Report from regional workshop on the future of peacebuilding

Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

and

PRINCIPLES *for* **PEACE**

SUMMARY

In June the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa partnered with the [Principles for Peace initiative](#) and organised a regional workshop on the "Peacemakers' Covenant", a policy proposal emerging from a global participatory process aiming at developing a new set of principles, standards and norms to reshape how peace processes are structured, sequenced and actualized. The workshop that was held in Amman, Jordan, brought together members of the [International Commission on Inclusive Peace](#) with scholars and peace practitioners from the Middle East and North Africa region. The meeting served as an opportunity to gather inputs and perspectives from the regional context. Points that that were highlighted included calls for stronger emphasis on justice and transitional justice; stress on local ownership and external powers needing to be more humble and focusing on playing supporting roles; and stress on inclusion and pluralism, moving from cosmetic inclusion to genuine engagement with broad spectra of society.

KEY POINTS

Key points from the rich discussion included:

Participants portrayed a sense of a gap growing between the MENA region and the rest of the world – that the MENA region was falling behind in technology and ability to generate ideas. I**n terms of conflict dynamics, there was little sense for optimism**. The region is home to many of the ongoing violent conflicts in the world, which risk being further exacerbated by wider trends – climate change, internal displacement, desertification, urbanisation, and refugee flows as well as the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Workshop discussions portrayed a lack of progress on peace processes in many places.

Participants called for more **emphasis on justice and transitional justice**, particularly as it relates to the root causes of conflict. Meanwhile, some participants identified a need to think about and relate to the psychological element of conflict and the way in which trauma influences the long-term transformation of conflict. Moreover, it was raised that the focus still tends to be on the moment of a 'peace process' which is somewhat reactive. Thinking about systems of violence would allow seeing the conflict in the wider context of the cultures of violence (e.g. the patriarchy) and for a **focus more on prevention**.

The discussion focused partly on **value-based principles – dignity, solidarity, and humility**. Dignity was linked to solidarity. It was argued that dignity needs to be understood as solidarity with victims. *'You need to understand the fears and the loss of the victims, and to show solidarity.'* Participants insisted that solidarity should not be with a particular conflict party, but rather with the victims. This would entail solidarity also with refugees wherever they may be,

finding sustainable solutions for them. It should mean ensuring that the victims have a role in the process. Meanwhile, in engaging with conflict parties, neutrality was deemed an appropriate principle. Some participants preferred empathy as a principle rather than solidarity. Humility was seen by some as the most essential principle. **External actors should not come with pre-created proposals** which they ask locals to implement, and internationals should not be applauded for solving local conflicts. **Humility calls for modesty in not owning the process but facilitating it.** It was pointed out that we should be less interested in how humble internationals or external actors *feel* but rather how they *behave*.

The centrality of legitimacy in how we think about peace was stressed by participants. Participants **linked inclusion and pluralism firmly and integrally to legitimacy.** Mechanisms for inclusive participation were seen as key to legitimacy of the process. 'Sitting with ordinary people' and having a bottom-up process were seen as important ways to legitimise a process. Some participants connected this conversation to democracy, while others resisted using the term. Nevertheless, the discussions highlighted the **importance of talking to everyone and moving away from exclusive and secretive processes.** The discussions also touched upon a crisis of legitimacy of the international community. Some argued that in order to be permitted to be involved in a peace process, actors should have 'mud' on them – i.e. to have genuine connection with the people on the ground and to understand and know the context.

Overall, the ideas with **pluralism** resonated well with the participants as they called for **moving from cosmetic inclusion to genuine engagement with the civil society**. Pluralism was summarised as fundamentally being about bringing around the whole community, including spoilers and those that the internationals do not normally engage. Drawing from the lessons of the inclusion work, some cautionary notes were raised regarding tokenism. In this regard, participants wanted **pluralism to be framed as part of both the process and the outcome**.

A desire to **move decision-making as close as possible to those who will live with its consequences** was emphasised. For example, one person articulated that it is a big problem that externals tend to own the process while locals consult in their own countries' processes. Another participant emphasised **authenticity as a key principle – solutions need to emerge from within the local environment**.

Participants highlighted the importance of thinking about the transfer of responsibility closer to the people as a process that takes place over time. In achieving decision-making that is as close as possible to those affected, one of the elements to focus on has to do with the confidence of the local actors as they have thus far been operating in an internationally designed system. Relatedly, the **need for local and regional knowledge hubs** was mentioned as crucial.

Part of the workshop was dedicated to discussing how to **convert ideas into actions**. Participants talked about the need for a layered strategy. Those who already endorse the principles, those who endorse but do not intend to implement (i.e. those who pay lip service to the ideas) and those who oppose the principles, need to be influenced differently. In their case, participants talked about the importance of supporting civil society actors and those affected by conflict so that the principles can be used by them. Strategies will also need to be catered for different types of actors. For example, for non-governmental organisations at the international level, certification was discussed as a way to influence their actions, while local NGOs will need support in gaining the confidence required in assuming a more leading role. Toolkits will be necessary to help NGOS and other actors to transform, and in some cases accompaniment might be necessary.

In relation to monitoring, participants emphasised the need to map who is who and who is involved in a peace process, in order to make actors accountable. *'We know enough about conflict, but not enough about who is doing what in peace?'* The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was mentioned as an example to bring the proposal concretely to the international system and transform it into more than a theoretic and compelling text. UPR has meant that Special Representatives of the Secretary General (SRSG) have an obligation to gather all information on NGOs and peace activists, make report, and send to Security Council and the General Assembly. This is a very concrete and systematic step that can make a tremendous difference.

The findings of the meeting will feed into Principles for Peace continued work on the "Peacemakers' Covenant".