

# **OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION ACTIVITIES IN CYPRUS: THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE PROCESS**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper aims to provide an overview of the conflict resolution activities in Cyprus and an examination of their role in the peace process. As such its focus will be on what is otherwise known as 'Track Two' diplomacy. Reference will also be made to the lessons learned from these activities.*

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One of the most unfortunate results of the lack of progress toward a political settlement in Cyprus is the increased distance between the two communities, leading to distorted images of the other, growing mistrust, and increased differences in culture and mentality. The events of August 1996, in which several individuals were killed in the buffer zone, demonstrate that the level of frustration among the general population is rising and the situation in Cyprus is quite volatile. The tension following these events led to a rise in extreme nationalism, increasing the voice of hardliners and making it more difficult for peace builders to promote trust towards the other community. Many experts fear that even if an agreement is signed, it will be difficult to "sell" it to the general population, and there may be serious attempts to sabotage the agreements. For many, the situation is dismal, offering little hope for settlement in the near future.

In contrast to the pessimistic situation on the political *level*, in recent years there has been significant progress in bringing citizens from the two communities together for various activities. It has become clear that diplomatic efforts that focus only on the official level are not sufficient. Increasingly, diplomats, local officials, and the citizens of Cyprus are recognizing that bi-communal activities offer one of the few ways to make progress, while the political situation remains deadlocked. There is now widespread recognition by the diplomatic community that much work must be done at the citizen level in order for official efforts to be successful.

During the period 1994-1996, I worked in Cyprus as a Fulbright Scholar, offering

workshops, seminars, and training in the areas of communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution. My colleagues in this endeavor consisted of a core group of individuals from both communities who are committed to efforts at the citizen level to promote understanding, confidence, and reconciliation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The participants in this core group created a collective vision for building peace in Cyprus, and we worked together on a number of conflict resolution projects with a variety of bi-communal groups. I came to deeply appreciate and respect the motivation and commitment of the individuals in this core group, and I gained a great deal of satisfaction from working with them. I believe that their activities are playing a key role in moving Cyprus toward a lasting peace, and I see their work as critical in successfully implementing any political agreement that may be reached.

In this essay I will attempt to provide an overview of the conflict resolution activities in Cyprus and an examination of their role in the peace process. I will also make some observations about what we have learned from the conflict resolution activities. While the views that I will express are those of a third-party scholar, I will attempt to relate my personal experience in Cyprus rather than present primarily academic theory and research. The latter has been done by several respected scholars, and I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to personalize the case for conflict resolution activities by drawing from my own experiences in Cyprus.

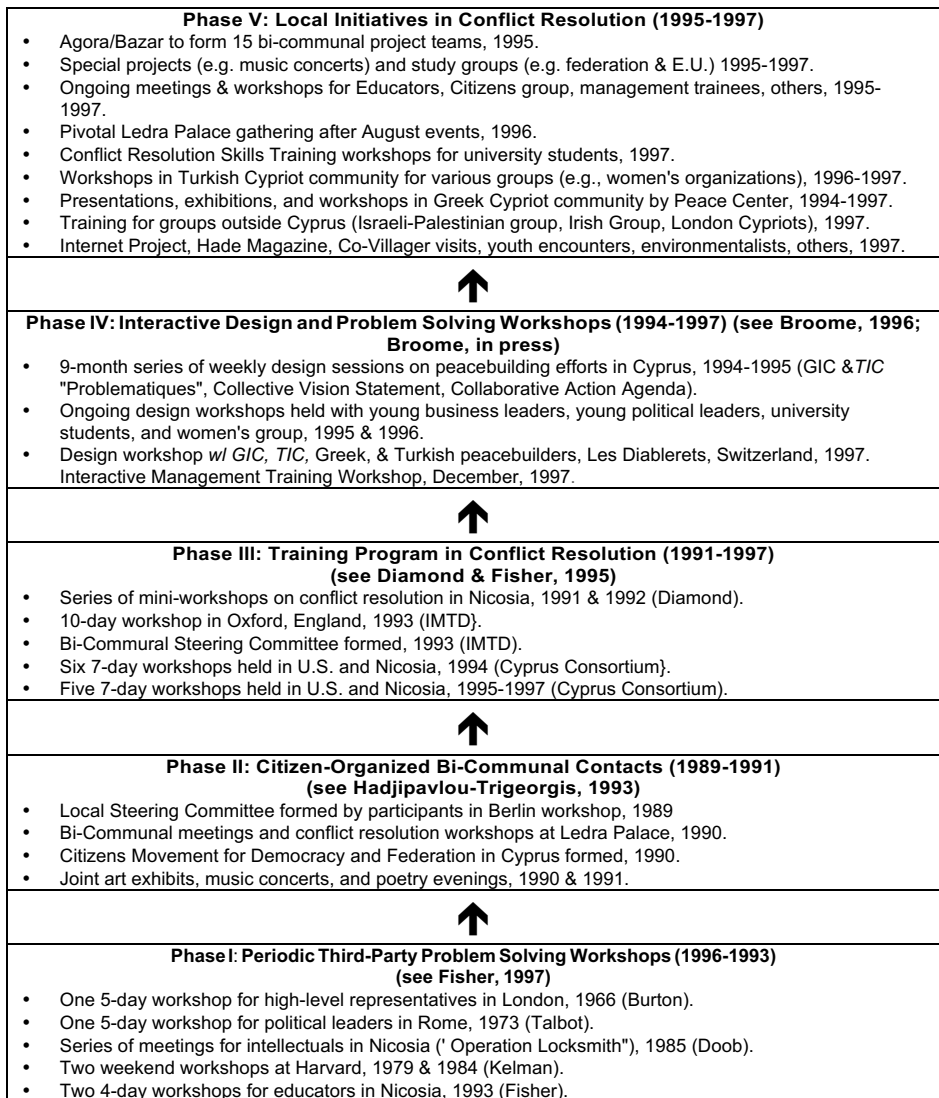
Before continuing, I must point out that there are other bi-communal programs that have goals in common with those that I will describe here, although they were not initiated under the rubric of "conflict resolution". Rather, they were focused on specific concerns that needed to be addressed in a bi-communal setting. UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has been the primary leader in promoting these types of activities, creating bi-communal task forces to deal with sewage systems, architectural restoration, medical services and the like (see Lasaan, 1997). Other diplomatic entities, such as the Goethe Institute and the French Cultural Center, have sponsored bi-communal programs in the arts, and the European Union has organized two very successful forums with the trade unions. For a number of years, the Slovak embassy has hosted meetings between the leaders of the political parties in the two communities, and the British have sponsored at least one ongoing bi-communal group. The conclusions I present might apply to the experiences of these groups as well, but my focus will be on activities that are directly connected to the academic study and practice of conflict resolution.

