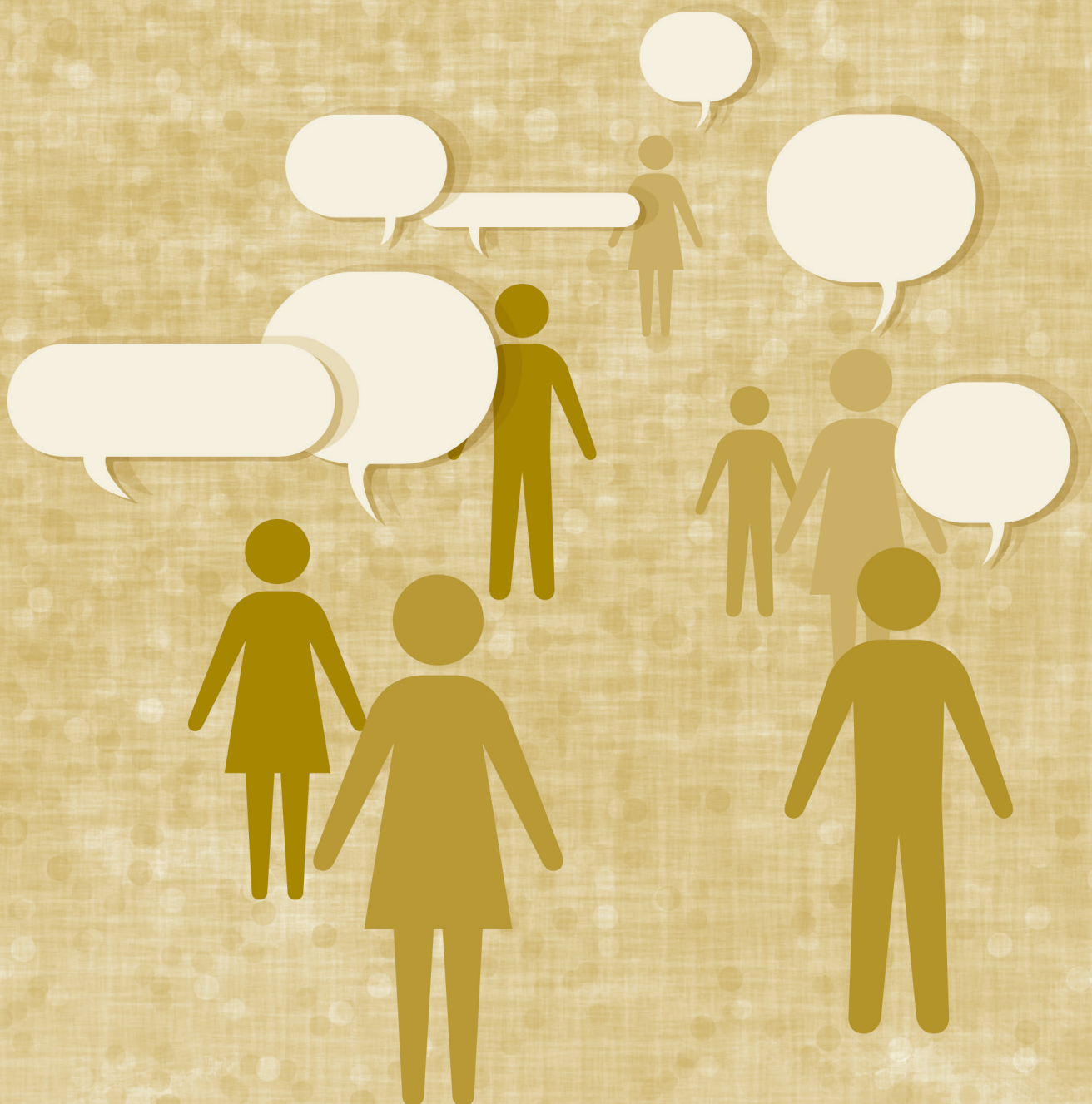


# Peace Mediation and Diplomacy: Joining Forces for More Effective Cooperation



**Participants at the MSN meeting in the Hague:** Luxshi Vimalarajah (Berghof Foundation), Chris McNaboe (Carter Center), Anna Dick (Center for Peace Mediation CPM), Sebastian Kratzer (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue HD), Rouba Beydoun (HD), Diego Bulla (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular), Ron Ton (Clingendael Academy), Maaïke Aans (Clingendael Academy), Evelien Borgmans (Clingendael Academy), Izzy van Unen (Clingendael Academy), Annelieke van de Wiel (Clingendael Academy), Olivia Caeymaex (Conciliation Resources EU CR), Jibecke Joensson (CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation), Simone Ceresa (CSSP Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation CSSP), Christoph Lüttmann (CSSP), Pontus Ohrstedt (Folke Bernadotte Academy FBA), Maja Jakobsson (FBA), Luca Willig (Mediation Support Project MSP / swisspeace), Katrina Abatis (Mediation Support Project MSP / Center for Security Studies CSS at ETH Zurich, MSN Secretariat), Joane Holliger (MSP/CSS), Florence Mandelik (Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution NOREF), Christian Ruge (NOREF), Claudia Maffettone (Search for Common Ground SFCG), Peter Nsenkeng (United Nations Mediation Support Unit UN MSU), Esra Cuhadar (United States Institute of Peace USIP), Elizabeth Shillings (USIP), Levinia Addae-Mensah (West Africa Network for Peacebuilding WANEP).

**Online participants:** Marisha Ramdeen (The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes ACCORD), Afshar Mandana (Berghof Foundation), Narine Karapetyan (Berghof Foundation), Rachel Gasser (Berghof Foundation), Betchak Padilla (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies CPCS), Saara Vuorensola-Barnes (CMI), Miguel Álvarez Gándara (Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz SERAPAZ).

**Authors:** Maaïke Aans (Clingendael Academy), Suzanne Damman (Clingendael Academy) and Izzy van Unen (Clingendael Academy)

**Editor:** Katrina Abatis (CSS)

**Disclaimer:** MSN Discussion Points summarize the authors' reflections and do not aim to provide a comprehensive or consensus MSN view.

**Online version:** [www.mediationsupportnetwork.net](http://www.mediationsupportnetwork.net)

**Print version:** Send an e-mail to [info@mediationsupportnetwork.net](mailto:info@mediationsupportnetwork.net)

**Copyright:** © Mediation Support Network 2023

**Series:** Discussion Points of the Mediation Support Network (MSN)

**Layout:** Miriam Dahinden-Ganzoni (CSS)

**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks are given to Luxshi Vimalarajah and Rouba Beydoun for reviewing this publication, to WANEP and to Emma Leslie (CPCS) for providing extra case examples and to the Mediation Support Project (a joint project of CSS ETH Zurich and swisspeace funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) for supporting the production of this paper.

**ISSN:** 2413-2020

## **MSN Annual Meetings 2022**

The Mediation Support Network (MSN) is a global network of primarily non-governmental organizations that support mediation in peace processes. Mediation support refers to activities that assist and improve mediation practices, for example, training activities, developing guidance, carrying out research, working on policy issues, offering consultation, backstopping ongoing mediation processes, networking and engaging with parties.

The MSN's mission is to promote and improve mediation practice, processes, and standards to address political tensions and armed conflict. The MSN connects different mediation support units and organizations with the intention of promoting exchange about planned and ongoing activities to enable synergies and cumulative impact; providing opportunities for collaboration, initiating and encouraging joint activities; and sharing analysis of trends and ways to address emerging challenges in the field of peace mediation.

