

Report of Round Table on Mediation in Peacebuilding

Tbilisi 19th July 2008

On the 19th July 2008, the mediation cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding convened a roundtable to discuss the conceptual basis of mediation in peacebuilding. The meeting was attended by 18 local and international experts from across the South Caucasus who have taken part in civil society peacebuilding initiatives in the region. The purpose of the meeting was to come to a common understanding of 'mediation' in peacebuilding, as preparation for a series of articles or case studies on the subject to be published by International Alert later in 2008, and to be developed into a book on Caucasian mediation processes in 2009.

The following issues were discussed:

1. The conceptual basis of mediation;
2. The difference between mediation and facilitation in peacebuilding processes;
3. The Caucasus' experience of mediation;
4. The mediator as one of the sides in the conflict / peacebuilding process;
5. The purpose, structure, methodological approaches and future utility of a book on Caucasian mediation experiences.

The meeting was valuable in terms of developing a shared understanding of the Caucasian experts' experiences of mediation, but also produced some recommendations for future development of the theme in the Caucasus. Participants recognised that their experience is valuable and can be shared to good effect. Having started out as 'objects' of mediation processes by third parties, over time they developed skills as mediators within their own societies, even between conflicting sides, despite being a side to the conflict themselves. Some reflections were made on traditional institutions of mediation, such as 'elders' and how conflict and transition destroyed these institutions, which were replaced at different times by criminal gangs, armed forces and later by international organisations. It was discussed that in post-conflict societies, mediation for building peace should be an integral part of the post-conflict rehabilitation of society as a whole, alongside measures such as rehabilitation of infrastructure, dealing with societal trauma, economic development and building a social security system, etc. At the same time, mediation can be used as a tool for cooperation between the conflicting sides in joint implementation of such measures. The need to revive local institutions for mediation adequate for the modern day was discussed, building on local experiences of mediation in peacebuilding processes. Further study of local mediation institutions is required; nevertheless, the book on Caucasian mediation processes will draw out lessons and will serve as a handbook to assist in developing the skills and practice of new mediators in future.