <http://www.gpplatform.ch>.

Series Editor

*Dr. Achim Wennmann
Executive Coordinator*

© Geneva Peacebuilding
Platform, 2012