The MSN meetings are organized and hosted by member organizations on a rotating basis. Each meeting has a primary topical focus, which is jointly decided by all network members. In 2022, the member organizations agreed to focus on strengthening collaboration between diplomacy and mediation support. The 2022 meeting in the Hague, organized by Clingendael Academy, marked the 16th annual meeting of the network and was attended by 27 participants representing 17 member organizations (in person), with three additional member organizations represented in online attendance.

# Contents

Introduction.....	5
Rationale: Theory and practice.....	5
On mediators and diplomats .....	6
Limitations.....	6
1. Third-party perceptions: role and cooperation .....	8
Understanding of context and process .....	8
Approaches to peace.....	8
Impartiality .....	9
2. Challenges in cooperation .....	10
Challenge 1: A competitive marketplace.....	10
Challenge 2: Lack of long-term funding, commitment, and flexibility.....	10
Challenge 3: Overview of the peace ecosystem.....	10
Challenge 4: Do no harm .....	11
Challenge 5: Lack of trust at different levels .....	11
Challenge 6: Changing nature of conflict .....	12
3. Opportunities.....	12
Opportunity 1: Willingness to intensify and improve cooperation.....	12
Opportunity 2: Coordinating role of mediation teams .....	12
Opportunity 3: Diplomats in supportive roles .....	13
Opportunity 4: Developing our toolboxes .....	13
4. Examples of good practices .....	13
Philippines .....	13
Myanmar.....	14
Mali .....	14
5. Recommendations to strengthen cooperation .....	14

# Introduction

This edition of the MSN Discussion Points aims to explore cooperation between diplomatic and mediation actors who are involved in peace processes (from here on named ‘third parties’<sup>1</sup> or ‘third-party actors’) and to give recommendations to increase the effectiveness of this cooperation. The paper draws on a perception study that was conducted by Clingendael Academy in 2020 and 2021 on third-party cooperation. The paper further draws on discussions that took place during the Annual MSN meeting in the Hague in spring 2022. Mediation support experts exchanged perspectives and discussed challenges and opportunities in cooperation between diplomats, mediators, and mediation support organizations (MSOs).

This paper has five substantive chapters that follow this introduction based on the findings of interviews carried out by Clingendael Academy and the discussions held during the MSN meeting. The first chapter focuses on the perceptions mediators and diplomats have of each other and themselves concerning their roles and interaction. It is mostly based on data from the study conducted by Clingendael, and thus represents the personal views of those who were interviewed. The second chapter looks at challenges that may hinder (the improvement of) cooperation, and the third highlights how to create and increase opportunities for collaboration. The fourth chapter showcases a number of good practices where third-party cooperation had positive effects. Combining the interview results and MSN discussions, the last chapter gives eight recommendations.

## Rationale: Theory and practice

The work of diplomats, mediators, and MSOs is inherently complementary, as all focus on maintaining peaceful relationships between nations, groups, or individuals. They share an interest in the ultimate outcome of peace negotiations, often being the cessation of violence and the building of a durable peace.<sup>2</sup> To realize this complementarity, effective third-party cooperation is necessary. Although such cooperation does already happen, and various successful efforts can be named (see the examples in chapter four), numerous scholars have written about the haphazard form it often tends to take and the need for more coordinated approaches. When well-aligned, multiple actors in a process may enhance each other’s strengths. Involving different actors at different levels and during different phases in a process may improve its overall outcome.<sup>3</sup>

Palmiano Federer et al. (2019)<sup>4</sup> emphasize the importance of linking interventions at various societal levels to build sustainable peace. Such approaches should take place both horizontally within the same levels of society, as well as vertically across societal levels. This should always happen in a conflict-sensitive manner, recognizing that in certain instances it may be wiser to avoid linking or collaborating.<sup>5</sup> However, as Strimling (2006)<sup>6</sup> states, minimal coordination should at least take place to avoid harmful interactions.

Lanz and Gasser (2013)<sup>7</sup> see two ways in which mediators can take a leading role in coordinating the various third parties in a specific context. This can either be done through ‘hierarchical coordination’ where a single actor, whose hierarchical position is recognized, takes the lead and allocates roles to other third parties. Alternatively, ‘network-based cooperation’ operates under the principle of different parties collectively deciding upon a division of labor that is most beneficial to the process, recognizing each actor’s strengths. More aligned with the latter form, Ricigliano (2003)<sup>8</sup> proposes the concept of a Network of Effective Action: an integrated peacebuilding approach that underlines the importance of establishing collaborative networks involving government entities, multilateral organizations, private sector, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), local communities, and other relevant actors. It underscores the interconnected nature of conflicts and their transformation, proposing the need for systems-theory inspired holistic interventions stemming from traditionally distinct disciplines.

In practice, however, and despite the above theoretical contributions, sometimes diverse parties involved in peace processes still hinder rather than help each other. From its long experience conducting training and capacity-strengthening activities in the conflict resolution field, working with all actors involved in this arena (from diplomats and mediators to non-state armed groups), Clingendael Academy experienced that there is often a gap in knowledge and understanding between different third parties involved in peace processes. Despite the common goal of reaching sustainable peace, Clingendael observed that at times diplomats and mediators negatively interfere with each other’s work instead of mutually reinforcing each other.

1 The term “third parties” throughout this paper refers to mediators, mediation support actors, negotiation support actors, implementers, and peacebuilders more generally; this can also refer to diplomats who act as third-party mediators or facilitators in a peace process, such as the role Norwegian diplomats played in the Colombia peace process.

2 Andrea Strimling, “Stepping Out of the Tracks: Cooperation Between Official Diplomats and Private Facilitators,” *International Negotiation* 11: 91–127, (2006): 105, [https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91_5.xml)

3 See, for example, Smith and Smock (2008), Crocker et al. (1999), Strimling (2006), and Kriesberg (1996).

4 Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, “Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes”, (December 2019) <https://css.ethz.ch/en/center/CSS-news/2020/01/beyond-the-tracks-reflections-on-multitrack-approaches-to-peace-processes.html>

5 For example, in the early phases of conflict resolution such as during pre-talks, involving (too) many parties may undermine delicate and confidential processes. The extent of cooperation should always be measured by the usefulness to a specific context and follow a do-no-harm principle. This is further elaborated upon under Challenge 4.

6 Andrea Strimling, “Stepping Out of the Tracks: Cooperation Between Official Diplomats and Private Facilitators” *International Negotiation* 11: 91–127, (2006): 99, [https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91_5.xml)

7 David Lanz and Rachel Gasser, “A Crowded Field: Competition and Coordination in International Peace Mediation”, *Mediation Arguments Series*, (Hatfield, Centre for Mediation in Africa: University of Pretoria, 2013).

8 Robert Ricigliano, “Networks of Effective Action: Implementing an Integrated Approach to Peacebuilding”, *Security Dialogue* 34:4 (2003), 445–462.

To explore this, the Academy conducted a perception study between 2020 and early 2022. This consisted of two main activities. After some exploratory desk reviews, eleven in-depth interviews were carried out with high-level diplomats and mediators currently or formerly active in diverse organizations like the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe, United Nations (UN, Mediation Support Unit and various missions), European Union (EU), and the German and Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs, as well as conducting three interviews with experienced Clingendael Academy associates and trainers. They were asked to reflect on what they saw as the main challenges in cooperation between third parties, and the roles diplomats and mediators should ideally take in mediation processes. To validate these findings, the results were discussed during an expert meeting with eight senior diplomats and mediators from various organizations.

## On mediators and diplomats

Traditionally, a diplomat's main mandate is to represent and further the interests of their state or the intergovernmental institution they represent, often through negotiations with representatives of other states and intergovernmental organizations. Conflict resolution is an inherent part of their work, as they focus on improving relations and cooperation between their country or institution and other entities. In some instances, though, state diplomats receive a specific mandate to mediate in a certain conflict. In such a case, the diplomat moves their focus from furthering the interests of their country to furthering all involved parties' interests and would therefore be considered 'a mediator'.<sup>9</sup>

Mediation is the process in which 'a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements'.<sup>10</sup> Historically, this was a domain often reserved for state diplomats and UN envoys.

