Conference Session 3.2 Conflict Resolution – During Conflict

Religions for Peace 〜ʲ

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Introduction

The experience of religious communities in confronting violent conflict around the world reveals their capacity to build peace. They can educate their communities on the causes of conflict; serve as effective advocates for the prevention of conflict; play a central role in mediation and negotiation among armed groups; and lead their communities in the reconciliation and healing required to transform armed conflict into a true and lasting peace.

This paper addresses the nature of violent conflict today, the actual and potential roles of religious communities in conflict transformation, and the power of multi-religious cooperation to transform conflict. It points toward needed steps for multi-religious action on every level – local, national, regional and global.

I.   Violent Conflict

Trends
Violent conflict in the world at the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century has several defining characteristics:

▪   **More civilian than military casualties.**
More than 200 million people were killed in 250 wars and multiple acts of genocide during the last century. As the century progressed, warfare shifted from battlefields to communities. Since the end of World War II, an estimated 75 percent of 35 million war casualties have been civilians, including many women and children.[1] Violence against women and girls, including rape, forced pregnancy, enslavement, forced prostitution and trafficking, has become a tool of warfare in many conflicts. Casualties of violent conflict often are indirect. Indeed, war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition kill far more people than armed conflict itself.[2] The proliferation of intra-state armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War, and the rise of terrorism have contributed to civilian casualties as a constant feature of modern armed conflict.

▪   **Disproportionate impact on developing world.**
Despite a century marred by war, armed conflict trends took a seemingly positive turn in the late 1990's and early part of the new century. In 1991, thirty-three percent of the world's countries were experiencing some form of serious armed conflict. By 2005, this number had dropped by over one-half, with only fifteen percent of the world's countries experiencing war.[3] Behind these statistics, however, is the fact that affluent states had begun to enjoy sustained periods of peace, while the world's poorest countries accounted for a disproportionate share of global warfare.[4] Modern armed conflict is overwhelmingly

taking place in the world's poorest nations. Indeed, most of the world's conflicts are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa.[5] Syria, today, is a notable exception.

- **Terrorism.**

The number of significant terrorist attacks is increasing and the threat of terrorism has become a rationale for state-sponsored military interventions. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 sparked state military responses in Afghanistan and Iraq and heightened existing tensions throughout the world. Subsequent acts of terrorism – in Russia, Israel, Palestine, Indonesia, Spain, Turkey, England, Jordan, Iraq and recently in Algeria and Mali – have killed civilians, sowed insecurity and fear, and often exploited sectarian differences for violent ends.

- **Economically-driven conflict.**

Many of the world's conflicts are caused or exacerbated by transnational criminal networks and profits from black market commodities such as small arms, diamonds and drugs.[6]

The root causes of armed conflict are complex and often contentious. Some experts argue that cultural, religious and ethnic differences, or group identities, are the driving force behind most of today's conflicts. Others contend that an underlying cause of war in this century is rapidly growing populations competing for scare resources such as petroleum, water, gems and timber. Another point of view attributes mass violence to the deliberately violent response of determined leaders and their supporters to a wide range of social, economic and political conditions.

Experts frequently distinguish the root causes of inter-state and intra-state conflicts. At the heart of many armed conflicts between states, such as those between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Pakistan and India and the Palestinians and Israelis are border and land disputes. In contrast, armed conflicts within states are often rooted in oppressive, illegitimate or incompetent governments, dramatic class differences, and ideological, ethnic and religious antagonisms.

- **Religious Understandings of Human Vulnerability to Conflict**

Religious communities—each in their own way—have what might be termed a "meta" analysis of the human propensity to conflict. This is expressed in such terms as "ignorance," the "refusal to submit to God," and sin. These forms of analysis are—in turn—directly linked to each religious community's understanding of "salvation." Each religious community would do well to connect its meta analysis of the human propensities to conflict with the concrete characteristics of conflict today. This could serve to both deepen the analysis of conflict and also further illumine the strengths of religious communities to help transform conflict.

