



## **VOICES FROM ASIA: TOWARDS A PROCESS FOR COOPERATION AND SECURITY**

**MAJLIS EL HASSAN & SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION ROUNDTABLE**

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES**

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### **CONFERENCE REPORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The West Asia – North Africa (WANA) region is in profound crisis. Conditions are becoming more complex, more fragile and more dangerous with every passing day, and there is an urgent need to address them. Initiating a viable process for cooperation and security in the WANA region has been recognized as a way to overcome regional challenges. In this context, three practical tools were proposed: a cohesion fund, a social charter and a community of water and energy. The aim is to build a regional community that can address its problems, and a regional civil society that is able to communicate its needs in partnership with citizens from across the region.

Together with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal and his office (Majlis El Hassan) have promoted the process of “Voices from Asia” as a means for dialogue and mutual participation. The Institute of Strategic Studies is an Islamabad-based policy centre with a focus on security issues.

The Islamabad roundtable, “Towards a Process for Cooperation and Security” was sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, and organised by Majlis El Hassan in partnership with the Institute of Strategic Studies, with the help of the Helsinki Process for Globalisation and Democracy.

The meeting focussed upon four interrelated issues:

- Opening the channels of communication to build a WANA concept;
- Concrete means for creating a process for cooperation and security in WANA;
- Empowering the powerless;
- and moving forward with a process for cooperation and security.

Participants considered the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as the value of Track 1, 2 and 1.5 networking within and beyond the WANA region.

## **Session 1: Empowering the Powerless – A Process to Involve and Engage the Marginalized**

### **Three main questions discussed:**

1. How do we break down the boundaries between people and promote effective citizenship over emerging exclusionist identities?
2. How do we harmonise the network of civil societies and maximise their potential?
3. How can the cooperation between civil society organisations in West Asia be promoted and supported?

**Inge Lonning** discussed the experience of Nordic countries in building democracy through the involvement of civil society. He noted that until 150 years ago, the Nordic region suffered from frequent conflicts and was one of the least developed areas of Europe, whereas today they are among the 10-20 richest countries in the world. Consistent democratisation efforts, the decentralisation of governance mechanisms and the involvement of all citizens in governance processes have been major contributing factors to this development. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, social contracts were developed to support the poorest sectors of society, and create the tripartite model for controlling the labour market – bringing together the government, civil society and business – which then spread to other areas. Today, Nordic societies actively involve minorities in policy making and governance – the guiding principle is that organisations of civil society have to be key players in social development, as coexistence takes place in the realm of everyday life. Mr. Lonning concluded that the main lessons to be drawn from the Nordic experience are the importance of fostering inclusive civil society organisations as part of society and the active participation of such organisations in public and political life.

**Walid Salem** challenged the framing of the session by asking where citizens figure in the tripartite structure of society, consisting of the public sector, civil society and business. He suggested that more initiatives directly from the citizens would be needed and therefore citizens should be seen as the fourth, and most important, sector in society. The value of this would be that it would force us to reconsider and expand our traditional understanding of the public sphere as not something completely contradictory to the private sphere, and thus also force us to bring some issues, such as the role and rights of women, from the private sphere into the public sphere. Making an ethic of responsibility to humanity part of the public sphere opens up a new range of policy choices. To promote effective citizenship and to make it more difficult to claim to speak in the name of the people, the concept of democracy needs to be reversed from people's sovereignty to citizen's sovereignty. Citizens should be responsible for their own sovereignty as they are the cornerstone of democracy. Regarding the empowerment of the marginalised, Mr. Salem noted that the people are powerful even when they are silent as silence can also be a rejection of the current situation. He outlined four projects which could maximise the potential of citizens, provided regional policies could be developed. He also relayed MECA's willingness to expand in order to work with other civil society movements in the region. The four projects outlined were:

- Civil Peace – internal disputes, such as those between the secular and the religious or the Sunni and the Shia have led to more deaths than international disputes;
- Building citizenship as well as democracy and democratic institutions – so far most initiatives to build democracy in the WANA region have been top-down and citizens' movements would be needed to build democracy from the bottom up;

- Human Security – the right of all people to have equal access to freedom from fear and want;
- Promoting the ideas of moderation – moderate groups are still the majority in the WANA region, but they are voiceless. Citizens’ movements to promote moderation are badly needed.