### **Overview of Conflict Resolution Activities in Cyprus**

Conflict resolution activities have progressed through five identifiable phases (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Overview of Conflict Resolution Activities in Cyprus**

The arrow should be interpreted as "Made Possible" or "Laid the Groundwork For" the subsequent phases.



Although there is some overlap between the various phases, the events of each phase served as the impetus for the phase that followed. As Figure 1 suggests, much of the conflict resolution activity in Cyprus has involved the assistance of outside third parties. At the same time, it was a local initiative that was responsible for bringing in most of these experts from abroad, and the current situation is characterized by a preponderance of locally-directed activity. From a relatively humble beginning, some form of conflict resolution work in Cyprus now takes place several times weekly, and hundreds of people are waiting for the opportunity to become involved .

The first phase of conflict resolution activities dealing with the Cyprus conflict started in 1966, when John Burton and his colleagues in London offered a five-day workshop in "controlled communication" (see Burton, 1969) that brought together high-level representatives from the two communities (Mitchell, 1981). Some years later, in 1973, an informal seminar involving political leaders of the two communities was held in Rome (Talbot, 1977). Attempting to build on the success of this event, Lawrence Doob made plans to offer a workshop in Cyprus in July 1974, but the events of that period precluded such an activity (see Doob, 1987). A locally organized workshop involving intellectuals, called "Operation Locksmith", was held with Doob's participation in 1985. In 1979 and again in 1984 problem-solving workshops were conducted for community leaders by Herbert Kelman and his colleagues at Harvard University (see Stoddard, 1986). Ron Fisher held a series of 4 workshops over a five-year period, with the two primary workshops focusing on the educational system in the two communities (see Fisher 1992 & 1997).

The second phase began with a local initiative of intercommunal contacts that started in September 1989 (see Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1993). Following their participation in a workshop in Berlin, a group of individuals from both communities formed a steering committee and engaged the assistance of the United Nations in arranging bi-communal meetings. Sixty-five individuals participated in the first workshop, which was given positive press coverage, and numerous follow-up meetings were held, both in a bi-communal setting and in separate community groups. In mid-1990, the contacts were institutionalized into a joint social action movement under the name "The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Federation in Cyprus". This group sponsored several public presentations and discussions, and it organized a number of talks by foreign diplomats stationed in Cyprus. Other meetings were organized to jointly study and analyze the concept of federation, and there were joint art exhibits, music concerts, and poetry evenings. The groups encountered difficulties in holding many of their planned events, primarily because political concerns often prevented the granting of permission to Turkish Cypriots to attend bi-communal meetings. Nevertheless, a large number of people were exposed to conflict resolution concepts and principles through this citizens' initiative. It was during this phase that the Peace Center was

