AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING

PEACE MEDIATION AT A CROSSROADS

BOLOGNA PEACEBUILDING FORUM 2024

Agency for Peacebuilding

June 2024

ABOUT US

The **Agency for Peacebuilding** (AP) is a think-and-do organisation committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in peacebuilding. AP aims to contribute to more peaceful and just societies by preventing and transforming violent conflict and creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation across sectors and divides. AP's vision is of a world where conflicts can be transformed without violence and where peace can be promoted through inclusive, innovative, and sustainable means.

www.peaceagency.org

The **Bologna Peacebuilding Forum**, the flagship initiative of the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP), is a leading **annual event** with two main objectives. First, to **strengthen the network of peacebuilding** scholars and practitioners to improve policy-oriented research and fieldwork. Second, to open **up the field of peacebuilding** to a wider audience.

www.peacebuilding.eu

IN A FEW WORDS

In its sixth edition, the *Forum* was devoted to exploring **peace mediation** in the current global landscape.

Peace mediation has profoundly changed over the last two decades in terms of actors, approaches and legitimacy. While the role and leverage of the United Nations have diminished, some regional entities, such as the Arab League and the European Union, have acquired more space. Besides, a plurality of state actors has aspired to be recognised as credible and effective peace brokers, such as Türkiye or China, enriching a grouping that in the past was largely composed of European states such as Norway and Switzerland.

At the same time, peace mediation has increasingly become a proper **professional field**, with its own diverse community of researchers, experts, and practitioners. Different forms of mediation support guide and underpin the work of mediators, while different states and regional organisations increasingly rely on **specialised mediation support staff and services**, conduct mediation-oriented training, and nurture mediation rosters.

Against this backdrop, the Forum has provided a space to analyse these transformative dynamics with particular attention to the opportunities offered by **multi-track and inclusive mediation**. As mediation is a discrete job often conducted out of the public eye, the Forum has provided a rare opportunity for a **frank and open debate** involving different stakeholders along three paths: A changing landscape for peacemakers; Mediating with who? Inclusiveness beyond rhetoric; The future of (contested) peace mediation.


They [the parties] are locked in a deadly struggle trying to exterminate each other (...) The miracle is that [mediation] sometimes works.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE FOR PEACEMAKERS

Over the past 15 years, global peacefulness has declined, with 2023 marking the thirteenth year of deterioration. Conflicts have become more interconnected and complex, often involving violent extremism and a range of actors operating at various levels. The international system is increasingly fragmented, particularly due to deadlock at the UN Security Council, weakening the liberal international order and complicating peace and security efforts. This complex global landscape impacts mediation processes, which often focus on short-term conflict management rather than long-term resolution, leading to recurring tensions.
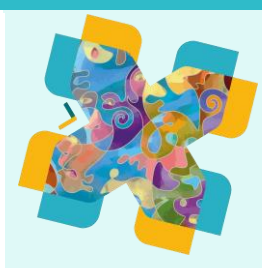
We delved into the evolving landscape for peacemakers with **Luxshi Vimalarajah,** Senior Mediation Advisor - Track 1 & 1.5 at Berghof Foundation, **Janna Greve** from the EEAS, PCM.2 - Peace Mediation and Dialogue Sector, **Mmathari Mashao,** Minister Plenipotentiary at the South African Embassy in Rome. **Kristoffer Liden,** Research Director at PRIO, skillfully moderated the discussion.

Shortcomings and challenges

- **The role of emerging mediators.** The evolving landscape for peacemakers underscores the importance of re-examining historical approaches, such as the EU's role in peace mediation. Established actors often exert significant influence over local and national conflicts. The discussion highlighted how certain actors, despite being portrayed as "new", have a longstanding involvement in peace mediation. For example, Qatar has a peace mediation mandate enshrined in its constitution and widely elaborated on the concept of tactical neutrality and equidistance. The standard UN approach has faced criticism, with traditional historical peacemakers often positioning themselves as champions. In contrast, non-traditional peace powers diverge from the dominant liberal model. Today, most of the traditional mediators advocate for liberal outcomes, creating a dilemma between inclusiveness and elite deals in peace processes.

- **Normative dilemmas.** The differences between traditional and emerging mediators are also normative. Notably, mediators must strike a delicate balance between achieving short-term negative peace through difficult dialogue (a primary goal for non-traditional mediators) and promoting long-term positive peace through practical change (a central issue for traditional mediators). Traditional mediators also face the challenge of maintaining impartiality and neutrality, often at the risk of being perceived as biased towards democratic transformation. In addition, general tension remains between including marginalised groups in the peace process and pursuing elite peace deals that can strain these processes.

