



The U.S. Agency for International Development
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA)
Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM)

Presents

**A Panel Discussion Marking a New
Publication:**

Religion, Conflict & Peacebuilding
An Introductory Programming Guide

WITH

Mr. Joshua DuBois

Director of The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Dr. Marc Gopin

Director of the Center on Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University

Dr. Douglas Johnston

President and Founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy

Monday, March 8, 2010

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Ronald Reagan Building, Hemisphere Suite A
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20523

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/conflict/publications/toolkits.html

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A Panel Discussion Marking a New Publication:

RELIGION, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING

An Introductory Programming Guide

Report from Roll-Out Event, March 8, 2010, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington D.C.

Rapporteur: Silja Paasilinna, AMEX International, Inc.

Speakers

Neil A. Levine, *Director, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, USAID*

Mr. Joshua DuBois, *Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships*

Dr. Mark Gopin, *Director of the Center on Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University*

Dr. Douglas Johnston, *President and Founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy*

Summary

Opening the panel discussion, **Mr. Neil A. Levine** stated that today's event constitutes the formal launch and roll-out of the Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding toolkit, which is part of a series of toolkits produced by USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM). The primary purpose of these toolkits is to identify emerging issues in the field of conflict at the nexus of policy, academia and the implementing community. The toolkits also contribute to a deeper understanding of programming at the field level. Religion and conflict dynamics shape the approach to development, and it is important to understand how to work with religious actors in order to effectively manage programs where religion is a key component. **Mr. Joshua DuBois** described the involvement of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in faith and community-based initiatives. Although currently there is a lack of a comprehensive interagency strategic vision for engaging with religion, the launch of the toolkit furthers the Office's core goals. It also clarifies the legal dimension, as individuals sometimes shy away from programs with religious elements due to a fear of constitutional factors. Mr. DuBois explained that President Obama will continue to listen to a broad range of actors because in spite of differences, the shared interests of these groups are paramount. **Dr. Mark Gopin** emphasized the need for more flexibility in religious harmony funding and the importance of moving from *words* to common *action*. His recommendation is to focus less on the word "religion" and to define the concept as part of a set of deeper values that are shared across cultures, creating a social contract. There can be no short-term peace without having a social contract in place with religious people around the world. **Dr. Douglas Johnston** spoke about ICRD's program in Pakistan that works with madrasa leaders to broaden the curriculum to include physical and social sciences with a strong emphasis on human rights and critical thinking. There is a demonstrated multiplier effect as teachers are often also imams in mosques where thousands listen through their Friday sermons. Tapping into religious values to effect change has an inherently secular purpose, and legal constraints can hamper efforts in this regard. In closing, **Mr. Levine** remarked that the U.S. Government simply cannot afford to exclude religious programming from donor engagement.

Opening remarks: Neil A. Levine

Director, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, USAID

This event constitutes the formal launch and roll-out of the conflict and peacebuilding toolkit, a USAID/CMM product, which is on the cutting edge of emerging issues in the field of conflict. This is the latest of a series of toolkits produced by CMM, for example on land and conflict and youth and conflict, with ten toolkits now available in hard copy and on the USAID website. The primary purpose of these toolkits is to identify over-the-horizon issues at the nexus of policy, academia and the implementing community, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of programming at the field level. This will allow development professionals to identify trends well in advance and find solutions to problems as they manifest themselves.

Religion and conflict dynamics shape the approach to development and we ignore them at our peril. It is important to understand how to work with religious actors in an intelligent and sensitive way. The toolkit will help USAID staff and implementing partners handle contexts and programs where religion is a key component, identifying lessons learned from USAID's experience of field programming. This is somewhat different from other USAID programs since there are fewer programs dealing with religious actors. As a result, case studies from Albania, Israel, Nigeria and Kyrgyzstan are highlighted in the toolkit. Additional resources can be found at the end of the publication with references to texts by some of the speakers.

A special thanks is given to Marci Moberg, one of the principal authors of the toolkit; Ari Alexander, Kirby Reiling and David Hunsicker at USAID; as well as Amex International. USAID staff are encouraged to sign up for a training entitled "Programming in Religious Environments", which will be rescheduled shortly. The speakers and audience today represent the spheres of the U.S. Government, academia and the NGO community.

Mr. Joshua DuBois

Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

The toolkit represents a powerful lesson to all who work in government, with ordinary government workers taking charge of a matter that was daunting to address directly due to sensitivities around the issue. They worked tirelessly to develop resources to address the gap of religion in conflict and to bring this to fruition, catalyzing critical conversations inside the U.S. Government.