The Geography of Conflict

Each region of the world endures a unique set of challenges. Africa is the region of the world most severely impacted by armed conflict, with more people in recent decades being killed in wars in this region than in the rest of the world combined.[7] Countries rich in natural resources like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria have experienced decades of corruption and civil war. Tribal and religious conflicts, most notably in

Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Sudan, have fueled genocide and massive movements of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In Liberia, political and religious actors attempted to transform a social and political conflict into a religious conflict. As a direct or indirect consequence of these conflicts, the health, social and economic ramifications of war in Africa are endless, including poverty, HIV/AIDs, starvation, illness, infant mortality, a lack of education, domestic and sexual violence, child labor and drought. The Middle East is characterized by the exceptionally long-lasting conflict between Palestinians-Israelis. Over the past three decades, the Persian Gulf has been the site of an Islamic revolution, two major wars, and political and economic developments that have affected every country in the world. Iraq has experienced consistent turmoil for more than 30 years, including an eight year war with Iran in the 1980's and the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq in 2003. Today, Syria is the site of extreme violent conflict and lacks effective governmental or civil society mechanism to mediate sectarian differences and to effectively harness the diverse religious groups' potentials for cooperation to help build peace. The conflict in Syria impacts in immediate neighbors: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Moreover, it is implicated in a broader regional struggle that at least in part relates differences among Sunni and Shiite identities and thus neighbors such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and for other reasons states like Russia and the United States and intergovernmental bodies like the European Union and the Arab League.

Internal conflict has become increasingly widespread in Asian-Pacific countries, creating instability around the southern rim of the region, stretching from Indonesia to East Timor, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji. The aftermath of conflict in Sri Lanka remains to be addressed and new flashes of identity-based conflict have flared in Myanmar. There are significant economic causes and consequences associated with this instability, including effects on resource utilization and export earnings, and on wider issues of economic development and regional cooperation. Most conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region have been intra-state conflicts.

In the past twenty years, twelve of the twenty-seven countries formerly part of the Soviet Union have endured armed conflict, mostly in the Balkans, the Caucuses and in the Central Asian Republics.[8] These conflicts have resulted in widespread death, destruction and large numbers of refugees and IDPs. Wars have been spurred by ethnic and religious conflict, as in the former Yugoslavia and Chechnya, as well as border disputes and attempted transitions to democracy and capitalism across the region, from Moldova to Uzbekistan.

In the 1980's there were at least eleven wars in Latin America, while in the 1990's there were only five. The Latin American trend seems positive in the 21st century thus far. Democratization may have contributed to a relatively peaceful period.

Women and Conflict
As the nature of war has changed so has its impact on women. Wars are no longer fought solely between soldiers. With the shift from standing armies engaging on battlefields to armed conflicts engulfing local communities, the number of casualties among women and children in some cases exceeds the number among men. Violence against women, including mass rape, has become prevalent as a means of subjugating the enemy in ethnic and religious conflicts from Bosnia to Rwanda.

Efforts to bring an end to violent conflict often fail to recognize the changing reality of war. Most disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs, for example, do not include female combatants, leaving women without access to resettlement allowances and other forms of support. Many DDR programs do not recognize women who have performed non-combat roles and services, such as cooking or nursing for combatants.[9]

Despite the appalling suffering women face in conflicts, they are also vital actors in conflict resolution. Women have successfully organized efforts to stop war through community organizing, lobbying efforts and through "mothers against war" groups in Latin America, Africa, Europe and the United States.

II.   Conflict Transformation

The characteristics of armed conflict today shape efforts to transform it.

<u>Stages of Conflict</u>
War and peace are neither static nor mutually exclusive. Addressing violent conflict in a meaningful way is a dynamic and ongoing process. Conflict transformation involves a range of activities intended to change an existing conflict situation from one of destructive, possibly violent manifestation, to one of constructive and peaceful outcomes. Conflict transformation is a means of transforming people and relationships, who then work together to transform the conflict.[10]
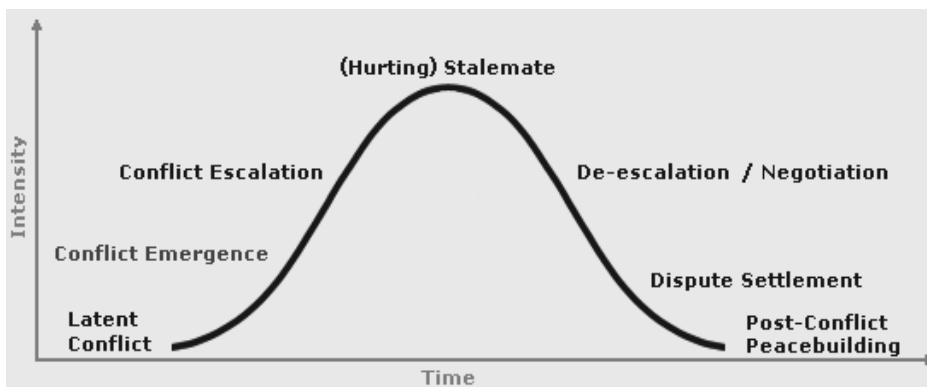
Source: Kriesberg, Louis. 2003. "De-escalation Stage."

