Press Freedom and Peacebuilding
Editorial

In the most vulnerable regions and those affected by conflicts, the freedom of the press and freedom of expression are often completely disregarded. These fundamental rights are the first pillar of any democracy. As the guardians of political authority, journalists play a key role in the dissemination of information, addressing issues of common concern and facilitating public debate. However, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, more than 1000 media professionals have been killed in the course of their work since 1992. And that figure does not include the journalists who have been harassed, insulted, kidnapped or unlawfully detained. Despite the adoption of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in 2011, the situation remains difficult, particularly for women and for the citizen journalists who have grown in number since the advent of social networks.

Taking the examples of the current situation in Sri Lanka, Syria, but also in Gaza and Algeria, this edition provides an overview of this issue and heightens awareness of this key aspect of peacebuilding.

Marie Seidel
Editor

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Freedom of Expression and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

On 4th August 2014, a mob led by Buddhist Monks invaded a Church-run institution in Colombo and forcibly stopped a private meeting that was being held where Tamil families of disappeared persons from the North were ‘listening and sharing’ their pain and struggles with civil society representatives, lawyers, religious clergy and diplomats. The police refused to disperse the mob and provide protection to the people attending the meeting. Instead, they stopped the meeting, sent people to the police station and sent families home. Ruki Fernando, a Sri Lankan human rights and press freedom activist, witnessed the mob. He accepted to share information about freedom of expression and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Although the war ended in May 2009 with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the Sri Lankan government forces, challenges remain. Freedom of expression was particularly limited during the war with the two conflict parties heavily influencing the level of media coverage. The above case demonstrates a recent example in which different groups of people in the country find it difficult to see eye to eye and have different views on what reconciliation is. Since the end of the war, families of those killed and disappeared, university students, religious clergy, human rights activists and opposition politicians have faced threats when they tried to publicly and collectively express grief for those lost in the war. In their view, the opportunity to demand truth and justice remains limited. The North of Sri Lanka is the area that was most affected by the war. For decades, people felt constrained in their ability to express themselves due to the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE. Today, people have expressed concern that the military is currently occupying vast swathes of land and that they tend to control many facets of life. There have been cases of many journalists from the North that have disappeared and allegedly killed, with some arguing that the number has increased over the last eight years.

Journalists all over the country feel that there is a lack of freedom of expression, with the highest intensity being in the North. Self-censorship is widespread, as parents, children and spouses often appeal to activists and journalists due to numerous fears. Moreover, reporters often doubt whether editors will publish critical content. Journalists have been confronted with a choice of being independent at their own risk or being subservient to other powers. Due to this challenging environment, many investigative journalists and press freedom activists have gone into exile. Mobs have disrupted meetings of civil society and journalists, raising questions of justice and security for all.

This is the challenging context in which Sri Lankans seek reconciliation, five years after the end of the war. The Lessons Learnt & Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) appointed by the Sri Lankan President had stated that it was “deeply disturbed by persistent reports concerning attacks and obstacles placed on journalists and media institutions including news websites and killing of journalists and the fact that these incidents remain to be conclusively investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. [...] Any failure to investigate and prosecute offenders would undermine the process of reconciliation and the Rule of Law.” (section 5. 155, Pg. 197). Truth seeking and opportunities for people to share what they went through and still going through, without fear, is essential for genuine reconciliation. The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of South Africa provided a platform for victims and perpetrators to express themselves freely. This also appears to be the case with various other Truth Commissions across the world. But in Sri Lanka, there continues to be a fear of whether both victims and perpetrators have the opportunity to share their experiences and struggles. There has been resistance to allow public remembrances of those dead and disappeared. There are restrictions on fact finding and reporting of issues central to peacebuilding and reconciliation process.
Although prospects for free expression and reconciliation are bleak, there are signs of hope. Some journalists both inside and outside the country are dedicated to supporting free expression and promoting diverse perspectives on the situation. Despite a challenging context, people are courageous to speak out against ongoing difficulties and share their experiences. Social media is emerging as an important space to publish alternative news and views that mainstream media does not carry. However, they too often face challenges such as the blocking of websites and threats. It remains imperative, particularly now, to support journalists that take risks in order to ensure that independent reports and opinions are being published both in the country and externally. A small number of Sri Lankans continue to write and speak what they think and what they see and hear. Support and encouragement from fellow Sri Lankans and across the world will be what will sustain them and promote free expression and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Gender Asymmetries in the Media World

Freedom of the press and peacebuilding are essential for ensuring the protection of media representatives. The United Nations sets out various approaches to this in its “Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”. However, it overlooks the fact that the media sector is marked by gender asymmetries. Besides being severely underrepresented in the media, women have to develop different strategies depending on their positions and resources; they are also exposed to different dangers.

