Global Conflict Prevention Mechanisms and their Relevance for Latin America and the Caribbean

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Introduction

This article analyzes evolving global trends in conflict and conflict prevention, including those favoring preventive diplomacy, mediation, and increased consideration of gender as well as two conflict prevention tools developed by the United States Institute of Peace[1]. Finally, it assesses the conflict challenges and institutional capacity for prevention and the relevance of global prevention tools for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Violent Conflict Today

In 2011, there were thirty-seven conflicts with a minimum of 25 annual deaths, and six wars characterized by 1,000 conflict deaths or more (Themnér&Wallensteen, 2012). Many of these are "intrastate" wars, fueled by racial, ethnic, or religious animosities and struggles to control resources, as much as by ideological fervor. A growing number are communal conflicts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Themnér&Wallensteen, 2012).

Contemporary conflicts are characterized by the predominance of intra-state or civil wars over inter-state wars--a shift which has increasingly placed civilians in the cross-fire of violence. Today, civilians constitute more than 75% of those killed or injured in wars. A World Bank study in 2011 calculated that over 1.5 billion people worldwide live in countries experiencing violent conflict, and underscored the profound impact that such violence has on communities, development prospects, and economic prosperity (World Bank, 2011).

Other features of war today relate to the changing nature of fighting and the increased vulnerability of civilians. Despite great strides to control their usage, landmines have been one of the most common weapons of modern warfare. Tens of millions of landmines--weapons that do not distinguish between soldiers and civilians, or between a time of war and a time of peace--have been sown around the world. Afghanistan and Colombia are the two countries that have suffered the most injuries from landmines.

Another characteristic of warfare today has been the strategic use of conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated mainly against girls and women, but also against men and boys (UNSG, 2010). Gender-based violence (and violence against ethnic groups) is employed in a variety of degrees and ways by armed actors across different conflict settings. Such violence is usually part of a continuum of discriminatory and violent practices from pre-war eras. A UN report in 2012 found that the use of sexual violence in the context of war "humiliates, dominates, instills fear, breaks identity," and its impact "creates enduring ethnic, family and community divides" (UNDPA, 2012). In the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, sexual violence was used as to promote "ethnic cleansing" and to alter reproductive patterns. In Sierra Leone, sexual

violence was used to promote troop cohesion among forcibly recruited Revolutionary United Front fighters (UNDPA, 2012). Sexual and gender-based violence in the context of war are effective instruments for undermining social and community cohesion, and breaking down resistance to those who employ it.

A third phenomenon of modern warfare is the forced displacement of people. In 2011, 26.4 million people were displaced from their homes by criminal and drug violence in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, by armed battles in Côte d'Ivoire and the Sudan, and by uprisings across the Arab world (IDMC, 2011). Violence often displaces people from their lands at a moment's notice. They leave behind their homes, their possessions, and their support systems, including families and friends, neighbors, churches, and other social networks. In addition, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and refugees are frequently traumatized by the violence or threats that caused them to abandon their homes. They often continue to be at risk as they struggle to meet their basic needs in unfamiliar environments. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar/Burma, Bougainville, Colombia, and Darfur, combatants have used sexual violence or the threat of sexual violence to provoke displacement in order to increase territorial control or access to resources (UNDPA, 2012).

Evolving Global Interest in Conflict Prevention

The shift in the nature of modern warfare has had implications for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. While the UN Charter addresses primarily the need to prevent violent conflict between states, the rise in complex, intra-state conflicts, and the immense human and material costs of wars have increasingly demanded new approaches that are more comprehensive and that link local, national, regional and global efforts more effectively as needed.

The last two decades especially have produced intensified attention at the global level, particularly at the United Nations, but also among regional organizations, governments, and civil society organizations, to the issue of conflict prevention. New normative frameworks, pushed in part by civil society, are now in place in relation to preventive diplomacy

and more recently the "responsibility to protect," mediation, and the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution. The gap however between these new global frameworks and their implementation remains large.

Preventive Diplomacy

First articulated by UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, the idea of preventive diplomacy—a term that refers to a particular kind of conflict resolution, namely diplomatic actions taken to prevent or curtail violent disputes—has seen a resurgence in usage. The last three secretaries general of the United Nations have helped give normative substance and institutional capacity to the concept. In "An Agenda for Peace," UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali asserted that preventive diplomacy would provide the underpinnings for the United Nations' work in peace and security. He urged the international peace-building community to "strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence, or continuation of violent conflict" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).

