

## Minorities & Human Rights

Human rights violations are important causes of conflict and not just consequences. Any policy of conflict prevention must pay close attention to human rights even though there may be strong institutional and organizational pressures to relegate human rights to the back burner. Human rights include civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights and it is important to recognize that the denial of economic and cultural rights is also a source of conflict. More effort should go into developing mechanisms of "remedial prevention" by sending human rights observers and monitors into areas where there is strong evidence of human rights violations. Technical assistance in drafting human rights legislation in countries undergoing democratic transition can further the goals of structural conflict prevention. There is a continuing need to bring human rights considerations into the operations and normative frameworks of international financial and lending institutions, the global trading regime, and regional trade organizations. Other points in the discussion were:

- The effectiveness of human rights mechanisms and institutions in some regional organizations is hampered by a lack of adequate resources and insufficient personnel.
- Some member states, which are critical to a viable, regional human rights regime, are not part of the system because they have not yet ratified key conventions.
- The distance between international organizations and local human rights groups and nongovernmental organizations should be narrowed.

## Electoral Assistance, Democratic Development

There was widespread consensus that the international community has placed too much emphasis on elections as a "quick fix" to the problem of establishing democracy. Elections have been too closely tied to "exit strategies" as opposed to long-term strategies of engagement in war-torn societies. Timing is crucial. If elections are held before political parties have had a chance to form or before moderate political elements have built their political base, they may perpetuate conflict and further polarize attitudes while political entrepreneurs exploit the situation. Even so, a well conducted and professionally managed election can help to resolve/prevent conflict particularly in those situations where tensions are high and a "contested" electoral process could trigger an uncontrollable escalation of violence. Those involved in mediation should also seek out the advice of electoral experts as they negotiate peace settlements.

- Electoral observation is an extremely costly undertaking for most regional and international organizations and more cost-effective ways have to be found.
- Monitors and observers in elections should also be local and not simply international.
- Outside organizations have to become involved early in the preparation efforts leading up to an election to ensure that they are free and fair.
- Parliamentarians, political parties, and their staff require training, and more international effort and resources have to go into these kinds of governance undertakings.