- **Addressing marginalisation.** Addressing gender roles and their impact on (and contribution to) conflicts has become increasingly crucial. This recognition underscores the urgent need for a shift in conflict resolution approaches to better incorporate gender perspectives and promote more inclusive and effective peace processes. For instance, from a South African insight, training efforts have predominantly targeted women, recognising that conflicts often disproportionately affect women and children, yet negotiations are often male-dominated. This urgent change must reflect a commitment to promoting gender equality and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, are equipped with the necessary skills to contribute effectively to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

Peace mediation needs to keep adapting and act more preventively. One thing is to be awake, and another is to get out of bed.

Takeaways

- **Hybrid and pragmatic approach to mediation.** Pragmatism does not mean the absence of norms and a trade-off between effectiveness and inclusion is needed. Excluding or disengaging either traditional or non-traditional approaches could undermine the effectiveness of peace processes. Consequently, there is a necessity for a hybrid adaptation, which incorporates both traditional and non-traditional approaches into future peace processes and ensures a more comprehensive and inclusive mediation effort.

- **More preventive conflict analysis and actions.** Conflict analysis should be less reactive and more focused on conflict prevention. Tied to it, increasing preventive actions is crucial for mitigating conflicts and fostering sustainable peace. By prioritising prevention, societies can proactively work towards resolving conflicts and building resilient communities that are better equipped to handle future challenges.

- **Training at different levels.** Programmes should be created with a focus on equipping individuals in different positions with essential mediation skills. By empowering different stakeholders with the necessary skills, these programmes should seek to broaden participation and foster a more comprehensive and effective mediation environment.

MEDIATING WITH WHO? INCLUSIVENESS BEYOND RHETORIC

Inclusivity in peace processes certainly incorporates the role of civil society organizations, women, and youth. However, some marginalised groups receive even less attention, and the inclusion of critical groups such as violent extremist actors is often neglected. While digital technologies can enhance inclusiveness by providing platforms for dialogue and engagement, they can also inadvertently harm inclusivity by amplifying divisive voices and spreading misinformation, thus posing challenges to the peace mediation process.

The discussion was led by **Stefano Marinelli,** AP Associate, and featured **Johanna Poutanen,** Head of Digital Peacemaking & Women in Peacemaking at CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, Finland; **Evelyn Pauls**, of the Gender, Justice and Security Hub at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security and Associate Researcher at the Berghof Foundation; and **Francesca Caruso** from Community of Sant'Egidio.

Shortcomings and challenges

- **Flexible inclusiveness?** Inclusivity is not solely about the presence of diverse groups but also about the representation of diverse perspectives and interests. It remains controversial if in some critical contexts, inclusion can be adopted during the mediation process or if it should be always the first step. Yet, flexibility can be adopted on some side activities such as trust-building sessions. Overall, while some scholars consider that there is no evidence that more inclusivity is less effective, some traditional and non-traditional mediations integrate each other in mediation processes to their ability to include (for example, some mediators can include radicalised groups, while others are more focused on women and youth).

- **Not all women.** Not all women have the same perspective, and this diversity must be acknowledged and valued in peace mediation processes. Women's experiences and viewpoints vary widely based on factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status, among others.

- **Digital inclusion.** We must consider whether women or other marginalised groups have access to the internet and digital tools or if they possess the digital skills to take part meaningfully. Without addressing these disparities, digital technologies may inadvertently harm inclusivity by excluding those without adequate resources and skills, thereby posing challenges to the peace mediation process.

- **Beyond the rhetoric.** An inclusive process is not just a one-day event with different stakeholders. Fostering lasting change and genuine societal transformation requires an ongoing commitment to challenging existing norms, biases, and barriers to inclusion, as well as continuous engagement with diverse stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard and valued over time.

We need to make the case for women's place in security. Women should not cover only the role of gender experts. All questions from peace and security should be analysed with an agenda-sensitive approach.

Takeaways

- **Diversified participation.** Diversified participation is crucial for ensuring comprehensive and representative decision-making processes. By involving individuals from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, we can access a broader range of insights, ideas, and solutions. This inclusivity not only enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of decision-making but also promotes social cohesion and equity. Not all individuals within marginalised groups share identical perspectives or experiences. Recognising the diversity within these groups is essential for understanding and addressing the complex intersections of privilege, discrimination, and marginalisation that shape individuals' lived realities.

- **Shifting from women's inclusion to agency.** Women participation should be reconsidered not in terms of inclusion, but in terms of quality participation. Many times, women get training and men opportunities. This can not be the case in future programming.

