

# Engaging Businesses to Tackle Conflict:

## Perspectives from a Peacebuilding NGO

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- Framing peacebuilding, and links to human rights
- Understanding options for a peacebuilding role for business
- What we've learned from attempts at constructive engagement, and limitations

# Human rights and conflict

International Alert.

Framing the links from a peacebuilding perspective...

- Human rights abuses are both **symptoms**, and **deeper causes**, of violent conflict
- Violent conflict **generates an atmosphere of impunity** and **perpetuates** the most egregious human rights violations
- Systematic human rights violations further **undermine trust** among conflict parties and make peace processes and negotiations more difficult

Therefore...

- Addressing human rights, and conflict, are **mutually dependent** and **complementary**
- **Synergies** needed between **prescriptive approaches** to protect individual rights and **facilitative approaches** to transform violent conflict into a peaceful change process

# Conceptualising – peacebuilding

- Aims to prevent the **outbreak**, the **recurrence** or the **continuation** of armed conflict
- Seeks to **transform** those **attitudes**, **behaviour**, **relationships** and **structural conditions** that facilitate violence

# Understanding options for a business role

Business potential to address conflict differs depending on:

- Sector: different footprints and links (e.g. extractives, construction and engineering, finance)
- Location/size
- Multinational/domestic
- Its role in the political economy of a conflict

# Framing constructive engagement



# Examples of engagement

Work needed both on improving policy and practice...e.g.

- Awareness raising and recommendations: **case studies, lessons, toolkits**
- Long-term engagement with MNCs on '**conflict-sensitising**' operations: improved conflict analysis and stakeholder engagement
- Different types of **training**: CSR in Sri Lanka; Conflict-sensitivity at headquarters for Northern MNCs
- Long-term engagement with domestic businesses to **promote a peacebuilding role**: e.g. dialogue forums, tackling security issues; involvement in peace processes; tackling social divisions and relationship-building

- Business awareness of cost of conflict, and profit opportunities from peace
- Conflict analysis, self-reflection and willingness to change own practice
- Advocacy ‘sticks’ needed for engagement ‘carrots’ to work
- Identify value-added and entry-points for business
- Need to ‘speak right language’/ find a ‘shared language’
- Individual leadership and collective action
- Working in partnership with other sectors

# Challenges of constructive engagement

- Engaging economic peace spoilers constructively??
- Need clear win-win opportunities
- Peacebuilding is a long-term process, no 'quick fixes': risk of business fatigue and frustration with 'process focus'
- 'issue overload'? HR, environment, conflict...
- On the whole, we have had individual successes and have put 'the issue on the agenda'; but as yet no broad, cumulative impact on the ground