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Guatemala Roundtable with human rights delegates

A delegation of representatives from different Guatemalan human rights NGOs visited Switzerland to attend the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. In early April, the three delegation members Helen Mack, Carmen Aída Ibarra and María Canil met at KOFF with representatives of NGOs, solidarity groups and of Political Division IV of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to discuss the current political situation in Guatemala. The three delegation members reported on the political situation in their country three months after Oscar Berger took over the reins of government. The topics specifically addressed were peace agreements, human rights and political stability, the justice system, security and CICIACS (Comisión de investigación sobre los cuerpos clandestinos de seguridad), as well as the situation of the indigenous people. It emerged from the discussion that the delegates were observing the Berger Government closely and were somewhat critical of it. They did underline at the same time, however, that it was still too early to assess the government’s policies.

Delegates visit DFA

Helen Mack, Carmen Aída Ibarra and María Canil also visited the DFA’s Political Department IV during their stay in Switzerland. Helen Mack is the President of the Fundación Myrna Mack, an NGO that for years now has been militating for access to justice and against impunity in Guatemala. These are also the core issues of the PD IV Guatemala programme and the Fundación Myrna Mack is a Partner of PD IV in Guatemala. Accordingly, the reason for the delegation’s visit to the DFA was to share information on the next moves by the various players in the urgently needed reform of Guatemala’s judicial system.

01.04.04

Fifth Gender Roundtable on UN Security Council Resolution 1325

A large number of representatives of civil society, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and individuals participated in the 5th session of the Gender Roundtable at the end of April. The main focus was again on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 „Women, Peace and Security” - this time with Ancil Adrian Paul from the conflict transformation organisation International Alert (IA) as guest speaker.

In the first part of the Roundtable, Ancil Adrian Paul discussed a three-fold set of questions: What lessons have been learned from international lobbying and advocacy, what are positive examples of implementing 1325 and what are the most important next steps, both nationally and internationally, to be taken to ensure the successful implementation of 1325.
As far as the first question was concerned, Ancil Paul put at centre-stage the need to be well-informed about the stakeholders, i.e. the affected women in conflict areas on the one hand and the structure and mandate of the UN Security Council, like-minded UN Security Council member states and key allies in the UN system on the other. According to Ancil Paul, positive examples of implementing 1325 were the joint working group of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence and the NGO „Women’s Security Council“ in Germany. Both initiatives were set up with the aim to successfully monitor and accompany the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the respective countries. As important next steps, Ancil Adrian Paul considered the strategic targeting of persevering and well-informed partners for collaborative advocacy and lobbying. In this context, Paul underlined the need to design, far from any „armchair rhetoric“, a coherent pro-active strategy grounded in the needs of women and the local realities of their participation in governmental-to-grass-roots-level organizations.

In the second part, the participants discussed what a Swiss national plan of action on 1325 could look like. Participants stressed the need to have regular follow-up platforms among NGOs and government institutions to critically accompany the implementation of 1325 in Switzerland. Other participants were more concerned about the role of the national media and about making UNSCR 1325 more widely disseminated and better known. Still others focussed on the role of schooling and higher education, where children and adults should be taught about 1325, its strengths and potential for gender-sensitive peace building. The next Gender Roundtable will take place on the 24 June 2004.

Ancil Adrian Paul is currently manager of the Gender and Peace-building Programme of International Alert. International Alert is one of the few conflict transformation organisations with a track record of gender mainstreaming in their development and peace-building work. IA initiated the worldwide campaign „From the village council to the negotiating table. Women in peace-building“ in 1999 and has been heavily involved in lobbying and advocacy for UN Security Resolution 1325 for the last couple of years.

30.04.04
KOFF Annual Report 2003

KOFF published its Annual Report 2003 in April. The 12-page document reviews the background, activities and institutional challenges of the past year. Activities focused on „conflict sensitivity”, especially on issues of mainstreaming and effectiveness assessment and the launching of „gender and peacebuilding” as a new priority topic. Other subjects included „dealing with the past” and „civil observation missions”. On these subjects, KOFF organised roundtables and workshops, held trainings and started cooperation with Swiss and foreign partner organizations. The Center organized 16 roundtables and workshops on Angola, Israel/Palestine, Sri Lanka, South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Guatemala, Colombia and Iraq. Furthermore, KOFF supported several NGO members and the federal administration by offering consultation on programme planning and methodological questions. The Center’s staff consisted of five, at times six, persons. 15.04.04

Conference on the role of Civil Society in Afghanistan

At the request of the German Foreign Office, the Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF) of swisspeace and Germany’s Friedrich Ebert Foundation organised a conference in Berlin at the end of March on „Civil Society Participation in Afghan Peace Building and Reconstruction.” Forty representatives of Afghan civil society elaborated recommendations on the subjects of „disarmament”, „elections”, „implementing the Constitution” and „the role of the international community” for the government conference on Afghanistan held from late March to early April.

