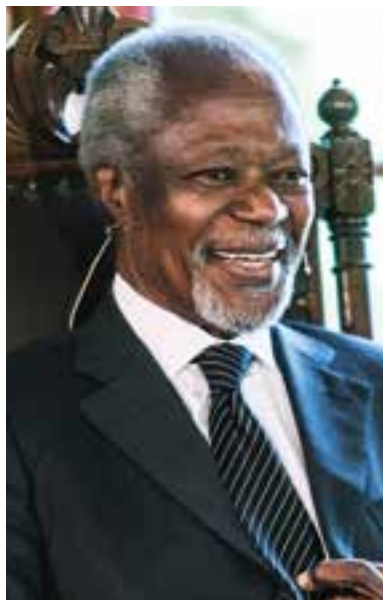


# OSLOFORUM2017

## Peacemaking in a new era of geopolitics



Authored by Christina Buchhold, Jonathan Harlander,  
Sabrina Quamber and Giles Pitts

Meeting  
**report**

“**hd**” | Centre for  
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Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs

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exchanges with provocative inputs from a range of different speakers, including conflict party representatives, war correspondents, outstanding analysts, thinkers and experts on specific issues.

Participants have included **Jimmy Carter**, former President of the United States; **Federica Mogherini**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; **Juan Manuel Santos**, President of Colombia; **Kofi Annan**, former Secretary-General of the United Nations; **Fatou Bensouda**, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; **Lakhdar Brahimi**, former Joint Special Representative for Syria of the United Nations and the League of Arab States; **Catherine Samba-Panza**, former President of the Central African Republic; **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland; **Thabo Mbeki**, former President of South Africa; and **Gerry Adams**, President of Sinn Féin. The Oslo Forum is proud to have hosted several Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

The retreats refrain from making public recommendations, aiming instead to advance conflict mediation practice.

OSLOFORUM2017

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# Peacemaking in a new era of geopolitics



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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Its mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation.

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*David Harland*

## The Oslo Forum 2017: an overview

The fifteenth Oslo Forum convened one hundred of the world's leading peacemakers, conflict actors, decision-makers and academics, bringing together people with forty-two different nationalities. The participants included Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs; Maria Ángela Holguín, the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs; Thabo Mbeki, the former President of the Republic of South Africa; Rodrigo Londoño (Timoleón Jiménez), the Head of FARC-EP; John Kerry, the former United States Secretary of State; Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations; and Børge Brende, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Forum's overarching theme was **Peacemaking in a new era of geopolitics**. Those attending explored how growing regional and international competition among powerful states is influencing conflict resolution efforts around the world. They discussed the prospects for mediation processes in environments which are increasingly shaped by geopolitical rivalries, how mediators can avoid becoming pawns in a bigger chess game, and what can be done to encourage an alignment of great power interests for the sake of peace.

The impact of great power politics also featured prominently in a session on the **United Nation's role as a peacemaker**. Participants discussed how the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoys and Special Representatives can face increasing regional tensions, deepening geopolitical fissures, and growing scepticism towards a multilateral system. Participants agreed that the UN will need to undertake reforms if it is to deal effectively with the changing nature of today's conflicts.

Key actors involved in the negotiation of the **Colombian peace agreement** reflected on lessons from their shared path to peace.

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Practitioners cautioned  
that re-labelling  
peacemaking as CVE  
can limit access to  
conflict parties.”

They stressed the importance of the unilateral ceasefire declared by the FARC-EP, not only in building trust among the conflict parties but also in restoring trust within the population. They considered the inclusion of military personnel as well as victims of the conflict in the negotiations to have been another crucial factor in the success of the process. While the successful implementation of the peace agreement remains a significant challenge for the country, participants shared an optimistic outlook for Colombia's future.

Participants also analysed the dilemmas which mediators face when **seeking popular validation for peace agreements**. They discussed how to balance the advantages of democratic validation with the risk of jeopardising agreements. Holding a referendum, in particular, represents both a high-reward and high-risk strategy, as the rejections of peace agreements by popular referendum in Colombia and Cyprus have demonstrated. The participants agreed that, in order to choose a suitable method of validation from a range of alternative options – including parliamentary or judicial approval, elections and informal consultative mechanisms – mediators need to take into account a country's history as well as its legal and political culture.

The attendees also noted that the recent decline in violence in **Syria** could mark an inflection point in the conflict's bloody trajectory. They specifically discussed how localised ceasefires and the establishment of de-escalation zones have contributed to this reduction in violence. Commentators, however, explored whether such deals can establish durable stability and open up space for a lasting political settlement of the conflict.

The controversial subject of how mediators should position themselves with regard to the paradigm of **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)** sparked an interesting debate. While CVE agendas have often been described as community-led, those



*Lundeg Purevsuren, Teresa Whitfield and Bineta Diop*

The lack of the necessary political commitment to an inclusive peace process in **South Sudan** meant that participants in that session shared a particularly bleak outlook for the country. Divisions within the government and opposition groups, as well as the fragmentation of existing opposition parties, are pushing the country further towards the brink with little hope that a credible solution is within reach.

Discussions on **Cyprus** found the process at a make-or-break moment. While both conflict parties had made significant progress earlier in 2017, commentators noted that disagreement over the issues of security and guarantees, in particular, could still endanger the success of the entire process. These fears were unfortunately confirmed after the Forum when the breakdown of talks at the end of June put an end to the latest – and very promising – attempt to bring an end to the conflict.