formed in the Greek Cypriot community.<sup>1</sup>

The third phase began in July 1991, when Louise Diamond, a conflict resolution specialist from the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) in the United States, visited Cyprus at the invitation of members of the newly formed Peace Center in the Greek Cypriot community. During this visit and on a subsequent trip in November 1991 she met with members of both communities, as well as the international diplomatic community, to explore the need for training in conflict resolution and how funding could be secured for such efforts. Some of the people with whom she worked had taken part in the earlier workshops conducted by Ron Fisher. In April 1992 Diamond offered several public presentations and mini-workshops on conflict resolution, and in October 1992 she conducted a full-day workshop in each community. A joint steering committee<sup>2</sup> was formed for purposes of promoting conflict resolution efforts in Cyprus, and plans were drawn up for offering more extensive training. Their plans were eventually realized in July 1993, when a group of 10 Greek Cypriots and 10 Turkish Cypriots went to Oxford, England for a 10-day workshop facilitated by Louise Diamond and her associates (see Diamond & Fisher, 1995).

The Oxford workshop proved to be pivotal in forming a strong and committed group of citizen peace builders that spanned the political spectrum in both communities and included people from various levels of society. Although its participants (particularly the Greek Cypriots) were subjected to wide-spread criticism and harsh personal attacks in the media, the event led to a sustained effort in conflict resolution activities that has continued to the present day. Partly as a result of the success of this program, a number of conflict resolution workshops were held in the summer of 1994 organized by the Cyprus Fulbright Commission (CFC) and conducted by the Cyprus Consortium, a group that consists of IMTD, the Conflict Management Group (CMG) of Harvard University, and National Training Laboratory (NTL) based in Virginia. The team leaders for this effort were Louise Diamond and her colleague Diana Chigas (from CMG). Funded by U.S. Agency for International Development and administered by CFC, several week-long workshops were offered, including two that covered basic conflict resolution principles and skills and one that offered training for those interested in conducting local conflict resolution workshops. Additional workshops were held in the United States for policy leaders and for returning scholarship students. During the period 1995-1997, more workshops conducted by the Cyprus Consortium were held both in Cyprus and in the United States, including an advanced training of trainers workshop. Currently, the Cyprus Consortium is putting together a bi-communal team that will conduct an intractability study to examine why the conflict has been so difficult to resolve and to find ways to move forward in a productive manner.

The fourth phase had its beginnings in 1994, with the establishment of the resident Fulbright Scholar position in conflict resolution. This position was requested by

those who had participated in various conflict resolution efforts in previous years. It was a bi-communal effort, initiated by those who had been involved in the Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Federation, and brought to fruition by the efforts of Daniel Hadjittofi, Executive Director of the Cyprus Fulbright Commission. Both the local initiators and the Fulbright Commission saw the need for an outside third-party expert in conflict resolution who could be in full-time residence over an extended period in order to offer on-going training and to help facilitate bi-communal contacts. Initially, this position was offered as a "serial" fellowship intended to be repeated for a three-year period, contingent upon its success. It was extended for a fourth term beginning in 1997, and a fifth term has already been approved for 1998. Most of these terms cover a nine-month period.<sup>3</sup>

Before taking up the Fulbright position in September of 1994, I participated as a member of the Cyprus Consortium's training team for the summer 1994 workshops. From these workshops there emerged a core group of individuals who expressed a commitment to offer conflict resolution workshops and develop projects that promote greater awareness within each community and greater understanding between communities. They included participants from most of the earlier workshops, including the London educationalist group, the local "Citizens' Movement", and the Oxford workshop, as well as newer members who joined the process for the first time during the summer 1994 workshops. They called themselves the "Conflict Resolution Trainers", and they are often referred to simply as the "Trainers".

During the nine months from October of 1994 through June of 1995, a series of planning and design workshops were conducted for this group of thirty-two individuals, which consisted of approximately equal numbers of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. A problem solving and design process referred to as Interactive Management (IM) was used (see Broome & Chen, 1992; Broome & Keever, 1989). IM has been successfully applied in many parts of the world to help groups deal with complex problem situations (see Broome & Cromer, 1991; Broome & Christakis, 1988; Warfield, 1995). The design sessions focused on developing a strategy for peace-building efforts in Cyprus. During these sessions, the group progressed through three stages of planning and design: (1) analysis of the current situation, (2) goal setting for the future, and (3) development of a collaborative action agenda (see Broome, in press). The group met in the evenings on a weekly basis, and occasionally on weekends. In the beginning months of the work I met with the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot groups separately, because the political situation did not permit bi-communal meetings. These became possible in February of 1995, after which we met together in the buffer zone.