The delegates were members of political parties, youth groups and tribal councils, religious figures and deputies from the Loya Jirga, as well as human rights and peace activists. There was consensus amongst the delegates that the civil society had to play a crucial role in the process of change in Afghanistan. The delegates nevertheless expressed considerable misgivings about the current security situation. They stressed that the disarmament process was the key to the peace process and called for the appropriate support from the Afghan Government and the international community. Delegates spoke out specifically in favour of extending the deployment of the troops of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the whole country. 30.30.04
Political early warning – potential for conflict prevention

“Early Warning is the collection and analysis of information about potential and actual conflict situations, and the provision of policy options to influential actors at the national, regional and international levels that may promote sustainable peace. Early Warning is not only about assessing the possibility of conflict but also identifying the possible resurgence of conflict and the opportunities for peace.” This is one of the most widespread definitions of political early warning (FEWER 1997). Accordingly, an operational political early warning system necessarily entails: information gathering; analysing that data; sending an early warning signal; formulating scenarios and appropriate action alternatives and communicating them to political decision makers. On the one hand, the functioning of early warning systems should in principle be politically neutral and independent of governments, yet on the other they must be mindful of the goals and the room for manoeuvre of the respective target groups when formulating the action alternatives.

Warn early and act early

The aim of early warning about armed conflicts is to be able to avert the escalation of violence or at least attenuate its effects. Early warning must therefore be combined with „early action“, in other words proactive, timely action. For that purpose, the information and insights gleaned through an early warning system must be conveyed in good time to government policymakers and must contain appropriate action proposals.

This is also where the future challenges to early warning systems lie, that is, closing the gap between early recognition and early warning on the one hand, and between early and appropriate action and the prevention of conflicts on the other. The present obstacles to this are: inadequate information or data density; insufficient analysis; slow or late reaction; inadequate – possibly misguided – reactions; inconsistent or contradictory reactions; partial reaction. The obstacles may therefore be attributable to political, context-specific and/or psychological (e.g. bias) or institutional and bureaucratic factors. Lastly, the unsatisfactory analytical capabilities of early warning systems may also give rise to problems.

Different early warning systems with different methodologies

There is a broad and varied range of early warning systems worldwide. Systems that warn of political conflicts - using widely varying methods - include the Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) or the Global Events Data Systems (GEDS) run by the Centre for International Development and Conflict of the University of Maryland for FEWER. In addition, various regional organisations - primarily in Africa - are currently engaged in building up early warning systems.
The swisspeace political early warning system FAST

FAST (Frühanalyse von Spannungen und Tatsachenermittlung) was founded in 1998 by swisspeace in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The purpose of FAST is to enable decision makers in politics, government and industry to take appropriate steps to prevent the violent escalation of conflicts that have been detected early or at least to attenuate their consequences. FAST also strives to make out «windows of opportunity», in other words, conflict constellations in which peace processes can be reinforced in a lasting manner. In geographical terms, FAST currently spans the regions of Southern Africa, the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa, the Balkans, Palestine, Central Asia and South Asia. FAST is the only conflict early warning system in Switzerland.

Analysis with qualitative and quantitative elements

FAST developed a methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative elements. FAST cooperates with local staff for carrying out quantitative-empirical work. They gather event data and feed it into the FAST database via the Internet. There are three to seven staff members active per country. Thanks to software developed by Virtual Research Associates (VRA) at Harvard, the assembled event data can be evaluated and conflict in the target countries can be graphically represented. However, a sound analysis embodying both the quantitative and qualitative components will become possible only thanks to the context-specific understanding of the internationally renowned FAST experts.

The FAST standard product ultimately consists of selected diagrams showing the progress of the conflict on a quarterly basis, a brief interpretation by the experts and a look at possible future developments.