Another exchange focused on opportunities and challenges for implementing a revived reconciliation agenda in **Somalia** following the landslide election of a new president in February 2017. A separate session also considered the layers of conflict in **Nigeria**, and how mediation and inter-communal dialogue can reduce simmering tensions and recurrent violence.

In other discussions, the retreat provided attendees with a chance to consider the **prospects for reconciliation in a post-ISIL Iraq**, emerging threats to security in **South East Europe**, and the recent achievements and setbacks in the peace process in the **Philippines** between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Throughout the Oslo Forum, practitioners were challenged to reconsider the complexities of peacemaking in an increasingly fractured world, review their analysis of current conflicts, and rethink the value of old peacemaking strategies in a new era. Despite the myriad of obstacles to peace which emerged from discussions on South Sudan, Iraq and Syria, the session on Colombia offered an important opportunity for peacemakers and mediators to draw inspiration from successes.

attending the Forum pointed out that CVE programmes are, in fact, mostly government-led and donor-driven. They cautioned that re-labelling peacemaking as CVE can limit access to conflict parties, and they encouraged donors to critically assess the implications of a framework that lacks both an adequate definition and examples of efficacy.

In a separate session, participants examined the impact of new communication technologies on mediation processes and explored the opportunities and challenges for **diplomacy in the age of WhatsApp**. While new technologies are not a substitute for the direct and field-based work of peacemakers, participants agreed that, whether they want to use new technologies or not, mediators can no longer afford to ignore them.

## Syria: a chessboard of regional interests

After seven years of war in Syria, levels of violence appear to be taking a downward trend. Assessing peacemaking efforts in the Syrian conflict, participants discussed the de-escalation zones announced in May 2017 through the Astana process and questioned whether they would pave the way to stability in the country.

Commentators observed that, in the past, local peace deals in Syria had been criticised by external parties for slanting conditions in favour of the Syrian government. Some critics had argued that localised deals would undermine the official peace process. The United States in particular had called for a national solution as the only acceptable outcome. However, those views have recently begun to change, recognising that localised deals and cease-fires do at least reduce levels of violence. It was less clear whether such deals can establish durable stability in different areas. Some contributors argued that, in the current Syrian context, a grand, national solution is out of reach.

Reflecting on the Geneva communiqué and UN Security Council resolution 2254, participants inquired whether the conditions they set had acted as a straitjacket on peacemaking efforts, disconnecting the process from realities on the ground and the Syrian battlefield. Actors with insights on the Geneva process suggested that, while 2254 remains the key standard on paper, there are efforts to reduce its constraints and manoeuvre within ambiguities in the text to make the process more responsive to the realities of the conflict and its possible outcome.

Questioning how ‘representative’ are the international peace processes, participants noted that many Syrians have complained that they are neither represented nor considered in either the

Geneva or Astana processes. Both are perceived to represent the concerns of external actors, with limited consideration for the interests of Syrian stakeholders, especially citizens.

Participants also discussed the impact of changing regional dynamics due to the political rift between some Gulf countries and Qatar. Increased uncertainty was likely to have a destabilising effect as Syrian groups supported by Gulf countries reassessed their strategic calculi. Turkey and Iran’s response to the rift could also significantly shift the regional power balance.

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**It remains to be seen whether the recent reduction in violence opens the path to a long-lasting political settlement.**

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The theme of uncertainty-recalculation also applied to the United States’ strategy regarding Syria. One commentator remarked that the US faces a ‘trilemma’, as its three stated priorities may be incompatible: defeating ISIL, curtailing Iranian influence and maintaining a minimal footprint in the Syrian conflict. While some participants questioned the loss of US influence in the region, others maintained that, even with other major players deeply involved on the battlefield, any far-reaching or long-term deal is unlikely without US approval or acquiescence.

A contributor expressed optimism that this summer marked a moment of hope in the Syrian conflict, with the caveat that such moments have emerged and been squandered before. A combination of battle fatigue, the dearth of good options for any group and the desire of external powers to exit the Syrian theatre may hasten an end to the fighting through de-escalation zones and localised ceasefires. However, another contributor cautioned that no ceasefire would last indefinitely, even with powerful guarantors such as Russia and Turkey, without political mechanisms to discuss grievances. It therefore remains to be seen whether the recent reduction in violence opens the path to a long-lasting political settlement to the conflict.



*John F. Kerry and Kofi A. Annan (left)*

*Alice Nderitu (top right)*

*Ibrahim Ahmed Ghandour (centre right)*

*Roland Paris and Sarah F. Cliffe (bottom right)*



## South Sudan: resuscitating the dream

Two years after its emergence on the world map, the world's youngest country descended into violent conflict as a result of political disputes within its leadership. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) led the peace process to curtail the violent fallout of the dispute between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, which culminated in a peace agreement in July 2015. Two years after the signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), peace process actors reflected on its implementation and the challenges facing South Sudan today.

Although the ARCSS was acknowledged by observers to have the necessary components to assist in building a durable peace in the country, its implementation has been problematic from the beginning. Some participants recalled that, at the time of signing, the agreement had been imposed on the conflict parties by South Sudan's neighbours. However, the political willingness to impose the agreement's implementation remains lacking, within both the national leadership and IGAD. As a result, the incumbent President Salva Kiir has selectively chosen and applied just a few ARCSS provisions. Meanwhile the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO), Riek Machar, has been unable to leave South Africa since July 2016, despite being a signatory to the ARCSS.