Several important results emerged from this series of design workshops. First, each community group produced a systems analysis of the obstacles to peace-building efforts in Cyprus. By exploring the relationships among various factors that

inhibit efforts to build peace, the group was able to present a holistic picture of the situation confronting those who work for peace in each community. Their analyses were the source of much learning when the two community groups exchanged their products at their first bi-communal meeting, and they have been instructive to those outside the group interested in a deeper analysis of the situation. Second, the bi-communal group created a "collective vision statement" for the future of peace-building activities in Cyprus. They proposed goals for their efforts and explored the manner in which various goals support each other, resulting in a structure of goals that could guide their choices and their actions. They struggled together to understand and appreciate ideas that at first seemed incompatible with their own community's goals, and in the end they developed an inclusive product that addressed the needs and concerns of the collective whole. Third, the group developed a plan of activities that would guide their work over the following 2-3 years. They proposed a total of 242 separate possibilities for workshops, presentations, training programs, and other events that could make a difference in Cyprus. From this large set, they selected 15 projects for immediate implementation, and they held a bi-communal "agora/bazaar", or "activities fair", at which they "recruited" interested participants to join them in carrying out the 15 projects.<sup>4</sup>

The work of this core group of conflict resolution trainers over nine months, capped by the agora/bazaar in 1995, marked the start of the fifth phase, which proved to be a major turning point for conflict resolution work in Cyprus. For the first time, there was a significant expansion of types of activities and numbers of participants involved in conflict resolution activities, and most of the training was provided by Cypriots rather than by outside parties. Guided by their vision statement and the set of 15 projects, the core group of conflict resolution trainers formed new groups with young business leaders, young political leaders, educationalists, students, women, and various assemblies of citizens. Other groups formed to study or examine special topics, such as European Union issues, the concept of federation, or identity concerns. Special events were held, such as concerts, poetry evenings, and other cultural activities. At the end of 1996, over 300 people were involved in ongoing groups, and hundreds more had been exposed to conflict resolution principles and concepts through various weekend workshops. During 1997 there was a significant expansion of bi-communal activities, and at the time of this writing more than 1500 people are actively involved in various groups and projects, many of them started by their initial participation in a conflict resolution workshop.

Although most of the current activities are locally initiated, the Fulbright Commission has continued to support them, particularly through the continuation of the Resident Scholar position. The Fulbright Scholars have continued to work with many of the previously-formed groups, and they have provided training in facilitation to many of the newly-formed groups as they dealt with relational and organizational problems. In addition, they have served as a resource and mentor to those

most active in the conflict resolution work. The presence of a third-party scholar at a critical time in the expansion of the conflict resolution activities was invaluable as the activities gained momentum. With much of the introductory conflict resolution training now being offered by local facilitators, the third-party scholars are able to concentrate on either advanced or specialized training, often leading workshops that are held outside Cyprus.

### **Contribution of Conflict Resolution Activities to the Peace Process**

While it may be premature to state that a bona fide citizens' movement for peace has come into full swing, there is no doubt that the conflict resolution activities over the past several years have provided the impetus for inter-communal cooperation on a scale that has probably never existed in Cyprus, certainly not in the past 33 years. It is very difficult to know how much influence the conflict resolution training has had on the political process of negotiating an agreement, but in a small society such as Cyprus it is inevitable that ideas and views have made their way into the thinking of officials. Although many people are critical of conflict resolution activities, they have set the stage for bi-communal business ventures and the establishment of bi-communal institutions that will be critical for developing strong connections between the two communities after a settlement is reached.

In essence, the bi-communal activities show that a federation can work in Cyprus, and they provide an arena in which participants gain "practice" in implementing the federal model. Such a model requires a very different attitude and approach on the part of both communities than currently exists. The distortion of the past, the negative images of the other community, the placement of blame on the other, the lack of trust between the two sides, and the unwillingness to make concessions all hamper efforts to find a solution to the Cyprus problem, and they make it unlikely that any political agreement, particularly one involving federation, can be successfully implemented. The conflict resolution activities can help overcome these obstacles, and they can help develop more productive attitudes and approaches. Specifically, they can lead to:

#### *1. A more balanced view of the past*

It would be misleading to suggest that anyone can be completely objective about the past, but the deliberate distortion of history to serve primarily political purposes creates unnecessary division and presents a serious obstacle to reconciliation. Generally, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are very selective in their memory of past events, and their description of these events is far from objective. The past has been distorted beyond recognition by the educational systems and political propaganda of both sides. Such one-sided interpretations of historical events push the two communities further apart and allow little room for healing



processes. In the conflict resolution workshops, participants are able to hear the other side of the story, to listen to a different interpretation of the past. They have the opportunity to help each other understand the distortions and to correct the misperceptions. Members of both communities learn that the view of events they have come to accept as the "truth" is biased and one-sided. By listening to another viewpoint, participants begin to understand their own history better, and they develop a desire for correcting their own community's interpretation and presentation of the "facts".

