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Emma Leslie, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.**

In January 2012, our Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies facilitate a visit of the Karen National Union to visit the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Cotobato City, Mindanao. The KNU had asked about the experience of armed groups in ceasefires, and there is no better place in the region today than to see how hard the Philippine government and MILF have worked to sustain a ceasefire while there peace talks go on.

The Chairman of the MILF peace panel, Mohagher Iqbal, chose carefully his advice to the KNU. Number one he said: "Prepare, prepare, prepare. And when you think you are ready prepare some more." He explained that as an armed group you have been well trained to fight in the jungle, but negotiations is a different arena, and requires training, preparation, knowledge, awareness, tactics, strategies, skills. He understood that even when you think as the group demanding your right you are ready, there will some aspect of the negotiation you have not yet considered.

Secondly, he said: Maintain military discipline. He said military discipline is not just for fighting wars. He said when you sign a ceasefire agreement you need to ensure that your chain of command is in tact. A ceasefire does not mean disarm. A ceasefire is the ceasing of hostilities so talks can go on. If you sign a peace agreement you need to know that when you tell you troops to disarm they will put down their guns and they will go home. You can negotiate confident you cannot deliver on your own promise.

Thirdly he said: You will think negotiating with your opponent is hard, but negotiating within your own group is even harder. Unifying and bringing your people along with the negotiation is the most challenging aspect of peace talks. At times you will feel closer to your negotiating counterpart, then you do to your own stakeholders.

Since then the KNU General Secretary and Commander in Chief have commented many times, that despite all the international experts, and peace trainings they have attended since the commencement of the Myanmar peace process in 2012, it is the words of the trained soldier, and seasoned negotiator Chairman Iqbal who have rung true throughout the process.

I must say I felt like a sheepish outsider on the day they spoke to each other, as all the tools, frameworks and recipes for peace we had so faithfully trained in workshops over so many years seemed watery compared to the strength and wisdom of the MILF.

As a result of this exchange our organisation found ourselves fundamentally challenged. What if armed groups know more about peace than we do? What if those who faced the horrors of war understood the path to peace better than us?

The MILF generously devoted their time to several more of Myanmar armed groups throughout 2012, including the 88 generation democracy leaders, and at CPCS we start to re-assess and evaluate the frameworks, paradigms and tools we have so long taken for granted as fundamentals of peace building and conflict transformation.

The title of my presentation today is reframing our analysis, frameworks and ourselves. The dictionary defines reframing as:

1. to support or enclose a picture in a new or different frame
2. to change the plans or basic details of a policy, idea,
3. to look at, present, or think of beliefs, ideas, relationships, in a new or different way reframe from a new perspective
4. to change the focus or perspective of (a view) through a lens
5. to say (something) in a different way reframe the question

And my own definition that means we *walk in the shoes of the other*.

The concept of reframing has become a very core principal and learning for our team. We are starting to see that reframing may well be what peace building is all about. Reframing as to rethink. Reframing means, just like conflict, we are not stagnate. Reframing forces us to think out of the box. Reframing pushes us to creativity, new ideas, new possibilities, new thought patterns, which take us beyond the old paradigms of party A and party B fight, cease fire, negotiate, sign peace, give up arms and go home.

At this moment in peace building and conflict transformation, I think we have a need to reframe three areas: our analysis, our frameworks and ourselves.

Let me start with **analysis**. In 2008 the world viewed Myanmar through a good versus evil frame. ASSK was pure, good, white, angelic. General Than Shwe was evil personified, and his regime was monolithic. The analysis was therefore simple – by beating the regime with a stick (i.e sanctions) we can get ASSK to be released, and she can lead the NLD to power, democracy will flow like a raging river and all other issues ethnic struggles and religious divides will fall into place.

This analysis needed a major reframe. So between 2008 and 2010 business, civil society and religious leaders from inside Burma, with a frame of their own went out into the world to share a different picture. The picture they painted was a complex regime structure, with competing power structures, one of which was working towards reform and needed support. They portrayed a vibrant civil society with capacity who have survived through years of monitoring and surveillance. They demonstrated behind the scenes mediation efforts,

humanitarian assistance and gradual shifting of the status quo. In the beginning the powers that be in London, Brussels, Washington, Beijing and New York did not believe them. But as Western and even Chinese policy makes shifted their own frame, understanding and possibilities emerged. This reframing has enabled and supported a reform process, which is far from complete, far from imbedded but will be hard to turn back.