Improving user-friendliness and acceptance

The biggest short-term challenge facing FAST will be to prepare data and products specifically for practical political use. This is mainly about improving the user-friendliness of the database. The challenge to the end users of the FAST analyses (SDC, Sida) lies chiefly in the sphere of mainstreaming. It is a matter of promoting the acceptance and generalised use of the early warning analyses in the administration and consequently their incorporation in decision-making processes.
News from Swiss NGOs

Study Tours of the Institute of Federalism

The International Research and Consulting Centre (IRCC) of the Institute of Federalism (IFF), University of Fribourg organises and facilitates regular study tours to Switzerland on selected topics. The study tours - often at the request of development cooperation organizations - would be of interest to representatives from government and administration (national and local), civil society and the academic community. The definition of the content of the study tours is based on its practical relevance for the participants, e.g. how these experiences can be integrated into a peace process. The study tours provide active, participatory and output-oriented learning for both sides. The IRCC carries out the content-related, conceptual and organisational work and facilitates the exchange during the study tours. Additionally, the IRCC gives support for follow-up activities in the country of the participants (workshops, research etc.) in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the study tours.

The IRCC is an internationally known academic centre of expertise for issues on federalism, decentralisation, human rights, minority protection, good/democratic governance and conflict transformation, with a special focus on how these issues affect multicultural societies.

Annual meeting of Women for Peace, Switzerland

The Annual meeting of „Women for Peace, Switzerland“ (FF) at the end of April in Basle approved a resolution calling on the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports (VBS) to deploy other means with which to safeguard peace. In particular, recruits should be thoroughly trained in the techniques of non-violent conflict transformation. The resolution further demands that Switzerland should cease any weapons cooperation with warring countries and that stringent legislation be introduced, including a weapons register.

The meeting received reports on the multifaceted activities of FF. At domestic level, a broad range of resolutions and letters to the editor were published - amongst other things, supporting the general peace endeavours by Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey and the Geneva Initiative. At the same time, FF drafted a critical position on the new Weapons Act. In addition they successfully promoted women peace activist candidates in elections to the Swiss parliament. The new layout for the FF Bulletin „Frauenstimme“ brought new dynamism. At the international level, a new working group on Israel/Palestine was created at the end of the year. In connection with the Iraq war, the FF made appeals to the US and UK Parliaments and worked along with women’s and peace organisations in the USA. Besides that, the „Russian soldiers’ mothers in Karelien“ project, the „BANGWE“ women’s peace project in Central Africa, as well as the „Children in Moroccan prisons“ project again received financial and personnel support.
FF strives for the participation of women at all levels in political dispute settlement processes. In that regard, Cordula Reimann - responsible for gender affairs at KOFF - gave a presentation on „Gender in peace building“. Furthermore, the FfF’s peace women nominees under the „1000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize“ project were announced. They are Marianne Schmid-Thurnherr from Basle, co-founder and long-standing Managing Director of FfF, and Colette Samoya from Central Africa, initiator and Coordinator of BANGWE.

General Assembly of PBI Switzerland

Peace Brigades International (PBI) Switzerland held its General Assembly at the end of April in Berne. It emerged at the meeting that the organisation managed to increase private donations by six per cent in 2003. PBI Switzerland currently has 420 paying members and 280 private donors. There are another 70 involved institutions such as churches, cantons, municipalities or the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). In 2003 and early 2004 PBI also broadened its regional coverage: new groups were created in Berne-Fribourg, Lucerne and Lausanne. Groups are being established in Zurich and Geneva, and another is now being set up in Basle. Six Swiss volunteers are currently active and another six are about to be deployed.

Furthermore a report was made at the meeting on the situation of the „Do no Harm“ process in PBI (see Circular Letter 1/2004). In addition to recognising and eliminating conflict potential that could arise from organisational activities, the process also makes for improved accompaniment of volunteers, before, during and after their mission.

Thomas Greminger, Head of Political Division IV (Peace Policy Section) of the DFA, spoke on government cooperation with non-governmental organisations in general and with PBI in particular. For three years now, PBI has been among the strategic partners of PA IV. PBI expertise is oriented primarily toward conflict prevention and transformation, Greminger said. It is impressive that PBI can count on such an extensive contact network of embassies, government representatives and military authorities, international organisations and non-governmental organisations. In the second place, PBI Switzerland has the skills for raising awareness amongst the Swiss public. This is of paramount importance to the DFA and its work to promote human security. Third, PBI Switzerland is contributing meaningfully to encouraging young blood and winning over young people to the cause of peace, said Thomas Greminger.