*2. Less negative images of the other community*

It is difficult to share a small geographical area with someone you do not like, respect, or otherwise consider as your equal, and it is especially difficult if the other is considered your enemy. Both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots tend to paint a negative image of each other. The general Turkish-Cypriot description of Greek Cypriots is especially harsh, often portraying the Greek Cypriots as suppressors and murderers. Although there is acknowledgment of the "good Greek Cypriots", the all-too-common image is one of extremists intent on exterminating the Turkish Cypriots. At first glance it might seem that the Greek Cypriots are less negative in their portrayals of the Turkish Cypriots, especially given the often-heard references to the kindness of Turkish-Cypriot neighbors and their affection for certain individuals. However, it becomes clear upon closer examination that the Turkish Cypriots are not viewed with respect or equality. Such images of the other do not make it easy to enter into productive negotiations about issues that divide communities. From their participation in conflict resolution workshops, individuals are able to encounter members of the other community as fellow human beings rather than as objects of hatred or contempt. Turkish Cypriots learn that their neighbors on the other side of the buffer zone are usually well-intentioned, even though they make mistakes. Greek Cypriots come to accept Turkish Cypriots as equals - intellectually, socially, and culturally. Both do away with the extreme images that have been promoted in their media and educational system, adopting a more realistic picture of the other community. They realize that a wide variety of views and intentions exist in both communities, and the stereotypes and prejudices that have dominated their thinking about the other is both counterproductive and dangerous.

*3. Acceptance of mutual responsibility for the current situation*

It is rare that full responsibility for a problem can be attributed solely to one party. In Cyprus the case can be made easily that both parties share the blame equally (along with Turkey, Greece, the U.K. and the United States). Yet in each community, the tendency is to place almost full blame for the situation on the other. This kind of blaming places each of the parties in a defensive position, causing each to focus on attacking the other rather than acknowledging its own responsibility for creating and maintaining the situation. Such blaming actions quickly spiral into a mutually

destructive exchange of accusations, making it impossible for the two sides to consider concessions to the other. While the conflict resolution workshops cannot erase the feeling that the other is to blame for the troubles that divide the island, they go a long way toward helping individuals accept the notion of co-responsibility. Only when conflict is viewed as mutually created can parties work together in resolving it. By analyzing the situation in Cyprus in an atmosphere where all views can be heard and respected, the participants are able to understand the complexity of the conflict, and they learn that simplistic "finger-pointing" is of no value in promoting realistic solutions to the conflict.

*4. Increased trust of the other*

No relationship can last long without the existence of mutual trust. Lack of confidence in the intentions of the other leads to continuous questioning of each other's motives. It is clear that both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are suspicious of the motives of the other community. Even more serious, each side doubts the sincerity of the other about wanting an agreement. Each believes that the other is gaining positive benefits from the current situation and stands only to lose if the conflict ends. Such mistrust leads to continuous posturing by both sides, resulting in a game of exaggerated demands and resistance to backing off first for fear that one will take advantage of the other. Through the interpersonal contacts that occur in the conflict resolution workshops, participants build trusting relationships with members of the other community. A climate of openness and security often develops, in which true sharing can take place. Of course, increased trust in a few individuals does not eliminate the overall distrust of the other's authorities and their intentions vis-a-vis one's own community, but it helps to differentiate the individual human beings that make up the other community from the official stances stated by authorities for public consumption. In the long run, this more sophisticated understanding of the other community and the development of trust in individuals from that community will make it easier to support ideas that move the process forward, rather than retreating behind the wall of unrealistic demands.

*5. Willingness to promote positive steps toward reconciliation*

No deadlock can be broken until one side or the other makes the first conciliatory gesture. If each side maintains a hard-line stance, it offers no way for the other to take positive steps that might relax the situation and lead to a positive climate for negotiation. In this case, it is not so much what one or the other says or does as what they fail to say or do. Although both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots sometimes use a rhetoric of cooperation, neither offers suggestions that might help defuse the tension. Each is afraid of taking the first step toward building confidence. In order for fruitful discussions to take place between the two sides, each needs to offer an opening toward peace, a window in which a future could be built together. Once participants have lost some of their fear of the other, it becomes much easier

for them to promote actions that send positive messages to the other community. Members of the conflict resolution groups are able to see the effects of their own hard-line policies on the other community and how these play into the hands of the extremists. They learn first-hand how damaging certain policies and actions can be for accomplishing the very goals they are intended to advance. These individuals can serve as a moderate voice in their own community, realizing that strength comes from a willingness to reach out toward the other as much as it does from attempts to push the other away.

The attitudes and approaches described above are not always accepted as legitimate goals by those who favor a maintenance of the status quo. In fact, it is precisely because they help bring about such changes that conflict resolution activities are often criticized. For some, the "truth" about the past is not to be questioned; the enemy cannot be regarded as one's friend or equal; accepting responsibility is an admission of guilt; trusting the other is dangerous; and compromise of one's position is a sign of weakness. Viewed in this light, conflict resolution activities are nothing less than attempts to undermine the position of those in power, to destroy the hard work that has been done to build up one's case against the other community, to poison the minds of people so that they cannot see the true dangers. While these fears must be acknowledged, they can only be judged as unformed and short-sighted. In the long run, no viable solution to the Cyprus problem can be found if the current attitudes and approaches continue to rule the day. Changes must occur so that reconciliation and cooperation replace acrimony and discord. To the extent that conflict resolution training can promote these changes, it must be seen as playing a crucial role in the peace process.