In June 2001, Boutros-Ghali's successor, Kofi Annan, issued a report on the prevention of armed conflict (UNSG, 2001). In it, Annan addressed the question of who holds responsibility for the prevention of violent conflict. He charged national governments and civil society—including churches, businessmen, journalists, academics, human rights defenders, trade unionists, and all those who live in the community affected by the violence—with primary responsibility. Annan assigned secondary responsibility to international, regional, and sub-regional organizations, which, working in partnership with governments and civil society, are often well positioned to respond to threats of violence and can help to create or strengthen mechanisms to prevent or avoid the repetition of violence. That same year, the UN Development Program (UNDP) created a Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery to provide technical assistance and help build local capacities for conflict prevention.

By the time of the UN World Summit in 2005, and in the wake of the genocide in Rwanda, the concept of conflict prevention and

preventive diplomacy took off in a new direction, shaping a gradual consensus among UN member states around "R2P", the "responsibility to protect" populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Nonetheless clear concerns remained on a number of fronts, including the power dynamics that could affect implementation of R2P, the potential of the concept to be misused for political purposes or for "regime change," and concern that R2P could be used to justify military interventions. In addition, fears persist on the part of some smaller nations that R2P could be used to undermine national sovereignty and counter self-determination (Responsabilidad, 2012).

Mediation

Increasingly, the United Nations (as well as other regional and state entities) is seeking to strengthen capacity for mediation and dialogue as part of its strategy to prevent violence or the recurrence of violence. In the last decade, we have seen a drive to develop institutional capacity within the United Nations, as well as member states and regional organizations, especially the African Union and to a lesser extent the Organization of American States (OAS). In 2005, the United Nations established a Peace Building Commission (which has mostly focused on post-conflict peace-building rather than prevention). In 2006, the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) was established to provide technical assistance to mediators and their teams.

New infrastructure for mediation and preventive diplomacy was put in place after Ban Ki-Moon assumed the mantle at the United Nations. In 2008, the Department of Political Affairs beefed up its conflict prevention staff by four-dozen positions and established a small rotating Stand-By Team of mediation experts. Both the MSU and the SBT have enhanced the capacity of the United Nations to provide targeted substantive support for mediation processes. The UNDP has similarly created new positions for peace and development advisers within conflict zones. In some missions, UN peace-building programs are bolstering local and national capacity and enhancing mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Another thrust of UN efforts has been to help professionalize the field and improve the practice of mediation. In the ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, between one-third and one-half of the peace accords reached worldwide were not sustained beyond 5 years (Woocher, 2009). There is less concern today with getting a quick agreement and more concern that agreements reached can be sustained and implemented. The UN is now moving to systematize its mediation experiences. In July 2011, the United Nations General Assembly issued its first resolution on mediation (A/RES/65/283: "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution"), which called on the Secretary General to report on the status of mediation and to provide guidance for mediators (UNGA, 2011). The 66th session of the General Assembly will consider the Secretary-General's mandated report on the status of mediation practice, as well as new guidelines for effective mediation. These 2012 documents are expected to be the most far-reaching documents on mediation ever presented by the United Nations.

Under Ban Ki-Moon's tenure, reports by the Secretary General and resolutions by the General Assembly and the Security Council have all urged the development of mechanisms for preventive diplomacy and mediation. Turkey and Finland have spearheaded the formation of a UN Group of Friends of Mediation that rallied some forty initial members to help generate political will and support mediation as the preferred mechanism for resolving international conflicts.

In his 2011 report, "Preventing Diplomacy: Delivering Results," Ban Ki-Moon described a shifting terrain for conflict prevention and identified the factors that have helped maximize success in UN preventive diplomacy engagements, namely, "early warning, flexibility, partnerships, sustainability, evaluation and resources" (UNSG, 2011). He outlined many of the structural and substantive changes that have taken place under his tenure, including the strengthening of mediation mechanisms (as outlined above) and the introduction of regular consideration of potential conflicts at Security Council meetings. Significantly, the report's recommendations underscore the importance of developing stronger relationships with regional organizations and civil society—especially women and youth, who he sees as particularly

well placed to identify early warning indicators before violent conflict breaks out. In practice, these relationships have been somewhat slow to be forged, and the discourse has been slow to be translated into practice.

The increased impact of war on civil society has dictated a proportionally greater role for civil society in peacemaking and peace-building. Many international organizations, donors, and governments have sought to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations working in conflict zones to promote and build peace in the belief that a strong civil society will be the best tool to prevent the breakout of violence. They have thus empowered civil society to create programs, processes, partnerships, platforms, and networks that protect and promote human rights, peace, democracy, and development.