**Ron Pundak** approached the questions set for the session by using the Israeli-Palestinian case-study as an example. Building on two points made by President Musharraf in his inaugural address, namely that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved and that there is no time to waste, Pundak asked how the people, civil society as well as citizens, could contribute this effort. He outlined three scenarios – the current ‘ugly’ scenario, the ‘bad’ scenario of the conflict escalating further, and the ‘good’ scenario of the Palestinian unity government contributing to the initiation of dialogue between the governments of Israel and Palestine. The last scenario is the one the people of Israel and Palestine wish for but also one which they believe possible. Four legs would be required; the political leg, the security leg (human security as well as national security on both sides), the economic or developmental leg, and cross-border civil society cooperation. The main role for civil society is to build critical mass in order to influence the mindsets of people, shift perceptions and recreate trust and hope. These processes are being initiated through the organisation of meetings between young politicians and leaders, religious leaders, football players, teachers and other key sectors of society. The example of the Israeli-Palestinian peace NGO forum could be replicated in other areas, such as economics and the media, and new technologies should be employed to create dialogue between the youth, as the next generation of leaders. Another idea would be to create one economic unit in WANA, which would then relate to other countries and regions, building on the example of Integrated Crop Management. Pundak concluded by noting that in his experience, wherever a cooperative process has been initiated, citizens have been eager to take part and promote such activities – a sign that it is possible to solve current problems and end the conflict.

**Rahman Sobhan** concluded the discussion by noting that much of the discourse on civil society is held captive by the notion of civil society related to liberal humanist values. In the WANA region, the most active civil society group has been the fundamentalists, who have been very successful in reaching out to the powerless, due to their global outreach and well-established financing networks. In the absence of a peaceful route for expressing their discontent with current regimes, the marginalised and the powerless are channelling their discontent through extremism. Unless policy agendas aim to address the deep injustices in all our societies and structural change is attempted, the world will become even more dangerous and unstable. In a region where there is weak democracy and extreme conditions of poverty, it would be essential to create liberal channels of venting anger. One possible solution would be to provide better opportunities to enter the market in an effective way, thus providing more opportunities for inclusion.

#### **Key issues discussed:**

- There is a need for a network of networks – regional NGOs able to connect with existing networks outside the region.
- Structural change at the level of institutions and society would be needed to remove the potential of individuals turning to violence when current structures are not working.

This should be complemented by policy agendas that address the root causes of injustice.

- Obstacles for change and agents of change should be considered together. Key obstacles for strengthening civil society and participation identified in the discussion were authoritarian regimes, extremists, ‘invaders’ and elites interested in maintaining the status quo. Citizens and civil society could contribute by initiating discussion about working towards participatory democracy. Discussions should involve governments, could highlight different issues and needs (e.g. education, health care, citizens’ needs, etc) and should aim at achieving change in a peaceful and organised way. Mobilising the moderates in society was seen as a key to developing non-violent strategies for reform.
- By focusing on shared problems experienced in different countries within the WANA region, regional civil society awareness could be created and some sensitivities felt by national governments could be defused.
- As a first step towards strengthening civil society in the WANA region, a taskforce should be set up to consider what needs to be done. It would be helpful to involve people who have initiated similar civil society processes in different regions, in order to learn from their example.
- The Citizens’ Global Platform, the World Movement for Democracy and the Community of Democracies were identified as possible partners.

## **Session 2: Concrete Means for Creating a Process for Cooperation and Security in WANA**

### **Three main questions discussed:**

1. How can we effectively implement these tools: a cohesion fund, a social charter and a water and energy community?
2. How and where do we begin implementation?
3. Do the three instruments serve as a meaningful basis for developing cooperation within West Asia?

