During the April 2005 CPRF, we focused on Conflict Prevention. Our speakers were Elisabeth Kvitashvili, Director of the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), United States Agency of International Development, and Melanie Greenberg, President of the Cypress Fund for Peace and Security, and Board Chair for the Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution.

It was noted that, although the situations that occur after conflict has already broken out are usually the ones that dominate the headlines, it’s important to be committed to a proactive stance of early intervention and working with countries teetering on the edge of conflict. It is important to respond to extremism, instability, violence, conflict, and failed and failing states, by addressing their causes. For conflict prevention to be viable, two conditions need to be met. First, you need to see it coming (two or three years ahead of time). Second, there need to be points of leverage.

CMM has developed an early warning system to mitigate risks before violence erupts. They identify countries at greatest risk for violence and map out how to respond. Development assistance needs to shift to address issues like youth unemployment, etc.—not to develop stand-alone programs, but to incorporate conflict prevention into everything USAID does. There are various tool kits to address different issues, such as a tool kit on conflict commodities (like diamonds), a land tool kit, a youth tool kit, etc. CMM’s goal is to help USAID get to the point where they understand and address issues that cause violence, and not just deal with the after effects, like refugees.

USAID also deals with extremism and terrorism. One important issue to address is sanctuary. Because of success in limiting terrorism, terrorists now seek sanctuary in weak states. It’s important to increase US assistance to these areas, such as Yemen, the Horn of Africa, etc. USAID is also adapting programs to deal with shadow economies, like diamonds, by supporting programs to move them into clean channels. They support agriculture in Afghanistan so that people have other viable options to growing poppies. This kind of assistance addresses the roots of conflict. USAID also supports security sector reform, providing demobilization help, and training non-combatant forces, like police. Many youth at risk for violence are unemployed, so USAID supports youth employment programs. In the West Bank, they sponsor technology employment programs. In Sierra Leone they train at-risk youth to be election monitors. The first priority of USAID continues to be to improve the lives of people in developing countries.

The fact that we would have a member of the development community on the same stage as someone from the conflict resolution community is revolutionary. The two fields didn’t have anything to do with each other at first, but in the last fifteen years, the changes have been revolutionary. A major change happened with the manifesto of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. Before, conflict resolution was considered a matter of process, and there was very little talk about changing structures. But the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict laid out a new way of thinking: addressing the roots of conflict, such as youth, health, environment, etc. Who do we reach out to so that our track II discussions will take root? People used to talk in
these discussions about how to change governments, but as soon as the talks were over, they would fizzle into nothingness.

Another change happened around 2000, when development industries started calling conflict resolution organizations, saying that all the development aid they were pouring into countries was disappearing, because conflicts kept re-emerging. September 11 also changed things. There was a great sense of despair in the conflict resolution community, as people were thinking that all of the dialogues they held hadn’t helped.

How can the conflict resolution community coordinate with the development community? Most of what is done in the conflict resolution community is done at the NGO level. They are mostly very small organizations. How do we coordinate with development organizations on the ground? How do we coordinate track I and II fields? Community-driven development is a good area for coordination. Skills of the conflict resolution community are helpful here: facilitation, problem-solving.

The biggest way the conflict resolution field can coordinate with development is by using our process and dialogue skills to build democracy: promoting dialogues that are the building blocks of democracy.

The conflict resolution community can also help stabilize the situation in the volatile period after a peace agreement is signed.

But there is still a question of scale. Conflict resolution organizations are comparatively small, so how do they respond to ICQs? As foundation funding is drifting away, how can the conflict resolution field insert itself into government? How do we think about this change of culture? How do we reach out to these other groups in ways that are helpful? What are the best modes of communication? This forum is good, but are there more formal ways we can continue the dialogue?