According to a survey carried out by the International Women’s Media Foundation in 2011, female media workers worldwide experience threats such as intimidation, violence and sexual harassment, with conditions often made more difficult in contexts where women have little access to the public sphere. Local female journalists face an even greater challenge, but their calls for additional protection largely go unheard although they could be instrumental in identifying local strategies for women to deal with an everyday life scarred by conflict. Such information can provide important guidance for peacebuilding.

The report claims that female journalists are also exposed to harassment at work. Editorial teams are often male-dominated environments rife with sexism and many women feel this would prompt them to give up their jobs. Although there are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which specialise in this area, most of them lack the resources they need to combat this problem effectively.

Barely any attention is paid to the issue of sexism. In conflict situations, reporting is often reduced to gender stereotypes which pave the way for sexist practices, with men presented as active individuals while women are portrayed as mothers and weeping victims even though they also play diverse and indispensable roles in conflicts. A consistent gender perspective aims to break down this polarisation in favour of peacebuilding based on diversity. The Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) discusses such issues at roundtable events and searches for progressive approaches.
Press Freedom, a Fundamental Issue for Peace

Press freedom is one of the key conditions in order for a society to get closer to the democratic ideal. This freedom does not exist by itself: it is merely the consequence of the public’s right to be fully informed at all times. It is neither a commercial or political carte blanche for editors, nor a guarantee of immunity for journalists. While the (countervailing) power of the press is vital, it is only legitimate in the light of its social responsibility.

By tarnishing the freedom of the press in countries where this principle is accepted, we render it devoid of meaning for countries in which it is denied – those where Fondation Hirondelle concentrates its efforts. It is in these countries affected by conflict, governed by authoritarian regimes or suffering from extreme economic and political fragility, i.e. for the majority of people living on our planet, that the Fourth Estate is notably absent, eaten away by threats to the safety of journalists, repressive laws and the economic weakness of independent media outlets. Such issues open the door to brainwashing, rumour, impunity and corruption.

There is no independent information in South Sudan, a country devastated by a most bloody conflict where the regime, the opposition and international stakeholders all attempt to control the media. In the Central African Republic, Ukraine and Syria, the situation is similar and the absence of independent information has become a licence to kill. Through the creation or support of independent media outlets in crisis areas and its determination to give the utmost importance to their credibility and impartiality, Fondation Hirondelle commits itself, on a daily basis, to highlighting the fact that press freedom is fundamental for peace.

Civil Liberties at Risk in Algeria

In January 2014, a new law on civil society associations came into force in Algeria, causing a great deal of uncertainty amongst the country's population. All Algerian associations – including foreign organisations based in Algeria – were required to be re-registered under stricter conditions by January 2014. Financial support from abroad is now subject to stringent requirements and must be approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of this law is presumably to stop funds from Saudi Arabia from reaching Islamist organisations in Algeria, thereby preventing the spread of Islamist ideologies and terrorism. However, it opens the floodgates to arbitrariness and runs the risk of restricting people’s freedom of association.

If the activities of an organisation are considered to be interfering with the internal affairs of the state, this is regarded as a violation of national unity and public policy, which can be punished by dissolving the organisation in question. If members of an unregistered or dissolved association continue to engage in activities in the name of the association, they could face three to six months in prison and a fine equivalent of up to CHF 3,350.

Freedom of association is not the only liberty being restricted in Algeria; freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are limited too. The presidential election on 17 April caused concern for large sections of the population. Media representatives and activists were intimidated and arrested, in some cases by force.
Although the state of emergency declared at the start of the civil war in the 1990s was lifted in 2011, public gatherings still require official authorisation. Peaceful demonstrations throughout the country are regularly broken up by security forces, often by violent means. Civil society still has to fight for its right to exist, its right to play an active role and its liberties.

cfd has been running projects in northern Algeria to help women and victims of violence for around ten years. In spite of the more difficult framework conditions, it is continuing its cooperation with local partner organisations.

Press House Palestine – a Free (Media) Island in Gaza

The role played by the media in the Middle East conflict should not be underestimated. Both in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the media shape public discourse and contribute to the marginalisation of opinions critical of the authorities. According to Reporters Without Borders’ report on the freedom of press in the OPT, independent media representatives are caught between “three sides”: On the one hand, they are regularly put under pressure by the Israeli occupying forces, while on the other hand the political split between Fatah and Hamas means that they are tightly controlled by one faction or the other. As long as the reconciliation agreement announced in April is not firmly implemented, the freedom of the press in the OPT remains in a precarious state. Therefore, the creation of protected spaces for independent media representatives in Gaza and the West Bank is particularly important.