**Muchkund Dubey** outlined a possible concept for a Social Charter for the WANA region, drawing on his experiences from developing a social charter for South Asia. He argued that because of the democratic deficiency in the WANA region, pushing the frontier of political and civil rights should be an essential element of the Charter. A Social Charter has very little meaning unless it grants rights and entitlements on the basis of citizenship, which is indiscriminatory and something all people have in common (unlike religion or ethnicity for example). He also argued that in the context of the globalisation and liberalisation project in ascendancy today, a Social Charter should redefine the role of government participation in the governance of the market, which by nature favours the strong over the weak. The Charter should have effective provisions on monitoring – on-the-ground monitoring should be done nationally but there should also be a mechanism for regional cooperation. WANA should start with an inter-governmental Social Charter to which civil society could contribute at the national level – effectively a bottom-up participatory process directed by governments. The first step in developing a Social Charter for WANA would be to identify the areas which should be included in the charter, and suggested that those areas could be human rights, employment (especially employment of the youth), provision of shelter to the homeless, education, health, poverty alleviation, and provision of assets to the

unemployed. The second step would then be to initiate short studies into the reasoning behind the areas selected, outlining current problems and possible solutions as well as identifying the necessary rights and entitlements. The preamble should be a statement of the principles and roles, based on the broader international framework of values and norms. The main body of the Charter should contain a set of objectives and goals, in some cases even quantifiable, in order to measure progress in the future. As a third step, a strategy should be created to achieve these goals. Professor Dubey suggested that it would probably not be realistic to aim for a judiciable legal document, but that the rights and entitlements contained within it could be guaranteed by local and national law, complemented with instruments of accountability, such as public hearings.

**Ahmad Mango** briefly outlined a possible understanding of the proposed three instruments of a Cohesion Fund, a Social Charter and a Community of Water and Energy, and suggested how and where to begin implementation. He defined WANA as a region covering 25 countries: the 22 of the Arab League, plus the 3 neighbours in West Asia (Iran, Israel and Turkey). In outlining the socio-economic realities in WANA, Dr. Mango identified three clusters of countries on the basis of their income levels: low, middle and high income. He argued that despite considerable variation in income levels among countries in the WANA region, there is still a meaningful basis for cooperation in the region. He noted that WANA suffers from two basic structural challenges: the imbalance in the distribution of natural and human resources and market failures resulting from the "Dutch Disease". A network for the conveyance of the two basic natural resources in WANA (water and energy) among its different regions could form the back-bone of a regional industrial policy to deal with market failures resulting from the Dutch Disease. This network, the Community of Water and Energy, which includes renewable energy and desalination, would require the following to emerge:

- A financing mechanism for the conveyance system through a Cohesion Fund (contributions of approximately 1% of GDP could be made by each participating country).
- Part of the Fund should be allocated to finance supporting infra-structure in transport (highways, rail and port facilities) and environment.
- A regional Social Charter that gradually integrates national social security systems in the region.
- A vision for an Industrial Policy in WANA to deal with market failures that have prevented the emergence of a modern manufacturing industrial base.

This could serve as the foundation of a sustainable development paradigm and provide a bridge for the region to fully join the globalising world economy and away from its current image as a supplier of oil and a source of violent extremism. Dr. Mango concluded by arguing that detailed studies would be needed to further develop the Cohesion Fund, the Social Charter, the Community of Water and Energy and Industrial Policy in WANA, and to identify operational instruments for their implementation.

#### **Key issues discussed:**

- It was noted that extremist organisations in the WANA region are currently providing more effective safety nets than governments – simply looking at how to use current resources more effectively to provide social security could improve regional stability.

### Social Charter

- It would be important to strengthen the capacity of judicial systems to implement legislation which could guarantee the rights and entitlements provided in the Charter.
- Mobilising civil society at the regional level to construct a regional Social Charter would in itself already promote societal development in the WANA.
- The Social Charter should be a combination between a social charter and a code of ethics – in addition to outlining rights and entitlements it should also outline social responsibilities such as a citizen’s pledge to volunteerism, non-violence, celebrating diversity and civil peace.
- A taskforce should be set up to initially conceptualise a social charter, drawing upon existing material, and to distribute the draft to relevant stakeholders for comments. It was suggested that Professor Dubey could lead such a taskforce.
- HRH suggested that, in addition to Professor Dubey, a member of the Arab thought forum and Ann-Marie Sigmund should be involved in the drafting of the Social Charter. HRH further stressed the need to develop a code of standards which could be integrated into the Social Charter.