In the days immediately preceding the session, IGAD held the 31<sup>st</sup> Extra-Ordinary Summit on South Sudan since the outbreak of the ongoing crisis. The summit called for a comprehensive political forum in which all stakeholders can participate in search of a solution to the conflict, and the establishment of a revitalisation committee to reinvigorate the peace process. Conflict actors cautiously noted that such an initiative may serve to open the political space needed. However, they repeatedly highlighted

the urgent need for any political process to be inclusive, so that all stakeholders are able to participate.

Several strategies have been offered by stakeholders and observers to resolve the conflict in South Sudan in the last two years, most with grave shortcomings. Following the violent events of July 2016, and lack of implementation of the ARCSS, the international community took a more security-focused approach, with the deployment of a Regional Protection Force designed to help secure Juba and create a more conducive environment for

peace. Commentators noted the ongoing strategy of pacification adopted by the government to extend government authority into opposition-held areas and questioned the political will to implement the agreement.

In light of the spiralling situation, some actors have propagated the trusteeship option, whereby the current leadership is replaced with a technocratic government until elections can be held. However, credible options for encouraging the current leadership to step away from power are absent, as pointed out by commentators. This option is also strongly criticised by those South Sudanese who fought for decades for the cessation of the country from Sudan.

The SPLM-IO has proposed an 'ante-status-quo' option, which calls for reinstating all political leaders to their positions in government as listed in the ARCSS. However, observers questioned the assumption that pushing the two leaders to collaborate in the same tested and failed configurations of power would work if tried for a third time.

Some political actors within South Sudan have called for new elections, in order to reinstate full legitimacy to the current government. But participants noted that, in the absence of credible

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The political  
willingness to impose  
the agreement's  
implementation  
remains lacking.

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*Lyse Doucet, Jeffrey Feltman and  
Børge Brende (top left)*  
*Hakeem Baba-Ahmed (top centre)*  
*Chrystia Freeland (top right)*  
*Naz K. Modirzadeh (bottom right)*



institutions and with continued conflict throughout the country, elections are likely to provide only additional fuel for the fighting and instability.

Discussing the national dialogue announced by President Salva Kiir in January, commentators stressed that national dialogues are not intended to stop wars. Without free access, assurances of safety and the participation of all opposition actors, the national dialogue is unlikely to be productive and, according to one commentator, could prove to be a 'national monologue' instead.

Highlighting the emerging divisions within the government, the mushrooming of new opposition groups and fragmentation of existing opposition parties, participants noted that South Sudan is on the brink of collapse. Extreme economic instability and insecurity-induced famine are contributing to the unprecedented exodus of refugees and internally displaced people. An inclusive peace process is required to bring the country back from this brink. However, the absence of the necessary political will to convene this process remains the most critical hurdle, with no credible solutions on the horizon.



## Over-democratising peace? The dilemmas of popular validation of peace agreements

The rejection of the Colombian peace deal in a referendum in October 2016 demonstrated the considerable risks associated with the democratic validation of peace agreements. As one Oslo Forum contributor noted, peace deals are complicated and may not easily bare close scrutiny; they require compromises which might be difficult for constituencies to accept. As a result, managing communication around a validation process represents a significant challenge for the parties and peacemakers involved, who need to both clarify the individual provisions of an agreement and address the strong feelings involved in the process.

There are a variety of options for increasing public ownership of a peace process including holding referenda or elections, as well as seeking parliamentary approval or judicial validation. Participants agreed that in order to select a suitable option it is necessary to take into account the history of a country as well as its legal and political culture. They also noted that it is important to carefully consider how the logic of a peace process may

limit the validation options which are available to the parties and mediators. In Northern Ireland, for example, the text of the Good Friday Agreement specified that the bill introduced by the legislature to amend the Constitution would need to be put to a referendum.

Referenda represent both a high-reward and a high-risk strategy for obtaining public validation. They constitute an effective and definitive means of expressing public endorsement for a peace agreement, and can also function as an emergency brake in case negotiations result in unpalatable concessions. However, they also represent a considerable gamble. The outcome of a referendum can be influenced by factors unrelated to the peace agreement including political manipulation, economic conditions, or natural disasters. Political parties, for example, may use the referendum process to make short-term political gains rather than focusing on peacemaking. Negotiators may also be tempted to postpone including some constituencies in the peace process by promising



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Referenda represent both a high-reward and a high-risk strategy for obtaining public validation.

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to hold a referendum later, resulting in dangerous delays in incorporating some stakeholder demands for adjustments.

Using a referendum to provide negotiators with a mandate prior to negotiations can appear to be a safer alternative. In 1992, for example, almost 70% of white South Africans answered ‘Yes’ when asked: “Do you support continuation of the reform process which the State President began on 2 February 1990 and which is aimed at a new Constitution through negotiation?” The results of the referendum consequently provided a strong mandate for President de Klerk to pursue negotiations with the ANC which eventually led to the first multi-racial elections in South Africa.

*Vitaly Naumkin and Yalda Hakim, Marianne Hille and Bineta Diop, and Beatrice Mégevand-Roggo (bottom left to right)*

Other alternative or complementary means of generating public support include establishing parallel and informal consultative mechanisms to official negotiation processes. Participants mentioned that new technologies provided useful tools for familiarising populations with the key issues being negotiated. However, participants disagreed in relation to the reliability of trends gleaned from analysis of social media. While one participant underlined that such analysis would be essential to assess public opinion, others warned of the risks associated with the manipulation of such data and the unreliability of the results.

Participants agreed that conflict parties and peacemakers would all benefit significantly from the development of a menu of options for validating peace agreements which offered alternatives to holding referenda and outlined how some options could be combined. They concluded that there is a need to carry out more research into the circumstances that lead agreements to be approved or rejected, and to use this knowledge to inform current and future processes.