One such space is “Press House” in Gaza, which was set up in 2013. It serves as a training and working place for independent journalists and promotes the freedom of the press in Gaza. The Human Security Division (HSD) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) was the sole state donor involved in the beginning, and thus made a significant contribution towards setting up “Press House”. Within a short period of time, the organisation has established itself as a protected training and working centre for journalists in Gaza who do not want to work for the media controlled by political factions. During the most recent conflict, the independent media institution managed to reinforce its reputation as a bastion of press freedom, acting as a safe house and service centre for local and foreign war correspondents. Electricity is scarce in Gaza, but since “Press House” has its own power supply, it can offer uninterrupted Internet services, enabling domestic and foreign journalists to broadcast the latest updates on the current conflict situation in Gaza around the clock.

Syria: a Magazine to Escape the Horrors of War

According to the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, Syria is ranked in 177th place out of the 180 countries assessed in 2014. The armed conflict has compounded the structural difficulties faced by journalists and citizen reporters in Syria. Since March 2011, there has been a sharp rise in arrests
and kidnappings by government forces or non-state armed groups. Access to information is very difficult and independent publications are almost non-existent.

In Syria, the Human Security Division (HSD) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is supporting a partner in its printing and distribution of a bi-monthly apolitical and non-partisan magazine for Syrian children and young people caught in the crossfire of the conflict. The aim is two-fold: on the one hand, the publication of stories and accounts from daily life seeks to help young readers escape — even if for a short while only — the reality of war and to try to mitigate the associated shock and trauma. On the other, the content of the stories teaches young people the importance of values such as tolerance and respect for others, vital elements for promoting pluralism amongst communities and fostering a multicultural society in Syria.

International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding

SDC
Markus Heiniger
Focal Point Conflict and Human Rights

Links
Freetown Communiqué
New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States
Members of the g7+ states
Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
Message on Switzerland’s International Cooperation in 2013–2016
INCAF

During the 4th Global Meeting of the International Dialogue in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the draft monitoring report about the implementation of the “New Deal for Engagements in Fragile States” was discussed. The report shows that awareness raising about the need to change the way of working in fragile contexts has taken place in the two years since the endorsement of the New Deal. Within the g7+ states some remarkable dynamics can be observed, for instance the Fragile to Fragile cooperation, whereby representatives of g7+ countries that have already some experiences with fragility assessments or compacts are exchanging with other g7+ countries.

However, progress on the ground is not impressive. The political dimension of the “out of fragility strategies” must be taken into account more seriously. It was said that donors often do not sufficiently consider the political context and are not good enough at the early recognition and analysis of context changes. Technical solutions are not sufficient to address problems that are of political nature. As one INCAF member (International Network on Conflict and Fragility, a subsidiary body of the OECD Development Assistance Committee) formulated in Freetown as an example, the crisis in South Sudan shows that the principles of the New Deal are very relevant, in particular the first Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goal (legitimate politics).

Switzerland, in particular the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with the message 2013–2016, has already increased its engagement in fragile contexts and adapted its working modalities (e.g. more specific context and conflict analysis, joint strategies with the aim of poverty reduction and aid for peace). More contributions to collaborative efforts in fragile contexts are envisaged also on the policy level: Switzerland (Elisabeth von Capeller, head conflict and human rights, SDC) was in that sense in March 2014 elected Co-Chair of the INCAF. In Freetown it was welcomed that the challenges regarding fragility would also be a major topic during the annual gathering of the ministers and heads of international cooperation agencies, the “Tidewater meeting”, which this year took place in Switzerland. There as well, it became clear that the New Deal has a great potential if it is politically more supported.
swisspeace’s National Peacebuilding Strategy in Guinea

Unlike its neighbours, Guinea has not been hit by any civil wars to date. Nevertheless, the Guinean government has entrusted swisspeace with the task of developing a national strategy for preventing conflicts and consolidating peace, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Around 60 participants discussed the topic of peace in consultations at markets in Labé, Kindia and Conakry, with the “products” of these discussions forming the basis for the national strategy.

The road to a credible, functioning democracy is a rocky one, even in Guinea. Next year’s presidential and local elections present a major challenge, as the Guinean population’s tendency to vote on the basis of ethnic criteria is exploited by the political parties to the point of manipulation. As long as ethnicity remains more important than the actual candidates themselves, violence will threaten to erupt and disturb the peace every time the people go to the polls. Equally worrying is the situation for young people in Guinea: insufficient education and a severe lack of job prospects are causing much frustration, bringing with it the risk of social dissatisfaction and unrest.

This and other problems were dealt with in depth during the consultations. The people are calling for politicians and their parties to respect the law, especially during the election campaign. They do not just want responsible leaders; they also need strong, independent institutions. Some have also warned against radical movements which are threatening to take advantage of people’s poverty and frustration, particularly amongst young believers.

The suggestions put forward are to be taken into consideration in the national strategy. Ensuring peace also depends on some of these recommendations being put into practice. The chances of implementing effective ideas are good thanks to the commitment of the participants and their strong belief that the country can continue to avoid a civil war in future, in spite of the differences.

National Dialogue & Peace Mediation Course (CAS)

National Dialogues have become an increasingly important topic in international debates. They are seen as a promising approach to addressing and resolving the causes of violent political conflicts in an inclusive manner. National Dialogues can be set up before, during or after peace negotiations and serve to provide a space to discuss issues and build trust among different segments of the population. Being nationally-led, such processes are crucial in promoting ownership, inclusivity and legitimacy.

Responding to this increased interest in the topic, swisspeace and the Berghof Foundation jointly offer a 10-day course providing insights on how to understand, design and support National Dialogue processes, practical training in dialogue and mediation skills as well as critical reflection on lessons that can be drawn from previous cases. The course is designed for practitioners and academics interested in bridging their own experiences with current academic insights and practical knowledge on National Dialogues. It is facilitated by leading scholars and experienced practitioners.
This course will take place at the swisspeace Academy, Basel, Switzerland on 19–28 January 2015. It can be taken as one module of the new Master of Advanced Studies in Peace & Conflict Transformation (MAS) offered by swisspeace and the University of Basel. Registration closes on 31 October.

International Partner Organisations

News from the international peacebuilding scene and KOFF partner organisations

Berghof Foundation
CDA Collaborative Learning Projects
Conciliation Resources
EIP
EPLO
ForumZFD
FriEnt
Geneva Peacebuilding Platform
GIZ
GPPAC Foundation
International Alert
Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung

International Alert

International Alert’s annual report looks back on the highlights of 2013, such as the promotion of peace journalism in Tajikistan, the support of the Sri Lankan diaspora during the reconciliation process and the improvement of political dialogue in Lebanon, and provides an interactive overview of the organisation’s main activities. The report entitled “Looking at the world in a different way” focuses on the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding as the first stage of conflict resolution. You can view it online or download the PDF.

Conciliation Resources

New research commissioned by Conciliation Resources explains how local leaders in east and central Africa and the international community can better protect civilians from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and reintegrate former members into their communities.

Two companion reports examine the roots of these interconnected problems and suggest ways forward: “A people dispossessed: the plight of civilians in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord’s Resistance Army” investigates chronic security threats in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including the LRA and armed cattle herders.

“Back but not home: supporting the reintegration of former LRA abductees into civilian life in Congo and South Sudan” casts new light on the situation facing those who escape Joseph Kony’s group and the communities which receive them. It explains why some communities turn away the returnees and suggests how local and outside actors can ease tensions and support the reintegration process.

Findings from both reports are summarised in the Policy Brief, “Safe paths home: protecting civilians and supporting reintegration in LRA affected communities”.

PUBLICATIONS

How Do I Know? A New Study by FriEnt

There is often a gap between the intended effect of peacebuilding projects and the results they actually achieve. In 2012, a report on two international workshops jointly organised by FriEnt and the Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) of swisspeace pointed out that results orientation in its currently practiced form is more of a hindrance than a help for achieving better results. In the study “How do I know? Strategic planning, learning and evaluation for peacebuilding”, members of FriEnt draw on experiences from specific (post-) conflict situations to highlight the issue.
The study offers clear demonstrations of alternative methods of monitoring impact that are able to take better account of the complexity and dynamics of highly tense situations.

Freedom of Connection, Freedom of Expression

The first decade of the 21st century was shaped by the technological revolution of the Internet: two billion people use this virtual space, giving them great access to information and communication resources. However, there are limits to the digital freedom of expression. From censorship to arrests of bloggers, systematic measures have been taken for years with the intention of curbing the freedom of Internet users to express their views. The publication "Freedom of connection, freedom of expression" by UNESCO uses various accounts to illustrate the problem of regulatory forces behind the supposedly free virtual world.

Research Mirror

The Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) has launched a new online publication. Published every other month and focusing on swisspeace’s main areas of work, Research Mirror offers a selective overview of recent developments, issues and trends in peace research. It aims to stimulate reflections on the strategic and methodological aspects of peace research. The publication is available online now, or you can subscribe to it for free.