### Cohesion Fund

- The Cohesion Fund should be part of a broader framework for regional cooperation in order to motivate countries to contribute to it. It should also be taken into consideration that a fund capable of making sizeable contributions would require an effective bureaucracy and safeguards against abuse.
- The fund could be used to improve infrastructure or to empower the marginalised and powerless through identifying the lowest segment of the population in each country and giving them a ‘corporate equity stake’ in the oil industry in the region, in order to create a permanent source of income generation.
- The Cohesion Fund could learn from the Partnership for Governance Reform on Indonesia which pushes for reform programmes (in public service governance, democratic governance and security and justice governance). It is a multi-stakeholder body, which enjoys broad Indonesian ownership and has effective accountability measures. It works in partnership with a multitude of actors, such as government, academia, civil society and the parliament.

### Water and Energy Community

- Some participants considered the Water and Energy Community as the most promising initiative to start with, because it concerns essential basic needs around which cooperation could be built and around which there already exists some infrastructure of cooperation.

### Session 3: Opening Channels of Communication to Build a WANA Concept

#### Two main questions discussed:

1. How do we define the supranational needs of our region?
2. How do we constructively interact within Greater Asia?

**Ilari Rantakari** delivered a message from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Mr. Erkki Tuomioja. Minister Tuomioja highlighted that while the magnitude of problems in the region is daunting, it is no justification for inaction, and that a step-by-step approach can achieve positive results, as was concluded at the Amman meeting. He suggested that although developing a vision of the future can give a clear sense of direction to the process, ambitious goals, if formulated at the onset of the process, may in fact make the initial stages more difficult. In the case of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, for example, there were 10 principles guiding cooperation between participants and the spirit of mutual confidence-building. Simply initiating an inclusive and flexible multi-stakeholder process with a pragmatic focus in the WANA region would be an invaluable contribution in itself. Minister Tuomioja extended an invitation to consider the usefulness of further pursuing the possibilities for advancing the WANA agenda through the OSCE, during its Finnish presidency in 2008. There is a long-standing relationship between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia) as well as the Asian Partners for Cooperation (Japan, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Afghanistan and Mongolia), and the “OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century” already provides the organisation and Partner States with an opportunity to explore new avenues of co-operation and interaction for the purpose of enhancing mutual security.

**Shireen Mazari** suggested several supranational needs for the WANA region. She noted that the region is heavily impacted on by extra-regional powers, which also have a role in sustaining the instability and disunity of the region. The first supranational need, therefore, would be the creation of a conflict resolution framework or a conflict management mechanism, in order to break the cycle of violence. Dr. Mazari suggested that the Oxford Research Group model could be used as a starting point. The OIC should also be activated to consider the possibility of supporting a non-Muslim peace keeping force, in order to create breathing space for finding political solutions to regional conflicts – in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A second supranational need Dr. Mazari identified was the need for transforming religion into a source for peace, not conflict, through promoting tolerance and the understanding of differences. She suggested two deliberate, long-term policies which could make negotiation and conflict resolution easier: using the media to publicise the positive aspects of the ‘other’ and undertaking confidence-building measures to reduce the negative images of the ‘other’. Regarding linkages with Greater Asia, Dr. Mazari suggested that bringing together communities of power might be one way to build regional integration and bring about greater civil society participation and empowerment.

**Takeaki Hori** called for the activation of civil society movements in the WANA region. He noted the flipside of globalisation which has led to a widening of the gap between the haves and have-nots, thus making the promotion of civil society and democracy more difficult. Civil society activation, following the model of Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, is needed to bridge this deficit. Professor Hori used the example of the Open Society Fund of George Soros as a model which could be suitable for the WANA region. Additional organisations that were successful in developing international civil society

cooperation are the People in Need Foundation, based in Prague, the Helsinki Process of the 1970's, the Oslo Initiative and, more recently, the democratisation process in South East Asia.

