Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mediation for peace
Médiation pour la paix
الوساطة من أجل السلام
为和平而调解
Mediación para la paz
Посредничество во имя мира

The HD Way

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's Approach to Effective Mediation

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Introduction

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) works to prevent, mitigate and resolve armed conflicts around the world through mediation and private diplomacy.

HD's global reach, multi-track methods and extensive networks allow us to work beyond the limits of traditional diplomacy and engage all parties in pursuit of peace.

From our first project in Aceh, Indonesia in 1999, HD has been a pioneer of discreet, impartial and independent conflict mediation. Over the years, we have evolved into a peacemaking institution and partner with clear principles, defined methods and robust processes.

Today, HD is engaged in the majority of the world's violent conflicts with projects in Africa, the Middle East, Eurasia, Asia and Latin America.

HD engages with all actors relevant for the resolution, management or prevention of a conflict. One of our greatest contributions is HD's ability to engage with the hardest-to-reach actors beyond the boundaries of official diplomacy — by building communication, trust and pathways to peace.

HD is largely decentralised to allow rapid responses as dynamics shift, concentrating decision-making in regional hubs and increasingly using mediators working on conflict in their own regions and countries.

At the same time, having our headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland ensures HD has direct access to and contact with major actors on the international scene.

From high level to local level, HD's core work is about helping to reduce tensions, prevent escalation in conflict, limit the human suffering caused by war and develop opportunities for peaceful settlement.

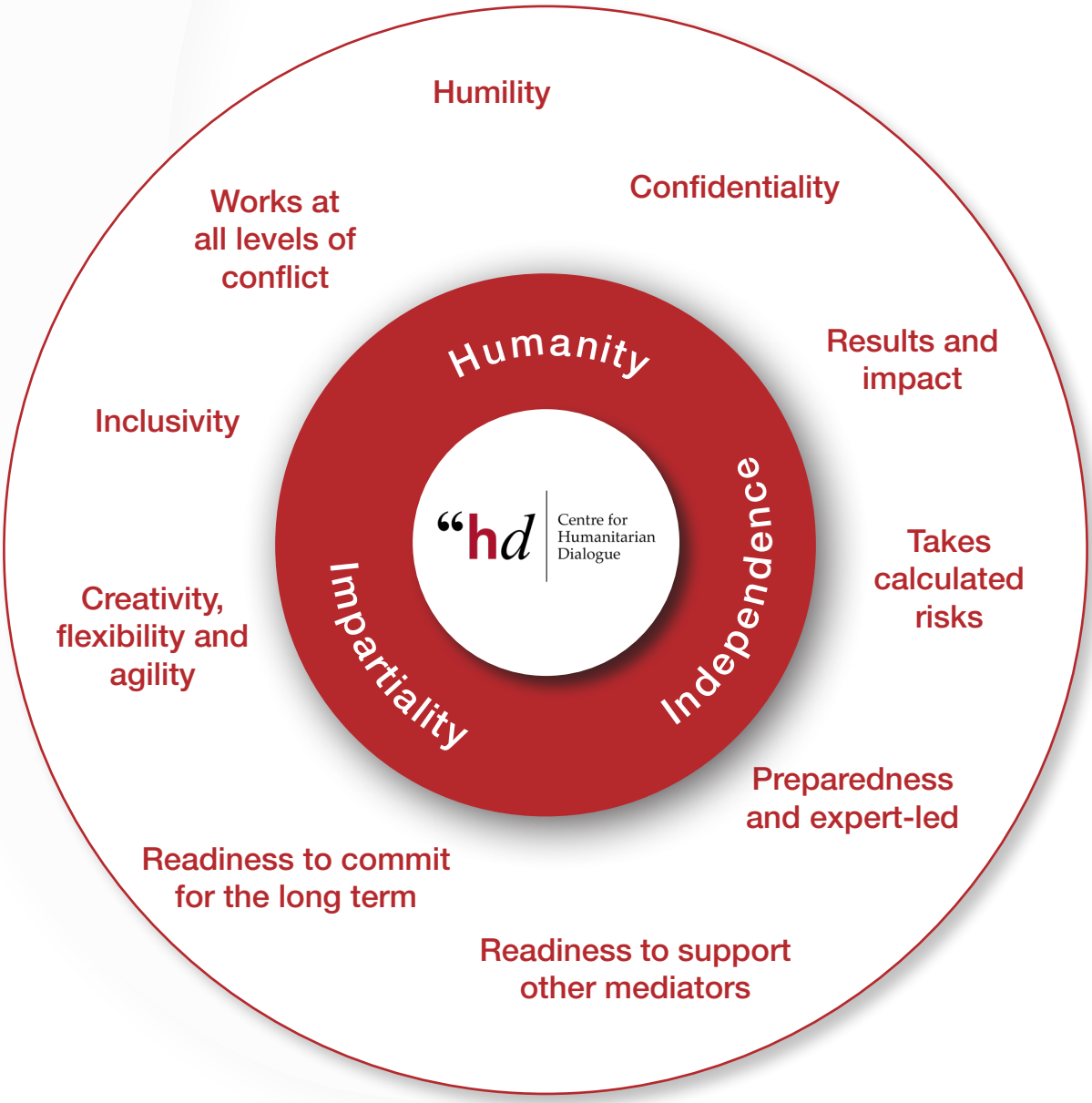
To do that, we bring together governments, armed groups, opposition parties and communities – including women and youth – to help them build a shared vision of a better future.