No two conflicts progress in the same way, yet there are identifiable stages through which most social conflicts progress.[11] Describing these stages helps to identify appropriate conflict transformation roles and related strategies to fulfill these roles. The first stage is <u>latent conflict</u>, where injustices and gross imbalances of power are present but have not yet surfaced. A key conflict transformation role at this stage is education to raise awareness of injustices. In an era when violent conflict is often attributed to religious, ethnic and political differences, confronting violence means confronting the misuse of these differences for violent ends. In intra-state conflicts, since governments are often parties in the conflict, the education role has primarily been

assumed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), marginalized groups and community-based organizations.

If such processes are not implemented effectively and the parties in power fail to appropriately address inequities and power imbalances then marginalized groups tend to pursue their cause through advocacy. This second stage is <u>confrontation</u>. If confrontations are not stopped immediately they tend to escalate and become intractable. At this point, advocacy is an important conflict transformation strategy, particularly when those in power reject or ignore demands. In the confrontation stage, NGOs, international organizations and special interest groups have assumed the role of advocates seeking to end violent conflict.

Confrontation may be followed by <u>escalation</u>, which can become very destructive. Escalation, however, cannot continue indefinitely. <u>De-escalation</u> can be temporary or can be part of a broader trend toward settlement or resolution. Or escalation may lead to a <u>stalemate</u>, a situation in which neither side can win. But which often presents an ideal opportunity for negotiation and a potential settlement.[12] As weaker parties gain strength, negotiation becomes possible. Typically, the change being sought by parties in conflict requires a rebalancing of power in the relationship by which all those involved recognize one another in new ways and come to understand their interdependence. Mediation and negotiation are often employed at this conflict stage, to facilitate cease fires and peace agreements for example. Mediations are often facilitated and monitored by international organizations. Since the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping forces frequently have assumed this role as mediators.

The final stage is the <u>post-conflict</u> stage, when violence has ceased. The key conflict transformation activity at this stage is reconciliation and social reconstruction. State and civil society have been primary actors in this stage, and are often aided by international organizations.

Conflicts rarely progress through a tidy sequence of stages, nor pass through one stage at a time. Nonetheless, the conflict stages are analytically useful in identifying appropriate conflict transformation strategies.

Conflict Transformation Strategies

Conflict transformation strategies include education and advocacy to prevent armed conflicts from developing and to end confrontations once they have begun. Effective mediation and negotiation among opposing parties can lead to cease-fires and constructive peace negotiations. Concerted efforts to achieve reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of conflict can help rebuild society and ensure a lasting peace.

Stages of Conflict and Corresponding Conflict Transformation Roles[13]			
Latent Conflict ↓ **Education**	**Confrontation** ↓ **Advocacy**	**Escalation/Stalemate /De-escalation** ↓ **Negotiation/ Mediation**	**Post-conflict** ↓ **Reconciliation**

The nature of conflict today calls for greater emphasis on the use of these conflict transformation strategies in local communities where the burden of armed conflict is the greatest. One model of the relationship among actors in conflict transformation emphasizes the fundamental role of mid-level actors and their capacity to link "top leadership" with grassroots interests and efforts.
Religious communities are uniquely able to take on many of these roles.

