



The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in 2015

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 ...rights and humani-
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 ...ers, beliefs and professions. Since the...
 ...and mediate between parties in conflict, fac-...
 ...an organisation that mediates and facilitates peace talks, assists mediation act-
 ...vision of a world more humane. It aims, through mediation and dialogue, to reduce the suffering caused by armed
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 ...ability to conduct mediation at the leadership level of parties in conflict; Political independence and impartiality so valued in third parties; Re-
 ...; Creativity and willingness to take risks for peace; and capacity to convene. The HD Centre pursues its objectives with a commitment to new
 ...The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) is an independent organisation dedicated to improving the prov-
 ... We deploy our expertise to support local and nationally-owned processes that protect civilians and foster la-
 ...ducts research on mediation issues. This position enables us to link and collaborate with multiple organisations
 ...where possible, to prevent such conflict; otherwise to help resolve it, or to mitigate its consequences. The HD C-
 ...committed to respecting international principles in relation to human rights and humanitarian affairs. As a
 ...flexible response and the effective management of discreet processes; Readiness to support other lead mediators; h-
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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Its mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation.

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Haunting images of desperate families crowding highways through the Balkans and the cold statistics of the number of people drowned attempting to reach Italy and Greece, bear terrible witness to the human costs of today's protracted conflicts. Europe is currently facing its biggest influx of refugees and migrants possibly since World War II. Nearly a million people, mostly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, have crossed European borders since the start of 2015. A majority of those arrivals are fleeing conflict and instability. As Europe weighs the political, social, financial and security costs of its migrant crisis, it may also reflect on how these costs could have been avoided.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) was at the forefront of international efforts to address the root causes of this migration crisis in 2015, working at the heart of some of the most dangerous conflicts. In Syria, Libya and Ukraine, HD used its unique access to conflict parties to complement and support international peacemaking endeavours. Its activities in those countries, however, were only part of a widening and more diverse portfolio of operations. 2015 saw HD engaging with major powers on regional security flashpoints, working with governments and civil society to avert election-related violence and inter-communal strife, and helping humanitarian agencies in some of the most insecure environments gain access to civilians trapped by conflict.

The scope of HD's work reflects a hard-headed focus on ensuring its operations deliver tangible benefits. HD has helped to conclude 30 peace and conflict management agreements or declarations since October 2011.

The acute political challenges overshadowing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia in 2015 underscored in particular the vital importance of HD's work. By patiently building relationships with conflict parties and enabling communications between them, HD is able to avert worse violence and find pathways to negotiating peace.

HD's growth in 2015 built on 16 years' experience of discreet private diplomacy, reinforced by rigorous analysis of where it can add value and deliver concrete results.

In Syria and Libya, two of the world's most complex and intractable conflicts, HD was able to engage with a wide range of armed groups on their political positions and, in the process, create channels for communicating with them for international stakeholders. The organisation also built on the success of its work in defusing inter-communal conflict in central Nigeria and engaged armed groups prone to explosive violence in dialogue in the Central African Republic. In Ukraine, HD was able to keep channels of communication alive and, in Asia, it broke new ground working with China and regional stakeholders on mechanisms for averting conflict in the South China Sea.

HD's growth in 2015 built on 16 years' experience of discreet private diplomacy, reinforced by rigorous analysis of where it can add value and deliver concrete results. Starting from a commitment to principles of independence, impartiality and humanity, HD has a track record of

connecting with key, hard-to-reach conflict actors facilitating contacts beyond the reach of officials working through formal diplomatic channels. A lean structure at its headquarters, backed by the expertise of its regional offices, has enabled it to respond quickly to the requirements of state and non-state actors by rapidly mobilizing relevant expertise to address issues of substance or process.

HD is committed to ensuring the processes it is involved in are inclusive of the broadest possible spectrum of relevant actors, including women and minorities.

Its Geneva-based Mediation Support and Policy Unit (MESU) provided ‘**surge capacity**’ support to HD’s operations in Myanmar and Ukraine, as well as deploying experts on thematic concerns such as elections, constitutional reform and ceasefires. MESU also responded to the European Union’s requests for expertise through the “European Resources for Mediation Support” (ERMES) facility.

At the same time, HD pushed ahead with a number of initiatives designed to **strengthen mediation practice**. The organisation is committed to ensuring the processes it is involved in are inclusive of the broadest possible spectrum of relevant actors, including women and minorities, where they can generate creative solutions and wider buy-in to making those processes work. It has backed up that commitment by putting together a team of four Inclusion Advisers with a range of languages and regional expertise. In 2015, these Advisers worked on 10 of HD’s projects in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia.