### **Major Findings from the Conflict Resolution Activities in Cyprus**

Based on my own experience and on what I have learned from the other conflict resolution activities in Cyprus, several observations and findings emerge. Although I will not provide a direct comparison with situations elsewhere, my own findings are consistent with what we have learned from application of conflict resolution activities in other parts of the world.

1. *There is a great desire within each community to know the people of the other community.*

When examined from a purely objective point of view, there should be little enthusiasm within either community to communicate and develop relationships across the "green line". The negative portrayals of each other in the press, and the educational system, and from political propaganda, combined with the difficulties surrounding any form of communication or contact, do little to promote interest in bicomunal meetings. Fortunately, we have found that the waif of separation, even

though it has existed for more than a generation, has not destroyed the desire of people to know their neighbors. People are eager to come together, and it is not only because of curiosity about "life on the other side". Many people have expressed to me that they feel a part of themselves missing because they are separated from one another. There is a spirit of kinship that exists between the two communities, and most people are eager for the "family feud" to end so they can develop more normal relations with their "cousins".

Less than three years ago, there were only a handful of people involved in regular bi-communal contacts. As the conflict resolution work developed, it became clear that there exists a large unspoken desire to join these activities. This is evidenced by the hundreds of individuals who have participated in conflict resolution workshops and the thousands of others who have attended various bi-communal events, such as concerts or receptions organized by the United Nations. The number of people currently involved in various bi-communal groups has continued to grow despite the fact that for large periods of time bi-communal contacts were not permitted by the Turkish Cypriot authorities. Today the most pressing problem is the need for more people with training in conflict resolution who can work as facilitators with new groups that are ready to be formed. This increase in contacts has not eliminated the mistrust and anger toward the other community, but there clearly exists a willingness to meet together to work on overcoming these difficulties.

*2. Productive dialogue between the two communities can take place under the appropriate conditions.*

When speaking about bi-communal activities with my Greek Cypriot friends who are not involved in the conflict resolution activities, one of the most common statements that I have heard goes something like this: "If the Turkish troops left Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots would have no trouble getting along with one another." Although this statement greatly masks the complexity of the situation, our own experience in bi-communal activities has shown that members of the two communities can speak easily with one another and can readily form friendly relations in social situations. Rarely do major disputes arise during either social gatherings or in workshop settings. However, there is equal truth in the contentions of some Turkish Cypriot academics that the real problem between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots lies not at the individual level, where friendly relations are not difficult, but at the community level, where the Turkish Cypriots have been badly mistreated by the Greek Cypriots.

My own conclusion is somewhat different from either of these positions. On the one hand, I have learned that polite conversation and friendly relations are not the same as mutual understanding, respect, and ability to work together. I have come to believe that the initial friendliness of most bi-communal gatherings exists at only a surface level and is made possible by the natural politeness of Cypriots and the

resistance, especially by Turkish Cypriots, to confrontation in social gatherings. At the same time, I have learned that productive dialogue is possible, both at the individual and the community level, when the appropriate conditions exist. In order for productive dialogue to take place, it is important to provide a "safe space" in which people can share their views in an open yet structured manner without fear of attack and free from worry about politicization of every issue. Mechanisms must be provided that allow systematic movement from initial statements of concern towards deeper exploration of difficult issues. Much work needs to be done to help build trust and to create a sense of interpersonal "safety".

I have seen time and again the relational damage that can be done when people are simply placed in the same room and expected to find ways to overcome decades of misinformation and lack of trust. They often have no choice but to utilize the rhetoric of their own side's propaganda, without realizing the effects it has on the other person and on relations between the communities. Of course, progress is seldom possible without difficulties, and even with the most carefully designed plan of activities, there are many delicate moments when the whole process is on the verge of falling apart. However, the more the groups have worked together to build trusting relationships, the more difficult it is for a single incident to unravel the group. In a situation such as that in Cyprus, where there has been such a long period of separation, these trusting relationships are not likely to happen without some assistance. Members of both communities must work extremely hard to deal with the burden of past traumas. Conflict resolution activities offer one way for this to happen.

