

**Remarks for the New Paths to Peace Conference
University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee
November 5, 2003**

**Richard McCall
Director, Communities in Transition
Creative Associates International**

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers of this conference, particularly my good friend Rob Ricigliano, for not only inviting me as a participant, but also for asking me to speak as well.

In looking over the Conference Agenda, I was struck by the wealth of experience and intellectual firepower that has been assembled here. Our challenge is to bring our individual views and experiences to the table hopefully to shape a more holistic approach in addressing the enormous challenges the global community faces in peace building.

On October 21, 2001, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan laid out a new vision for the international community. In his Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, the Secretary General urged the international community to place human security above the traditional notions of state sovereignty. Annan stated that in the 21st Century he believed:

(and I quote)

“...the mission of the United Nations will be defined by a new, more profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life, regardless of race or religion. This requires us to look beyond the framework of States, and beneath the surface of nations or communities. We must focus, as never before, on improving the conditions of the individual men and women, who give the State or nation its richness and character.

“...In this new century, we must start from the understanding that peace belongs not only to States or peoples, but to each and every member of those communities. The sovereignty of States must no longer be used as a shield for gross violations of human rights. Peace must be made real and tangible in the daily existence of every individual in need. Peace must be sought, above all, because it is the condition of every member of the human family to live a life of dignity and security.” (close quote)

The Secretary General focused on the dilemma created, perhaps inadvertently, by an international community that confers legitimacy on those governments that, by their own actions, do not enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. He raised the age-old question that dates back in time to the struggles between Julius Caesar and the Roman Senate. Caesar's drive for a perpetual dictatorship was resisted strongly by the Roman Senate because it permanently abrogated the sovereign rights of the people. The early Romans appreciated full well where sovereignty was, or should be vested. Over time the concept of national sovereignty has come to be equated with those who occupy the seats of power. The concept of sovereignty flowing from the people who confer upon their

leaders the right to represent their sovereign interests both internationally and domestically has not been the accepted norm in relations between states.

The problems facing many peoples around the world, such as disease, illiteracy, grinding poverty, repression, and corruption stem from weak and oftentimes non-existent institutions. There has been an assumption that the existence of a state's governmental apparatus alone, within clearly defined borders, constitutes a coherent and stable country. We have slowly come to the realization that it does not. This reality forces us to re-evaluate many of our assumptions and to develop different analytical tools and frameworks to more effectively promote sustainable solutions for overcoming both political and economic poverty that is characteristic of far too many countries. One thing is for certain, crisis and conflict in many areas of the world will be with us well into the foreseeable future. The challenge will be the degree to which the international community recognizes the need to organize itself in a collaborative effort to more effectively respond to this reality. The fact that this conference is being held is reflective of the concern on the part of the participants that we cannot continue with business as usual.

In those areas of the world rife with conflict, countries have not undergone the processes fundamental to the creation of a functioning nation-state. Many of these states are comprised of diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural communities. They rely upon voluntary cooperation among and between diverse elements within the state. This cooperation functions relatively well during the good times. However, stress, no matter what the source, can be the spark that touches off violent conflict.

I would like focus on an area that is given too little attention or value by the international community writ large. And that is the area of constituting processes. These are processes that create institutions that clearly spell out rights and responsibilities of individuals and communities at all levels of society, political, economic and social. They are fundamental to the maintenance of coherence and order, particularly during times of stress. For voluntary cooperation to be sustained, it has to be encapsulated within institutions that reflect not only a common set of values, but also a strong sense of national community across the entire population. The creation of these institutions, in turn, can transcend the sometimes, divisive nature of localism or communalism, whether ethnic, cultural or religious.

While all modern nation-states have undergone these constituting processes, the citizens in far too many countries have never had the opportunity or space to engage in processes whereby commonly identified values are agreed upon and institutions created that reflect this fundamental societal consensus.

Violent conflict generally breaks out in a society when the fundamental ideas and agreements that constitute order break down. It is these ideas and agreements, when given the force of law, and enforced equitably by the state, that regulate behavior. Conflict is first and foremost a political failure, whereby states cannot, or will not, build productive political communities or enable them to operate.