## Nigeria: a multidimensional conflict landscape

Hopes ran high after the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. It seemed to mark a major watershed in Nigerian politics: a peaceful political transition, and a new president who had been elected freely and fairly on the promise that he would reduce insecurity, fight corruption, and improve governance.

However, two years later, Nigeria remains at a dangerous crossroads. The Niger Delta remains unstable, and renewed calls for Biafran secession have been met with anti-Igbo sentiment in the north. There have been clashes between the army and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, a Shia organisation now proscribed in Kaduna State. Even though Boko Haram is losing territory, violent conflict has led to a massive humanitarian crisis which has seen affected regions in the country included alongside South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen on a tragic list of four major famines. In the longer-term, as one participant observed, there is a serious risk that ten million young people will grow up without education unless the Nigerian state and the global community intensify their intervention efforts.

The participants identified the use of force in conflict resolution as one of several structural problems which underlie the challenges in Nigeria. Mediation by third parties has secured the release of some of the Chibok schoolgirls captured by Boko Haram, and kept the door slightly ajar for dialogue on issues including temporary ceasefires. However, the support of the Nigerian government for these efforts has been lukewarm, and there is very limited scope to expand such initiatives while the military continues to insist that it can defeat Boko Haram. As one participant noted, Boko Haram will continue fighting because it's the only choice it has.

A recurring theme during the discussions was that social narratives tend to instrumentalise ethnic and religious identities as well as fuel divisions. One contributor noted that the history of

conflict in Nigeria is not taught in Nigeria and people quickly seek to blame 'the other' for aggression rather than questioning why communities fight. In a tense atmosphere in which both the press and people on social media are eager to emphasise difference and provoke resentment, conflicts are easily sparked.

Framing the national state of affairs is uncertainty about President Buhari, who is currently kept from his office by illness. Under a long-observed and unwritten 'gentlemen's agreement', power rotates between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south every two terms. In a situation where President Buhari, as a first-term president who is a Muslim from the north of the country, is unable to continue, some people in the north are fiercely determined that Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo, who is a Christian, is not considered the rightful successor. The delicate issue of succession would thus require careful management to avoid a destabilising power struggle.

Although the future seems bleak, there are ongoing attempts to recreate the dialogue initiatives that saved the country from conflict during the political transition of 2015. Participants were urged to consider how to combine the power of traditional leaders who are not drawn from the existing political class in order to address the current crisis in relation to leadership.

Looking at the longer term, participants called for the replacement of the presidential cult of personality in Nigeria with stable political parties that build legitimacy and support on the basis of their views, rather than their military influence. In this way, political institutions can develop which are capable of mediating relationships between citizen and state, and citizen and citizen.

While this vision of a renewed and more stable politics in Nigeria is to be encouraged, in the coming months the focus will be on immediate concerns. In an atmosphere of alarming speculation about the President's health, Nigeria's future hangs in the balance.

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The use of force is  
one of several  
structural problems  
which underlie  
the challenges  
in Nigeria.

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*Staffan de Mistura and John F. Kerry (top left)*

*Matthew Hassan Kukah (centre)*

*Mohammad Javad Zarif (bottom left)*

*Federica Mogherini (bottom right)*



## The UN, great power politics and peacemaking

In an era in which great power politics seems to be returning, and regional rivalries are determining the course of conflicts and stalling their peaceful resolution, the Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General face steep and evolving challenges as they attempt to fulfil their missions. This session took place against a backdrop of threats – real and perceived – to the multilateral system, and began with an acknowledgement that this is a tough time for peacemaking. Powerful states are asserting that ‘might is right’ and that there is no such thing as an international community – such assertions shake the foundations of the UN. There was agreement among contributors that such sentiments must be contested by those who disagree, and that ‘nineteenth-century’ thinking must be called into question by those who have an alternative vision for the twenty-first century.

The toxic situation in the UN Security Council is often not a good starting point for addressing the complex conflicts that affect the world today. However, Special Representatives and Special Envoys do have some creativity at their disposal in terms of using the good offices of the Secretary-General. Likewise, some Security Council mandates, such as in the case of the Syrian crisis, have constructive ambiguity built in that allows Special Envoys to exercise flexibility in their role. However, it was argued that, at times, the politics of the Security Council can lead to a mandate that hurts the UN’s efforts to act as a third party, such as the case of Resolution 2216 on Yemen.

Mandates are sometimes very specific, such as in the case of Colombia where the UN has the clearly defined role of verifying the ceasefire and the laying down of arms by members of FARC-EP. But they are problematic when they become so large that they

are an opportunity for Security Council micro-management, for example via extensive reporting requirements. The length of a mandate is also an issue, since missions often shut down more quickly than is ideal for seeing through implementation. The number of UN missions over the years in the Central African Republic, for example, may indicate that some have ended prematurely. However, it was noted that much of the UN’s vital political, peace and security work happens outside Security Council mandates, such as through under-the-radar conflict prevention initiatives and the provision of support to non-UN mediators.

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**The UN must be open to reform itself if it is to deal effectively with the challenges posed by shifting international politics.**

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In terms of managing a process, it was agreed that in general, it is best practice to have one mediation process and one mediator. The choice of mediator is contextual: rather than defaulting to the UN, the key question in any given case is who has the leverage, credibility and influence over those who have the power to prevent or end conflict. However, when there is more than one active official process, such as the Geneva and Astana processes on Syria, these do not have to be in competition. Creative management can shape the processes in ways that are complementary. With this approach, facilitators can constructively address the conditions of involvement in the process that certain parties might demand. For example, if a party insists on the need to solve terrorism issues first, and this

will be discussed in the second process, it can be removed as a barrier to entry in the first.

