A journey of 20 years
(Quotes and pictures)
The first retreat in Oslo was small and intimate. I remember sitting around a long, heavy wood dining table. I was working on Norway’s third party facilitation of the peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The negotiations had stopped and we were looking into possible ways forward. During a session on Sri Lanka, other mediators gave frank, concrete and practical advice. It was highly valuable to us.

— Lisa Golden, Director, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Though there must have been an agenda, I remember it as what we used to call BOGSAT, Bunch Of Guys Sitting Around a Table. The idea that ‘peacemakers’ were becoming an epistemic community with an identity and imprint of their own had not yet gelled. Recently I attended a Oslo Forum retreat in Mexico which dealt candidly with a number of contemporary issues in the region. I was impressed with the diverse and plural participation. The Oslo Forum has become the conflict resolution equivalent of Davos or Munich.

— Álvaro de Soto, Professor, Sciences Po Paris; veteran mediator and peace negotiator
There’s something special about The Mediator’s Studio. This gathering in the elegant intimacy of the Losby Gods library, at that special hour in the sun’s slow descent in a Norwegian summer’s sky, is a moment for mediators to immerse themselves in all the extraordinary woes and wonders of their world. We laughed with Kofi Annan over mistaken identities, at Jeff Feltman’s missing speech in Iran. We felt the pain of Ghassan Salame’s memories of friends lost to war, were fascinated by Jimmy Carter’s fierce feminism, by Bill Richardson’s Cuban baseball diplomacy. Cathy Ashton held our attention with anecdotes from breathtaking nuclear negotiations. And we all felt the weight of wise words from Lakhdar Brahimi and Martti Ahtisaari. All that and more in the marvel that is The Mediator’s Studio.

— Lyse Doucet, BBC’s Chief International Correspondent
Mohammad Khatami and Raymond Johansen

The Asia regional retreat in Beijing, China

Olusegun Obasanjo

The Africa regional retreat in Zanzibar, Tanzania

Thabo Mbeki
I came to the 2007 Oslo Forum on the day the Tony Blair government came to an end in June 2007. I had spent a decade as his chief of staff in No 10 Downing Street and as the chief negotiator in Northern Ireland. I was already working with Martin Griffiths of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on the Basque issue. It was a revelation to me to find so many other people wrestling with the same problems I had faced in making peace – and ever since I have drawn ideas and inspiration from the Forum for my work on conflicts around the world.

— Jonathan Powell, CEO, Inter Mediate
The magic of the Forum is that it brings the parties themselves: working with the Philippines negotiators as they iron out the issue of off-shore waters; listening to the Colombian foreign minister and the FARC commanders as they explain their plans for the post-agreement work.

— David Harland,
Executive Director, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)
Torgeir Larsen, Teresita Quintos Deles and Louise Arbour

Espen Barth Eide and Lakhdar Brahimi

Bono, Jonas Gahr Store and Aung San Suu Kyi

Said Dinnit and David Lambo
US President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Jimmy Carter, and the President of the Central African Republic, Catherine Samba-Panza

Jeffrey Feltman, Visiting Fellow at Brookings Institution, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Tawakkol Karman

Betty Bigombe, Advisor to the Government of Uganda on South Sudan

President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos

Jeffrey Feltman, Visiting Fellow at Brookings Institution, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Tawakkol Karman
In 2015, the Forum brought together officials from the Afghan government, people from the Taliban political office and some of the special representatives from other countries. The informal safe space allowed actors to have contact when they were not interested in meeting formally at that stage in the conflict. At that time it was an important step.

— Lisa Golden, Director, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Oslo Forum has been an anchor institution for mediators and conflict resolution practitioners over the past two decades, the decades in which mediation has evolved from a dark art to a staple tool of peacemaking diplomacy. Mediation is a high-risk activity practiced with a degree of experimental uncertainty and mostly in isolation. The Oslo Forum has not just provided a platform for discussion and debate, it has also served as a platform to create a ‘community’ of colleagues and peers for those involved, in ever more diverse ways, in a fragmented and increasingly challenged activity.

— Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan
The first time I attended the Oslo Forum, it was intimidating to meet so many high-level diplomats. I remember thinking ‘I don’t belong here!’ Over the years, as I have been invited back, this feeling has changed. One of the strengths of the Oslo Forum is the ability to bring together professionals of different levels and experience, without all the protocols of formal settings.

— Ngozi Amu, Head of Research and Analysis, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)
The Oslo Forum is, par excellence, when mediation’s ethics, levels and techniques are scrutinised, assessed and compared. It is an irreplaceable moment in June of every year. You contribute and learn from people engaged in conflicts, as well as from those trying to end them. A mixture of professionalism and friendliness leads you, at the end of every edition, to start looking forward to the next.

— Ghassan Salamé, Professor Emeritus, Sciences Po
The Oslo Forum has been a platform I have looked forward to participating in to gain understanding of critical conflict issues and situations rather than to hear of positions vis-à-vis those issues, and I have never been disappointed!

— Haile Menkerios, Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office to the African Union

When the Covid-19 pandemic stopped the Forum from happening in person, we tried to find another way to share mediation lessons. The result was four seasons of The Mediator’s Studio podcast. A personal highlight for me was interviewing President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, reflecting on his life’s journey from rebel leader to negotiator to head of state.

— Adam Cooper, host of The Mediator’s Studio
At a time when many protracted conflicts and geopolitical tensions dominated the UN Security Council’s agenda, the January 2022 Oslo Forum retreat in New York was a chance to engage in refreshing dialogue outside of the typical Council cycle. At an important moment in time, it was a privilege hearing about the Secretary-General’s vision for preventive diplomacy and how we as a community can encourage international cooperation.

— Mona Juul, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations in New York

At a delicate stage in the Venezuela process, it was a privilege to be able to moderate an informal conversation between the lead negotiators, Jorge Rodriguez and Gerardo Blyde Perez, and the Norwegian facilitator of the political talks, Dag Nylander.

— Teresa Whitfield, former Director of the Policy and Mediation Division at UN DPPA
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Anniken Huitfeldt, opened the first regional Oslo Forum in Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico.
In mediation, it is often the people behind the scenes that really make a difference. It has been a privilege to host and learn from so many unsung heroes. The Oslo Forum’s achievements over the years also owe much to the team efforts invisible to the world. The team organising this event weaves together dedication, collaboration, and expertise, ensuring a strong outcome every year. A big thank you and congratulations to all of you!

— Christina Buchhold, Oslo Forum Project Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)