We have to understand and appreciate that we cannot short-circuit the processes that can lead to the creation of a viable, sustainable nation-state. This is a long-term process that should demonstrate sensitivity to, and understanding of, some basic fundamentals including, but not limited to:

- The creation and maintenance of institutions that reflect broad societal ownership is the major challenge in post-conflict societies. When trust breaks down, the legitimacy of governing processes must be built, which can only be done through constituting processes that are seen to be fair and inclusive. Building society-wide consensus around a new set of governing rules is critical to broad ownership of resulting institutions.
- Healthy states are multi-constitutional having multiple points of political access to address and solve problems.
- Effective long-term problem solving needs to occur at multiple levels and focus on building political solutions from solid social and economic foundations.
- A strong and active citizenry to design local institutions and co-produce public goods and services is indispensable.
- A commitment to dialogue, participation, competition and compromise from the local to national level is essential to the political and economic decision-making processes.

The goal of external actors should be one of partnership by encouraging an enabling environment so that rich systems of governance can be developed. The choices are not between small and large systems, but between systems of governance that develop locally rooted systems that, in turn, are tied into regional and national systems. This is the principle of self-rule through shared rule.

Yet, since the end to the Cold War, the international community has struggled to respond to an increasing number of failed or failing states. The logic of democratization and market economics has driven the notion that many societies are in transition – that there is somewhat of a linear progression from centrally controlled political and economic systems to democratic and free market driven systems. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that in most so-called transition countries a difficult and patient societal transformation is the more appropriate description of the processes required for peace, stability and political pluralism to be established and sustained over the long term. Transformation is not limited to just economic and political change. The requirement for psychological transformation is fundamental to the realization of the political and economic change that maximizes human potential, freedom and an inclusive economy in these countries.

As examples of the point I am trying to make, I want to briefly mention two areas of the world where working assumptions democratization and market economics turned out to be grossly incorrect – the former Soviet Union and the Balkans.

In 1998 the ENI Bureau of USAID completed a stocktaking exercise that reviewed the programmatic assumptions which drove much of U.S. decision-making processes in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union. Of the 17 assumptions that were challenged by this exercise, there is one finding which particularly stands out. This finding is as follows: Quote

“With the fall of communism, the old political order broke down. In many cases, there was no nation. Few systems were in place to help the body politic determine early on where the country wanted to go in the transition.” (close quote)

However, anyone with a sense of history would have understood that in the case of Russia the crucial issue for the past 200 years has been the consistent struggle, and equally consistent failure, to develop a nation-state.

Russia’s historical drive to build an empire obstructed nation-building. Empire building, according to British historian, John Hosking, necessitated the borrowing of a foreign culture and ethos which displaced the native inheritance. A potential identity had already been created for Russia by the invention of tradition in the 16th century, and it served as impetus and justification for the first stages of empire-building. But this identity was suddenly repudiated by the imperial state itself by the mid-seventeenth century. This repudiation generated a rift within Russia’s ethnic community whose consequences have not been entirely eradicated even today.

The political, economic and cultural institutions of what might have become the Russian nation were destroyed or emasculated for the needs of the empire, while the state was enfeebled by the hollowness of its ethnic substance, its inability at most times to attract the deep loyalty of even its Russian, let alone its non-Russian subjects.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia once again was faced with the absence of a consensus on a Russian national identity and the institutions that would reflect that sense of national identity.

The point of this little bit of history is that the debate over reform both economic and political was rather nonsensical because it was divorced from the Russian reality. As Hosking pointed in his seminal work, Russia: People and Empire, “Because Russian national institutions were dissolved in the Soviet imperialist ones, the crisis of defining a clear national identity whether civic or ethnic remains mired in conflict. Ironically, it is the same conflict that prevented the development of a clear national identity under the Czars as well.”

Last year a report on the State of Democracy in the Balkans was issued. The report entitled, “The Inflexibility Trap: Frustrated Societies, Weak States, and Democracy,” was written by Ivan Krastev a Bulgarian political scientist.

After years of economic restructuring, undertaken under pressure from the West, and top down democratization, Krastev has this very revealing observation to make:
(quote)

“The decline in the standards of living, the emergence of massive poverty, the high figures of unemployment are not new to the observers of the Balkans. What remains unnoticed, however, is the dramatic rise in the physical and social displacement of huge groups of society. In fact, Balkan democracies are democracies of the displaced peoples. This is obviously true with respect to the war victims in the former Yugoslavia, but it is also true in a broader sense. How many people live in the place where they lived 10 years ago? How many of them work in the same place? How many of them stay in the same professional and friendly circles? Migration to capitals and big cities and emigration to the West is a well-documented story. But the story that remains untold is the destruction of the old professional classes. The loss of status no less than the loss of income determines the attitude of huge groups of people to the new status quo. Balkan societies are inflected with ‘status panic.’ Social stratification and the rise of social inequality are critical to understanding the attitudes of the public to democracy and its institutions.