There is a growing consensus on civil society's role in lending credibility and legitimacy to a peace process, helping to identify and address the underlying structural causes and inequities that formed the root causes, contributing analysis on the nature of the conflict at the local level, ensuring the implementation of the agreements, and in the longer term reweaving the social fabric damaged by violence. International alliances like the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), established in 2003 and linking 15 regional networks of civil society organizations working in conflict zones, offer vehicles for global coordination and engagement of civil society efforts. Such alliances can help institutionalize and implement what GPPAC has called a "global shift from reaction to prevention of violent conflict" (GPPAC, 2012).

Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention and Mediation

In practice, those most affected by conflicts are usually among the most disempowered within a country: often including women, children and youth, and ethnic minorities, yet they are also the ones less likely to be given a voice during peace negotiations and international mediation efforts. Consequently, their specific interests have not generally been well served by peace accords.

A new development in the field of conflict prevention in the past twelve years is the greater recognition of women's potential contributions to the field of peace and international security. The international community has been actively designing normative frameworks, and individual governments, in collaboration with civil society, have been creating national action plans toward this goal. Beginning in 2000, the UN Security Council passed numerous resolutions that recognize the differential impact of war on women and men, call for the inclusion of women in all aspects of conflict prevention and peace building, and recognize domestic violence and violence against women and girls as a threat to international peace. With Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008); 1880, 1888, and 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); and 1974 (2011); normative frameworks and international commitments are in place for increasing the participation of women in conflict prevention, monitoring and addressing sexual and gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict, and building institutional capacity to curtail impunity and exact greater justice for victims of gender-based crimes (Barrow 2010). These resolutions mandate protection from and accountability for gender-based and sexual violence in conflict zones, and call for the integration of gender perspectives and analysis in conflict prevention initiatives, cease-fire agreements, peace accords, DDR (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration) strategies, reparations programs, and the design and implementation of post-conflict reconciliation initiatives.

Implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security has been slow or non-existent, but the pressure for results is steadily increasing. More importantly, the institutional structures for demanding accountability are also being developed, particularly with UN reforms in 2010 that merged the resources and mandates of the four UN agencies charged with work on gender equality and women's empowerment (DAW, OSAGI, INSTRAW and UNIFEM) into a single power-house agency, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (known as UN-Women), new reporting requirements that will allow progress toward the established benchmarks to be documented, and the establishment of national action plans that will bring national governments into alignment with their international commitments.

Despite these tremendous normative advances, the translation from discourse to practice has moved with glacial slowness. A recent status review noted persistent gaps in implementation of the Security Council resolutions and the "continued low numbers of women in formal institutions of conflict prevention, especially in preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts" (UNSC, 2011). The United Nations has yet to appoint a woman as a lead mediator in any of its missions. Less than 10 percent of negotiators and less than 3 percent of those who sign peace agreements are women. Concerns about sexual or gender-based violence are only rarely addressed in ceasefire agreements or peace accords--only 8 percent of peace accords make reference to sexual violence as a war crime, and only three ceasefire agreements (Nuba Mountains, Burundi and Lusaka) have specifically included sexual violence as part of the definition of ceasefire (UNDPA, 2012).

USIP: Two Conflict Prevention Tools

Building on the conflict prevention work of the Carnegie Commission, the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and others, and contributing to these global prevention trends, the U.S. Institute of Peace has developed a number of practitioner tools to aid in conflict analysis and prevention strategies (Woocher, 2009).I mention two here.

An early tool developed by Michael Lund and published in his book, *Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy*, is the visual graphic of the "conflict curve." Lund situates the primary goals identified by the Carnegie Commission for intervention (namely, to prevent the onset, escalation, and recurrence of violence) along a bell curve (Lund, 1996). Lund traces the course of conflict in two dimensions. The vertical axis measures the intensity of the conflict and the horizontal axis measures the conflict's duration. The curve arches from left to right across the diagram, tracing the incremental rise and decline of violence over time. Lund's model maps a predictable continuum of conflict with innumerable potential points along the curve for preventive interventions to interrupt its course. Lund's diagram includes a number of arrows that deviate from the curve, indicating variation in real-life conflicts, as well as the potential for

renewal or re-escalation of violence at any point along the curve. The bell represents an "ideal" conflict, and oversimplifies the more complex nature of real conflict cycles, yet the model holds considerable heuristic value, as it permits practitioners to develop strategies for intervention that relate to the intensity of the violence over time. This model continues to be a reference point for discussions on conflict prevention (Pascoe, 2010).