But the danger is we rest on our laurels and don't reframe once again our analysis on Myanmar. Much has happened since the reform and peace processes began in 2012. And in 2103 now we must once again grapple with our analysis in Myanmar as Rohingya violence spreads to Muslim - Buddhist violence, to reveal a deep-seated societal xenophobia and fear of difference in a volatile and fast changing context where vulnerability and political manipulation spreads communal violence like wild fire.

As peace builders we repeat time and again: analysis is a critical component of our work, but do we really embrace analysis as a dynamic, essential, ever changing element of all we do. Have we really applied the tool of reframing the conflicts of Asia through a lens which truly reflects the frustrations and aspirations of those who initiate and perpetuate such conflicts. Do we really understand the new frame of Sri Lanka since the Northern provincial elections? Do we understand deeply enough the changing dynamics of Mindanao since the Zamboanga violence and how it plays into the peace talks process? Have we re assessed post agreement Aceh, Timor Leste to see new conflict dynamics which emerge? Have we understood the political crisis in Cambodia as both political maturity whilst potentially being the cause of future conflict? Reframing our analysis is critical and is more than reading the latest International Crisis Group reports. Which brings me to the need to reframe out frameworks.

Peace building as a field is relatively young, especially when compared with the sectors of human rights or development. It is the early nineties that there are peace building workshops, and its not until early this millennium that peace academic courses at a post graduate level have become more common place on university prospectuses. Unless you were a Quaker or Mennonite, funding for peace building was not common until late in the nineties, more so now, and peace and conflict advisor positions in the likes of DFID, AUSAID, and UNDP are less than a decade old in most cases. Kofi Annan frames the UN's mission to prevent armed conflict only in 2002 and called on civil society to work with the UN to do so.

My point is as a field coming of age, peace building has come a long way in a short space of time. Organisations to like CDA in Boston have helped us to grow through Do No Harm to the tools of Reflecting on peace practice culminating in powerful tools for analysis, planning and evaluating peace work. In this region research such as the Asia Foundation's The Contested Corners of Asia help us to go deeper into the causes of conflict and how we interact with it.

So we are a field, recognised, accepted, and institutionalized. And therein lies the danger. Just like any young person in our late teens or early twenties we can think we know best, we can think we have all the answers, and can border line become fundamentalist and stuck in ways even before we have really gotten started.

Chairman Iqbal's wisdom to the KNU forced us to rethink or reframe if you like the way we teach negotiation to armed groups. This region has stunning examples of frameworks emerging from out of the box thinking, or homegrown solutions to home grown problems.

One such model is the International Contact Group, a hybrid support mechanisms bringing together four governments (UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Japan) and four Non governments organizations (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, The Asia Foundation, Mohammadiyah and Conciliations Resources) provides support to the Malaysian facilitator and parties in the GPH-MILF negotiations. It does away with the idea of a "big man mediator" who runs the talks and has all the answers, instead providing a collaborative mechanism with full access to the process, weaving a web of support around the peace talks both in session and in between.

The MILF themselves have challenged the well known concept of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation), preferring to use their own term 'normalisation' better describing the post agreement realities on the ground. This kind of bottom up, authentic, homegrown models developed to fit needs of parties to conflicts is essential to make sustainable and viable peace process.

And as the peace Philippine government – MILF peace talks slowly come towards a final comprehensive agreement, the MILF have started to examine more closely the terminology of transitional justice. They are soon to visit Cambodia to study the to understand how 160 million dollars in a Tribunal set to trial just four people over several years resonates as justice for the Cambodian genocide with ordinary Khmer people. They are already asking how Islamic concepts of justice could be accepted in a transitional mechanism. How can past colonial legacies be addressed with all the too legalistic mechanisms the international community has to offer them in our existing menu of transitional justice options? Surely in such a community of practice we can think more creatively about transitional justice than tribunals and truth commissions, to a design which address the real desires of people on the ground for justice and peace.

We need to reframe our frameworks, and then reframe and rethink them again until we find authentic, creative, viable, sustainable paradigms, possibilities and solutions to decades long struggle against injustice in our region.