With HD's results-driven system of process design, mediation support and constant analysis, we hone our effectiveness and share knowledge – including expertise in digital conflict, inclusive peace processes, environmental peacemaking and healthcare challenges in high-risk areas.

This document – **The HD Way** – captures the values, mission and methods that are vital to our work and success in helping to achieve sustainable peace.

The HD Way

A key part of our doctrine is that we should not be too prescriptive in our approach, because our success rests on our ability to shape our work to suit the contexts where we are active. Nevertheless, there are core principles and fundamentals that underpin how we work.



Core Principles

As HD's Charter lays out, our organisation was founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence.

1. Humanity

The prevention and alleviation of human suffering lies at the heart of HD's work and is the core principle to which we return.

2. Independence

HD exists to advance the human interest. The more fully we can develop and articulate our own principles and objectives, both globally and specific to contexts, the more independent we are from the objectives of others and the more successfully we can achieve our commitment to humanity.

3. Impartiality

HD does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class or political opinions and does not take sides in hostilities or support particular national, political, religious or ideological interests.

If a mediation process is perceived to be impartial, this can greatly increase its chances of preventing, managing or resolving a given conflict. To ensure that the process is as impartial as possible, HD:

- Engages with all relevant actors for dealing with a conflict or reducing tensions, including those that are out of reach for official diplomacy
- Ensures that the treatment of the parties is fair and balanced and that HD does not have a material interest in the outcome
- Is transparent with the parties regarding the principles that guide our involvement
- Does not accept conditions for support from external actors that would affect the impartiality of the process
- Avoids association with punitive measures against parties by other actors, except in cases pertaining to the most serious international crimes
- Avoids criticising parties in public, while maintaining frank exchanges in private
- Does not advocate for a solution to a conflict but may share options with parties based on their grievances, objectives and redlines
- Ensures our funding comes from a diverse range of donors who see the value and effectiveness of HD's mediation model and impartial actions
- Only accepts funding from donors who understand and support our independence

In parallel to the impartiality of the process, HD staff behave impartially as individuals. In practice, this entails:

- Supporting without advocating: HD is there to support and enable the parties to engage. In some cases, this may involve advising the parties or capacity building. However, HD never becomes a representative or advocate of any party.
- Understanding without endorsing: Demonstrating a genuine sense of empathy is often an important part of building trust between the mediator and a conflict party. However, this should not cross over into endorsement.