“The social condition in the Balkans is a key factor for the volatility in individual and collective behavior. It is hardly surprising that in the current social circumstances society is dominated by the ‘values of survival’ and not the ‘values of self-expression.’” (End of quote)

The lesson drawn from this observation is that if substantial numbers of people do not have a sense of local community, how can we expect them to have a shared sense of national community? The democratic transition paradigm assumes that a functioning state is always there and that state-building and democracy-building reinforce each other. There are just too many examples where this has not been the case.

I could cite numerous other examples of where the West’s simplistic notions of democracy-building and development of market economies are doomed to failure. Whether is the transition from totalitarianism in the former Soviet Union, to the conflagration that swept the Balkans, or the genocide in Rwanda or the horrible human tragedy that continues unabated in places like the Congo, there is one element that is consistently ignored in the strategies of the international community. We ignore all too often the basic human psychology at work in these societies – particularly post conflict societies.

In May 1999, I had the good fortune to participate in a week long State of the World Forum in Belfast Northern Ireland. The Forum was billed as the Coexistence Initiative and brought individuals from some 50 countries around the world, most of

whom were grassroots leaders from societies in crisis or coming out of conflict. Having spent seven days listening to those who were on the frontlines in peace-building or conflict resolution efforts, I realized how little the international community understood the local, psychological, dynamics at work in conflict-prone societies.

At the end of the Forum, there was a consensus that was reflected throughout the discussions on the part of people from differing ethnic, cultural, regional and religious backgrounds. Everyone agreed that it was the issue of values that underlay conflict. Often, there are conflicting values between various communities. There is a lack of trust and understanding of each other. It is like integration versus segregation. There is a sense of security in living in your own community that oftentimes involves building psychological, if not physical walls (as in the case of Belfast) around you. The challenge is one of creating a process that builds enough confidence in one's own identity to accept those who might be different in another community. The question that was asked repeatedly during the week was as follows: "If you want us to live together, help us identify a mechanism that fosters mutuality in the relationship. We need a common civic vision."

While not going into great detail, I want to briefly note the work of the War Torn Societies Project International. WSPI was created by a group of 10 bilateral and multilateral donors, all of whom were frustrated by the inability of their own institutions to deal with, let alone understand, the failed state phenomenon. It is a hybrid UN/Swiss Ngo that has been on the cutting edge in the use of a unique methodology that facilitates locally-owned peace building processes.

WSPI is viewed as a neutral forum in the countries in which it operations. It uses participatory action research at the grass roots level that is extraordinarily useful in identifying the unique historical, cultural and political characteristics of peoples and places. It is a fully indigenized mechanism that creates the space for people to reconcile their own historical, cultural and political differences. The process does identify themes common to all communities within a post-conflict society and brings to the surface shared values that in turn can guide the creation of institutions reflecting broad ownership. However, it is a very time consuming process that requires between three to five years for a result to be produced in the form of what is called a "Self Portrait" of a society. The WSPI approach runs counter to donors who have been historically prone to wanting quick results and often times pressing prematurely for national elections as an exit strategy.

What I found so compelling about Hosking's book on Russia, Krastev's work on the Balkans, the State of the World Forum and the work of the War Torn Societies project, is that all centered around a common theme – and that theme is about people, the vast majority of whom live in societies with no firmly rooted sense of national identity and struggling with physical and psychological insecurities.

What struck me about Hosking's book on Russia is that many of the crises we are seeing elsewhere, particularly in Africa, suffer from the same underlying fault-lines. In the absence of a broader sense of national identity and national community, the seeds of democracy and economic reform will not fall on fertile ground.

In concluding my remarks, I want to emphasize that I am a firm believer that there is a set of values common to all humankind. All too often we let our own differences, biases, and cultural insensitivities, and yes insecurities, blind us to the very things that should unite us. As external actors we need to have the patience and foresight to facilitate processes that allow for the identification of these common values that, in turn, can then be reflected in broad-based ownership of institutions that reflect the aspirations of all, regardless of ethnic, religious or cultural background. Getting back to the five fundamentals to which I alluded earlier, is a good place to start.