The Office coordinates efforts with the President's Cabinet Secretaries and each of the twelve agency offices for faith-based and neighborhood partnerships, including USAID. The Office intends to increase the awareness and the comfort level as well as the knowledge of staff working with religion and religious actors. Although sometimes religion can be used to justify or promote violence against women and minorities, the fundamental insights of all religious traditions are a beacon of hope – a clarion call for peace and development. The many development and diplomatic challenges faced by our nation require tools such as this document.

In partnership with the National Security Council, the Office is spearheading an Interagency Working Group on Religion and Global Affairs where Federal agencies research and report on their initiatives, which allows for a mapping of U.S. Government involvement in these efforts.

There is a lack of interagency strategic vision for engaging with religion. The toolkit strengthens and further clarifies the legal dimension, as individuals sometimes shy away from programs with religious elements due to a fear of constitutional factors. It is critical to advance our collective understanding and contribute to more informed thinking on the subject, which is why the toolkit can be applauded for

raising awareness and educating stakeholders. It can serve as a model for more similar initiatives that are needed to contribute to our collective knowledge.

This represents a powerful opportunity to help build momentum for the Office's core goals: First, to build capacity by providing additional support and training to U.S. government colleagues to engage faith-based and community-based organizations; second, to build bridges between young people with different backgrounds as part of a 'Kansas to Cairo' technology initiative; third, to work across lines of traditional culture, for example by catalyzing over 3,000 interfaith service projects this past summer; fourth, to present a series of recommendations to President Obama and USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah on how faith-based and community-based organizations can partner with government; fifth, to support multi-faith coalitions in battling issues such as climate change, malaria and disasters, such as the earthquake in Haiti; and finally, to represent the Administration in promoting interfaith cooperation such as recently in Jakarta and the USAID-sponsored conference in Bangladesh.

President Obama will continue to listen to a broad range of actors, because in spite of differences, the shared interests of these groups are paramount. This toolkit will help improve the nation's global engagement.

Dr. Mark Gopin

Director of the Center on Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University

Most conflicts are caused by different factors beyond almost everyone's control, including that of Presidents of the United States. Thus, there is a need to engage in comparative analysis and move step by step to develop the right framework to achieve results. Results are not always as predicted: places where it was thought that conflicts would be resolved are yet to be resolved and others are on the road to recovery. However, the common thread is that in each place, people no one knew about, heroic people, caused a paradigm shift. From Bosnia to South Africa, these people of great courage were early seeds who created a new vision of something that all thought was impossible.

The separation of religion and state has spilled over so that religion has become viewed as a problem. There has been a tendency to bifurcate the world: religion is a problem and secular institutions are seen as the solution. For example, in today's reporting about religious clashes in Nigeria, a news correspondent said that it only looks like a religious conflict but that it is in fact economic and power-based. This minimizes the role of religion, which is a sin of the West. To exclude these visionaries, such as imams or women that could be part of change, is a great sin that we are trying to correct.

The forces of violence are well-funded – hundreds of millions of dollars are poured into conflicts. In the Middle-East, at least three billion people have a vested stake in a small town called Jerusalem. The amount of money going into peace is criminal, and the amount going into religious peace a joke. From a scientific point of view, the problem with religion in peacebuilding is not quality, it is quantity. Most religious actors are not perfect, but there is no need to give up. There is a lack of resources and capacity to build something where religion becomes a part of the solution as we negotiate tough issues, such as sharing land and resources. As time went on, Desmond Tutu and his companions started to understand how critical religion was to prevent a bloodbath in South Africa. His approach made sense to South Africans in their indigenous environment, which moved things in a different direction.

In recent years, there has been a move away from interfaith dialogue. We should not be interested in words, but in deeds. On the ground, religious people care deeply about needs, justice, equality, empowerment, fairness, dignity and respect. This is what religion teaches are the highest values. It is not

about getting together to talk in a nice room, but moving away from *words* to common *actions* – from who to what – from famous clerics to people who do something. We create the people important to the process. We cannot only pay attention to people in fancy robes; rather, we need to support those who focus on justice, repentance and poverty. We, the people, create this reality.

There is a difference between coherence theories of truth – those that make sense within the bureaucracy, but make no sense to those outside – and correspondence theories of truth – the Aristotelian approach of approximating what coheres to you with what is actually out there. The military is ahead of non-military actors in this regard because they die and kill, becoming more practical as a result.

