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## Concordis International US Conference

Thursday, March 6, 2008

Rome Auditorium, School of Advanced International Studies  
Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC

### Towards a Safer World: Lessons from the Past, New Approaches for the Future

#### Introduction

Concordis International held a conference on 6 March 2008 in Washington, DC, on the topic of international conflict and methods of intervention, focusing especially on official and unofficial diplomacy. The purpose of this conference was both to help raise awareness in the USA about the work of Concordis International and to encourage a more general understanding of international conflict, including resolution methods that supplement official diplomacy. The Johns Hopkins University's School of International Service co-sponsored the conference and provided the venue for the event. As well as individuals with a more general interest in international relations, participants included students, academics and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution.

Senator John E. Sununu (R-NH) delivered the keynote address to start off the programme. National security policy expert Nancy Bearg, American University's Dr. Anthony Wanis-St. John and Concordis International chief executive Peter Dixon followed the Senator with complementary talks on issues related to the conference theme. The following report details a summary of each of their discussions as well as the panel and peacebuilding simulation conducted during the conference.

#### Senator John E. Sununu



Senator John Sununu of New Hampshire's address was entitled "Towards a Safer World: How the International Community Could Work Better to Prevent and Resolve Global Conflicts". Senator Sununu spoke about four aspects of dealing with international conflict: mediation, peacekeeping, effective multi-lateral cooperation and conflict prevention. He noted the importance of having mediators with the proper skills and credibility, mentioning that mediators that perceive they are effective can ultimately be detrimental. He explained that peacekeeping is often necessary in serious conflicts, such as in Darfur, but peacekeeping by itself cannot ensure resolution. He also said that moral persuasion was more important than binding agreements when talking about multi-lateral cooperation, citing the need for a broader consensus on resolving international conflicts.

The Senator highlighted his work on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as focusing primarily on prevention, stating that it was probably the most important aspect of dealing with international conflict. Under prevention he referred to three important issues:

1) **Representational Government** – This is more than just spreading democracy. After a question from an Afghan prince who was in the audience, Senator Sununu explained that there are many forms of

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**Patrons:** Lord Ahmed of Rotherham, Lord Anderson of Swansea, Viscountess Brentford OBE FCA, Rt Rev'd and Rt Hon Lord Carey of Clifton, Sir Fred Catherwood, Mr Ram Gidoomal CBE, Professor Gillian Stamp MA PhD DPhil FRSA, Rt Rev'd Dr Tom Wright

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representational government other than a pure democracy, noting that the United States itself is actually a constitutional republic. He did, however, cite the fact that countries with governments that are democratic in nature rarely, if ever, go to war with each other.

2) **Economic Development** – There has been increasing recognition that economic development is more about implementing institutions and ideas than about handing out aid. Building good governance and institutional capacity is often at least as important as an aid package. Where civil unrest and economic opportunity are concerned, ideas matter.

3) **Global Ties or Engagement with Neighbours** – The Senator linked global ties to his previous point, suggesting that trade matters to economic development. Trade ties act as a mitigating force on two countries that might be in conflict. In the same vein, he said that multilateral organizations are also important because they draw countries closer by necessity. Where commitment and shared goals exist, conflict is less likely.

Senator Sununu closed his remarks by stating that when the preceding three ingredients are in place, countries are much less likely to engage in conflict and if they do, it is much more likely to be resolved through diplomatic means. He gave the recent example of the flare-up between Colombia and Venezuela as one that would likely find resolution through diplomacy more than through violence because of the existence of these three conditions in South America.

### **Nancy Bearg**

Ms. Bearg served as a National Security Adviser to the Vice President of the United States (Bush 41) during the early 1990s. She has also served in several positions within the National Security Council and has worked for the Aspen Institute, Search for Common Ground and was the President and CEO of EnterpriseWorks Worldwide, a non-profit international development organization headquartered in Washington D.C.