A second tool developed by USIP is a strategic framework for preventing violent conflict. Issued in September 2009, and developed by Lawrence Woocher in a USIP special report, the framework draws on prior research in the field to identify three broad, sometimes overlapping, objectives—to "mitigate global risks, [to] mitigate societal risks, [and to] halt and reverse escalation"—that will lead to the desired end state of "stable peace" (Woocher, 2009; USIP, 2009). Though the USIP document cautions that the framework "should not be mistaken for a checklist or a 'one-size-fits-all' template for preventing conflict," each objective comes with a list of activities and leadership responsibilities (USIP, 2009). Where Michael Lund's conflict curve illustrates the evolution of a conflict and the possible moments throughout the cycle where violence might be interrupted or prevented, Woocher argues that conflict prevention technically refers only to "strategies used before disputes have produced large-scale violence." Nonetheless his framework includes both analytical tools to identify the drivers of violent conflict before violence erupts, as well operational tools to defuse violence once it has begun (Woocher, 2009: 2).

Woocher's operational tools include a long list of specific diplomatic and political, legal and constitutional, economic, social and cultural, and military and security tools that are available to governments, civil society, and the international community. (Notably, spiritual and religious tools—tools with special relevance for the LAC region—are missing from this global toolkit.) For mitigating societal risks, tasks address the structural roots of violence and the need for effective security, rule of law, governance, equitable economic growth, social well-being, and understanding across identity groups. To mitigate global risks, the framework objectives include managing demographic change, reducing environmental pressures, international economic stability, restricting illicit financial and trafficking networks, regulating

extractive industries, restricting small arms and WMD materials, and strengthening respect for human rights. Finally, the tools to halt and reverse escalation include cooperative problem-solving among parties, altering incentive structures to favor peaceful solutions, strengthening moderates, restricting the capacity of the parties to wage war, and protecting civilians.

The USIP framework underscores the importance of leadership, institutional capacity and preparedness, advance planning and coordination, and the need to consider complementary short and long-term strategies for greatest impact. In all cases, context-specific conflict analysis is the recommended starting point for the design of an intervention strategy.

Analysis of Conflict Trends in Latin America

Thus in beginning our discussion of conflict prevention in the LAC region, I begin with a macro-analysis of conflict in the region. The LAC region, consistent with worldwide trends, has had few inter-state conflicts in the last two decades. Most of the region's major long-standing border disputes have been resolved, put on hold, or referred to regional or international bodies for resolution. With the exception of Colombia and Mexico, the LAC region is by and large not a region at war. That said, Colombia's longstanding war has created a humanitarian disaster of vast proportions that is undermining security and peace in the region. The Colombian conflict has forcibly displaced between 3,876,000 and 5,281,000 people (NRC/IDMC, 2011), and sent 400,000 Colombians across the borders (mainly into Ecuador and Venezuela) in search of refuge. Forced displacement is both a symptom and consequence of the conflict and the factors that fuel it. In recent years, there has been an escalation of violence in the border areas of Colombia, where trafficking in humans, weapons, and drugs is pervasive. The incapacity of relevant governments to control the border regions has been a persistent source of tensions in the region.

Mexico is the other wars cape in the hemisphere. There a vicious war is underway between rival drug cartels and gangs that have penetrated and corrupted the highest levels of the state, as all parties seek to profit

from the lucrative drug trade. In the period from December 1, 2006 to September 30, 2011, the Mexican government reported the deaths of more than 47,000 people in these drug wars (Molzahn, Rios and Shirk, 2012). Strong-arm policies and the engagement of the military in fighting drugs have unleashed a complementary set of human rights and corruption related problems. Like Colombia, but to a lesser extent, the drug and gang wars are forcibly displacing hundreds of thousands of people, some of whom cross the border into the United States. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that some 160,000 people have fled drug cartel violence in Mexico since 2007 (NRC/IDMC, 2011). Also, like Colombia, the war is spilling over into the neighboring region.

In keeping with international trends, civil society in both countries has been hard hit by war, particularly with regard to civilian casualties, displacement, landmines and sexual violence. In addition to the displacement caused by the conflicts in Colombia and Mexico, the legacies of the wars of the 1980s and early 1990s included the displacement of 242,000 Guatemalans, 150,000 Peruvians, and 20,000 Mexicans who have yet to be accounted for (NRC/IDMC, 2011). Land mines and unexploded ordinance from old and current wars affected at least thirteen countries in the region. While the Central American region, following a highly successful campaign to ban landmines that included a comprehensive global strategy, has been completely cleared of mines, Cuba, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and the Falkland Islands/Malvinas have not yet reached their demining goals (ICBL, 2010). Sexual violence is hitting Colombia (where nearly half a million women have been victims of sexual violence as part of the war) and Central America pretty hard, and it is prevalent throughout the region (NPR, 2012; Green, 2012). While some 90 per cent of the victims of homicide worldwide are young men, a recent study showed that of the 25 countries around the world with the highest homicide rates for women, 14 are in Latin America and the Caribbean (Small Arms Survey 2012). In 2011, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Guatemala, with twelve, eleven, and ten female homicides per 100,000 female population, respectively, were the countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world (Small Arms Survey, 2012).