And so if we are to keep rethinking or reframing our frameworks to address old and emerging and ever evolving conflicts, we need to reframe ourselves – the community of peace builders. In discussing the reframing of ourselves I would like to share with you three “pet hates” I have about peace building:

1. On Saturday night the MILF peace talks went on until 4am in the morning in order to try and finish their agreement before Eid. (*And Eid Mubrak to all our Muslim colleagues and friends here in the community of practice.*) One diplomat shrugged his shoulders about the failure to finish the agreement in the time allotted saying “Oh well at least they are still talking”. This notion that time, when it comes to peace talks is infinite is unacceptable. There must be urgency about the way we work. Not to rush. Not to detrimentally push. But for those communities of Mindanao who have already waited 16 years for a conclusion to this war, its simply not good to enough to at least be talking. And here I would like to quote from the reflecting on Peace Practice manual of 2009:

*Is the change from this effort **fast enough**? Sooner is almost always better than later in ending violence and injustice. One should always ask whether this effort is more likely to gain results faster than anything else we might do, or whether there are other ways to work that could produce results sooner. At the same time, there is a caution against inadvertently causing harm through haste! Sometimes people (perhaps pushed by donors) try to do too much too quickly, without the necessary analysis and planning.*

To me, or I suspect to someone sitting in an evacuation centre in Mindanao, “well at least they are still talking” hardly satisfies whether the change we are trying to achieve is fast enough. And my own addition to this question is – have we been creative enough?

2. My second pet hate in peace building – the ego. We are all guilty of it. The late Somali Kenyan peace builder Dekha Ibrahim Abdi’s peace process mantra was “take your ego out of it”. There is no place in peace building for our egos. Its enough already. No one of us can achieve peace on our own. No one organisation/ government/ negotiator /donor /agency /activist/ department has a monopoly on building peace. I don’t even need to give you an example of how ego plays into the rat race of peace building in this region and beyond. It has to stop, if we are serious to build sustainable and lasting peace for the people who need it the most. Let’s take our ego out of it.
3. Lastly, a sure fire way to take our egos out of it, is through evaluation and feedback. In one peace building evaluation workshop I attended I head a

peace builder say – how can anyone evaluate my work, as it is the work of my heart!! Another commonly heard statement – “it is impossible to evaluate our work, as the real impact won’t be seen for another 50 – 100 years or more”. In my view, this is unacceptable. We have no right to intervene into conflicts in the name of building peace, if we cannot measure, assess, critique and evaluate our intervention. It’s not knitting. Its also not rocket science. However, our interventions impact on people’s lives. It is not OK when we forget to pass on a critical message in a peace talks process, and the talks collapse. Yes that happened. It is not OK when we raise expectations in communities by announcing ceasefire and associated projects, only for the people to understand that the reality of their situation has not yet changed as the military who raped their children has not yet pulled back. Yes that happened. We can not take our role lightly. Our project plans, log frames and interventions affect people’s lives. If that cannot be evaluated, critiqued, monitored and reviewed, then we have no right being there.

And so its time to reframe ourselves – we need to get moving, we need to take our egos out of it, and we need to be open to all of the critique and feedback along the way which helps us to be better, responsible, accountable peace builders.

As everyone knows in this room, Asia is a diverse region of religions, cultures, philosophies, hierarchies, political alliances, histories and of course delicacies. It is the way of the future, the dot.com region. At the same time the peoples of the region carry deep inside them an innate sense of their distant historical past greatness whether it’s the Malay archipelago, the Khmer empire, the time of the Burman kings and so on.... People, politicians, armed groups and business people use a myriad of the ancient, formal and informal networks and relationships to get things done.

To work in this region we must be constantly updating, reworking, reframing our analysis. It must be current. We must ask does it reflect the needs and aspirations of all parties or simply a historical understanding of a long running violent dispute? We must not rely on yesterday’s news, but find out for ourselves what is going on and adjust our programming and interventions accordingly.

Reframing our analysis will require us to rethink our approaches, frameworks and paradigms - are we creative enough, have we thought of all the options, are we following old models because they work or we have simply not dared to invent something better, more authentic, more grounded in the current reality.

And to be able to reframe our frameworks, we need to challenge ourselves. Are we equipped for the task, are we making it about our egos and our need for recognition or staying out of trouble, or are we working seriously, collaboratively, intentionally to end conflicts. Can we take the feedback, can we

go the distance, are our systems and institutions flexible and responsive enough to try new things, to accept new analysis, to work with new models and frameworks. And are we moving quickly enough to end the suffering of people.

Conflict in Asia is not static.

Reframing the way we perceive a conflict, the way we approach a conflict and how we ourselves are present can only lead to transformation and a significant shift towards an end to violent conflict in the Asia region.

After all we have nothing to lose, and only sustainable and authentic peace to gain.

Emma Leslie, October 14, 2013