

# **CONFLICT PREVENTION & RESOLUTION FORUM.**

## **MINUTES.**

**July 18, 2000**

**Topic: *Building Indigenous Capacity  
for Change and Conflict Management Worldwide.***

### **Speakers:**

**RAYMOND SHONHOLTZ (Partners for Democratic Change),  
DUSAN ONDRUSEK (Centre for Conflict Prevention and Resolution,  
Slovakia),  
&  
SOFIKO SHUBLADZE (Center for Change and Conflict Management,  
Georgia).**

#### **RAYMOND SHONHOLTZ:**

Partners for Democratic Change started with a lecture series in Moscow and Warsaw in November of 1989, funded by the United States Institute of Peace. In March of 1990, Partners organized training programs in Russia and Poland for educators, labor leaders, environmentalists, and in Poland for leaders of Solidarity Labor. We were using American trainers but there were two problems: 1) because of the size of the Soviet Union, we needed centers throughout the country to create domestic capacity; and 2) the issue of acculturation—we needed in-country people to acculturate their training.

We started in Eastern Europe in 1990 in Warsaw. From 1990-1992, six national Centers were established: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia. Additional Centers have been added in Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania, and Romania. From 1990-1994, Centers were located in universities throughout Eastern Europe. We realized that universities were a good place to start, rather than setting up independent NGO's as there was still a lot of suspicion about NGO's. We started mainly within departments of psychology.

By 1994, the Centers were training hundreds of people and managing ethnic and environmental programs, which were controversial for the universities. Accordingly, in 1994, Partners moved the Centers outside the universities and established them as NGOs with their own board of directors and staff. Partners is a capacity building organization and each Center is designed to train trainers in change and conflict management skills, train government and civil society leaders in these skills, develop academic courses in conflict resolution, promote public policies that advance the field, and apply mediating and cooperative planning processes to specific in-country issues and conflicts. Some Centers manage full mediation services. The American role includes building this broad capacity, raise funds for the first few years, create the local legal structure and board, hire the Center director, and develop annual work plans and budgets with Center staff.

Partners has created ethnic conciliation commissions in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia which involve improving community, police, and local government relations and skill building for minority leaders.

Partners also sells and distributes publications and products (some centers form Limited Liability Corporations). The reason for this is: 1) NGO's cannot charge for profit for training programs that they run, even if training companies; 2) we were losing our best trainers to the market.

### **SOFIKO SHUBLADZE:**

Our target groups are very diverse because there are many different groups in Georgia that need these methods. Our target programs include:

Training

Meeting facilitation

Cooperative planning

One project that we run is a summer camp for youth, which is USAID funded. In order to reach more people within the country, we did a training of trainers for social workers and youth workers after the first camp we held. These people were then able to lead the camps in the following year. Another project is our academic program. We work with university departments and professors so that conflict change and management content is worked into curricula. This allows us to reach many more people because within an academic year, you may have hundreds of students who are introduced to these methods.

We also carry out cooperative planning projects. We've found that the best way to argue for the validity of this method in our context is to point out to the local government that policy/project decisions are often not implemented because the main stakeholders are not involved in the negotiations and planning. This non-implementation is a major frustration for the government and so we try to show how cooperative planning brings in all the players. It was very important for us to start with projects that we feel pretty confident about their potential success. It is important that people see that these methods work so that they are willing to participate and expand the spheres of application.

### **DUSAN ONDRUSEK:**

One of our biggest projects has been to work with the Roma people. Demographics reveal that this is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups and that the local communities and governments are not at all prepared for handling this. In Slovakia, the Roma people currently make up 9% of the population but have an 80% unemployment rate. We run ethnic conciliation bodies that are staffed by local people. We base these on the "table societies" of the past that served to mediate in communities. In these countries with Roma populations, the systems and institutions must be inclusive.

In Bosnia, we brought together the leaders from the different associations in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia which search for missing persons. This was a problem common to all the ethnic groups and so we brought them together on common actions: 1) common advocacy to demand government cooperation, and 2) information sharing. It was a very long process to get these groups to work together but finally they were able to cooperate based on their common suffering.

**Q&A and Discussion:**

The opposition that we encounter is mostly one of involvement, of getting these methods to take root within institutions. There is the problem of the paternalistic habits of these societies in which there is no sense of an ongoing, sustained process that involves government and citizens and civic organizations.

We have projects that are dealing with Serbia and Montenegro because this is an area of great concern. We have a regional project through the Hungary Center that convenes NGO's from Serbia and Montenegro to discuss initiatives. We have a training of trainers project in municipal governments. We also have a regional academic program which is a three-year project that focuses on curriculum/course development.

These types of projects are really the essence of preventive diplomacy and have to become the policy of institutions like the World Bank, USAID, etc. We feel that only in-country people can carry the work forward in a sustainable way. We try to identify local leaders in order to get capacity in place *before a crisis occurs*. This capacity building also builds a voice that can help to shift political will, which is absolutely necessary. We take a very pragmatic approach to the methods of tolerance and cooperative planning: there simply comes a time when communities realize that nothing will be achieved with the old methods.