Undoubtedly, the UN must be open to reform itself if it is to deal effectively with the challenges posed by shifting international politics and the changing nature of conflict. But this session proved that the UN still has its staunch defenders, confident of its place as the crown jewel of multilateral organisations.



Lam Akol Ajawin and Gunnar Holm  
(top centre)

Børge Brende (top right)

Abir Hajibrahim (centre)

Joëlle Jenny (bottom left)



## Somalia: reflecting on a revised reconciliation agenda

In February 2017, President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed 'Farmajo' came to power in Somalia, in what was hailed as a landmark election and a turning point in the country's fractious history. The President enjoys widespread support among Somali youth and diaspora, as well as within the international community. However, the challenges facing his government remain significant: weak institutional capacity, stunted economic growth, drought, a weak National Army, deep political rifts between national stakeholders and an ongoing insurgency by Al-Shabaab.

Key Somali and regional actors highlighted that it was of utmost importance for the new federal government's political strategy to be built around peace and reconciliation, and not centred on counter-terrorism alone. While Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat to the Somali state and neighbouring countries, it has been significantly weakened due to the military offensive by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Yet, territorial gains by AMISOM have not been consolidated through better governance and social services in reclaimed areas, contributing to low confidence in the federal government, as well as to continued support for the insurgency.

Participants noted that it is essential to reverse this pattern if support for Al-Shabaab is to be eradicated. In order to establish the credibility of the government, inclusive governance structures must provide services and justice mechanisms to all Somalis. Addressing local grievances, fighting corruption and providing alternative opportunities for the youth of Somalia were identified as fundamental steps towards improving federal credibility. Boosting economic recovery was also raised as an essential goal for the new Somali government.

Discussing the political strategy for reconciliation and recovery, participants repeatedly stressed that these efforts must be Somali-led. They added that the country's long-term security architecture must be designed jointly by Somali federal and regional governments, with the strategic goal of transferring responsibilities from AMISOM to a robust Somali National Army in the near future. Somalia's neighbours and the international community have a significant role to play: first, by supporting the federal government; and second, by avoiding regional rivalries in Somalia. The

new government has stressed that it should be the primary recipient of external support and assistance so that it can build its capacities and credibility with the Somali public.

Reconciliation, highlighted as a top priority by President Farmajo, needs to take place at multiple levels: both between the federal government and Somaliland, and with the cadres of Al-Shabaab. While the leadership of the group has expressed no interest in reconciliation efforts, observers noted that reconciliation with Al-Shabaab's rank and file was not only possible, but necessary. One participant noted that while it was imperative to maintain sustained military pressure on Al-Shabaab, avenues for political engagement with the group at all levels should remain open. Politically, the regional governments must be involved in these efforts, to consolidate the federal system and improve the credibility of the governments in the eyes of the Somali people.

Despite the numerous challenges, President Farmajo's election has initiated a historic moment of political opportunity in Somalia. Embarking on a commitment to reconciliation and reconstruction, the new leadership in Somalia will need the support of the region and the international community, and the patience and cooperation of Somali stakeholders at home and abroad.

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**To establish the credibility of the government, inclusive governance structures must provide services and justice mechanisms to all Somalis.**

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*Retno L.P. Marsudi (top right)*

*Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour and David Gardner (centre right)*

*Sadiq Al-Rikabi (bottom right)*

*Ghaith Abdulahad, Yazan al Jiboury and Teresa Whitfield (bottom left)*



## Cyprus: on the brink of breakthrough or breakdown

At the time of the 2017 Oslo Forum, the Cyprus peace process was entering a critical stage. Although previous ‘make or break’ moments have come and gone, there was increasing agreement among stakeholders that the late-June talks in the Swiss Alpine resort of Crans-Montana represented an opportune moment to make the pending decisions that could finally end this seemingly intractable conflict.

Not since the early 2000s had the talks gained as much momentum. Over the past two years, significant progress had been made on five of the six chapters of the talks: governance and power sharing; property rights; the economy; EU membership; and territory. In the case of Cyprus’s territorial divisions, a sizeable step forward was taken in early 2017 when an agreement was reached on the proportion of land that would be returned to Greek Cypriots under a proposed new federal system.

Much more work remained, however, on the sixth chapter, security and guarantees – the final major piece of this complex jigsaw. At times, the public debate about security has been locked in familiar lines of argument. Turkish Cypriots’ fear of being overrun in the future – a fear that can be traced to their gradual marginalisation in the 1960s and an attempted military coup in 1974 by Greek Cypriot hardline nationalists – means that, for them, Turkish guarantees and the presence of Turkish troops is a necessity. But this answer is itself the problem for Greek Cypriots, who argue that Turkish troops are a threat to sovereignty and an inherent source of insecurity.

During the session, participants reflected on strategies that helped to increase trust and accommodation on both sides, such as encouraging negotiators to think about security in various layers, including constitutional security (concerning the settlement itself and the legal safeguards that will ensure the future of a federal system) and security of implementation (an agreement on international oversight that may replace the need for perma-

nent guarantor states). This creative breakdown of thorny issues into sub-units allowed for incremental progress to be made. It also aimed to prevent inevitable sticking points from giving the impression that there was disagreement on a whole chapter. Furthermore, plans for a new framework for military cooperation between Greek, Turkish and Cypriot forces – including, for example, search and rescue operations, intelligence sharing and the management of critical infrastructure – aimed to build a space in which normalised military diplomacy could happen.