Latin America and the Caribbean is a vastly heterogeneous region. Nonetheless, many of the risk factors in the region today stem from shared historical conditions of structural violence. Despite recent improvements in poverty reduction, this is still the region with the highest income inequality in the world (Cord 2012)[2]. Its highly skewed distribution of wealth and resources is compounded by discrimination, social exclusion, and unequal access to education, health, jobs, and justice mechanisms. Political, economic, social, and cultural structures perpetuate poverty and inequality, and sustain gender-based and ethnic violence. Exclusionary practices continue in many Latin American countries, despite evolving global and national human rights norms and laws guaranteeing equal treatment before the law.

Ethnic tensions in the LAC region often simmer at the local level and occasionally lead to outbreaks of violence, some more sustained than others. The Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Katari uprisings in Peru and Bolivia, respectively, were rooted in centuries of neglect of and disdain for the needs of indigenous Andean highland population that continue without resolution. The Zapatista movement centered in Chiapas, Mexico in the 1990s, the civil war in Guatemala (which some have called a genocide, given the toll of some 200,000 indigenous dead), and the election of Evo Morales as President of Bolivia were related to centuries of discriminatory practices that denied indigenous peoples recognition as human beings and their full rights as citizens. In places like Colombia, ethnic groups enjoy special protections under the law in theory, but practice often violates these guarantees.

The multiple kinds of violence that predominate in Latin America and the Caribbean are not directly conflict-related, although much violence stems from the legacies of state violence and past civil wars. These legacies include a proliferation of legal and illicit arms, landmines, militarized cultures, deep distrust of the state (with some national deviations), and weakened institutions that appear unable to administer the rule of law. Violence in the region is manifest in high rates of homicides and kidnappings, deaths from firearm and traffic injuries, suicides, sexual and domestic violence, and child and adolescent abuse. Interpersonal and domestic violence account for more deaths in the region than organized crime or drug-related deaths (UNODC, 2011: 49; Gushiken, Costa, Romero, and Privet, 2010; Costa,

2011). Dealing with each of these particular kinds of violence requires highly context-specific analysis of the drivers of violence and the best way to address them.

Homicide rates for the region are second only to those in Africa, and only by a fraction, according to a UNODC study published in 2011. Of the estimated 468,000 annual global deaths by homicide registered in 2010, the UNODC found that 36 percent occurred in Africa, 31 per cent in the Americas, 27 per cent in Asia, 5 per cent in Europe and 1 per cent in Oceania. Adjusting for regional population size, the homicide rates in Africa and the Americas clock in respectively at 17 and 16 homicides per 100,000 population - more than double the global average of 6.9 homicides per 100, 000 population (UNODC, 2011). These regional rates hide tremendous national and even sub-regional variation. At the upper end, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Colombia all have rates from 40-50 homicides per 100,000 population while on the lower side, homicide rates in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina are 2, 6, and 7 per 100,000 respectively (UNODC, 2011).

Preliminary data based on case studies suggests that there is wide variance of risk factors linked to particular contexts, though a few factors such as development levels and availability of arms seem to remain relatively constant across studies (Costa, 2012: 4-6). One World Bank study of violence in seven Central American countries cited drug-trafficking, youth violence, arms availability, and female-headed households as key risk factors for homicides (World Bank, 2011). A UN Development Program study of the same region found risk factors to include principally availability of arms and poor socioeconomic indicators (PNUD, 2009-10). A global study on urban violence in five violent communities done by the World Bank including Port-au-Prince, Haiti and Fortaleza, Brazil noted the importance of urban infrastructure and services, the high correlation between domestic abuse and street violence, and the untested hypothesis of high youth unemployment as major risk factors for violence (World Bank, 2011a). A recent UNODC study attributes high homicide rates to human development indicators, absence of or weak rule of law, high availability of firearms, and illicit drug trafficking and organized crime (UNODC, 2011).The lack of jobs and productive employment are

widely believed to feed the proliferation of local criminal gangs; illegal drug trafficking of drugs, weapons, and human beings; and organized crime networks. Weak and inadequate state institutions, corruption, social and economic exclusion, and the alienation of youth are also conflict drivers in the region.

Indicators of new, emerging risks peer over the horizon. Climate change, natural disasters, and macro-development projects are interacting with economic, social, and political inequities to generate displacement and ignite violent conflict. Throughout the region, there has been increased conflict around mining and excavation of natural resources (including gold, silver, copper, zinc, emeralds, oil) and illicit crop production (PCCR, 2012). Periodic violence is erupting in regions occupied by indigenous or Afro-descent populations over environmental and ecosystem damage, lack of prior consultation, land usurpation, working conditions, and inadequate compensation (PCCR, 2012). If development policies and practices (especially those relating to extractive industries) are not better managed and negotiated between companies, governments and local communities, conflict risk will continue to be high.

Conflict Prevention in Latin America

In recent decades, the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy have been seen as key to conflict prevention in the LAC region. This trend was paradoxically strengthened by the experiences of military dictatorships and civil wars, where states enjoyed virtual impunity, and the rise of civil society organizations dedicated to the documentation, monitoring, and advocacy on behalf of human rights. The legacy of that era includes an ongoing quest for truth, justice, reconciliation, and a sensibility to the need for institutional mechanisms to protect human rights and democracy.

In addition to the global norms established at the level of the United Nations, whose members include all of the LAC countries, this is a region that has one of the most highly developed sets of regional frameworks and institutions for human rights and conflict resolution in the world. The crown jewel of the inter-American system (currently

facing severe budget and identity crises), has been the Organization of American States (OAS), particularly its Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and Inter-American Commission of Women (Herz 2008). Along with the OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, the Peace Fund, and the Department of Democratic Sustainability and Special Missions, each of these institutional mechanisms are dedicated to some aspect of conflict resolution, and direct or indirect conflict prevention. In 2001, the OAS established the Inter-American Democratic Charter as a new mechanism to support and strengthen democracy in the hemisphere.

Preventive Diplomacy, Mediation, and Dialogue

Diplomatic initiatives within the region have largely been sufficient to keep border tensions and territorial disputes in check. The OAS, which includes all of the states of the western hemisphere minus Cuba (an issue of considerable debate), has promoted dialogue between disputing parties, sent high-level fact-finding missions and engaged in preventive diplomacy throughout the hemisphere. Although it is not the only institution to exercise these roles, it is often a first recourse for member states.[3] The OAS helped to tamp down tensions between Belize-Guatemala (2000-present), Honduras-Nicaragua (1999-2007), El Salvador-Honduras (2003-4), Ecuador and Colombia (2008-present). Sporadic tensions that have militarized the borders between Colombia and neighboring Venezuela and Ecuador over the past five years were largely set to rest following changes in leadership in Colombia, the establishment of numerous bi-national working groups and commissions, and good offices of the OAS and others in Ecuador and Colombia that helped restore diplomatic relations between those two countries. After twelve years of confidence-building measures by the OAS to help facilitate a solution to the longstanding territorial differences between the governments of Belize and Guatemala, a path forward has now been defined and preparations are being made for national referendums to take place in 2013 in both countries with a likely resolution involving the International Court of Justice. Likewise, a century-old border dispute between Nicaragua and Costa Rica that threatened to blow up in 2011 has been turned over for rulings from the International Court of Justice three times since.

Numerous other border disputes heat up periodically and offer potential prevention scenarios. Colombia and Nicaragua have competing territorial claims. Land-locked Bolivia has long demanded that Chile cede access to the Pacific Ocean. Water issues have also been a source of tensions between Uruguay and Argentina. Finally, the long-standing question of ownership of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands continues to plague Argentine-British relations.

Mechanisms such as the Rio Group, or the more recent Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) formed in 2008with a mandate that includes establishing the region as a "zone of peace", also figure among the repertoire of regional organizations with the capacity to prevent conflict in the region. UNASUR intervened diplomatically to prevent violence during crises in Bolivia (2008), Honduras (2009), Ecuador (2010), and the conflict between Colombia and Venezuela (2010), and the Rio Group was active in supporting a peaceful solution to the Central American Wars at the end of the last century.

Sub-regional mechanisms appear to have more capacity to resolve conflicts once they break out rather than to prevent them. These mechanisms include the Central American Court of Justice, the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), Central American Integration System (SICA), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Mercosur, and the Andean Community of Nations.

The United Nations has been no stranger to the LAC region. A United Nations peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH) has been in Haiti since 1994. The UN played a peacekeeping role in El Salvador through its United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). It sent a personal representative to the Central American Peace Process and supported the establishment of a UN Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Through the UN Observer Group for Central America (ONUCA), the UN monitored compliance with peace accords and DDR programs in the Central American region in the post-war period. In Colombia, the UN Secretary-General lent his good offices briefly to the peace talks that lasted from 1998-2002 in Colombia, and in 2012 both the UN and the OAS (among others) have offered to play a role in future peace talks as might be needed.

The UN, like the OAS, has also engaged in confidence-building measures and dialogue processes meant to prevent the outbreak of violence. Since 2003, the UN Department of Political Affairs has been engaged in a process of dialogue with the different stakeholders in Guyana, where tensions between the India-descent and Afro-descent populations have sometimes resulted in violence. Likewise, the UN is providing good offices to help resolve a long-standing border controversy between Guyana and Venezuela.