- **Women's quotas are still relevant.** The ultimate goal of diversified participation is to extend beyond gender and encompass a broad spectrum of identities, experiences, and perspectives. However, achieving this goal requires overcoming various barriers and challenges, including systemic inequalities, discrimination, and marginalisation. In some contexts, incorporating women's (and other marginalised individuals and groups) quotas remains imperative due to the recurrent absence of female representation at peace-making and decision-making forums.

- **Perpetual effort.** An inclusive process extends beyond a singular event convened with various stakeholders. It encompasses a sustained and comprehensive approach that fosters ongoing engagement, dialogue, and collaboration among diverse actors over an extended period. This prolonged engagement allows for the cultivation of trust, the exploration of differing perspectives, and the identification of shared goals and priorities. By recognising that inclusivity is a continual endeavour, rather than a one-time occurrence, mediation efforts can effectively address complex challenges, nurture relationships, and generate lasting solutions that resonate with all stakeholders involved.

Peace mediation is about creating spaces where parties can look at each other's faces.

THE FUTURE OF (CONTESTED) PEACE MEDIATION

In the context of the ongoing global transformation, the field of peace mediation is confronted with a crossroads. Although new approaches and perspectives are emerging to address the challenges of the present era, they have yet to be widely adopted and are not yet universally accepted. As the era of liberal peacebuilding recedes into the past, how can mediators reconcile the pursuit of long-term conflict resolution with the exigencies of short-term conflict management in the context of peace mediation processes? What innovative practices can be employed to render peace mediation less contested?

Guiding us through this session have been esteemed experts: **Mabel González Bustelo,** international consultant on mediation from the Institute of Studies on Conflict and Humanitarian Action (IECAH); **Julián Arévalo,** Senior Fellow (Mediation) at Swisspeace; **Tarila Marclint Ebiede,** Policy Leader Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute, and Director of Conflict Research Network West Africa; moderated by **Simone Tholens,** Professor at John Cabot University, at the European University Institute, and at Johns Hopkins University, SAIS.

Shortcomings and challenges

- **Shifting trends in the international arena.** The current international system is marked by shifting trends and dynamics. Firstly, there is a dominant approach characterised by military responses to armed conflicts. The regulation of the use of force, increase of military spending and less resources for peace mediation. Concurrently, there is a resurgence of geopolitical competition, indicating the waning influence of liberal hegemony politics and a return to a landscape characterised by contestation over geopolitical interests, even in conflicts where there are no direct interests of global powers. This transition is further accentuated by the assertiveness of emerging middle powers, contributing to the emergence of a multipolar world and amplifying levels of uncertainty. Finally, there is a growing perception of double standards in international relations, wherein certain violations, such as those observed in Ukraine, are accorded significant attention, while others, such as those in Gaza, are not equally addressed.

- **Fragmentation of the conflict parties and mediation efforts.** Fragmentation prompts inquiries into the identities and affiliations of the parties involved. On the one hand, at the negotiation table, the complexity arises from the potential fragmentation within the counterpart groups, stemming from internal divisions, divergent objectives, or conflicting viewpoints among members. This internal discord can impede the negotiation process by hindering the presentation of a unified stance or the articulation of cohesive demands. On the other hand, the fragmentation of mediation efforts, characterised by overlapping initiatives and competing agendas, often undermines the effectiveness of mediation processes and, ultimately, diminishes their impact. This fragmentation occurs when multiple actors or mediators become involved in a conflict, each pursuing their own strategies, priorities, and interests without sufficient coordination or collaboration. As a result, instead of complementing each other's efforts, these fragmented initiatives may inadvertently duplicate resources, confuse parties, or even exacerbate tensions.

- **Lack of a coherent paradigm of action.** The persistence of the ripeness paradigm in negotiation contexts highlights a continued reliance on the notion of opportune moments for conflict resolution, often overlooking the inherent complexities and multifaceted nature of contemporary conflicts. The focus on ripeness often detracts attention from the core objective of negotiation: transforming the conditions and dynamics of the parties involved.

- **Lack of accountability in mediation.** The absence of accountability frameworks in mediation processes poses significant challenges to their effectiveness and sustainability. Accountability mechanisms play a crucial role in ensuring transparency, fairness, and adherence to agreed-upon principles and norms throughout the mediation process. Without clear mechanisms in place to hold parties accountable for their commitments and actions, there is a risk of impunity, distrust, and the erosion of confidence in the mediation process.

- **Overambitious and sprint goals.** The pursuit of overly ambitious goals and a preference for expedient solutions can present significant challenges in various contexts. This propensity often leads to a lack of thorough analysis, inadequate consideration of complexities, and an underestimation of potential obstacles. As a result, hastily implemented solutions may prove unsustainable, ineffective, or even counterproductive in addressing underlying issues.