The Cyprus peace talks have operated on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and every day moved the parties closer to breakthrough or breakdown. Unfortunately it was the latter which prevailed, with the parties unable to reach agreement on a number of key issues including the ongoing presence of troops on the island and the status of guarantors. The Crans-Montana negotiations ended in acrimony, a blow from which the process may struggle to recover for the foreseeable future. There is fatigue in the international community following this latest setback, and further talks in the near future seem unlikely, not least because they would be interrupted by Greek Cypriot presidential elections in early 2018.

Meanwhile, in the absence of an agreement, tensions could rise yet again, not least around energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. The view of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot government is that drilling operations for oil and gas should not take place ahead of a settlement, whereas the Greek Cypriot government has previously argued that, as a sovereign nation, it has the right to conduct business as usual regardless of the talks.

The recent signing of a peace accord in Colombia – after conflict as longstanding as that in Cyprus – continues to provide hope that breakthrough agreements can emerge from intractability. But the cautious optimism that surrounded this session at the Oslo Forum was soon tempered by disappointment.

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The breakdown of  
thorny issues into  
sub-units allowed for  
incremental progress.

”



*Kofi A. Annan and Lyse Doucet (top left)*

*Elisabeth Slättum (top middle)*

*Benito E. Tiamzon (top right)*

*Comfort Ero (bottom left)*

*Thabo M. Mbeki (bottom right)*



## Diplomacy in the age of WhatsApp

Amid Syria's raging civil war, an increasing number of agreements to secure humanitarian access, temporary ceasefires or local truces are being negotiated via WhatsApp and other instant messaging services. Yet, peacemakers have often been slow to catch up with new technologies used by conflict parties to negotiate agreements. In this session, participants agreed that whether or not mediators want to use new technologies, they can no longer afford to ignore them.

Participants discussed the possibilities opened by new communication technologies for mediation processes. Such technologies have enabled regular, informal and personal contact between conflict parties and mediators, circumventing physical and political constraints on meeting during ongoing fighting. From the front lines or the intimacy of one's home, communication on WhatsApp and other services has made conflict parties more likely to drop their guard, enabling mediators to build relations. New technologies have also aided the exchange of prisoners, through sharing proof of life, and the negotiation of local ceasefires.

It is not only the communication between mediators and conflict parties that has changed. Conflict parties have also utilised new technologies to consult more regularly with their constituencies during a negotiation process. Similarly, the possibility of including a virtually unlimited number of contributors has allowed negotiators and mediators to build processes with multiple participants, regardless of their physical location.

Yet these technologies come with considerable security risks. Cell phones can easily be monitored and used to geo-localise actors, posing serious threats to secret talks. Once tracked, switching off a cell phone might not be sufficient to circumvent surveillance, as information about who is shutting down phones at what time, and where, can provide insight into who is attending the talks.

The immediacy and intimacy of communications can also have clear downsides. Direct links with one's constituency can create circles of immediate accountability. In the absence of a confiden-



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Peacemakers have often been slow to catch up with new technologies used by conflict parties to negotiate agreements.

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tial conversation, it can be increasingly difficult for leaders to commit to unpopular compromises. Furthermore, the spread of confidential details of talks on social media networks may not only harm ongoing processes but also lead to immediate reprisals for the negotiators involved. Additionally, chatbots can be used to accelerate the replication of a particular message, enabling a minority voice to be suddenly and massively amplified. The risk of creating different perceptions of reality is therefore particularly acute.

*Erling Skjongsberg and Bård Ludvig Thorheim, Berhane Gebre-Christos, Geir O. Pedersen, Haile Menkerios and Kofi A. Annan, Wilma Austria-Tiamzon, and Paul R. Sutphin, Stephen Par Kuol and Christopher Trott (bottom left to right)*

Participants shared strategies that could help in mitigating some of the risks mentioned, including using a tin box or Faraday bag to stop phone signals. One participant pointed out that mediators should nevertheless work under the assumption that, despite encrypted end-to-end messaging, everything they exchange electronically can be monitored.

Participants agreed that new technologies are not a substitute for the direct and field-based work of peacemakers. The network, reputation and integrity of peacemakers remain key to establishing and building trust. Whether and how mediators use new technologies should be a conscious and informed choice that makes full use of their potential, while responsibly managing the associated risks.



## Post-ISIL Iraq: challenges and chances for reconciliation

Iraq is at a turning point in its history as the last pockets of territory under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are being liberated. Participants in this session explored potential trajectories for a post-ISIL Iraq, and identified challenges and opportunities for reconciliation. While the defeat of ISIL in Iraq now appears close, strategies for rebuilding liberated areas still haven't been developed.

ISIL brought the attention of the international community back to Iraq and had a unifying effect across the country as factions that traditionally opposed each other joined forces to fight against it. Utilising this momentum for reconciliation among Iraq's fragmented communities, however, remains a major challenge.

How can the state deal with those who have been associated with ISIL under the latter's brutal domination? While one participant stressed that there are no alternatives to reconciliation with those who have been coerced to fight for ISIL, others questioned whether such attempts would send the wrong signals to other extremist groups. Addressing the root causes which have contributed to the rise of extremist groups is central to any reconciliation attempt. A number of underlying challenges remain including the economic crisis, corruption, tensions between regional players, and divisions along sectarian and ethnic lines. While most participants emphasised the need for Iraq to include all social groups in development and reconciliation, one participant alternatively suggested that Sunnis, Yazidis, Christians and Turkmen could each be granted autonomous regions.