III.   Religious Communities and Conflict Transformation

Religious communities possess uniquely important spiritual, moral and social assets for transforming conflict. When properly mobilized and equipped, religious communities can educate their communities on the root causes of conflict; serve as effective advocates for the prevention of conflict locally, regionally and globally; play a central role in mediation and negotiation among armed groups; and lead their communities in the reconciliation and healing required to transform armed conflict into a true and lasting peace.
The spiritual assets of religious communities are, in the eyes of their communities, their greatest assets. Spiritual assets defy an easy description, but typically, spiritualities point to what is most elemental within religious visions regarding the meaning of human life. Our religious communities share a conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family and a sense of duty to confront all forms of armed conflict that threaten the human community.
Spiritualities can provide to believers enormous courage and strength to confront the tragedy and human wickedness of violent conflict. Religious communities can invoke their spiritual assets to counter messages of hate, calls for violence, and the misuse of religion for sectarian purposes. Spiritualities provide unique potential resources for reconciliation and healing among and between conflicted persons and communities. Religious practices foster mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. They can make available the strength to bear the unbearable, the grounds for hope when all seems hopeless, and the possibility to forgive the unforgivable.
Religious communities have moral assets that build upon and unfold the great strengths of their spiritualities. Religious leaders are uniquely positioned to use their moral stature and influence as advocates for conflict transformation. Religious leaders encountering situations of latent conflict can speak out against the scapegoating of other religions, ethnic groups and communities.

➢   Religious leaders from northern Uganda and southern Sudan met in 2004 to shape a joint advocacy strategy and frame practical ways of strengthening solidarity between the two communities in the face of a devastating decades-long cross-border armed conflict.

Many religious moral traditions ask their members to judge others by the same standard as they would judge themselves. These standards can provide a moral basis for establishing a communal consensus regarding the need to address injustices and work for the non-violent resolution of conflict. In the midst of conflict, religious leaders can

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articulate the moral responsibilities of combatants and moral duties to protect civilians. Religious leaders can engage in non-violent activism for peace and serve as mediators and negotiators locally, regionally and globally to end armed conflict.

Finally, and often overlooked by the secular community, religious communities provide an existing social infrastructure that can be used to transform conflict. Religious communities often are familiar and trusted institutions that can provide social cohesion in the aftermath of violent conflict.

Religious communities are located where conflict transformation takes place. The scale of religious infrastructure varies from country to country, but in most developing countries it is by any measure the most developed, inter-connected, and locally-led social infrastructure in existence, reaching from the smallest village to the capital and beyond. Religious communities' mosques, churches, temples and other social structures are located in virtually every village, district and city. Taken collectively, religious social structures represent significant channels for communication and action that, when engaged and transformed, enable religious believers to function as powerful agents of change in the transformation of conflict.

Religious communities can mobilize women to transform conflict. Women of faith are uniquely positioned to call for peace in their communities. Religious women and the myriad organizations they have built in the service of their communities are on the front lines of religious communities confronting violence. Conflict transformation efforts, to be successful, must take into account women's perspectives, experiences and unique contributions. Not only do women disproportionately suffer the human consequences of violent conflict, they are the first to respond to victims on conflict and increasingly are assuming leadership roles in their communities. Long before any external aid arrives, women in areas of conflict are the ones on the ground working to meet human needs and rebuild peaceful societies.

When mobilized and properly equipped, religious communities can use their considerable spiritual, moral and social assets for dual purposes: religious leaders can engage in public advocacy for peace in ways that resonate with their respective faithful as well as members of different faiths; religious women's organizations can lead community-wide advocacy efforts; religious schools can provide peace education in addition to religious instruction.

IV.   The Power of Multi-Religious Cooperation

Once religious communities gain the capacity to tap their existing networks and resources to transform conflict, their efforts can be made dramatically more powerful and effective through multi-religious cooperation. Multi-religious efforts can be more powerful, both substantively and symbolically, than the efforts of religious groups acting alone. Cooperation breaks down barriers between different groups and creates "horizontal" connections between religious communities, helping them to function as common stakeholders, greatly reducing the temptation to manipulate religion itself for violent ends. Cooperation among religious communities facilitates the establishment of strategic partnerships with other public institutions and agencies committed to addressing similar changes, without engaging those public institutions in advancing particular sectarian beliefs.

The symbolic power of cooperation is especially important in situations where religions are implicated or have become entangled in violent conflict. Cooperation in these situations can effectively undercut the exploitation of religion as a source of conflict and bring to the foreground the moral imperatives for justice, reconciliation and the rule of law that can be found in all of the major religions.

Multi-religious cooperation provides a huge moral coalition for needed change where there are unjust political, economic and social relations. Religious leaders working to transform conflict are strengthened by joining their efforts with those of religious leaders of different faiths. Religious leaders of different faiths can advance shared commitments to transform conflict.

Working together in this way, diverse religious communities around the world are preventing and mediating violent conflicts in some of the most challenging environments around the globe.