In order to move forward, many questions must be asked, such as: What do you need? Where do you want to go? How do you make peace? Is the answer tribal? Is it women? Bizarre religious ceremony? This will end the killing and begin healing and even prosperity.

For example, hundreds of millions saw a Jewish-Arab team on a TV station with a mufti in tears about Iraqi refugees, thinking of what can be done for them. This has an impact. This makes it harder to create a religious war between the Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. The main supporters of this project were EU representatives, which is an indication that it is time for the U.S. to step up and see the virtue of culture and religion as part of the solution. This is where we need to go.

The recommendation is to focus less on the word “religion” and define the concept as part of a set of deeper values that are shared across cultures. These values create a social contract of respect, honor, anti-humiliation, love of the poor, the children, healing, health and environment. The values creating the social contract are all key religious and secular values. But don’t emphasize the clerics, especially when empowering women.

Dr. Douglas Johnston

President and Founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy

Given the Chicago Council’s Task Force Report and the Interagency Working Group on Religious and Global Affairs, along with the publication of this toolkit, there is now real momentum to address issues related to religion in conflict, which is highly encouraging. One day, we will “get religion right” in our foreign policy.

For six years, the Center has been on the ground working with madrasas in Pakistan. From the middle ages through the 16th century, the madrasa educational system was the most advanced in the world and contributed to the European educational system. Overtime, as a reaction to British colonialism, there was a purge of Western and secular disciplines from the curriculum. The Center is working with madrasas in Pakistan to broaden the curriculum to include physical and social sciences with a strong emphasis on human rights, particularly women’s rights, and religious tolerance. In addition, the program is transforming the pedagogy to induce critical thinking. The program has had some success, due to the madrasa leaders feeling a sense of ownership of the process and instead of having something imposed from the outside. In addition, the Muslim heritage is used as an inspiration going back 1,000 years. Finally, the success is due to ensuring all changes are grounded in Islamic principles, and helping students feel that they are becoming better Muslims as a result.

Over the past six years, the project has trained 2,547 madrasa leaders and senior faculty from some 1,533 madrasas, which is just the tip of the iceberg of all the madrasas in Pakistan. The project has had

sufficient momentum to take it to scale on a nationwide basis, including more radical areas of the country. Teacher training has taken place at Karachi University, as well as universities in Peshawar and Kohat, which are located in the heart of tribal land. This requires relationships and trust over a long period of time. This accreditation program has allowed for better quality control of the curriculum. The elephant in the room is that Pakistan is a feudal society, in which democracy does not fit comfortably. The program attempts to bridge the social gap between madrasa students, who feel marginalized and looked down upon, and the elite of Pakistan attending university. There has also been wide-scale training of female leaders in girls' madrasas, along with vocational training, as well as enlisting madrasa scholars to develop alternative curricula based on best practices. ICRD organized a trip for master trainers to the United States to interact with USAID, State, Centcom, and CSIS. A Pakistani NGO is needed to serve as the face of the program and to raise funding from the Muslim community who are afraid of their assets being potentially frozen as a result of their connection to madrasas. This could also help with security, as the program is targeted by Lashkar-e-Tayba leaders who are competing for the same "recruitment pool".

There is a school of thought in Washington that madrasas are too few and not important. However, there is a demonstrated multiplier effect as teachers are often also imams in mosques where thousands listen through their Friday sermons. Therefore, changing their mindset is strategically important. This is an asymmetric counter to an asymmetric threat.

The Center is currently partnering with a Deobandi madrasa leader with tremendous influence over the Deobandi sect in Balochistan, as well as madrasas from the Wahhabi sect who also joined the effort, in order to work in the most radical areas.

My point is that the nine steps of due diligence mentioned in the toolkit are all valid. However, no situation is alike, and personalities and circumstances dictate the right mix of strategies to be used in a given situation. For example, ICRD initiated a courtship with the Government of Pakistan, where the Secretary for Religious Affairs was brought over to the U.S. along with the National Madrasa Oversight Board for 10 days and exposed them to Congress, the State Department, think tanks, etc. They went back as changed people. In this type of situation, it would have been a mistake to blindly follow a checklist, such as the one described in this toolkit, as common sense was more important to determining what can be achieved. The Government of Pakistan and the U.S. Government are very pleased with the project, but there is a need to find additional resources to complete the work.