HD’s approach to **inclusion** underscores its broader commitment to developing best practice

in mediation and sharing lessons learned within the sector. In 2015, this was exemplified by its continuing efforts to strengthen its approach to **monitoring, evaluation and learning**. HD submitted its programmes and projects to ongoing critical peer review, incorporating fresh perspectives and insights from across its operations and from peers outside the organisation. Eleven such reviews took place over the year, helping to assure the quality of HD’s professional judgments in the field. The organisation also hosted a second roundtable on evaluation processes with eight donors and nine organisations in the mediation sector, to share its evaluation and learning models, and to help shape best practice in the sector. In addition, forty HD staff from around the world gathered in Geneva for a three day peer-to-peer workshop discussing issues which are central to HD’s operations: engagement



with armed groups, inter-communal dialogue, and inclusion.

HD proactively shares its field experience and the lessons learnt from the processes it engages in with the wider mediation community. With Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it co-hosts the annual **Oslo Forum**, which is recognised as the pre-eminent gathering of mediators engaged in tackling the issues which confront their work. The 13th of these meetings held in 2015 became the occasion for a joint public appearance of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić and Kosovar Foreign Minister Hashim Thaçi. It also brought together senior political leaders and representatives of the Afghan Government and Taliban who discussed the broad contours of a possible peace process. Other events that drew particular interest were the opening plenary with Colombian President Santos on the complexities

of the peace process in his country, a discussion on possible responses to the Islamic State phenomenon, as well as a lecture by International Criminal Court Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda on the peace-justice nexus. During the year, HD also continued its efforts to develop collaborations with academic and research bodies such as the Geneva Graduate Institute, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and the Clingendael Institute. ■



Photo: ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, talked about the nexus between justice and peace during the 2015 Oslo Forum, June 2015.
© Stine Merethe Eid



In **Syria's** five-year old conflict, HD maintained and developed contacts with the Syrian regime, with major armed opposition groups, and with the Syrian Kurds. It facilitated communication and meetings for the United Nations Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, and engaged with key international and regional actors on the Syrian crisis.

HD had several meetings with representatives of the Government of Syria to explore avenues for political reform and local agreements that would allow a de-escalation of the conflict. At the same time, the organisation built its network of contacts with a wide range of armed opposition groups, except IS and Jabhat al Nusra, which are active in the north, the centre and the south of the country. In April, HD helped to set up a 'contact group' to provide a political platform for the major armed opposition factions. The group met seven times in 2015 and agreed on a consensus statement on the UN-led process and on the basis for a political transition. HD also made a series of trips to the Kurdish-controlled north-eastern area of Syria, meeting representatives of Kurdish and Arab groups and facilitating the drafting of the main points of a proposal for co-operation agreements between them.

Throughout its mission, HD liaised closely with the international stakeholders. It conducted bilateral meetings with a number of states including the US,

UK, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt as well as the EU, to brief them on developments in the contact group and local mediation initiatives. On humanitarian issues, HD worked with national and international NGOs identifying more than 90 projects that needed support and providing advice on how they could be implemented.

HD similarly sought to support international mediation efforts in **Libya** by building relations with key conflict parties across the political spectrum in order to help them to formulate demands and engage more constructively in peace talks. HD focused on armed and political groups and, in particular, the powerful al-Fajr (Libya Dawn) military alliance which had had little contact with the international community and exposure to international realities, but whose participation in talks would be essential for the development of a sustainable political settlement. In 2015, HD also paid particular attention to the violent upheavals in the eastern city of Benghazi which had attracted little international action due to access issues and ongoing fighting.

HD also focused attention in 2015 on Benghazi by engaging with local stakeholders with the aim of easing humanitarian access. These efforts were instrumental in opening up the space for aid deliveries.

In addition to regular visits to Libya and maintaining a permanent presence on the ground, HD convened a dialogue between al-Fajr representatives



Photo: A Tunisian woman casts her ballot in Tunis on 21 December 2014 during the Presidential run-off election. © Reuters/Anis Mili

and western governments in Switzerland early in 2015. As a result of those contacts, progress was made in clarifying the Libya Dawn leaders' demands and moving them towards a more constructive position on the peace process. Similarly, HD built a relationship with the leadership and supporters of the al-Karama military operation. The organisation also focused attention in 2015 on Benghazi by engaging with local stakeholders with the aim of easing humanitarian access. These efforts were instrumental in opening up the space for aid deliveries and led on to the discussion of ceasefire options. This culminated in a meeting between a wide range of political, civil society and humanitarian actors from Benghazi with representatives from western governments in Geneva in December. HD was also in touch with the new UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Martin Kobler, who took up his position towards the

end of the year, preparing the way for a positive relationship.