In the 1980s and 1990s, senior UN diplomats were at the forefront of several mediation processes that led to successful agreements and political settlements, such as the Iran-Iraq war, the Tripartite Agreement to end the war in Namibia (1988), and the Paris Peace Agreements (1991) ending the conflict in Cambodia. The UN contributed to ending civil wars in El Salvador in 1992 and in Guatemala in 1996.

Besides the UN, several countries have historically played a key role in peacemaking, mediation, and conflict resolution. For example, senior US diplomats actively brokered peace with the Dayton Accords in 1995 and helped facilitate the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 that ended the conflict in Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Norwegian diplomats have played the role of facilitator and mediator between parties to conflicts in various contexts for several decades. Promoting conflict resolution and supporting reconciliation is a central aspect of Norwegian foreign policy. For example, Norway has been closely involved in the negotiations that led to a peace agreement with the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army) in Colombia in 2016, and the country's diplomats also facilitate peace processes with the communist movement, National Democratic Front of the Philippines.<sup>12</sup>

In the last decades, the range of actors in the mediation field has broadened and the field has diversified. Nowadays, the role of mediator can be filled by a variety of actors.<sup>13</sup> The 1990s and 2000s saw the emergence of private and non-state actors in the mediation field such as the Community of Sant'Egidio, which played a central role in ending the war in Mozambique in 1992. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) mediated the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement that reduced the violence for a period in Aceh, Indonesia in 2002. The Crisis Management Initiative, led by former UN diplomat and mediator Martti Ahtisaari, then managed to reach a more lasting peace agreement signed in Helsinki in 2005, formally ending the war in Aceh.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to private and non-state actors, the 1990s and 2000s also saw increased mediation efforts from regional and supranational intergovernmental organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the EU.<sup>15</sup> These organizations generally enjoy broad legitimacy through their member states, have an official mandate to mediate in their region, and tend to know the context well.<sup>16</sup> ECOWAS, for example, was involved in mediation efforts in various of its member states, one example of which will be highlighted further in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> However, diplomats-as-mediators may be placed in a position of tension or in a double bind, when what is in the best interests of the parties at the table conflicts with the priorities of the mediator's state, or when the state in question continues to place its own interests at the forefront. The latter behavior has also been termed 'quasi-mediation diplomacy'. See, for example, Degang Sun and Yahia Zoubir, "China's Participation in Conflict Resolution in the Middle East and North Africa: A Case of Quasi-Mediation Diplomacy?", *Journal of Contemporary China* 27:110 (2018), 224–243.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, (New York: United Nations, 2012), 4, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation\\_UNDPA2012%28english%29\\_o.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_o.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> David Harland, *The Lost Art of Peacemaking*, (Geneva: Oslo Forum 2018), <https://hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-lost-art-of-peacemaking.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Peace, Stability and Security", accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.norway.no/en/central-content/en/values-priorities/peace-stability-sec>

<sup>13</sup> Simon Mason and Damiano Sguaitamatti, "Mapping Mediators: A Comparison of Third Parties and Implications for Switzerland", (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2019), 5, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/mapping/eserv/eth:4498/eth-4498-01.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> David Harland, *The Lost Art of Peacemaking*, (Geneva: Oslo Forum 2018), <https://hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-lost-art-of-peacemaking.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Atuobi, "ECOWAS and Mediation in West Africa: Toward an Enhanced Capacity", *Harvard Africa Policy Journal* 7, (2010–2011), <https://mediationsupportnetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ECOWAS-and-mediation-in-West-Africa.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Simon Mason and Damiano Sguaitamatti, "Mapping Mediators: A Comparison of Third Parties and Implications for Switzerland", (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2019), 20, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/mapping/eserv/eth:4498/eth-4498-01.pdf>

Hence, it is important to understand that diplomats and mediators can be one and the same, but are not necessarily so. A diplomat can take on the role of a mediator for a specific time, but then continues to be a diplomat with other roles at different phases in their career, for example, representing their country or UN interests. In this paper, we define mediators and diplomats by the roles they play in a particular peace process. When we speak about mediators, we refer to those actors who are mandated to support parties in coming to the negotiation table and in finding agreements – even if they are originally from a diplomatic or another expert background. When we discuss diplomats in this paper, we mostly refer to diplomats who work or are active in a conflict-affected region or country working towards peace, but who are not explicitly mandated to mediate. Obviously, there are also diplomats who due to national interests clearly favor one side of a conflict or seek a specific outcome and therefore potentially undermine an impartial mediation process. Being aware of this is key for mediators. However, in this paper we focus more on the kinds of diplomats who are working towards peace and not clearly aligned with a specific side.

## Limitations

This paper aims to open doors for further discussion and research on how to improve third-party cooperation in peace processes. Nevertheless, it is important to note some caveats to its contents.

It should be noted that although this paper aims to contribute to improved third-party cooperation, such cooperation is no guarantee for the success of mediated negotiations. Peace processes are complex, and their outcomes are not solely dependent on the cooperation between different third-party actors. A large array of other actors and variables are at play, first and foremost the willingness of the actors in conflict to try negotiations, but also the degree to which regional and international actors are ready to allow a peace process to proceed.<sup>17</sup> A larger peace process may see different initiatives happening simultaneously on different societal levels or “tracks”, and the linkages between those tracks may have considerable impact on the outcome and sustainability of a process.<sup>18</sup> Where Track I involves formal processes with negotiations between (national) leaders and officials of conflicting parties, often backed by supranational institutions such as the UN, ECOWAS and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Track II covers efforts among NGOs and civil society. Track III encompasses efforts by grassroots initiatives and communities. At the same time, we see changing trends that question this analytical categorization, for example, through the UN initiating Track II processes,

the increased involvement of regional intergovernmental bodies such as ECOWAS, and the growing number of private diplomacy actors and insider mediators<sup>19</sup> who work across all three tracks.

Besides the different tracks, the context of appointing mediators also tends to differ greatly. Whereas a mediator is ideally a trained professional, in many contexts a mediator may be a political appointee who is chosen because of their work experience or perceived legitimacy, for example, as a former head of state or a trained diplomat. The good practice example regarding Mali in chapter 4 further elaborates on this. This, however, does not necessarily guarantee that these appointed mediators possess the skills necessary to successfully mediate peace talks. Similarly, diplomats are not a homogeneous group. Career diplomats, for example, have different training and experiences than political appointees. Working in teams, thus complementing different skills, is one way to offset such challenges.

In addition, it is important to note that the positioning of ‘the diplomat’ versus ‘the mediator’ is challenging, as the roles can be fulfilled by one and the same person and some of their skills and competencies tend to overlap. For example, both diplomats and mediators are trained in listening carefully to gain insights and understanding in the needs and interests of others. Moreover, both invest in relationships and focus on building trust to help overcome differences. As previously mentioned, diplomats mandated to mediate have brokered peace agreements in the past without necessarily representing national interests, unlike state diplomats who represent their country during trade negotiations for example. Moreover, as mentioned above, UN diplomats have been at the forefront of several mediation processes that led to successful agreements and political settlements around the world. This paper, however, follows what was expressed during the Clingendael research and the MSN meeting: a working distinction between “mediators” taking on the role of mediation, be they diplomats or not, and “diplomats” working for peace more broadly, but not mandated to mediate. As a result, it also lays bare (perceived) differences between mediators and diplomats, and as such highlights some of the nuances in distinctions between the two, while others may be lost.