Inter-Religious Councils established by *Religions for Peace* are helping to prevent conflicts from developing, to mediate peace negotiations among warring parties, and to rebuild peaceful societies in the aftermath of violence.

V. Mobilizing and Equipping the *Religions for Peace* Network

Religious communities can play a central role in conflict transformation when they are properly mobilized, equipped and networked.

Religions for Peace established its program in Conflict Transformation during the mid-1990s to encourage a historic transformation in religions' response to violent conflict.

The Conflict Transformation Program works around the world in areas engaged in armed conflict to mobilize, equip and network religious communities to serve as effective agents for peaceful change. The overall program mission is to equip multi-religious mechanisms on the national, regional and global levels to transform violent conflict and build more peaceful and just societies.

The *Religions for Peace* network connects national inter-religious councils and groups; six regional inter-religious councils in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East-North Africa and North America; the "World Council"; Women of Faith Networks and youth groups.

Religious leaders and communities also need support to network with other sectors of society to effectively transform conflict. Religious leaders should seek to be "at the table" for key conflict transformation initiatives among governments, combatants and civil society. Religious communities can establish mechanisms for joint advocacy with governments. *Religions for Peace* can facilitate the sharing of information among religious communities engaged in conflict transformation, the building of action-alliances and the development of partnerships with relevant non-religious organizations.

While governments, armed groups and intergovernmental bodies are typically the primary participants in peace negotiations, the parallel efforts of other civil society actors can complement and advance the official peace process. Multi-religious cooperation can be a critical mid-level or "Track 2" process in support of top level, or "Track 1," negotiations among political and governmental actors.

VI. Suggestions for Collaborative Action

This brief survey of conflict transformation reveals a range of potential roles for religious communities. The suggestions for collaborative action identified below are based on the experience and achievements of religious communities throughout the *Religions for Peace* network, as well as other faith-based initiatives.

Religious communities can:
- Resist and confront any misuse of religion for violent purposes.
- Mobilize community faith-based efforts for conflict transformation and reconciliation.
- Mobilize and coordinate their financial resources to address conflict.
- Partner with governments, international organization and other sectors of society to transform conflict.

Religious leaders can:
- Raise early, public warnings about violent conflicts.
- Mediate and mitigate violent conflict.
- Recognize the vital roles of religious women in conflict transformation.
- Include and build the capacity of women of faith and youth to participate in the conflict transformation efforts of religious communities.
- Support and advocate for women's conflict transformation initiatives.
- Confront the violence against women and girls during and after conflict, including the use of violence against women in all its forms as a war tactic.
- Leverage the credibility, trust, and moral authority of their positions to promote peaceful action and reconciliation within their communities.
- Advocate for "space" at the table with government officials at all levels on behalf of disenfranchised victims of conflict.
- Educate/sensitize religious constituencies on principles of justice, peace and reconciliation.
- Mentor young people adversely affected by conflict and ensure their meaningful reintegration in society through programs such as skills training and peer mediation.
- Lead post-conflict efforts to achieve healing and reconciliation.

Religious women can:
- Advocate for particular protection and security for women and girls during conflict.
- Build synergies with male religious leaders and collaborate for conflict transformation.
- Advocate for greater participation in conflict transformation efforts.
- Develop models for conflict transformation that work.
- Document their enormous contributions to conflict transformation as a means of raising visibility.
- Network locally, nationally, and regionally with other secular women in civil society.
- Mentor young people adversely affected by conflict and ensure their meaningful reintegration in society through programs such as skills training and peer mediation.

- Respect each other and develop common strategies based on the principles of unity, solidarity, equity and reciprocity.

National RfP Inter-Religious Councils can:
- Strengthen the participation and leadership of women of faith in IRC structures and collaborate with women of faith networks.
- Work to reduce ethnic, religious, socio-economic tensions in their communities.
- Work to end violence against women and children.
- Actively develop conflict transformation strategies.
- Mobilize religious communities at the community level to address conflict, promote peaceful co-existence and facilitate reconciliation.
- Promote "cohesion" both within and between faith communities.
- Speak with one voice, offering a unified ethical vision for peace with broad appeal to all religious and secular communities.
- Promote collaboration and networking with societal actors, NGOs, and civil society.
- Support youth initiatives in conflict transformation.
- Educate the general public on peaceful means of resolving conflict and on promoting a culture of peace.
- Communicate and disseminate information on peacebuilding processes.