The fallout from Libya's turmoil was felt acutely in neighbouring **Tunisia**, where security challenges posed by terrorist attacks in 2015 threatened to undo some of the progress achieved in its transition to democracy. HD followed up the success of the 2014 elections by holding consultations with political parties and key actors, underscoring the relevance of the successful Charter of Honour initiative to forthcoming municipal and local elections.

Tunisia responded to the terrorist attacks on its soil and violence in Libya by closing its border with Libya, digging a trench along it, and reinstating the state of emergency. Thanks to its contacts on both sides of the border, HD was instrumental in reducing tensions along the border on several occasions. ■



HD's operations continued to gather momentum, particularly in West Africa, while in some other parts of the continent, the organisation worked within a narrowing political and security space. After months of negotiation, the Algiers' Agreement was signed by the Government of **Mali** in May and by a rebel coalition in June. This did not halt attacks on UN peacekeepers, but it proved to be a turning point for HD's activities as national and international actors supported its initiatives to assist the implementation of the agreement. HD paid particular attention to keeping its activities connected with the agenda of key stakeholders such as MINUSMA. At the same time, the organisation also brought together a wide spectrum of civil society representatives – among them women, journalists, young people and refugees – to communicate information about the agreement. It organised 16 missions to disseminate the aims and content of the Algiers' Agreement in areas controlled by northern armed groups, and initiated intra-religious dialogue among leaders of different branches of Islam. It also provided advice and training to Mali's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, working on different occasions with the ICRC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

HD, meanwhile, continued to build up networks among nomadic and pastoralist communities across **the Sahel**. This was done to provide a platform for stabilizing an area of extreme poverty and competition for natural resources that has become a breeding ground for extremist groups and criminal enterprises. HD is building the capacity of nomadic groups, as well as the local authorities in the border areas they pass through, to prevent conflict. In 2015, HD established three networks of community leaders at a national level and six at a local level in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Among their functions, the networks collect information on transhumance and potential conflicts and quickly pass it on to decision-makers in nomadic populations. The networks dealt with more than 50 local conflicts between nomads and pastoralists in 2015 and identified many more. They also confirmed that the number of conflicts they had dealt with had decreased in comparison with previous years.

In the Central African Republic, HD worked at the centre of efforts to rebuild national institutions.

HD also travelled thousands of kilometres to some of the most remote communities in the border regions of eight countries in the Sahel for a ground-breaking study on local perceptions of insecurity, radicalization and violent extremism. The research project seeks to inform non-coercive responses to radicalization and ultimately encourage a shift in the way related challenges – such as border management, state-shaping, faith-based and community-based dialogue, or development – are addressed in those areas.

In the **Central African Republic**, HD worked at the centre of efforts to rebuild national institutions,



Photo: UN peacekeepers stand guard as the electorate queue to cast their ballots at a polling centre during the Presidential election in Bangui, Central African Republic, 30 December 2015. © Reuters/Media Coulibaly

receiving a mandate from President Catherine Samba-Panza to assist her government in developing reconciliation and reconstruction strategies. With public security in most of the country at the mercy of militias, HD held dialogues on the political process with political parties, civil society, leaders of armed groups and the diplomatic community. These aimed to prepare the ground for the Bangui Forum which was convened in May to draw up a strategy for national reconciliation and reconstruction. HD advised the transitional authorities on recommendations in the resulting Pact, which is seen as a milestone in the process of stabilizing the country. HD also translated the Pact into Sango (the national language) to promote buy-in from the population. Quickly afterwards, the constitutional referendum and the electoral process became the priority in CAR. HD supported the translation

of the Constitution into Sango, provided support to the media in the elaboration of a specific code of conduct, and offered training on election observation techniques to the main presidential candidates.

Co-ordinating multiple actors was also an important part of HD's activities in **Senegal** where the organisation is working to address Africa's oldest insurgency in the Casamance area. HD has been assisting the Government of Senegal and three of the MFDC factions to structure the negotiation process, but progress has been slowed by the dogged refusal of one faction to join the negotiations. To try to end the stand-off, HD brought all the organisations mandated to participate in the peace process together for the first time in 2015 to harmonize their approaches. It also held meetings with the authorities of neighbouring Guinea Bissau, where

some MFDC leaders are based, and made contact with the Casamance diaspora in the United States.