**Key issues discussed:**

- The idea of developing WANA is a very welcome and workable initiative. The world has seen examples of the emergence of similar groupings in the past, for example in South-East Asia, where an imagined region was created through consistent and deliberate efforts, and today stands as an anchor for stability. The creation of WANA could start with a small number of countries willing to initiate the process and develop it further.
- A working group should be set up to work on the concept of WANA, through informal meetings, exchanges of ideas and other confidence-building measures. An offer was made to advance the agenda discussed during the Finnish Presidency of the OSCE in 2008.
- The focus of the process was questioned: is the aim to create a conceptual framework for creating a common identity among the WANA countries, or to create practical tools for initiating cooperation in the region? If the aim is the former, it is important to safeguard diversity and multiple identities. If the latter is considered the main aim, the role different stakeholders could play in developing and implementing them should be considered. A clearer division of labour between different actors would be needed.
- It could be useful to actually have a two-track approach with a governmental level as well as a civil society level. Governments could try to build practical, uncontroversial tools that would offer viable chances for dialogue. An Open Policy Institute for civil society organisations could also be established to facilitate parallel discussions on the same issues.
- Finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential for building cooperation within WANA, but we must be clear that solving it will not solve all the problems in the region, and that it should not be used as an excuse for not initiating a process.
- The long tradition of vertical, bilateral relations in the region have led to the breaking down of horizontal connections, which poses a challenge for developing relations between WANA and Greater Asia. A concrete democratic mandate and the involvement of civil society organisations would be needed to rebuild these horizontal connections. In the future, the great powers of the world will be in Asia, and thus the economic architecture of the region should also reflect the growing demands from South and South-East Asia.

**Session 4: Moving Forward – Implementing a Process for Cooperation and Security**

**Three main questions discussed:**

1. How do we identify partners for implementation? How can they be engaged?
2. How do we ensure the support of external players (e.g. the US and the EU)?
3. How can we coordinate with regional institutions in Asia (e.g. ASEAN and APEC)?

**Senator Mushahid Hussein** suggested that the process of cooperation in South-East Asia could serve as a model for the WANA region. He noted that dialogue and peaceful means of solving crises are badly needed in the region, especially when considering the futility of force in Afghanistan and Iraq. Senator Hussein also expressed his hope that the new Asian Secretary-General of the United Nations will use his full weight and moral authority to promote a peaceful resolution to the emerging standoff between Iran and the USA.

**Felia Salem** stressed the importance of finding a common platform which would allow both WANA and Greater Asia to achieve their goals. In Greater Asia, very different political and economic systems exist, as well as various religions and ethnicities. There are, however, common problems, including poverty, governance challenges, security threats posed by conflicts in the region and environmental issues. Salem asserted that despite the differences, it is indeed possible to build cooperation around finding solutions to these common problems by drawing on the shared great civilisations of Asia, the convergence of values and the world's largest market. There are already Asian communities in the making, mainly through the establishment of common markets and developing civil society cooperation, as is witnessed by the development of ASEAN for example, as well as several free-trade agreements, increasing intra-Asian trade and civil society initiatives such as the Asian Dialogue Society (ADS) and the Asian People's Assembly (APA). Salem also argued that in order to secure the support of external actors, countries in Asia would first need to find credible measures and leadership for overcoming lesser regional conflicts, improving economic cooperation and promoting Asian soft power, as well as agreeing on a common regional platform on which to build cooperation. She further argued that although ASEAN was not necessarily very successful in developing economic integration, it stabilised the region of South-East Asia politically. ASEAN could thus be seen as a better model for developing cooperation in the WANA region than, for example, the European Union. Finally, Salem proposed a Road Map for developing cooperation in WANA. First, a humanitarian assistance programme would be needed for the Palestinians; second, the WANA concept should be further developed along the lines of ASEAN or the EU; third, in the medium to long term, a common platform should be created to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and discuss pluralism and tolerance in Islam. She also suggested that the Water and Energy Community and the Millennium Development Goals could be good entry points for initiating a process of cooperation, which should also involve civil society and the private sector.