This paper includes anecdotes from different individuals (both interviewees and MSN members) working in and on peace processes, who are diverse in their level of experience, the geographical area or conflict context they work in, and the tracks they tend to work on. This inevitably shapes their comments. Respondents in the Clingen-

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, (New York: United Nations, 2012), [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation\\_UNDPA2012%28english%29\\_o.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_o.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Jean Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> There is no common definition of ‘insider mediators’. However, the understanding Clingendael Academy uses is mediators working in their own conflict contexts. In other words, compared to outsiders, these insiders are persons from the conflict-affected contexts they are working in. What characterizes them are their internal links to a conflict’s context, and their socio-cultural and/or religious – and, indeed, personal – closeness to the parties in conflict, from which they derive their legitimacy, credibility, and influence. Insider mediators often play multiple roles simultaneously: messenger, intermediary, conflict analyst, facilitator, mediator, witness, mentor, human rights advocate, and ceasefire monitor.

dael interviews were all senior-level national diplomats and/or mediators with experience in high-level, often UN-led, mediation processes with decision-makers. They bring a very different perspective to the cooperation than, for example, insider mediators and diplomats working at the regional level, or MSOs, such as those present during the MSN meeting. The results thus cannot be generalized to include all third-party actors, or to make normative statements about the global arena.

Regardless, the results give an indication that the need for improved cooperation and coordination seems to be widely shared. This paper may thus serve as a document for third parties to reflect on their own work and possible ways to improve cooperation among all actors, or as a starting point for further research.

## 1. Third-party perceptions: role and cooperation

The interviews conducted by Clingendael show that diplomats and mediators both acknowledge that there is a mutual gap in knowledge and understanding of the other. This has negatively affected the cooperation between mediators and diplomats in the past and may do so in the future. To explore opportunities for improvement, it is important to understand how both actors see each other and how they assess their current cooperation. To gain further insight, Clingendael Academy asked mediators and diplomats about their views. We share the perceived cooperation from the vantage point of the different actors (diplomats, mediators, and MSOs).

### Understanding of context and process

Participants in the interviews and during the expert meeting mentioned that sometimes diplomats underestimate the complexity of mediation processes. Participants suggested that this may have to do with the fact that diplomats sometimes confuse mediated negotiations with a negotiation itself – a process that they are more familiar with as it forms an integral part of their daily work. What followed from the interviews is that this means diplomats who are not specifically mandated to mediate in a process sometimes try to take on the role of the mediator, even though this conflicts with their partisan position. Mediators expressed that diplomats should take a more supportive but less central role in peace talks. Additionally, participants mentioned that diplomats tend to lack understanding of the context of a conflict due to the rotating nature of their position.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The diplomatic system is designed in a way that, generally, diplomats spend between two to four years on a specific posting before being moved to their next post in a different country. This is based on the idea that their priority is serving their home country's national interests and aims to prevent 'localitis' whereby diplomats start to see the people of the host country as those they are serving.

Conversely, according to Clingendael's interview participants and as illustrated in the quote below, mediators and MSOs sometimes lack full understanding of, and appreciation for, the benefit that diplomats may bring to a mediated peace process. This means they may not have a complete overview of the diplomatic dimension of a peace process.

*First, many mediators report communication problems and a lack of understanding about [the] national interests of diplomats and governments. A good understanding [of] how the diplomat works [would] make life for mediators much easier. They might focus more on the right stakeholders and know who to reach. [...] It is vital for mediators to understand how the diplomatic process works to make sure they can still effectively communicate with diplomats as well as pro-actively assess how diplomats will react or act and capitalize upon that knowledge for their own work.*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

Without a good overview of the diplomatic actors active in a conflict, including their interests and allies, mediators and MSOs might miss out on important information, and might not know how to involve these actors for the benefit of the process. Furthermore, due to the lack of this overview, mediators and MSOs do not always know how to effectively leverage the benefits that diplomats can provide. As one interviewee from the UN diplomatic community stated: "mediators need to be aware that no mediation process can take place without the role of diplomats".

### Approaches to peace

Interview participants mentioned that there is a tension between mediators and diplomats on the road to peace. Some diplomats argued that their colleagues may see mediation efforts as soft processes or soft political acts, as opposed to hard action such as military intervention. For them, this 'soft approach' may not always be desirable, for example when dealing with certain (armed) groups. At the same time, mediators stated that diplomats underestimate the time it takes to ripen<sup>21</sup> a context for fruitful mediation, instead wanting to move to quick action when this may in fact do more harm than good. Interviewed mediators emphasized that mediation is a question of endurance, as it may involve working around the clock for weeks, followed by months in which nothing seems to happen. One interviewee likened it to the process of gold digging:

<sup>21</sup> The concept of ripeness was originally developed by William Zartman, who theorized that parties to a conflict will seek an alternative way out, for example through mediation, once they reach a deadlock that is harmful to both and which they cannot get out of (also called a mutually-hurting stalemate). See William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985/1989).



Someone once described [a mediator] to me as a Klondike miner in [...] the goldrush era, getting the pan through the dirt, once a week finding a little nugget of gold, and you go: 'look at that', you pick it up, and you go back at it again. That is what mediators have to do, because most of the dialogue and most of the public statements are very negative. [V]ery often a diplomat will read a statement from a warring party and see no movement or no give, but a mediator will say: 'there is one nugget of gold in that. And we can work with that. And I'll spend six months turning that into two gold nuggets.' So I think that's the difference; a slight difference in mentality.

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

## Impartiality

Third parties may have differing perceptions of impartiality. Diplomats are sometimes viewed as not fully understanding what it means for a mediator to be impartial. Following the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation, impartiality means that a mediator "should be able to run a balanced process that treats all actors fairly"<sup>22</sup> – in short, it means the mediator should treat all parties equally even if they have favorites.<sup>23</sup> As such, when mediators speak to all stakeholders, including those deemed terrorist groups or illegitimate governments, this does not mean that they are giving legitimacy to such a group. Yet from the vantage point of some governments, interacting with these groups could be seen by the public as endorsing them. In this sense, private actors and small states focusing on impartial mediation can often take more risks than official large states that do not talk to all parties. For this reason, various third parties can and should aim to complement each other rather than trying to do everything themselves. For a mediation process to work, there needs to be communication channels to all parties, and the mediator needs to establish and keep these channels open for the sake of the process. At the same time, mediators cannot openly side with one party in the way that some diplomats can. This may trigger discontent if, for example, it means a mediator decides not to attend a meeting of diplomats involved in a peace process, as was the case with Kofi Annan and the Friends of Syria Group:

[...] It was very interesting, early on in the Syria process, the so-called 'friends of Syria' group emerged. These were the Western and Arab countries that wanted Assad to go. And they were shocked that Kofi Annan – a diplomat himself – didn't come to their first meeting. Shocked. To me, it was self-evident that he should not go to that meeting. That is a grouping of one side of the conflict, and that's fine, but that's what that is. So, it's also important to understand that that is the mediator's position.