24.04.04
Bread for All showcases HEKS peace-building project

Bread for All (BFA) regularly presents a „project of the month“ on its website. The project presented in April was one being jointly supported by HEKS, Swiss Interchurch Aid and BFA in Ethiopia.

In the Shashemene region, the organisation known as „Enweyay Civic & Social Education Center“ is conducting a range of activities to build awareness of human rights issues and non-violent conflict resolution, supported by HEKS and co-funded by Bread for All. Community instructors explain people’s rights under the Constitution, especially women’s rights, they provide information about harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation as well as exclusion mechanisms, which play a crucial role in Ethiopian society. The activities are targeted primarily at the police, prison staff and inmates, farmers associations and women’s groups.

Another HEKS project in Gambela entails strengthening the local authority through teaching and accompaniment in the fields of healthcare, equal rights for women and literacy. In addition, the migration movements of the Nuer are being studied, and a mobile school is to provide Nuer children with instruction. To illustrate peace work and conflict management, various events are organised, including sporting and social events, such as the well-loved folk theatre.

Bread for All is the development arm of the Protestant churches in Switzerland. BFA supports almost 400 development projects and programmes worldwide.

Swiss Nepal programme to be adapted to crisis situation

Switzerland can and should play a crucial role in the future peace process in Nepal. This was the upshot of a joint mission composed of representatives of Political Division IV of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and COPRET, the Conflict Prevention and Conflict Transformation Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in late February/early March.

The Swiss Nepal programme should be adapted to the new situation. The aim, on the one hand, is to carry out actions pertaining to conflict transformation, human rights and good governance/rule of law, and on the other, to promote the mainstreaming of human rights, conflict prevention and transformation and of gender issues. In the light of the worsening crisis, additional staff should be detailed to Nepal. To foster the political dialogue, it would be conceivable to build up the SDC Cooperation Office in Kathmandu into an Embassy.

The mission members further recommend that local technical cooperation should be continued, as this is crucial to human security and confidence building and as an entry point for local peace-building projects. It remains a priority task to observe and assess the changing situation on a continuous basis. Lastly, the mission members urge greater coordination within the donor community.
The backdrop to the PA IV/COPRET mission consists of the steadily widening gulf between rich and poor population segments and between the various regions of Nepal, massive human rights violations especially of women’s rights, and the deteriorating security situation.

15.04.04

PD IV Workshop on „Dealing with the Past“

Some 30 staff members of Political Division IV (PD IV) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), members of the Swiss Expert Pool and other experts met at the end of March for a three-day workshop in Montelier on „Dealing with the past: tensions and dilemmas between justice and reconciliation“. What gave rise to the seminar was the wish of PA IV to reflect on conceptual and practice-related areas of conflict in dealing with the past, reappraising its own experiences and laying out an orientation for the priority issue of „Dealing with the Past“ within PA IV.

The basis for the discussions consisted of reports on PA IV involvement in the Congo, Guatemala and the Balkans. PA IV played an active part in setting up a Truth Commission in the Congo. In Guatemala, two Truth Commissions - one national and one international - have already done their work. There, PA IV is engaged in accompaniment activities, inter alia, in connection with impunity and the payment of compensation to victims. In the Balkans region, given the International Tribunal in The Hague and the failure of the Truth Commission as a model in Bosnia, its efforts are centred primarily on the reform of the justice system and on strengthening civil society initiatives, which should contribute to a reappraisal of the past in the public arena.

The workshop allowed for central issues of dealing with the past to be raised, even if not to be fully discussed: What is the role of dealing with the past in conflict transformation? Are there relevant tools? What contradictions or lacunae are there between the requirement of justice and the call for reconciliation? Besides that, questions were asked about the role and function of internal and external players.

The discussions showed that „Dealing with the Past“ is a significant component of peace processes. Yet there is a certain risk that the topic could become a melting pot for all the still unresolved political, social and economic problems of the past.

25.03.04
Peace building through economic development cooperation - the example of Tajikistan

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) has been active since 1993 in Tajikistan, where it striving to use economic development to combat poverty, foster political stability and encourage „bottom-up“ peace processes. Precisely because Tajikistan lies in a politically turbulent region, economic development is crucially important to peace throughout the region.

Thus in 2002 for example, SECO provided funding through the „Farmer Ownership Model“ (FOM) pilot project to create the „SugdAgroServ“ (SAS) farmers cooperative. The firm is owned by 365 cotton farmers, seco itself having no share in it. The cooperative is intended to secure economic self-determination and autonomy for producers. The seco engagement is not limited to financial aid alone, however. Major successes have already been scored in cotton production thanks to technical support, training in business, marketing and management as well as quality improvement.

The project is part of the overall seco strategy for the region covering Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Azerbaijan. To promote domestic and international private investment in this field, seco together with the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have allocated over 4 million dollars for the next three years.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and with independence in 1991, Tajikistan became caught up in a protracted civil war. In 1994 troops from the Community of Independent States (CIS) intervened, in 1997 a peace agreement was signed, partly including opposition forces. Tajikistan has a predominantly rural population whose vital needs are largely unmet and whose future looks gloomy.

27.04.04

Conciliation Resources

CR will be holding a seminar and photographic exhibition on „Indigenous Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding in Southern Sierra Leone“ at the Commonwealth Club in London. (Further information)

European Centre for Conflict Prevention

Jointly with ECCP, the Irish Government hosted the European Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict from 31 March to 2 April 2004 at Dublin Castle. (Information on the „Dublin Action Agenda“)

EPLO

EPLO members met for their General Assembly on 22 April. Issues on the agenda included the 2004 EPLO work programme.
GTZ

The feature topic of the 2/2004 issue of the SPICE-Newsletter is „Reconciliation – a Task for Development Cooperation?“, with contributions on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in East Timor, Sierra Leone and Peru, and on ownership issues and reconciliation in the Balkans. 15.04.04

International Alert

- International Alert and partners hosted a panel discussion at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, concerning Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in the Congo. 09.03.04
- IA organised a two-day workshop in London on monitoring and implementation of small arms controls. 04.03.04
- IA has vacancies for two programme directors. 17.04.04
- IA tips regarding current publications. 17.04.04

Events

- On 7 May the annual meeting of the KOFF non-governmental member organizations will take place in Bern.
- After a one-and-a-half-year interruption, KOFF will be resuming its discussion roundtables amongst Swiss players in the Sudan on 12 May.
- On 13 May KOFF will be holding a roundtable discussion on Central Asia with David Lewis (ICG).
- A KOFF Sri Lanka Roundtable discussion is set for 14 May on „The Sri Lankan Peace Process after the Elections - Conflict Transformation at a Crossroads?“ Norbert Ropers of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies (Sri Lanka Office) will be guest speaker.
- On 26 May KOFF will be holding a roundtable discussion on South-Eastern Europe. The focus will be on the most recent unrest in Kosovo and its possible implications for project work in the country.

Publications

Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups
The study explores the links between religion, local culture and humanitarian engagement in Central Asia. The local Islamic opposition movements are significant opinion-makers for the population. This is why it is important for humanitarian organisations to know how these movements perceive outside humanitarian involvement.
The study examines the most important Islamic opposition movements „Hizb ut-Tahrir“, the „Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan“ and the „Islamic Renaissance Party“ and summarises their history. In addition, over a hundred religious and political leaders were interviewed, many are critical of the international humanitarian engagement. Many leading Central Asian figures suspect that humanitarian activities are not disinterested and are pursuing missionary or other hidden aims. The study emphasises that the local dynamics of international organisations have so far been only partly understood. The protagonists of humanitarian aid in Central Asia should endeavour to better explain their engagement and their aims.

Looking at a little known field in Central Asia, the study subtly tackles a controversial subject – that of contact with armed groups. It contributes meaningfully to a better understanding of humanitarian engagement in a context of complex social processes.

World Bank website on crisis prevention and reconstruction

The World Bank uses its website on crisis prevention and reconstruction to report on its strategies and activities in that field. The web pages contain all relevant strategy papers and tools as well as a wealth of information about the Bank’s activities. This informative website is a must for anyone interested in the role and orientation of the multilateral development agencies in peace building and crisis prevention.