Promoting Participation and Democracy

The dynamism of a culture of peace lies in human beings having a sense that they are, at least partly, in control of their own destiny. They must have a sense that they have access to meaningful opportunities to participate in shaping their society. No one should feel excluded.

The building of trust amongst individuals, groups and communities, and between the state and civil society, is a complex and necessarily incremental process. Maintaining that trust, and thus a modicum of social peace, through a long and arduous reconstruction process, is even harder. There are unfortunately numerous examples of emerging democracies where public support for democratic values is eroded and threatened by a public perception that the state is either unable or unwilling to deliver on its promise to provide public safety through legitimate, fair and yet effective law enforcement and criminal justice practices.

Values such as democracy, political inclusion and participation should clearly continue to guide Canada's policy in the area of international peacebuilding. However, unless they are accompanied by a clear understanding of what concrete tasks are required as part of a successful peacebuilding process, these values could amount to little more than a form of ideological imperialism.

We are apparently all prepared to accept that some form of electoral democracy is still the best way to create and support the legitimacy of government institutions. It presumably does so by opening up alternative forms of communication, participation and conflict resolution and thus reducing the need for any party to resort to violence. However, the task of encouraging and assisting democratic consolidation, whether in a post-conflict situation or not, remains a complex one. It not always clear that it is possible to successfully intervene a country where there is not already an indigenous process allowing citizens to learn their own lessons[9].

Finally, when the concept of social or political integration is used to define the goals of social development or peacebuilding activities, it often create a number of difficulties:

> "It is intellectually easy and often politically expedient to assume that grave problems of poverty and injustice can be alleviated through "including" people formerly "excluded" from certain activities and benefits. Yet in many cases, the existing pattern of development may be economically and ecologically unsustainable, or politically repressive. Therefore it is always necessary to ask "*inclusion in what and on what terms?*""[10].

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[9] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1996). *Report of Proceedings: Roundtable on National Capacity-Building For Democracy.* Strömsborg, Stockholm, 12-14 February 1996.

[10] United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1994). *Social Integration: Approaches and Issues.* UNRISD Briefing Paper Series 1, World Summit for Social development. Geneva: UNRISD