In Nigeria, HD developed an initiative to promote inter-communal dialogue in central Kaduna State, building on the experience it has gained, and progress which has been made, as a result of a similar initiative in neighbouring Plateau State.

As **Nigeria** sought to fend off terrorist strikes by Boko Haram and contain wider sectarian violence, HD widened its activities in the country in 2015. These included developing an initiative to promote inter-communal dialogue in central Kaduna State, building on the experience it has gained, and progress which has been made, as a result of a similar initiative in neighbouring Plateau State. The Tension Management team set up in Jos, Plateau State has proved effective in averting violent outbursts or retaliatory attacks and was active in 2015 in addressing conflicts between specific communities. After years of ethno-religious violence in Kaduna State resulting in loss of life and extensive destruction of property, HD completed the preparatory phase of a similar initiative to address inter-communal conflict by consulting state authorities, traditional elders and community leaders as well as women's groups, youth groups, and civil society. Those discussions have already helped to reduce mistrust and generated recommendations for action in 2016. Alongside its work at state level, HD worked closely with the new administration taking shape under President Muhammadu Buhari. Following up on a request from international aid agencies, HD's humanitarian mediation

team also explored the possibilities for working with communities affected by conflict with Boko Haram, and the team is planning a visit to north-eastern Nigeria in 2016.

In contrast to progress in Nigeria, conflict in **Sudan** continues and progress towards an inclusive national dialogue process has been slow. In this challenging context, HD has continued to facilitate dialogue among a range of stakeholders to promote an inclusive and credible national dialogue process for the country. HD's humanitarian mediation programme also continued to work with the women of the Darfur Nomad Network on approaches to resolving tribal conflicts.

South Sudan's peace process similarly struggled in the face of breaches of agreements and ceasefire violations by all sides, but HD continued to engage with key stakeholders to help prepare the way for movement towards peace. HD provided experts to advise the parties on contentious issues, such as options for transitional government and constitutional reform.

In **Somalia**, HD received a mandate from the National Leadership Forum which was set up in mid-2015 by the Federal Government and leaders of regional states to help develop a national vision on key issues. It also received a similar separate mandate from the National Consultative Forum, set up to help prepare for national elections due in August 2016.

Meanwhile, in **Mozambique**, HD continued to support national mediators seeking to avert the crisis in relations between Frelimo and Renamo from degenerating into full-blown conflict. HD organised training retreats to increase the national mediators' skills in developing strategies and communications. The organisation also supported wider dialogue on reconciliation throughout the country through the work of a religious leaders' forum. ■



Eurasia

Since the start of its engagement in **Ukraine** in 2014, HD has sought to minimise the risk of the conflict settling into a frozen deadlock. In 2015, the Kyiv Government and pro-Russian groups controlling the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Lugans'k People's Republic (LNR)

made some progress in implementing the 2014 Minsk accords in relation to separation of forces and prisoner exchange; but they made little headway on resolving the key political and constitutional questions. Against that background, HD's focus was on helping with the implementation of the Minsk process.

Requests for HD's consultations with key principals to the conflict showed there continues to be openness to external advice.

Requests for HD's consultations with key principals to the conflict showed there continues to be openness to external advice and HD sought to keep alive other avenues of contact for discussing issues of common concern. To support this approach, the organisation initiated a study



Photo: Ukrainian war prisoners are guarded by a serviceman of the separatist self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic army, while awaiting the next round of prisoners exchange, in the village of Alexandrovka outside Donetsk, Ukraine, 27 August 2015. © Reuters/Alexander Ermochenko

on economic losses from the conflict with a view to providing an entry point for dialogue and re-establishing economic connections.

HD's Ukraine operations in 2015 were part of a deepening engagement in **Central Asia**. This is intended to fill a void in conflict prevention activities in an increasingly volatile region exposed to fallout from the Ukraine crisis, low commodity prices, fragile regimes and the rising influence of violent extremist groups. HD has developed ties with influential individuals from five Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) to map regional security issues and policy options for addressing them. In an informal meeting in Geneva in August 2015, the group of individuals agreed to develop a cross-border mechanism to mobilize political support for regional conflict-prevention initiatives. Participants also agreed to meet in early 2016 to assess the progress of their research on the issues affecting Central Asia and the way forward.