Moving away from ripeness theory and towards the introduction of the emerging complex elements can lead to different and perhaps more adequate paradigms to address the challenges of peace mediation.

Takeaways

- **Fragmentation as an opportunity.** Viewing fragmentation as an opportunity for change entails reframing the challenges it presents as catalysts for innovation, collaboration, and transformation. Rather than solely perceiving fragmentation as a barrier to progress, this perspective recognises the potential for diverse perspectives, interests, and initiatives to offer valuable insights and opportunities for positive change in a "multi-mediation" framework. Additionally, leveraging the strengths and resources of diverse actors and initiatives can lead to more comprehensive and sustainable approaches to complex challenges. By encouraging experimentation, learning, and adaptation, it becomes possible to explore new approaches and test innovative solutions to achieve desired outcomes.

- **Mediation analysis.** Accompanying conflict analysis with a robust mediation analysis serves as a foundational step towards constructive conflict resolution. By integrating mediation analysis into conflict assessment processes, it becomes possible to gain deeper insights into the underlying dynamics, root causes, and potential pathways towards resolution. Mediation analysis involves examining the relationships between various factors influencing the conflict, including the interests, needs, perceptions, and power dynamics of the parties involved. This analytical approach enables mediators to identify points of leverage, opportunities for dialogue, and potential barriers to progress. Moreover, by conducting mediation analysis in tandem with conflict analysis, mediators can develop more tailored and effective strategies for facilitating constructive dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and fostering sustainable peace.

- **Importance of gradualism.** Gradualism means being able to achieve small solutions that can be used as examples that "things can happen". It means bringing short-term "negative peace" but as part of bigger outcomes related to "positive peace".

- **Humble approach.** Embracing humility is paramount, as it reminds us to approach these processes with openness, respect, and a willingness to learn from local contexts and experiences. By prioritising humility and providing support without dominance, we can empower communities to find sustainable solutions to their conflicts, paving the way for genuine and enduring peace.

Quicker solutions are over-ambitious solutions. Peace takes time. We must be able to do small things and, if needed, bring forward both negative and positive peace in spaces.
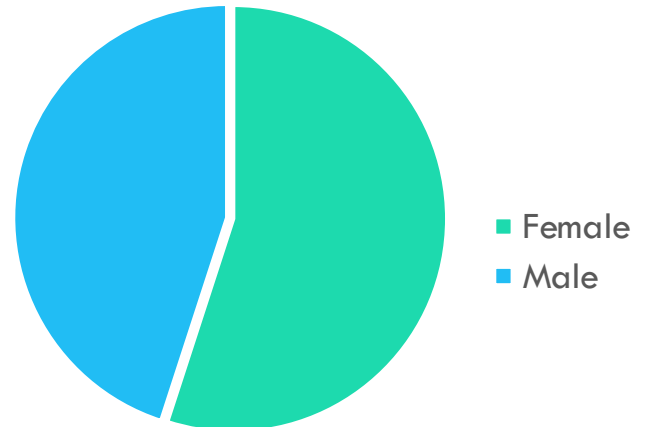
FACTS AND FIGURES

Data:

3 Days

6 Events

5 Locations

+200 Participants

20 Speakers from 9 countries

Speakers:

- Female
- Male

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME

Day 1

Wednesday 15 May

Digital technologies for peace and mediation
Università di Bologna - Via Andreatta, 4, Bologna

09:30 – 09:45
Arrival and registration of participants

09:45 – 10:00
Welcome address

10:00 – 11:15 Session 1
Peace tech: exploring the intersection between technology and peacebuilding

coffee break

11:45 – 13:00 Session 2
Digital technology and mediation: fostering inclusion in conflict

15:30 – 17:00
A world at war: peace mediation and the role of Italy
Cappella Farnese, Palazzo d'Accursio, Piazza Maggiore, 6, Bologna

21.00
Cultural event-pace libera tutti
Teatro del Baraccano - Via del Baraccano, 2

Day 2

Thursday 16 May

**International conference
Johns Hopkins School of Advanced
International Studies (SAIS Europe)**
Via Beniamino Andreatta 3, Bologna

09:15 – 09:45
Arrival of participants and welcome
coffee

09:45 – 10:00
Welcome address

10:00 – 11:15 Session 1
A changing landscape for peacemakers

coffee break and networking

11:45-13:00 Session 2
Mediating with who? Inclusiveness
beyond rhetoric

lunch break

14:30 – 15:45 Session 3
The future of (contested) peace
mediation

16:00 – 17:00
Final Remarks: innovative ways forward

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Day 3
Friday 17 May

Next generation forum student workshop
(reservations full)
Laboratorio 41 - Via Castiglione, 41

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