Ms. Bearg spoke about the role that development plays both within conflict and during a post-conflict peacebuilding stage. She discussed the fact that within the last 20 years, international development has gone from simply projects on infrastructure and education to building institutions for both good governance and the economy. Having opportunities for entrepreneurs is an important aspect of the new development capacity. Bearg suggested that technology and entrepreneurship are two of the “good ideas” that Senator Sununu had mentioned during his address. New technology can be anything that will improve people’s lives. It does not have to include only internet capability. She explained that anything with the ability to generate income is technology and that as long as it takes a culturally appropriate form, it can do much to foster growth and development in a post-conflict situation.

### **Anthony Wanis-St John PhD, American University**

Dr. Wanis-St John is an expert in the theory and practice of negotiation and mediation. His talk, entitled, “Is Diplomacy Enough? Examining a Common Term in an Uncommon Time,” focused on the need for other forms of resolution and diplomacy to deal with modern conflicts. According to Wanis-St. John we still live in a state-centric community where states are the major players, but one that is widening to include other serious actors. We still need diplomats, but they are not sufficient. The setting aside of official diplomacy for people-to-people conflict has given rise to Track II diplomacy which works at lower levels than the traditional version and is geared towards changing such important issues within conflict as enemy images and misattribution of intent. This form of diplomacy has many names. But whether known as Track II diplomacy, unofficial diplomacy, or something else, practitioners of this method must utilize a great deal of patience as the work often goes on for years. It can benefit, however, from operating with a much lower profile and with fewer political constraints than the official form of diplomacy between representatives of nations.

### **Peter Dixon, Chief Executive, Concordis International**

Peter Dixon described the 21<sup>st</sup> Century context of 'New Wars', where non-state actors as well as states are involved, targets include ideology, economics and identity as well as territory, the primary victims are civilians, and tactics such as human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing and forced urbanisation/radicalisation are central to strategy. Against this background, he described different ways of intervening in civil war and spoke about the work that Concordis International has been doing in Sudan since 1999 on long-term causes of conflict. These causes, many of which relate to under-development and inequity, need to be tackled at every phase of warfare. He described the distinctive, non-partisan approach taken by Concordis, which focuses both on long-term building of relationships of trust between influential individuals and on policy research into key issues underlying violent conflict. He related the approach to its foundations in a number of conflict resolution theories, but recognised the limitations, risks and constraints that face a non-official organisation.

After outlining the circumstances surrounding Sudanese civil wars in the past 50 years, Mr Dixon described the interventions undertaken by Concordis in the national conflict and those in the East of Sudan and in Darfur. In all cases, and especially the ongoing Darfur conflict, he argued that sustainable peace required a coherent and comprehensive peacebuilding strategy, involving support for and cooperation between official and unofficial interventions, so that attention could be given to the long-term underlying issues as well as short-term political disputes.

### **Panel on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conflict**

Immediately after lunch, Ms. Bearg, Dr. Wanis-St. John and Mr. Dixon gathered on a panel to take questions over their presentations and other more general questions about international conflict. The panel discussion hovered around the role of official and unofficial diplomacy, what governments are doing to deal with post-conflict situations (US State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, the UK's Stabilization Unit, etc.) and under what circumstances these kinds of intervention should and should not take place. Taken together, the answers pointed to the need for comprehensive and cooperative interventions, potentially including: peacekeepers with sufficient force and a robust mandate, mediation of ceasefire and a political settlement; inclusive policy-level dialogue to develop solutions to persistent inequities, community-level peacebuilding; and investment in reconstruction and development.

### **Peacebuilding Simulation**

The purpose of the simulation was to give conference participants a better understanding of the many components involved in developing a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy. In practical terms this allowed the participants to discuss issues together and work to develop a plan that would facilitate a successful peace process. The participants' ideas involved plans to address the role of the adversaries (state and rebel movement(s)), intervening governmental parties (US, UK, regional governments), international organizations (UN, AU, etc.), relevant non-government organizations and civil society.

### **Conclusion**

The one-day conference was well received, the different elements dovetailing well together to provide an excellent opportunity both to increase understanding of the complexities of twenty-first century conflict and to showcase the work of Concordis International to a varied audience.