

The Third Conference on National Dialogues, 5-6 April 2017

The House of the Estates, Helsinki

Building Peace Architecture in the Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa region are plagued by a number of violent conflicts, affecting peace and stability at the local intra-state level and at the same time the wider regional and inter-state level. Yet, the existing regional architecture has not shown concrete results in preventing or managing intra-state or inter-state conflict in the region. In fact, regional divisions are seen as fueling and prolonging internal conflicts in many countries. This session aims to be a stock taking exercise focusing on exploring the limits and potential of existing regional frameworks, and other initiatives that could support cooperation for conflict prevention and resolution, and more specifically national dialogues, and how such dialogues, wherever they exist, are supported or otherwise by regional intergovernmental structures.

The panel will consider the existing regional inter-governmental cooperation frameworks, that is the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and discuss their approach to conflict prevention and conflict resolution, and the normative frameworks-in place at the moment. Considering the lack of a strong track record, the panel will consider reasons for the current weaknesses and look into questions related to political will or lack thereof, leadership and power politics, historically motivated mistrust, geo-strategic competition and enhancing institutional capacity for dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflict.

The panel will consider how the very nature of the regional frameworks (exclusive by virtue of their cultural, ideological or sub-regional focus), influences any effort related to conflict prevention and resolution, and how regional power dynamics are reflected within and between these institutions. The panelists will consider whether the frameworks are merely a sum of their parts, or is there potential for more cohesion and unity of purpose. Several case examples will be cited, including Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

In addition to formal intergovernmental frameworks, the panel will discuss existence and/or potential for informal efforts towards engagement at the regional level that aim at supporting regional rapprochement, conflict resolution and more specifically national dialogues. Who should drive such efforts and how could they complement formal ones? The question will be posed as to how such informal efforts can support building a shared vision and devising functioning cooperation links and mechanisms, by strengthening and widening the scope and capacity of existing frameworks, while at the same time working on ad hoc basis on a specific crisis, to support conflict resolution and dialogue efforts.

The question will also be posed whether regional frameworks, where they do engage in conflict resolution efforts, adopt inclusive approaches and ensure an equitable and meaningful representation of women. Are questions of inclusivity, including the role of women, taken into consideration in formal and informal regional conflict resolution platforms, and in practical terms how has this been done? If not, how best can this be achieved? What are the lessons learned, constraints and opportunities?



Panel:

Amb. Nureldin Satti, CMI Senior Adviser, retired Sudanese diplomat and former senior official at the UN and UNESCO (Moderator)

Amb. Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Dr. Seyed Hamzeh Safavi, Director, Institute for Islamic World Futures Studies

Mr. Cengiz Çandar, Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies