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

Conversely, mediators may struggle with the fact that state diplomats will, in the end, openly represent the interests of their national government and work under its mandate.<sup>24</sup> This limits diplomats' flexibility, since at times they are not mandated to talk to certain parties, and also their trustworthiness in the eyes of the mediator. It may be a reason why mediators decide to keep diplomats out of a process or choose not to affiliate themselves with certain diplomats, even though they could add benefit. Based on such misunderstandings around interests and impartiality, diplomats have experienced 'distrust' and 'rivalry' with mediators (a sentiment that was conversely also echoed by mediators):

*'I think that there is kind of a rivalry between mediators and diplomats. I witnessed this myself. So you will see mediators [speaking] bad[ly] about diplomats and diplomats [speaking] bad[ly] about mediators. Because they have different approaches, whereas diplomats come from a 'we defend national interests' perspective, and we try to fight for our values on the global stage. Mediators would never subscribe to that, they would think that this is somehow bogus, not ethical or somehow not adequate. Mediators will always try to somehow keep out of this kind of competition or contest, international or global contest about values or interest and so on.'*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

Interview participants explained that mediators and diplomats are essentially two sides of the same coin: both work towards achieving sustainable peace, albeit with different drivers and interests. However, when the roles and responsibilities of both actors and the process are not clearly defined, their competition or misalignment may hamper reaching that joint goal.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, (New York: United Nations, 2012), 10, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation\\_UNDPA2012%28english%29\\_o.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_o.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Impartiality, then, is distinct from neutrality. Although the two concepts are closely related, neutrality in the process implies that an actor would work from a value-free basis. As human beings, we are shaped by our experiences, making it impossible to be fully neutral. Impartiality recognizes that a mediator may still bring their personal values or those of their organization into the process, such as democracy and human rights, but tries to avoid bias towards the parties. Impartiality relates to a mediator's actions and behavior: the ability to separate personal opinions from actions in the line of duty. In the words of Kofi Annan (22 January 1999, United Nations Podium), "impartiality does not - and must not - mean neutrality in the face of evil; it means strict and unbiased adherence to the principles of the Charter - nothing more, and nothing less." In mediation, neutrality relates more to the outcome. As a mediator has no decision-making power, they should have no (material) interest in the outcome of a process.

<sup>24</sup> Again, acknowledging the humanity of mediators and their lived experiences, we recognize that a mediator can never be fully impartial.

## 2. Challenges in cooperation

Although peacemaking and peacebuilding actors from different sides acknowledge the current gap in knowledge and understanding, and the need for improved cooperation, they sometimes seem to misalign in their cooperation. This leads to challenges that may negatively affect the process and outcome of a mediated conflict. The perceptions mentioned above create certain challenges which can largely be seen as endogenous to the field. Additionally, exogenous factors create hindrances for the cooperation between different actors in a peace process. Below, these main endogenous and exogenous challenges that were discussed during the MSN meeting, as well as during the Clingendael Academy research, are outlined.

### Challenge 1: A competitive marketplace

As mentioned previously, the lack of understanding about the goal of mediation and roles and responsibilities of different actors creates a potential for rivalry. This is not only observed between diplomats and mediators, but also between different states, (I)NGOs, and civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in a certain context. This is exacerbated by the fact that the number of third-party actors in any given process has increased significantly since 1992.<sup>25</sup> Besides the wish to achieve peace, ulterior motives to get involved play a role, such as the need for funding and recognition in the international arena:

*‘And of course, they all wanted to be the first to, well, once you get to a donor with [those contacts], then you get money and that donor naturally wants to play a part in that, too. There is a lot of fame and honor involved, and a penchant for Nobel Prize-like behavior. By the way, it is also just institutional survival for those NGOs, because they also need to be able to support a peace process once in a while.’*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

Consequently, third parties may get defensive about safeguarding their stakes, effectively shying away from cooperation which they may see as a threat to the independence, integrity, and effectiveness of their work.<sup>26</sup> These different interests contribute to a shrinking space for all parties to act and may even lead to the setting up of parallel mediation processes. Having parallel processes decreases the leverage of the lead mediator in each, as conflict parties may choose to turn to an-

other process when the first enters a difficult phase.<sup>27</sup> In short, competition risks undermining peace processes.

### Challenge 2: Lack of long-term funding, commitment, and flexibility

The structures of international diplomacy and mediation enable but also limit actors in various ways. MSOs, for example, are often limited by rigid project goals and requirements, timelines, and vetting procedures, due to accountability to their funders. Specific funds for coordination are not always included. Additionally, funds for a project often run for a limited amount of time – much shorter than it takes to sustainably mediate a conflict – and receiving future funds for the extension of a project is not a given. Diplomats, on their side, are bound by the mandate they receive from their government and the agreement they have with the host country. As a result, third-party intermediaries have limited flexibility to work with conflict dynamics on the ground, as well as with each other.

In addition, diplomats are required to change posts after a number of years. MSOs also tend to have a high turnover, especially of international staff, and specific mediators may be changed for different reasons. This hampers the continuity that is required for sensitive and lengthy processes like protracted-conflict mediation. It also means trust may need to be built all over again, which takes time.

*Mediators and diplomats change after two, three, four years, for all sorts of reasons. I think generally, mediators and mediation teams develop a sense of mission. To grip the situation, they live with it over time. They know where the diplomatic bodies are buried in the process. They know the footpath[...]. If the diplomats change, they often lose this.*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

### Challenge 3: Overview of the peace ecosystem

In order to coordinate peace initiatives where this makes sense, mediators and MSOs need to have a good overview of all the actors, their interests, and their interrelationships in a given process. However, the multitude of actors in the ecosystem, the speed of rotation, and the lack of communication between those actors make it very difficult to map and coordinate a mediation process and leverage each actor’s full potential. One example of this is the fact that MSOs predominantly work with their funders, often international organizations or states, but not with the diplomats that represent those donor states in local contexts or with diplomats from

<sup>25</sup> Simon Mason and Damiano Sguaitamatti, “Mapping Mediators: A Comparison of Third Parties and Implications for Switzerland”, (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2019), 17, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/mapping/eserv/eth:4498/eth-4498-01.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Strimling, “Stepping Out of the Tracks: Cooperation Between Official Diplomats and Private Facilitators,” *International Negotiation* 11: 91–127, (2006): 95, [https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91_5.xml)

<sup>27</sup> David Lanz and Rachel Gasser, “A Crowded Field: Competition and Coordination in International Peace Mediation”, *Mediation Arguments Series*, (Hatfield, Centre for Mediation in Africa: University of Pretoria, 2013), 3.

non-donor countries who could nevertheless play an important role. In addition, members during the MSN meeting recognized that MSOs tend to have a blind spot for certain actors such as the private sector and traditional leaders who mediate locally, as well as for national and local conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Elsewhere, the coordinating role this requires from mediators and MSOs has been likened to that of a conductor at a jazz concert, to account for the high level of improvisation and unexpected initiatives that are reflective of the reality of a peace process.<sup>28</sup>

*'It is my personal view that in general mediators, UN envoys, those types of people, need to take it upon themselves to, early on, engage in a process of coordination among the players involved in the conflict. It is not their job to simply shuttle back and forth between the parties and hope that the ecosystem out there helps the process. It is [their] job to help shape that environment. In general, if the mediator leaves that field open, someone else will plant crops in that field and that's not good.'*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

#### Challenge 4: Do no harm

When different initiatives or tracks effectively feed into each other, having simultaneous initiatives taking place may be beneficial to a conflict situation and even increase chances for resolution.<sup>29</sup> However, it requires close coordination and consultation between the different third parties involved, especially when they work on the same issues and with the same sets of actors.<sup>30</sup> When simultaneous processes have poor coordination, more harm than good may be done in a sensitive and volatile context. Especially in the early phases of conflict resolution, such as during pre-talks, involving (too) many parties may undermine delicate and confidential processes. Rather than bringing parties together, feelings of animosity or a sense of polarization may develop instead. In Afghanistan, for example, the national government convened with foreign states to create and implement a 'strategic framework agreement' for all engagements. This agreement, however, failed to adequately consider national political processes and social dynamics, causing it to have little real effect.<sup>31</sup> In Colombia and Syria, civil society actors that were drawn into national dialogues faced security threats, in turn nega-

tively affecting the possibility of building trust at the local level. In addition, when linkages are mainly established in a top-down manner with an overemphasis on Track I negotiations, a negative trickle-down effect may arise if the Track I process stalls. Creating horizontal linkages should be equally important. In addition, linkages must be established in a conflict-sensitive manner, with clear reflections on the reasoning behind them and analysis of the potential negative consequences.<sup>32</sup>

*The first job of the mediator is to do no harm. That's sounds obvious but it isn't. A mediator that puts a proposal forward at the wrong moment, might break trust for years. And leave parties more driven to fight. Or a mediator who has the wrong assessment of the problem and positions [themselves] 'here', while they should be positioned 'there', and therefore loses the trust of one of the parties. You'll create a blockage, there will be lives lost. The mediator has to be a deeply thoughtful person, who acts with moral seriousness. [...] It's about understanding that your actions have consequences, and that you should always ask yourself how parties will react to what you do.*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

#### Challenge 5: Lack of trust at different levels

Another challenge to effective cooperation is the lack of trust between different actors in the mediation arena. This involves diplomats and mediators, but also states, international organizations, NGOs, think tanks, etc. This distrust is attributable to the safeguarding reflexes, perceptions of the other actors involved, and rivalry detailed above. Additionally, as the work concerns sensitive processes, parties tend to keep a lot of information to themselves. Although this may sometimes be necessary as close interaction may create risks for the third parties and the involved actors<sup>33</sup>, it also prevents the establishment of bonds of trust through information sharing. The high staff turnover and thus the lack of continuity mentioned above also complicates trust building, not only between the conflict parties and those supporting the peace negotiations, but also between all actors involved in the mediation process.

28 Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, "Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes", (December 2019), 13, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/center/CSS-news/2020/01/beyond-the-tracks-reflections-on-multitrack-approaches-to-peace-processes.html>

29 Ibid, 12.

30 Louis Kriesberg, "Coordinating Intermediary Peace Efforts" *Negotiation Journal*, (October 1996): 303–14.

31 Lesley Connolly and Jill Baggerman, "Getting coherence and coordination right: Principles for the peacebuilding policy community", *Policy & Practice Brief*, Accord (August 2014), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/getting-coherence-and-coordination-right-principles-peacebuilding-policy-community>.

32 Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, "Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes", (December 2019), 11–13, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/center/CSS-news/2020/01/beyond-the-tracks-reflections-on-multitrack-approaches-to-peace-processes.html>

33 Andrea Strimling, "Stepping Out of the Tracks: Cooperation Between Official Diplomats and Private Facilitators," *International Negotiation* 11: 91–127, (2006): 99, [https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/11/1/article-p91_5.xml) and Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, "Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes", (December 2019), 12, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/center/CSS-news/2020/01/beyond-the-tracks-reflections-on-multitrack-approaches-to-peace-processes.html>

## Challenge 6: Changing nature of conflict

According to various scholars, we see an increasing internationalization of internal conflicts<sup>34</sup>, something that was echoed by interviewees in the Clingendael research such as in the quote below. Conflicts tend to be more fragmented, with several national parties being linked to multiple international actors. This leads to internal conflicts and geopolitical rivalries soon spilling over borders, causing the complexity of conflicts to grow. As a result, it is no longer possible to rely on traditional conceptions of a single intermediary mediating between two negotiating parties, at a single table within a simple coordinated process.<sup>35</sup> This can be seen as an exogenous factor that influences and challenges more conventional forms of cooperation between diplomats and mediators. Interview participants mentioned that the training diplomats traditionally receive is not adequately adept for these internationalized conflicts and requires new methods. Another approach has been to revisit methods from the past.<sup>36</sup> As was stated during the MSN meeting, this goes for the toolboxes of mediation and diplomacy as well.

*... [N]ot only have we moved into new territory, but the type of conflicts that are now pronounced globally do not lend themselves or allow diplomats to operate on the assumptions of their training, skill-set, and diplomacy. [...] Many of these conflicts are happening predominantly internally. The trends are deeply troubling. Whereas the overall number of conflicts are internal, and are protracted, we are now beginning to see an internationalization of conflicts that are internal, because in a region there is a regional perspective or regional context, there is a global context in which different states are taking sides in the conflict, but the conflict is internal.*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

## 3. Opportunities

The interviews and the MSN discussions also unveiled some opportunities for improving third-party cooperation in peace processes. Making use of these opportunities may help in establishing more effective peace-making efforts.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Mason and Damiano Sguaitamatti, "Mapping Mediators: A Comparison of Third Parties and Implications for Switzerland", (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2019), 5, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/mapping/eserv/eth:4498/eth-4498-01.pdf>; Matt Waldman, "Falling Short: Exploring Mediation Effectiveness", (Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2022), <https://fba.se/globalassets/publikationer/falling-short-exploring-mediation-effectiveness.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, "Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes", (December 2019), 11, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/center/CSS-news/2020/01/beyond-the-tracks-reflections-on-multitrack-approaches-to-peace-processes.html>

<sup>36</sup> Sean William Kane, "Making Peace When the Whole World Has Come to Fight: The Mediation of Internationalized Civil Wars", *International Peacekeeping*, 29/2, (2022), 177–203.

## Opportunity 1: Willingness to intensify and improve cooperation

All interview participants (both diplomats and mediators) and attendees to the MSN meeting acknowledged that there is a need for improved communication and cooperation between third parties. It is imperative that all involved actors see the need for improvement in order for their cooperation to reach its full potential.

Instead of excluding diplomats from a process to avoid meddling foreign interests, mediators should use the knowledge and networks that diplomatic allies can offer, yet in a channeled manner so that it is constructive to the process. They can sometimes even leverage this diplomatic power to the benefit of the process, albeit only with awareness of the fact that diplomats also intend to advance the interests of their nation. At the same time, diplomats need to be wary of their role in the process vis-à-vis the role of the mediator. Diplomats should reach out and be transparent towards mediators and MSOs, to consolidate the sharing of information and optimize cooperation.

## Opportunity 2: Coordinating role of mediation teams

All involved actors have a responsibility in establishing a well-coordinated mediation process, but the chief mediator and their mediation team should take the lead. For example, mediation teams, with the help of MSOs, could keep an overview of all actors, their positions, interests, needs, allies, and of all actions undertaken. This action could prevent parallel processes being established. Often there are many well-intentioned initiatives and actions which nevertheless add complexity, making it difficult to map the actors involved and have a coordinated process. Diplomats can assist by reaching out to the mediation team, by being transparent about their interests, and by opening communication channels for mediators. They should become cognizant of the need to inform the mediation team of actions they take (e.g., funding a party or organizing training) as a coordinated process is beneficial to everyone. Mediators or mediation teams, for their part, can guide diplomats on how to play a constructive role in line with developments in the mediation process.

*Mediators need to analyze the diplomats involved in the mediation process and conflict zone. Mapping the diplomatic stakeholder[s] will give the mediator a good idea where to go for information. You always need the regional and global powers to be involved as well. Working without good analyses of all diplomatic stakeholders is today almost impossible unless it's something super local.*

*Participant in a Clingendael interview*

An advantage that mediators have is that if they are accepted by the parties, they will be perceived as more impartial and will not side with any of the conflicting factions if they keep to their role, even when the mediator is mandated by a national government. Therefore, they can freely engage in dialogue with all parties to the conflict, as opposed to diplomats.

### Opportunity 3: Diplomats in supportive roles

Diplomats have the tools, access to funding, international networks, and the political backing to set up successful mediation arenas. They can ensure safe places for the negotiations to take place and they can help a mediation team prevent parallel processes.

Diplomats may have the power to influence parties to come to the table or to encourage them to move towards a certain line of action or a negotiated deal, through for example backchannel talks, (economic) incentives, the use of ‘good offices’<sup>37</sup>, or offering to host the talks in their country and thereby providing neutral and often safer surroundings. They can also issue public statements, which place the actions of parties in “the limelight of international diplomacy”<sup>38</sup> and so enable diplomats to maintain pressure on the parties to continue negotiating or take certain steps. These different forms of influencing the conflict parties can help in ripening the context for mediation. Diplomats may even be able to create access to certain (political) actors for the mediator through their convening power as well as access to high-ranking diplomatic circles.<sup>39</sup> Due to their continuous international engagement and connection to other embassies around the world, diplomats can provide mediators and mediation teams with important information on the positions of the main geopolitical stakeholders. With the internationalization of conflicts in mind, this becomes increasingly important.

Diplomats or states can also jointly take on this supportive role in a coordinated manner, as was the case with the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic, that brought together states such as the US, France, Turkey, the Republic of the Congo, and

Sudan, as well as various multilateral actors including the UN, ECOWAS, and the AU.<sup>40</sup>

In essence, diplomats can make the work of mediators easier by recognizing that their role is not that of the mediator, but that they can successfully support a mediation process by ripening a context for dialogue and providing mediators with information, (financial) resources, venues, communication, and other essential services. They can also play an important role as observers or monitors to the process. Additionally, interviewees suggested that diplomats can push for implementation of a peace agreement after it has been signed and the mediation team has left.

### Opportunity 4: Developing our toolboxes

As mentioned earlier, the changing nature of conflicts on a global scale presents challenges to the ways diplomats and mediators currently work. At the same time, it creates a window of opportunity to develop our toolboxes in the mediation and diplomatic fields. Acknowledging that internal conflicts increasingly play out in an internationalized arena requires third parties to adapt and allows them to create new strategies that include mediator-diplomat cooperation from the beginning. Expanding the toolbox can be done through additional research, training, mapping the field to document every actor’s added value, and taking lessons from other fields such as the humanitarian sector. All these actions should contribute to more efficient adaptation to the new circumstances and lead to increased understanding between different roles.

## 4. Examples of good practices

Notwithstanding the challenges outlined earlier in this paper, several instances of successful third-party cooperation can be found. Three examples are showcased below.

### Philippines

The International Contact Group (ICG) on Mindanao in the Philippines was established in 2009 and provided support to the Bangsamoro peace talks between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Where Malaysia took on the role of the facilitator in the peace talks, the members of the ICG worked together in a supportive role. Four countries (Japan, UK, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) and four INGOs/MSOs (Muhammadiyah, The Asia Foundation, HD, and Conciliation Resources) constituted the ICG.

37 The definition of good offices captures the support of states or international entities in providing, organizing, or establishing contact or negotiations between the disputing parties, with the goal of a peaceful conflict settlement. For further details see Michael J Greig and Paul F Diehl, *International Mediation*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

38 Mirak Raheem and Kethesh Loganathan, “Internationalisation of the Sri Lankan Peace Process”, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Background Paper for Conference on “International Dimensions of the Peace Process in Sri Lanka”, (July 2005), <https://cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/4/INTERNATIONALISATION%20OF%20THE%20SRI%20LANKAN%20PEACE%20PROCESS%20-%20Mirak%20Raheem%20and%20Kethesh%20Loganathan.pdf>

39 Simon Mason and Damiano Sguaitamatti, “Mapping Mediators: A Comparison of Third Parties and Implications for Switzerland”, (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2019), 5, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/mapping/eserv/eth:4498/eth-4498-01.pdf>

40 “The Roles and Contributions of States in Peace Mediation”, *Fact Sheet Series: Peace Mediation and Mediation Support*, Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD), (2017), [https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/c74cd3e8-9e9f-4651-ba01-8cfoa1c8fc81/FS2\\_The%20Roles%20and%20Contributions\\_States.pdf](https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/c74cd3e8-9e9f-4651-ba01-8cfoa1c8fc81/FS2_The%20Roles%20and%20Contributions_States.pdf)

The ICG was the first of its kind in bringing together diplomats and NGOs to work together in a formal setting. Consequently, the Bangsamoro process benefited from the qualities of both actors: the NGOs played a key role in sharing their technical knowledge, in engaging with the different actors and supporting communication for peace advocacy, while the diplomats provided essential leverage and political and economic support. By jointly working in a coordinated manner, the ICG was able to maintain trust between the different parties and to ensure implementation of mutually agreed approaches.<sup>41</sup>

## Myanmar

In Myanmar, the MSO Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies (CPCS) has taken on the role of coordinating different parties involved in efforts to build peace. This work began in 2012 but has intensified as a result of the coup d'état in 2021. CPCS works with multiple actors in Myanmar, including diplomats. Myanmar does not suffer from a lack of envoys – for example, an envoy from the UN, ASEAN, the EU, China, and Japan. CPCS works on a principle of “Spiraling for Peace” to bring people together. This means that they recognize the need to align efforts so that there is some coherence in peace efforts. Diplomats are briefed at the beginning and the end of processes and analysis on critical issues is shared within Signal message groups for embassy staff. Statements can be formulated jointly within these groups.

CPCS use their coordinating role to bring together those who may not be the ‘usual suspects’ in smaller and larger groups depending on what is appropriate to the situation. At the heart of their philosophy is the recognition that CPCS can step in and step out again, as the national actors are those who are the most important. CPCS’s approach is informed by their organizational values and principles of conflict transformation, maintaining a balance between mitigating physical violence but working towards addressing systemic and structural violence. CPCS uses this methodology on a range of conflicts in the Asia region.

## Mali

ECOWAS’ mediation approaches tend to limit the involvement of professional mediators in conflicts within the West African region. This is partly due to the state-centric nature of regional politics and considerations of cultural and power dynamics. Individual non-state mediators generally lack the credibility to mediate in Track I conflicts in West Africa. Instead, high-level mediation in the region relies more heavily on (former) president mediators, and sometimes career diplomats and former political appointees, who step into diplomacy to support ECOWAS’ mediation efforts. The ECOWAS media-

tion department then provides technical support to the (former) president-as-mediator.

In Mali, conflict has been lingering for a number of years. Several international peacekeeping missions have so far not been successful – in fact, there is a growing resentment among civil society that external actors are overcrowding the security space. Throughout the conflict, CSOs, faith-based organizations, women and youth groups, and political parties have been exerting pressure for increased participation.

In response, ECOWAS adopted a multi-stakeholder approach in their mediation efforts following the 2020 military coup d'état in Mali. Together with the AU and UN, they chaired the Transition Support Group Mali, effectively synergizing international involvement. In addition, they engaged a range of key actors from within Malian civil society with mediation experience, including WANEP. As an MSO, WANEP’s role involves providing capacity building support to key stakeholders, especially women, youth and other relevant CSOs, to enhance their capacity to engage and collaborate with ECOWAS’ diplomats, the president mediator and the Transitional Government in the mediation process. ECOWAS’ diplomats played an advisory role to the president mediator in identifying which groups to engage, recommending invitations for two or three representatives of the most important groups. In this way, ECOWAS’ efforts ensured linkages between support from the international community to local peacebuilding initiatives and regional forms of conflict resolution.

## 5. Recommendations to strengthen cooperation

The challenges, opportunities, and good practices outlined above provide ample room for a series of recommendations to further strengthen third-party cooperation. The following recommendations are directed towards all third parties involved in peace processes, or in mediated conflict resolution.