Interstate and hybrid mechanisms have also been developed to address particular conflicts or needs in the region. In 2006, at the invitation of the Guatemalan government, the United Nations established the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) to investigate illegal security groups and clandestine security organizations in Guatemala. Other countries in the region have expressed interested in replicating this model, though international support has not been forthcoming. Various "Groups of Friends" have supported peace processes in Central America and Colombia.

Many NGOs have also made important contributions to conflict prevention. Since the late 1990s, the Carter Center has been an active player in promoting dialogue to address potential conflict in the region. It created two high-level informal groups for the promotion and protection of democracy—the Council of Presidents and Prime Ministers, and the Friends of the Inter-American Charter—and has been engaged in work to facilitate dialogues on issues of human rights and democracy in Bolivia since 2002, Ecuador since 1998, Nicaragua since 1989, and Venezuela since 1998. For decades, the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the invitation of host governments, has also played a quiet, behind-the-scenes role in relation to the negotiation of peace accords, humanitarian agreements, and access to prisoners. Likewise the International Crisis Group with its network of in-country specialists, has been a key player in highlighting emerging situations of violence, sounding early warnings of risk, and making recommendations for preventing the emergence or escalation of violent crises.

National tools for conflict prevention have also been developed. In this region, the tools and mechanisms for transitional justice, including both amnesties and jurisprudence that challenged amnesties, were first honed. LAC nations have been at the forefront of developing

models for truth and reconciliation commissions and historical memory commissions. They have prosecuted or sought prosecution of human rights violators through criminal trials and lustration. They developed some of the first models for DDR (demilitarization, disarmament, and reintegration), as well as programs for symbolic and material reparations and the restitution of lands.

At the national level, the region has also developed innovative institutional structures for non-violent conflict resolution, including the establishment of ombudsmen (*personeros*), collective writs of habeas corpus (*tutelas*), and constitutional courts to ensure that national laws comply with international obligations. Many countries emerging from dictatorship and civil war enacted a wide range of security, military, judicial, legal, and educational reforms.

At the local level, LAC boasts countless experiences in mediation through facilitated dialogues, constituent assemblies, reconciliation exercises, and local peace councils. In Colombian cities like Sonson, Mogotes, Tarso, and Samaniego, civil society has created constituent assemblies, in order to enable greater participation, accountability, and peaceful coexistence in areas traditionally plagued corruption, mismanagement, cronyism, and violent conflict (Bouvier, 2009). Women, indigenous, church leaders, and Afro-descent communities have long been on the front lines in terms of early warnings and early crisis interventions.

Women and Conflict Prevention in Latin America

The OAS Inter-American Commission of Women, established in 1928 to promote the rights of women, was the first regional body in the world to take on the issue of the human rights of women. It secured approval of the thirty-four OAS member states of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women "Convention of Belem do Para" (1994) — the first ever treaty against violence against women, and has created benchmarks and monitoring mechanisms for implementation. More recently, the IACW has generated prevention strategies with integrated approaches that link the issues of HIV and violence against women (IACW, 2012).

Women's rights and gender-based violence are increasingly being included in the human rights discourses and most countries have created ministerial structures to address these issues. Quota laws have been enacted to ensure minimum rates of female political participation in Cabinet-level and elected congressional bodies, and national action plans and gender budgeting practices are being introduced to challenge discriminatory practices of exclusion (Bouvier, 2008).

Women's groups have sought to end and prevent violence throughout the region (Duncan, 2012). In local conflict zones throughout Colombia, women have been in dialogue with the armed groups to release hostages, to prevent displacement of communities, and to allow safe passage of food and medicine through armed blockades. Women's groups there have developed innovative methodologies to create consensus across ethnic, class, regional, and religious borders. NGOs have had some success with campaigns to publicize sexual violence as a weapon of war, and to advocate for laws that ban related practices, but it is still too soon to know if the campaign contributed to reducing sexual violence (Green, 2012).

International norms requiring greater female engagement in all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution have been slow to be implemented in LAC as in other parts of the world. Within Latin America, women negotiate conflict at the local levels, but their engagement in more formal levels has been close to nil. The recent announcement of peace talks between the Colombian government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC-EP) for late 2012 will open an opportunity for the Colombian government to put its international commitments into practice.

Conclusions

Despite the increased global attention to preventive diplomacy and mediation, in the context of a global economic crisis, the public perception that Latin America is doing relatively well compared to other regions has meant a dramatic decline in resources and personnel for LAC as a region. In the current economic environment, priority and resources are going to conflict zones such as the Middle East,

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Africa, where international attention has been historically more sustained.