Regional RfP Inter-Religious Councils can:
- Foster regional collaboration and information sharing among religious leaders and national IRCs.
- Strengthen the conflict transformation capacities of religious communities.
- Actively develop regional conflict transformation strategies.
- Facilitate solidarity visits to regional zones of conflict and work to end cross-border violence.
- Promote collaboration and networking with societal actors, NGOs, and civil society.
- Address gender-based violence.
- Support the participation and leadership of women in regional structures and initiatives.
- Address the needs of refugees, IDPs, war affected communities.
- Become advocates with governments, regional and international organizations to transform conflict and build peaceful societies.

Religions for Peace International can:
- Mobilize and help religious communities to build new inter-religious councils (IRCs) in conflict areas.
- Build the capacity of IRCs to ensure institutional sustainability, cohesion, independence and interdependence.
- Equip existing IRCs and Women of Faith Networks with relevant knowledge and skills to prevent and mediate violent conflicts.
- Strengthen the delivery capacity of IRCs.
- Support the establishment of regional and sub-regional multi-religious mechanisms for religious leaders confronted with violent conflict to respond to regional challenges.

- Support the development of women of faith networks and gender mainstreaming in the leadership of inter-religious structures and initiatives.
- Strengthen information-sharing throughout the *Religions for Peace* network.
- Accompany IRCs in critical conflict transformation efforts, such as solidarity visits.
- Support faith-based peace-building initiatives that promote tolerance, reconciliation and mediation.
- Increase awareness and support among international and secular organizations of the powerful role of religious communities and Inter-Religious councils in conflict transformation.

The **'World Council' of** *Religions for Peace* can:
- Act globally to foster high-level multi-religious cooperation to transform conflict.
- Support the efforts of *Religions for Peace* to build, equip and network inter-religious councils, networks of religious women's organizations and affiliated youth groups at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- Approve and adopt a five year conflict transformation plan of *Religions for Peace*.
- Provide a forum for sharing conflict transformation experiences globally.
- Provide solidarity and support for the conflict transformation work undertaken by IRCs globally.
- Support women of faith participation and leadership in inter-religious structures and activities.

Governments can:
- Include representative religious leaders as key stakeholders "at the table" to address conflict situations.
- Support the establishment of national inter-religious councils.
- Acknowledge the critical role and constructive engagement of IRCs in collaboration with other societal actors at national, regional and continental levels.
- Consult with religious leaders on conflict transformation efforts.
- Support women of faith in leadership roles in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.
- Include the concerns and perspectives of women of faith in the formulation of conflict transformation policies and strategies.

Secular organizations can:
- Partner with religious communities and inter-religious councils to transform conflict.
- Share resources and information with inter-religious councils and groups.
- Engage religious leaders and communities in discussions of peacebuilding strategies.
- Support the conflict transformation work of inter-religious councils.

Conclusion
The conflict transformation work of the *Religions for Peace* network is a collaborative work, a work that takes place where religious communities exist. It is a common labor that proceeds with respect for the ways that religious communities can organize themselves for common action on local, national, regional and international levels. Representatives of each religious community work together to take common action on

common problems, but in ways that respect the different religious identities of one another. In cooperation, we surrender nothing of the deepest inner impulse of our beliefs and spiritualities, but we express our commitments in action together. Religious communities working together to transform conflict demonstrates the largely untapped power of multi-religious cooperation.

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Notes

[1] Global Action Network. 2003.

[2] Human Security Centre. 2005.

[3] Center for Systemic Peace. 2006. Figure 3.

[4] Center for Systemic Peace. 2006. Figure 5. Numerous theories account for the shifting demography of war, however, the most evident is the fact that democracies, (particularly prosperous ones), rarely go to war with one another.

[5] Human Security Centre. 2005.

[6] Center for Systemic Peace. 2006.

[7] Human Security Centre. 2005.

[8] U.S. Agency for International Development. 2003. p. 1.

[9] Heyzer, Noeleen. 2003. p. 9.

[10] Lederach, John Paul. 1997.

[11] This brief analysis is drawn from the Preparatory Document for the Conflict Transformation Commission of the Seventh World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* (1999) drafted by Cynthia Sampson.

[12] Kriesberg, Louis. 2003. "Escalation and Institutionalization Stages."

[13] Vendley, William F. 2005.