

PEACEBUILDING AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Assisting transitions from power to authority

(Consultation Document)

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We learn that Canada will be giving itself the tools it needs to make a more effective contribution to the various international peacebuilding activities that the world urgently requires. All of us will welcome today's opportunity to help shape our national policies in this important area.

Part of our challenge, however, comes from the fact that peacebuilding, as many people have pointed out, is still a relatively new concept. It most certainly represents an area where our good intentions far exceed our collective experience, if not our wisdom.

There is a new international discourse which speaks bravely in terms of peacebuilding, institution building, rapid reaction forces, and so on, as if these terms designated clear and unambiguous objectives or methods. In truth, we probably all know considerably less than we are prepared to admit about how to achieve these objectives. That, in itself, should dictate a measure of caution in setting our own national objectives in this area. We still have much to learn about how a nation can effectively help another in building domestic peace. What is not clear, beyond the rhetoric, is exactly how, with limited financial means and in a context already exacerbated by recent violence and persistent distrust, one promotes a culture of peace and respect for human rights, and helps create the necessary institutions in somebody else's country. Fortunately, however, the fact that the task is a daunting one, has not brought us to withdraw into helpless and irresponsible inactivity.

Peacebuilding is still an elusive concept. In general terms, at least in post-conflict situations, it refers to a number of activities designed to identify and support structures that can contribute to a consolidation of peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. Violence and conflict, we all want to believe, are avoidable and preventable. Otherwise, we would not be prepared to invest significant resources in peacebuilding. What we perhaps do not yet perfectly understand