*3. Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots share a great deal in common, but it is critical to address the differences that exist both within and between the two communities.*

In their attempts to stress the need for communal separation, Turkish Cypriot rhetoric tends to overemphasize the differences between the communities, while in their attempt to stress the need for a unified island, Greek Cypriot rhetoric tends to overestimate the similarities. This is a case in which the views of both sides are essentially correct on one level and dangerously wrong on another level. By giving primary emphasis to the commonalities between the two communities, the Greek Cypriots are failing to take into account fundamental areas of disagreement that prevent the two sides from coming together. By focusing on the differences, the Turkish Cypriots are helping to create a situation where people may not be able to live together again when a solution becomes a reality. I have seen almost every group with which I have worked in Cyprus go through a stage in which the Greek Cypriots are shocked by the disparity between their views and those of their colleagues in the other community, and I have seen Turkish Cypriots constantly struggle with (and sometimes resist) the realization that there is much more commonality between the two sides than they expected. By designing appropriate activities

and taking the group through an appropriately structured process, groups can develop a more balanced picture that is closer to the reality of Cyprus, putting them in a much better position than the general population for working together in a true partnership.

It is also important to recognize that neither community speaks with a single voice. Most of the groups that have formed are composed of individuals from various political persuasions, with quite different views about what must be done to improve the situation in Cyprus. It is very misleading to state that this is the "Greek Cypriot position" or the "Turkish Cypriot position". Indeed, we have found that there is sometimes more similarity across community lines than there is within each community. It is often the case that Greek Cypriots will form closer ties with other Turkish Cypriots than they will with many of their compatriots. Of course, there is an "official" position on each side, and in the beginning stages of group work it is these views that often dominate. However, as the group develops a more open climate of sharing, individual differences are brought out into the open and form the basis for discussion. From the more than 200 bi-communal meetings and workshops in which I have participated, I have rarely seen discussion about issues which fall along strictly community lines. This richness of intra-communal differences may make it more difficult for the extremists on either side to promote separation of the two communities, and it is a factor that promises greater possibility for inter-communal cooperation in the future.

*4. Both communities must find a way to help each other overcome the pain and suffering associated with the past.*

The psychological burden carried by people in both communities is one of the major barriers to reconciliation. The Turkish Cypriots do not easily forget their past treatment as second-class citizens, particularly during the period 1963-1974, when they were confined to small enclaves and feared for their safety anytime they traveled outside these protected areas. Many have lost relatives, including immediate family members, friends, and neighbors, who "disappeared" or who were victims of raids on villages. No one in the Turkish Cypriot community wants to live through such a time again. Many of the Turkish Cypriots who lived prior to 1974 in the south of Cyprus did not want to leave their homes, but they felt they had no choice. Since 1974, Turkish Cypriots have faced other difficulties, resulting from non-recognition and an economic embargo, that they continue to blame on the Greek Cypriots. They live constantly in a state of uncertainty about what will happen in the future and whether or not they will be forced once again to move and start over. The pain that has resulted from these bad memories and anxieties about the future weighs heavily in their willingness to cooperate with Greek Cypriots.

Similarly, Greek Cypriots suffered a traumatic shock in 1974, being pushed out of their homes and away from their land and businesses, witnessing the killings, rapes, and destruction that accompanied the advance of the Turkish army. The

agony from having family members and relatives still unaccounted for, and the deep desire to return to their homes and communities, haunt the entire Greek Cypriot community. The sense of injustice and the feelings of helplessness follow them on a daily basis and bring anger, resentment, and feelings of revenge. It is often expressed as ultra-nationalist rhetoric that simply deepens the pain. For many, the simple act of meeting with Turkish Cypriots is seen as a betrayal to those who have suffered. For some, bi-communal meetings signify "giving in" to injustice and wrong-doing.

This pain, suffered by both communities and attributed to each by the other, cannot be overcome by simply blaming it on the other community, "punishing" the other community, or calling for a return to previous conditions. Neither can the wrongs of the past be righted by simply changing or legitimizing the current situation. The emotional trauma must be addressed by giving individuals the opportunity to meet with members of the other community and discuss their feelings together. These discussions cannot undo the past wrongs, but they can help lift the burden that prevents creativity and forward movement. Even those who remember the past situation more favorably (mostly Greek Cypriots) are weighted down by feelings of inconsistency. They wonder how it was possible to destroy the previous harmony, and even though they blame external forces, there is a nagging guilt associated with the possibility that they contributed to this situation by their own well-intentioned but thoughtless actions. As long as each community is mired in the past, it will be impossible to make progress.

In order to move toward a shared future, individuals in both communities must be willing to share their own pain in a constructive manner, and they must be willing to listen to the feelings of the other. There must be acknowledgment of responsibility for what happened in the past, and the public discourse in both communities must change so that the needs and concerns of both communities are taken into account. Provocative actions that heighten tensions only reinforce the pain for both sides, and all attempts to bring harm on the other only speed up the spiral of self-inflicted suffering. Conflict resolution activities offer one means, although certainly not the only way, to help individuals deal with their own psychological injuries and minimize the suffering that each side continues to bring to the other.