If we agree that conflict prevention is best engaged before the emergence of conflict, however, then LAC should be the ideal region in which to invest in conflict prevention strategies. This is a hard sell. Approaches that address conflict risks early on are more cost-effective and can save lives, but investing resources before catastrophe strikes requires establishing and monitoring early warning indicators, anticipating and planning for potential responses, and determining protocols for coordinating interventions, all of which require resources and political will that are all too rarely available for violence prevention.

Numerous lessons can be gleaned for Latin America and the Caribbean from global trends in conflict prevention. First, conflict analysis must be the starting point for the design and development of any prevention strategies, and analysis must revisited throughout implementation of the strategy. The analysis must consider the local, national, and regional contexts, as well as international contexts when appropriate. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the imposition of global prisms of analysis — including counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and counter-narcotics — have often generated inappropriate or incomplete diagnoses and led to solutions that addressed symptoms rather than root causes.

Second, the differentiation between long-term structural and short-term crisis adopted by many conflict analysts at the U.S. Institute of Peace and elsewhere, is a useful theoretical construct, but not always helpful when applied to the realities of Latin America, where crisis and structural violence are often intertwined. Historic patterns of exclusion and discrimination underlie much contemporary violence against women and other marginalized populations. Domestic violence and lack of economic opportunities for youth are key drivers for joining the guerrillas, paramilitaries, gangs, and criminal organizations.

Third, effective conflict prevention requires comprehensive, integrated strategies that draw on a wide range of complementary tools and stakeholders. Governments and the international community can be critical to providing visibility, security, and resources for addressing violence and potential violence, but without civil society input in

program design from within the conflict zones themselves, these strategies have relatively little chance of success.

Finally, establishing global norms that favor preventive diplomacy and ensuring that structures for conflict prevention are in place at the national, regional, and international levels are key to advancing an agenda for conflict prevention. In the LAC region, these structures are in place. They must now be maintained, strengthened, and held accountable for the implementation of norms and procedures that allow the effective participation of stakeholders and contribute to more effective conflictive prevention.

NOTES

1. The U.S. Institute of Peace is an independent, bipartisan institution created by the Congress of the United States to contribute to the prevention, management and resolution of international conflicts.
2. In the aggregate, poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean declined from 45 percent to 29 percent in the period from 2002 to 2010, and extreme poverty declined from 28 to 15 percent in the same period. There was a less dramatic decline of inequality in the same period as measured by the Gini coefficient which fell from 57 to 54 points, but Latin America remains the region in the world with the greatest gaps between the rich and poor.
3. The OAS established a Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia in 2004 that has played a role in verifying the demobilization of combatants, and has been highly attuned to the problems of recidivism.

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Abstract

Global Conflict Prevention Mechanisms and their Relevance for Latin America and the Caribbean

This article surveys the nature and context of violent conflict today as well as global conflict prevention tools. It addresses new trends at the United Nations favoring mediation, preventive diplomacy, and increased consideration of gender in peacebuilding, and two tools developed by the United U.S. Institute of Peace. Finally, it assesses conflict risks, prevention mechanisms, and the relevance of global developments for preventing conflicts in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Resumen

Mecanismos mundiales para la prevención de conflictos y su impacto en América Latina y el Caribe

Este artículo estudia la naturaleza y el contexto en el que se desarrollan los conflictos violentos en la actualidad, al igual que las herramientas mundiales de prevención de conflictos. Se analizan las nuevas tendencias en Naciones Unidas que favorecen la mediación, la diplomacia preventiva y una mayor consideración de las cuestiones de género en la construcción de la paz, así como dos herramientas desarrolladas por el Instituto para la Paz de Estados Unidos (USIP). Finalmente, se evalúan los riesgos del conflicto, los mecanismos de

prevención y el impacto de las iniciativas mundiales en la prevención de conflictos en la región de América Latina y el Caribe.

Summario
Mecanismos mundiais para a prevenção de conflitos e seu impacto na América Latina e no Caribe

Este artigo estuda a natureza e o contexto em que se desenvolvem os conflitos violentos na atualidade, assim como as ferramentas mundiais de prevenção de conflitos. Nele são analisadas as novas tendências nas Nações Unidas que favorecem a mediação, a diplomacia preventiva e uma maior consideração das questões de gênero na construção da paz, assim como duas ferramentas desenvolvidas pelo Instituto para a Paz dos Estados Unidos (USIP). Finalmente, são avaliados os riscos do conflito, os mecanismos de prevenção e o impacto das iniciativas mundiais na prevenção de conflitos na região da América Latina e do Caribe.