1. **Clarity of roles:** Third parties should recognize the strength of each individual actor, their added value, and their role in the process, and make tactical use of that. In addition, they should recognize that needs may differ over time. MSOs may be able to operate more discretely and quietly than larger formal actors. Once a peace process is more robust, diplomats, regional organizations, and international organizations can provide legitimacy, international support, and weight to the process. The timing and sequencing of linking actors and initiatives should hence be carefully considered and discussed together as far as possible.
2. **Lead:** Where possible, transparency or at least oversight in a process needs to be created. One involved

<sup>41</sup> “International Contact Group on Mindanao”, Conciliation Resources, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.c-r.org/our-work-in-action/international-contact-group-mindanao>

actor should take the lead to engage everyone and be clear about different steps (i.e., take a coordination role) and create an overview of the process and the different roles of each actor. Alternatively, networks of third parties can decide upon a role division jointly.

3. **Consultation:** Actors outside a formal peace or mediated process (if there is one) should consult those formally involved before carrying out actions or developing initiatives with conflicting parties, so oversight and a unified process can be maintained.
4. **Local ownership:** Third parties looking to get involved in a conflict context should recognize that not every conflict requires or accepts outsiders or foreigners becoming involved in resolving the conflict. Moreover, when involved, third parties should be aware and respectful of local initiatives and traditional conflict resolution methods, closing the current blind spot. International actors should make sure to complement other (local) initiatives, not compete with them.
5. **Ongoing analysis:** As mediation is complex and unpredictable by nature, third parties should invest in continuous conflict or political analysis and stakeholder mapping. Third parties to a mediated process can undertake this analysis together, from which they can then draw distinct spheres of action for each actor.
6. **Sharing learning:** Spaces should be created around a mediated process where all actors with a stake or interest can come together for (practical) learning, sharing of information, building trust, and creating networks. Good practices of MSOs supporting UN envoys behind the scenes or diplomats and MSOs working together such as those outlined above should be shared more widely to counter perceptions that diplomats and mediators cannot work together.
7. **Training and research:** Due to the changing nature of conflict and new conflict trends, it is essential for all third parties to invest in continued research and analysis of global trends, as well as to create professional training opportunities to help actors involved in peace processes be better prepared for new realities.
8. **Funding:** States and other entities investing in conflict resolution and supporting peace processes should continue to do so. In addition, donors should recognize the need for long-term and flexible funding and support, as peace processes are unpredictable and don't follow project timelines. Support is also needed during the implementation and recovery phases of negotiated settlements.

The MSN can fulfill an important role in carrying forward a number of these recommendations such as the dissemination of good practices, the creation of learning

spaces, and the development of mediation tools that align with current global realities. The broad reach of the networks of the MSN members, and the organization's geographical spread, lend themselves to the creation of a platform for experience sharing.

# Mediation Support Network

## Profile

The Mediation Support Network (MSN) is a small, global network of primarily non-governmental organizations that support mediation in peace negotiations.

## Mission

The mission of the MSN is to promote and improve mediation practice, processes, and standards to address political tensions and armed conflict.

Furthermore, the MSN connects different mediation support units and organizations with the intention of:

- promoting exchange on planned and ongoing activities to enable synergies and cumulative impact;
- providing opportunities for collaboration, initiating, and encouraging joint activities;
- sharing analysis of trends and ways to address emerging challenges in the field of peace mediation.

## Activities

The MSN meets once a year in different locations. The organization of the meetings rotates, with each meeting hosted by a network partner. Each meeting has a primary topical focus that is jointly decided by all network members.

## MSN Members in April 2022

- African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) [www.accord.org.za](http://www.accord.org.za)
- Berghof Foundation [www.berghof-foundation.org](http://www.berghof-foundation.org)
- The Carter Center [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)
- Center for Peace Mediation (CPM) [www.peacemediation.de](http://www.peacemediation.de)
- Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) [www.hdcentre.org](http://www.hdcentre.org)
- Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) [www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org](http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org)
- Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – Programa por la Paz (CINEP) [www.cinep.org.co](http://www.cinep.org.co)
- Clingendael Academy [www.clingendael.org](http://www.clingendael.org)
- Conciliation Resources (CR) [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org)

- CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation [www.cmi.fi](http://www.cmi.fi)
- CSSP Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation (CSSP) [www.cssp-mediation.org](http://www.cssp-mediation.org)
- Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) <https://fba.se/en>
- Mediation Support Project (MSP), swisspeace and Center for Security Studies (CSS) ETH Zurich [www.swisspeace.ch](http://www.swisspeace.ch) & [www.css.ethz.ch](http://www.css.ethz.ch)
- NOREF Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), [www.noref.no](http://www.noref.no)
- Search for Common Ground (SFCG) [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)
- Servicios Y Asesoría Para La Paz (SERAPAZ) [www.serapaz.org.mx](http://www.serapaz.org.mx)
- Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) [www.rep.usm.my/index.php/en/seacsn/about-seacsn](http://www.rep.usm.my/index.php/en/seacsn/about-seacsn)
- UN Mediation Support Unit (PMD/MSU) [www.peacemaker.un.org/mediation-support](http://www.peacemaker.un.org/mediation-support)
- US Institute of Peace (USIP) [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

## Previous MSN Discussion Points:

MSN Discussion Points no. 10, *Implementing Peace Agreements: Supporting the Transition from the Negotiation Table to Reality*, 2020

MSN Discussion Points no. 9, *Translating Mediation Guidance into Practice: Commentary on the Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies*, 2017

MSN Discussion Points no. 8, *Encountering and Countering Temporary Impasses in Peace Processes*, 2016

MSN Discussion Points no. 7, *Challenges to Mediation Support in Hot Wars: Learnings from Syria and Ukraine*, 2015

MSN Discussion Points no. 6, *Inclusivity in Mediation Processes: Lessons from Chiapas*, 2015

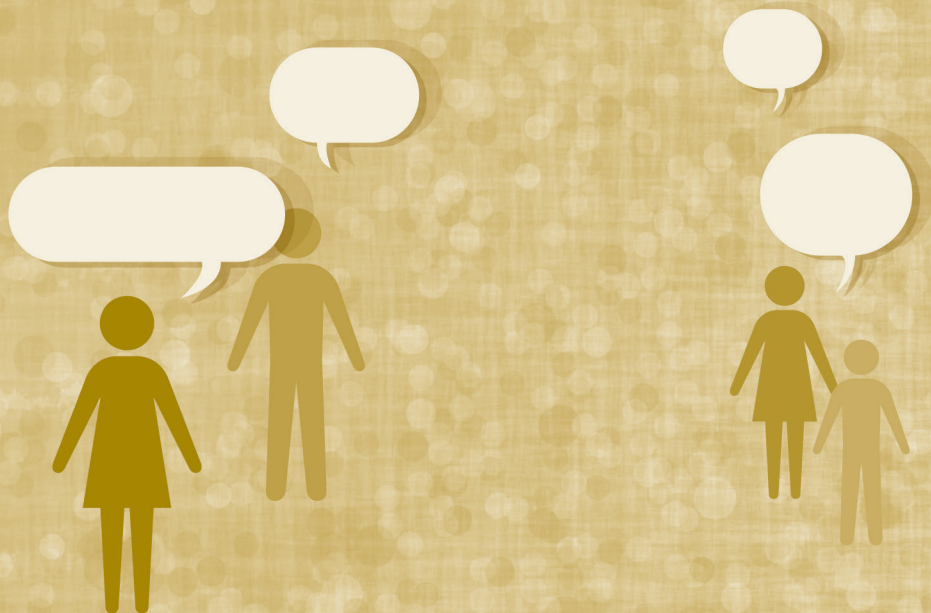
MSN Discussion Points no. 5, *Mediation and Conflict Transformation*, 2014

MSN Discussion Points no. 4, *Mind the Gap: How Mediation Support Can Better Respond to the Needs of Local Societies*, 2013

MSN Discussion Points no. 3, *Regional Intergovernmental Organizations in Mediation Efforts: Lessons from West Africa*, 2013







Berghof Foundation

THE  
CARTER CENTER



Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