The level of autonomy in Kurdistan also remains a crucial point of contention for Iraqis, as well as Kurdistan's access to federal resources – including to finance the Peshmerga – and its influence on the Iraqi government. One participant complained that,

while the President of Iraq has traditionally been a Kurd, his prerogatives are mostly nominal and the government remains *de facto* 'Shia-ruled'. It is therefore necessary for Kurdistan to turn a new page, the participant concluded. While an independence referendum for Kurdistan was scheduled to take place later in the year, participants in the session disagreed about whether independence would be a positive development or not.

Reconciliation is not a slogan and will require a roadmap involving actors from across Iraqi society, including religious leaders, women and young people. There is a need for reconciliation not only between communities but also within them. The session explored the possible option of amending the current Iraqi Constitution to facilitate reconciliation in the country. One participant suggested, for example, that a government with a political majority, rather than a system based on sectarian divisions, would change the military conflict into a political conflict. Despite discussions about possible solutions for Iraq, strong disagreements between participants during the session indicate that the path to reconciliation still requires significant compromise from all parties in the country.

“  
Addressing the root causes which have contributed to the rise of extremist groups is central to any reconciliation attempt.”





*Christopher Bennett, David Gorman and Juan Garrigues (facing page)*

*Yemane Ghebreab (left)*

*Espen Barth Eide (top centre)*

*Hajer Sharief (top right)*

*Michael Vatikiotis and Lundeg Purevsuren (centre right)*

*Almut Wieland-Karimi (bottom right)*



## South East Europe: stability under threat

More than quarter of a century has passed since Yugoslavia disintegrated in war. However, many issues arising from the country's dissolution and the emergence of seven new countries remain outstanding. Participants agreed that most of these issues do not present an immediate threat to peace but recognised that they nevertheless contribute to a wider malaise across South East Europe, undermining the prospects of reconciliation and cooperation among Yugoslavia's successor states. Stability of South East Europe is also key to addressing the many challenges currently facing Europe overall, including mass migration, extremism and terrorism.

Countries in the region share similar challenges: the lack of rule of law, corruption, unemployment and ill-suited electoral laws – all contributing to ethnic divides, interstate tensions and political instability. One participant underlined the need for regional leaders to focus on not only socio-economic challenges but also addressing political tensions in order to prevent future instabilities. A dual-track approach was advocated, in particular because political instability risks jeopardising socio-economic reforms.

One participant noted that, in South East Europe and the wider European region more generally, we are witnessing a battle between two concepts: a 'Europe whole and free', and the creation or recreation of spheres of influence by non-EU actors in South East Europe using more assertive policies. As these spheres collide, conflict can emerge. To prevent the emergence of such spheres of influence, the development of the European perspective remains key.

Integrating South Eastern European countries into the EU, and adopting the latter's values, standards and rules, could enhance stability in the region. Similarly, integration in the Euro-Atlantic structure would be a way to ensure peaceful development in South



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States in the region have a responsibility to address political tensions in order for real change to take place.

”

East Europe, as it transforms spaces from areas of geopolitical competition to areas for cooperation.

Yet, it was also noted that, independently from integration processes, states in the region have a responsibility to address political tensions in order for real change to take place. One conference participant, for example, reminded the audience that enlargement of the EU is not a mechanism for addressing conflict resolution, which requires strong domestic support to succeed.

All issues in South East Europe need to be addressed, rather than being disregarded until they transform into political crises which could affect stability in the entire region. Therefore, leaders in the region need to be proactive, rather than reactive.



*Kristin Lund, Amina C. Mohamed and  
Yusuf Garaad Omar (top left)  
Jeffrey Feltman (top right)  
Funmi Olonisakin (bottom right)*



## The Philippines: progress on the path to peace?

The conflict between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has been the subject of a lengthy peace process, with thirty years of on-and-off talks. Since the 2016 election of President Rodrigo Duterte, the process has gathered momentum with four rounds of talks between the Government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), which negotiates on behalf of the CPP and its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA).

In August 2016, the NPA declared a unilateral ceasefire as a confidence-building measure and this was reciprocated by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The ceasefire lasted for almost six months but broke down when the NPA took up arms again following the government's failure to release political prisoners as well as accusations that the AFP were carrying out small unit operations against NPA sympathisers. In March 2017, backchannel attempts to restart the talks were successful, but in the absence of a ceasefire, the process remains vulnerable to clashes on the ground.

A complication that has recently appeared is the attack by ISIL-linked Islamists in the city of Marawi and the declaration of martial law throughout Mindanao. Angered by a claim by the AFP chief that the NPA, as well as ISIL-related groups, are a target of the military clampdown, the CPP responded with a decision to increase tactical offensives. This led to the President cancelling the fifth round of the talks. In addition, the issue of revolutionary tax collection in Mindanao remains a sticking point and is now scheduled to be discussed later in the peace process under the topic of political and constitutional reform.

Despite challenges, peace remains high on the President's agenda and he has a longstanding relationship with the Communist movement from his time as mayor of Davao City. Both delegations are committed to the process and there is broad agreement on a framework for the discussion of social and economic reforms

which are a key component of the talks. The discussion at the Oslo Forum focused on these reforms, including agrarian reform and industrialisation. It was stressed that the reform programme seeks to address issues that affect South-East Asia more broadly, such as increasing inequality and persistent high levels of poverty.