**Dietrich Reetz** argued that although the three tools discussed at the meeting – the social charter, the cohesion fund and the water and energy community – are specific proposals, moving them forward in a coherent way would require institutional anchoring. In order to create a non-controversial framework for cooperation, an institutional framework should be discussed and developed early on. Dr. Reetz suggested that it would be difficult to induce countries in the region to implement international initiatives such as the three tools suggested, and that serious consideration should be given to how to win their support. In order to mobilise support among countries of the region, as well as among external actors such as the EU and the USA, he recommended developing a clear focal point for the process, such as Majlis El Hassan or, later on, a WANA multi-stakeholder foundation or the equivalent. The initial process should be built on cooperation around uncontroversial, common issues. The next step would introduce more concrete initiatives, such as the Social Charter, Cohesion Fund and Water and Energy Community. He also recommended establishing a platform to facilitate civil society cooperation and coordination, enabling civil societies to aid in the mobilisation of public support for regional cooperation initiatives aimed at improving the everyday lives of the people. The platform could also serve to bring

together different kinds of civil society groups, including secular, minority and Islamist organisations, around a common philosophy. Dr. Reetz argued that both the USA and the EU would be very supportive of any regional initiative which is focused and which suggests practical measures for how stability could be furthered with resources from the region. He also recommended considering possible synergies with the EU when developing the WANA concept and presenting the concept of the WANA process to organisations and institutions within the USA and the EU.

### **Key issues discussed:**

- This process is trying to conceptualize the WANA region in an innovative way – as people who are concerned by the problems the region faces and earnestly devoted to bringing about change. It is important not to limit the discussion to what governments could agree to, but to think creatively, freely and deliberately. People in the region, such as university students, civil society activists and businessmen, should be involved in the process in an attempt to broaden the views of regional governments and pave the way for inter-governmental cooperation.
- Promoting democratisation and multi-stakeholder cooperation within a single country is challenging enough, but doing so at the regional level is a greater challenge. The experience of Indonesia shows that such a process also requires enlightened leadership from the government as they possess the power to bring about peaceful changes.
- The idea of talking about a supranational reality in the geographical area of WANA would also address the problem of resource planning in the region (even more so than creating peace in the region). A framework strong enough to deal with the post-conflict challenges we will face in the future must be developed.

### **Conclusions:**

1. As a first step towards strengthening civil society in the WANA region, a taskforce should be set up to consider what needs to be done. It would be helpful to involve people who have initiated similar civil society processes in different regions. Examples of activities include the establishment of an international media peace corps, and networking with existing Asian organisations such as the aforementioned ADS and APA.
2. A taskforce should be set up to conceptualise a social charter by drawing upon existing material and to distribute the draft to relevant stakeholders for comments. It was suggested that Muchkund Dubey and Walid Salem would jointly lead such a taskforce.
3. A meeting of civil society activists could be organised in Jordan to discuss the draft Social Charter.
4. A virtual WANA platform for coordinating the efforts of civil society organisations should be set up using the various means available such as the Internet.
5. Research students from the WANA region should be encouraged to initiate further research into the modalities of the Water and Energy Community, Social Charter and the Cohesion Fund.
6. A forum for the alternative energy community and representatives from electricity experts could be created to discuss relevant viable options.

7. A forum of non-governmental experts could be created around water issues, perhaps in cooperation with Stockholm International Water Institution (SIWI)
8. The next meeting in Turkey in late 2007 should include:
  - Discussion on the draft Social Charter;
  - designing an appropriate institutional framework for the process;
  - developing a core group of civil society organisations, sharing the same vision and objectives as the process, from the WANA region;
  - developing a prioritised, three-year strategy plan for moving from discussion to action.
9. Majlis El Hassan could work as a focal point for the WANA process until a viable alternative is found.
10. The possibility of using the OSCE to take the process forward during the 2008 Finnish Presidency of the organisation should be explored.
11. HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal will share the ideas on the WANA process discussed at the meeting during his trips to Brussels and the USA.