*5. One of the most important roles of the diplomatic community is support of bi-communal activities*

Over the years, the Cyprus conflict has attracted a great deal of international attention from the diplomatic community. Scores of initiatives have been designed to broker an agreement, and hundreds of diplomats have visited Cyprus to hold talks with the leaders of the two communities. Despite this, the only notable successes, besides the prevention of further large-scale bloodshed, are the high-level agreements of 1977 and 1979, which provide a framework for a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. However, after nearly 35 years of intercommunal talks, the two

communities still seem far apart on issues regarding sovereignty, equality, freedom of movement and settlement, security arrangements and other basic concerns.

Faced with the lack of progress on the official level, diplomatic missions are giving increased emphasis to citizen peace building efforts. Reflecting on the lessons that have been learned in other parts of the world, most recently in Bosnia, work at the citizen level is being recognized as an integral part of diplomatic efforts toward bringing the two sides in Cyprus closer together, and diplomats are more aware of the way in which conflict resolution activities can make their own job easier.

This increased awareness of the important role of bi-communal contacts has led to greater coordination among the diplomatic missions to support them. The ambassadors from many of the major embassies have met together on several occasions to discuss ways to make bi-communal contacts easier to arrange. They have published statements that voiced their united support for bi-communal exchanges, criticizing those who put obstacles in the way of such events and calling for greater freedom for people to meet. Their support has made possible many activities that could not have taken place otherwise. One example of the impact of such efforts by the diplomatic community is the successful holding of a critical bi-communal gathering on 30 September, 1996, just one month after the tragic events in the buffer zone during August. Although many insisted that it was the worst possible time to hold such an event, the core members of the bi-communal groups felt the need to reaffirm the work in which they had been engaged. Nevertheless, there seemed little possibility that the authorities would give permission for the Turkish Cypriots to cross the checkpoint and come to the Ledra Palace. In the end, the gathering was made possible partly because the invitation was issued in the name of various embassies, providing a sense of legitimacy and security that encouraged participation and eased fears of sabotage. Additionally, the way was opened in January 1997 for bi-communal activities to take place on a frequency that is unprecedented. This also came as a direct result of the efforts by the diplomatic community to voice their strong support for bi-communal events. Since this "opening" of the permissions process, a plethora of groups have begun meeting at the Ledra Palace, and dozens of exchange visits have taken place in which Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have traveled together across the "green line" to visit places on the two sides.

### **Conclusion**

In conflict situations, one of the most serious obstacles to peace is often the different definitions of "peace" held by various parties. Cyprus is no exception, and the different views of peace held by the two communities are well known. The Turkish Cypriot official view is that peace already exists in Cyprus, and all it would take to maintain peace is legitimization by the international community of the status quo. The Greek Cypriot view is that peace cannot exist until the violations of human



rights that have taken place since 1974 are corrected. Taken alone, these very different views of peace are a tremendous challenge to those at the negotiating table. Even more critical, however, is whether one views peace simply as a signed agreement between the two communities or as a sustainable state of affairs in which the two communities develop mutual trust, respect, and willingness to work together toward a shared future. Until now, the two sides have resisted the former and avoided the latter.

It has not been the aim of conflict resolution activities in Cyprus to produce a signed agreement. Such efforts are the responsibility of the officials who have been appointed by their respective governments or authorities to carry out this task. However, activities such as those described in this paper should make it easier for a viable agreement to be reached, and they can significantly increase the likelihood that any signed agreement will be successfully implemented. Despite the many criticisms and accusations, the personal attacks against participants, and the tendency to downplay the importance of conflict resolution activities, more and more people are drawn to participate in workshops, seminars, and training programs that promote communication, problem solving, and skill development. It may not be possible to involve everyone in Cyprus in such activities, but their effects have already been felt across the island. If they can continue to take place, and if they can continue to be conducted by competent facilitators and trainers, they will play a key role in bringing a sustainable peace to a conflict-weary island.

### NOTES

1. Although this center operates primarily in the Greek Cypriot community, its stated purpose is bi-communal in nature, with the intention of involving both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the operation and activities of the center. Due to current political constraints, it is unable to operate as a true bi-communal organization, but it offers a number of conflict resolution workshops in the Greek Cypriot community and it organizes a number of presentations that focus on bi-communal organization.
2. This group later became known as the "Bi-communal Steering Committee". It served in the capacity of advisor for development of further conflict resolution activities, and it eventually obtained a permanent room in the Ledra Palace for its office and meetings. It has been recognized in at least one U.N. report for the valuable role it plays in promoting better relations between the two communities.
3. I came as the initial Fulbright Scholar in Conflict Resolution and repeated the next 2 terms, staying in Cyprus approximately two and one-half years, until January, 1997. Philip Snyder took up the position of Fulbright Scholar in conflict resolution during 1997, and John Ungerleider and Marco Turk came in fall 1997

and are continuing through the summer of 1998.

4. A full report of these workshop activities is available, containing a copy of all the group products. Write to the Cyprus Fulbright Commission at P.O. Box 4536, CY-1385 Nicosia, Cyprus, Tel: 357-2-449757 or Fax: 357-2-369151.

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