The participants agreed that there are lessons to be learnt from the Guatemala peace process where a lack of private sector involvement made it difficult to implement the socio-economic accord, including reform of the tax system. However, they noted that there is strong support for a peace deal in the Philippines among parts

of the business community, including the Mindanao Business Council. It remains to be seen how discussions will fit with the President's ambitious push for federalism, the details of which are still being finalised by the government.

Participants noted several positive developments in the peace process. One example was the inclusion of representatives from Congress in the recent talks in order to ensure reforms are eventually passed by Congress. These representatives have also observed working committees, including the committee on social and economic reform. One contributor also praised important confidence-building measures that

the President has already implemented, including the appointment of a dedicated secretary for agrarian reform drawn from a peasant organisation and the establishment of a peasant plantation in Davao.

Participants recognised that there is now a clear opportunity for progress in the Philippines although, in the absence of a ceasefire, the process remains vulnerable to clashes on the ground. The session consequently ended on a cautiously optimistic note, despite the array of challenges the peace process faces and the daunting issue of its implementation. While the stars might not yet be fully aligned, and considerable hard work remains to be done, there is a sense among both the parties and the facilitators that a historic opportunity awaits if stakeholders are willing and able to grasp it.

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**In the absence of a  
ceasefire the process  
remains vulnerable to  
clashes on the ground.**

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*Yalda Hakim and Robert Malley (top left)*

*Shukria Barakzai and Courtney Cooper (top right)*

*Igor Crnadak (centre right)*

*Mohammad Javad Zarif, Federica Mogherini, Børge Brende, Retno L.P. Marsudi  
and John F. Kerry (bottom)*



# Oslo Forum 2017 agenda

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Tuesday  
June 2017

09.45 – 11.15	<i>Opening plenary</i> Peacemaking in a new era of geopolitics	
11.45 – 12.45	Option 1	Option 2
Two parallel sessions:	Somalia: reflecting on a revived reconciliation agenda	South East Europe: stability under threat
12.45 – 14.45	Informal buffet lunch	
13.30 – 14.30	Lunchtime conversation	
15.00 – 16.30	Option 1	Option 2
Two parallel sessions:	Nigeria: a multidimensional conflict landscape	<i>Mediation laboratory</i> Over-democratising peace? The dilemmas of popular validation of peace agreements
16.45 – 18.00	Option 1	Option 2
Two parallel sessions:	The Philippines: progress on the path to peace?	Post-ISIL Iraq: challenges and chances for reconciliation
18.15 – 19.30	Mediator's Studio	
19.45 – 21.30	Formal opening dinner	

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Wednesday  
June 2017

09.00 – 10.15

Option 1

Option 2

Two parallel sessions:

Syria:  
a chessboard of regional interests

South Sudan:  
resuscitating the dream?

10.45 – 12.00

*High-level plenary*  
The UN, great power politics and peacemaking

12.00 – 14.30

Informal buffet lunch

13.00 – 14.00

Lunchtime lecture  
Where do mediators fit in the fight against extremism?

14.30 – 16.00

Option 1

Option 2

Two parallel sessions:

Situation Report:  
Cyprus

*Mediation laboratory*  
Diplomacy in the age of WhatsApp

16.30 – 18.00

*Closing plenary*  
Colombia: putting peace into practice

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*Staffan de Mistura (top)*

*Meredith Preston McGhie (bottom)*



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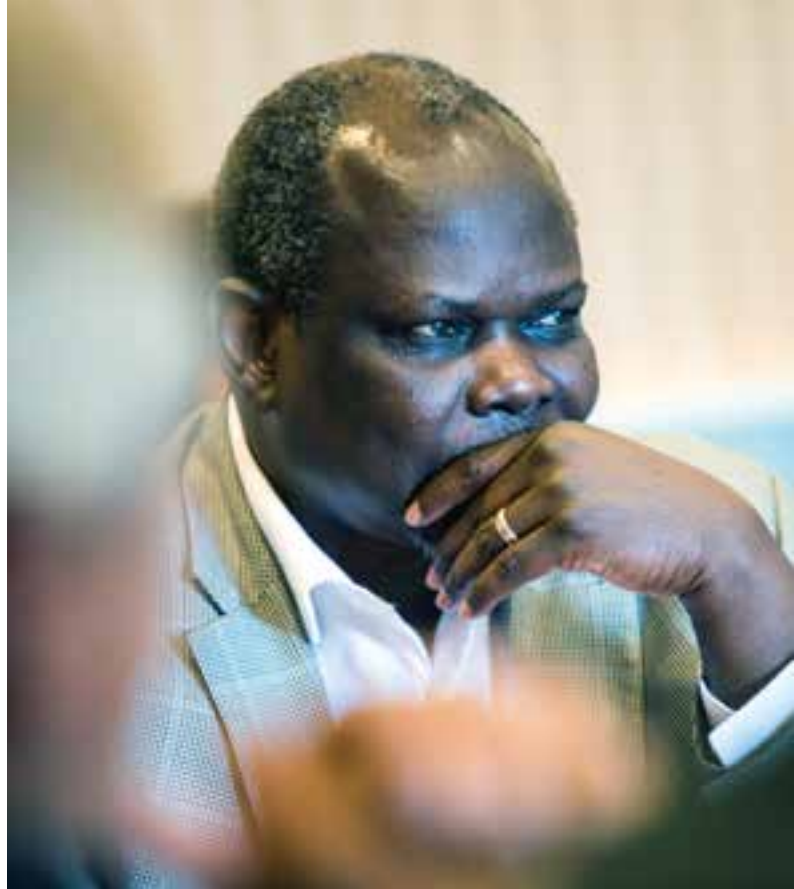
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