Promoting Press Freedom Worldwide

Hundreds of journalists worldwide are killed, persecuted or imprisoned each year. Since it was founded in 1981, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has been campaigning for freedom of the press and reporters’ rights. However, the New York-based non-profit organisation does not just pinpoint issues: it operates across a broad front, conducting active research, staging protests and publishing stimulating news articles in an effort to protect the vital role played by journalists in the balance of power between government and society. Various campaigns on the widespread impunity of perpetrators of violence towards media representatives also ensure that issues relating to freedom of the press are constantly on the political agenda. The committee's website provides extremely up-to-date information, documenting current conflicts and risks for journalists and describing them in detail. With the help of interactive world maps, tables and background information, visitors can gain an in-depth insight into the dangerous side of journalism.
Upcoming Events

**Until 15 September 2014 and from mid-October until December 2014**

The “Making Peace” exhibition staged by the International Peace Bureau (IPB) pays tribute to the men and women around the world who devote their time, energy and resources to the cause of peace. Having previously visited Strasbourg and Sarajevo, it’s now Basel’s turn to host this event which is part of the public program coordinated by swisspeace ahead of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. [Further information.]

**16 September 2014**

What measures should Switzerland take with regard to the economy, development and social policy in order to contribute to the resolution of global environmental issues without exacerbating gender or racial inequalities? As the controversial immigration referendum called for by Swiss group Ecopop (which has proposed a strict limit on immigration in Switzerland and the encouragement of voluntary family planning in developing countries) draws near, the feminist peace organisation cfd will discuss this issue at a debate in Bern on 16 September. [Further information.]

**19 September 2014**

The Geneva Peace Talks, which is an annual, public event organised on September 19, is a unique opportunity for different actors from all professions to share their experiences on peacebuilding. This year’s theme, “Let’s Talk Peace!” has solicited speakers to share their own personal stories on overcoming barriers to communication whilst forging peace. These discussions are also aimed at triggering a reflection in the audience about how we can overcome these barriers. The Geneva Peace Talks will take place on Friday, 19 September – two days before International Day of Peace – from 16:30 to 18:30 at Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. [Further information and registration.]

**26 September 2014**

What are the effects of climate change on migration in Europe and what future challenges does the OSCE face in this field? To answer this question, the Swiss Forum on Foreign Policy (“foraus”) has organised a panel evening preceded by a documentary on the subject. The event is being held in Basel and is part of the public program coordinated by swisspeace ahead of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. [Further information and contact details.]

**September 2014**

In September, Peace Watch Switzerland and Peace Brigades International are organising three information sessions for those interested in the commitment of being a human rights observer. The meetings will be held on 6 September in Zurich, 13 September in Bern and 24 September in Geneva. [Further information and contact details.]

**September - December 2014**

As part of the public program coordinated by swisspeace, the city of Basel is organising a guided city tour to take place once a month between September and December 2014. The tour, entitled “Basel, city of peace”, will be led by professor and historian Georg Kreis. [Further information, dates and registration.]

**6-10 October 2014**

swisspeace offers a 5-day course on Business, Conflict & Peace which explores and analyses opportunities and challenges faced by businesses in conflict-affected contexts and aims to ensure that businesses are not causing more harm than good. [Further information, Registration as soon as possible.]

**14 October 2014**

The Human Security Division (HSD) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is holding its annual conference on Tuesday 14 October in the Kursaal Bern. Entitled “Youth and Human Security: perspectives”, it will focus on young people, their role in conflicts and their work to bring about peace, democracy and human rights. [Further information, conference website and contact details.]
What are key criteria for designing, implementing and evaluating peacebuilding projects? Building on the basics of Project Cycle Management, the KOFF training Taking Action – Designing Effective Peacebuilding Projects explores methodological challenges and highlights best practices for working in complex environments. Further information. Registration closes on 24 September.

The “Practical Tools for Promoting Positive Change in Complex Contexts” course is being organised by CDA in collaboration with the Barcelona International Peace Resource Center. The course will be held in Barcelona from 27 to 30 October 2014. Registration closes on 12 September.

swisspeace offers a 5-day course on Conflict Prevention & Early Warning which provides an insight into key academic findings on conflict prevention, a synopsis of current conflict prevention efforts and an overview of possible avenues to enhance conflict prevention and conflict early warning. Further information. Registration closes on 31 August.

Entitled “Resilient Societies: Alternatives for Better Conflict Prevention”, the swisspeace annual conference will be held on 12 November 2014 at Fabrikhalle 12 in Bern. Further information and registration.

You will find more information about upcoming roundtables and events organised by KOFF on the KOFF website.