HD also continues to monitor events in the increasingly volatile Balkan region. In 2015, it conducted an assessment and completed a report on the political crisis in Macedonia. ■



In **China**, HD worked on conflict management in the South China Sea where Beijing's measures to assert ownership and control have generated tensions with regional neighbours and the United States. HD convened three meetings involving Chinese academics and a variety of academic and maritime law enforcement officials from three other countries with claims in the area (Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines). These meetings generated agreement on the need for an interim framework for managing security in the area. Participants identified the already established Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) as the ideal protocol for implementation in the area, and agreed to hold regular meetings of experts of the four countries. Although yet to produce a final agreement on a security framework, the CUES has attracted wider regional buy-in. At the end of 2015, China backed joint CUES training and exercises with ASEAN states while Singapore and Malaysia have supported broadening the code to cover non-naval vessels.

HD, meanwhile, was able to keep up the momentum of a range of Southeast Asian peace processes in the face of political challenges that might otherwise have stalled or derailed these initiatives. Mutual suspicion and political transition in **Myanmar** overshadowed efforts

by the Government to conclude a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with ethnic armed groups in 2015. Of 21 armed groups, only eight eventually signed and the biggest armies located in the north stayed away. HD's extensive contacts with the groups and shuttling between them helped to avert their outright rejection of the agreement.

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Political transition and deep-rooted enmities also precluded movement on the long-term status of the stateless Muslim population in Myanmar's Rakhine State. By working with Rakhine State and Muslim community leaders – including women and the business community – HD helped to de-escalate tensions. In the build-up to the national elections in November, HD facilitated agreement among 14 political parties and 10 independent candidates on a code of conduct which helped ensure the election was conducted peacefully. In the wider regional context, HD convened a series of dialogues involving Myanmar and its ASEAN neighbours on the situation in Rakhine State. HD contributed ideas and helped frame a regional plan of action for dealing with the massive outflow and illegal trafficking of the Muslim population. It also created a discreet channel of communication that will be crucial for the follow-up which will be needed to bring about further action.

The 2014 peace deal in **the Philippines** between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation



Photo: Philippine President Benigno Aquino (front R) and Al-haj Murad Ebrahim (front 3rd R), Chairman of the MILF, look at weapons during a Ceremonial Turnover of Weapons and Decommissioning of MILF Combatants at the old capitol in Simuay town of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao province, southern Philippines, June 2015. © Reuters/Romeo Ranoco

Front (MILF) came under heavy political pressure after 44 police commandos were killed in a clash with Moro fighters, including those from the MILF, in January 2015. HD's support to the peace panels and the Malaysian mediator, however, helped to keep the focus on implementing the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro and avert a flare up of violence in Mindanao. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Sulu, HD's team, working with local communities on violence reduction strategies, helped to mediate 16 clan conflicts and bring seven of them to an end.

In **Indonesia**, HD worked with Christian and Muslim communities in Ambon, Maluku, where tension and mistrust keep them almost entirely segregated and vulnerable to outbreaks of violence. HD produced and distributed a paper on

the drivers of conflict and challenges to reconciling the communities while also developing a network among inter-faith organisations. HD is building the capacity of these organisations to defuse tensions and achieved some initial interaction across religious lines through dialogue sessions in 2015. ■



Institutional developments

HD's finance and administration functions take a solution-centred and flexible approach to serving HD's operational activities, and continued to secure the organisation's future with strong policy guidance and oversight in 2015. This was done while minimising the costs of these functions with an overhead ratio which declined to 22% of HD's overall expenses in 2015. This reduction has been helped by the development and strengthening of HD's financial reporting

systems. Human Resources continued to support HD's strategy to ensure diversity across its staff and robust skills and practices. They were supported in this by HD's internal learning and peer-to-peer review initiatives which bring refreshing new elements to the development of HD staff.

In recognition of HD's contribution to mediation, its host country, Switzerland, signed a headquarters agreement with the organisation in 2015, granting it a status of "other international body", through which HD was awarded special privileges and immunities. These will enhance its ability to help prevent, mitigate and resolve armed conflicts.

Income from donors continued to grow in 2015 to CHF 27 million, reflecting demand for HD's work and effective support systems which enable this growth. The search for increased core funding to ensure HD is able to sustain its development and impact continued in 2015, however the refugee crisis in Europe and other constraining factors combined to limit the availability of such funding. ■



Photo: Villa Plantamour, HD's head office in Geneva, Switzerland.