- Guiding without dictating: HD invests time and resources to develop a thorough process design, while remaining flexible and open to change. HD facilitates discussions and strives to help parties move away from conflicting positions towards mutually acceptable solutions, which are owned by the parties.
- Fostering ownership: HD attempts to understand fully the needs, interests and preferences of the parties when helping them to shape the process. For instance, HD may ask parties to propose principles to ensure discussions remain productive and will work with parties to ensure timings and locations are convenient.
- Knowing your limits: HD staff remain aware of their own biases and stand ready to hand over to another mediator, as appropriate, if they feel unable to maintain a balanced and impartial approach.

Fundamentals

The following fundamentals are not core principles but nonetheless shape our approach and lie at the roots of our success as an organisation. Some appear in the HD Charter but most have emerged from over 20 years of private diplomacy experience.

1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality – between HD and conflict parties, but also around a mediation process more generally – is useful for building trust and enabling parties to test options for engagement with less risk, for example where they fear losing face or where there may be legal barriers to negotiation.

However, confidentiality rarely equates with total secrecy. Even in HD's most confidential work, the organisation needs to cooperate with different actors playing different roles. HD staff are therefore by guided by the question "Who needs to know what and when?" and elaborate the parameters of confidentiality in consultation with the parties while remaining frank about potential risks.

Equally, confidentiality does not mean there is a lack of ethical or methodological control. For example, mediators and their supervisors must report to HD's operations committee.

2. Creativity, flexibility and agility

While HD draws on lessons from previous engagements, the organisation is not constrained by existing practice and encourages high levels of creativity. HD's ability to develop engagements based on the specific needs of a given context is fundamental to our success.

HD also creates valuable peacemaking opportunities because we remain flexible and agile, entrepreneurial in spirit and able to move quickly and globally when the time is right.

The absence of overly cumbersome approval processes means that decisions can be made quickly. However, this flexibility only works when underpinned by ongoing conflict analysis, risk management, rigorous learning, quality assurance mechanisms, spaces for reflection among staff and respect for the "Do No Harm" principle.

3. Results and impact

HD is a results-driven organisation, committed to demonstrating our meaningful contribution to peace. Teams continuously interrogate their approach, reflecting on what they are doing and why are they doing it.

As part of this, they regularly capture results and describe the wider impact of their work, remembering that there are also valuable lessons to be learned when things do not go as planned.

HD results range from interim results such as new channels of communication and networks, well-prepared and structured processes, and committed and serious conflict parties to higher-level results such as violence reduction, the conclusion and implementation of agreements and de-facto cooperation between the parties.

All of these results are indispensable for sustainable peace and connected to each other. For more guidance as to what constitutes a valuable result for HD, and how we achieve them, please consult the HD results concept here.

4. Takes calculated risks

The security of staff and interlocutors remains the top priority. At the same time, some element of risk is often necessary to make progress in difficult situations, be it political, reputational, etc.

Crucially, deciding which risks to take is the product of a structured decision-making process: All teams systematically engage in analysis and risk-management in order to identify potential challenges and ways forward. Inevitably, this involves working through dilemmas and making difficult choices.

While an inclusive and participatory approach to managing dilemmas is important, accountability nonetheless resides at the appropriate level in the management structure.

5. Preparedness and expert-led

Mediation requires thorough preparation. Preparedness means HD is ready — and helps the conflict parties and other stakeholders to be ready — for different types and phases of dialogue.

All HD staff receive the proper preparation, induction and capacity-building for their position and HD teams ensure they have in place the right experts with the right knowledge to take advantage of opportunities to advance peace as they arise.

Finally, preparedness means avoiding the urge to rush parties to the negotiating table, finding instead the best moment to convene them.

6. Readiness to support other mediators

Although HD often works discreetly, no project can succeed in isolation. HD is always ready to recognise our comparative advantage vis-a-vis other mediation actors and play a supporting role or coordinate where it is in the best interests of the peace process.

As an unofficial actor, HD recognises that in a number of situations, official actors such as representatives of a state, regional organisations or the United Nations might be more suited to drive the process given the legitimacy and leverage that their organisation may bestow on them in that context.

HD can add value to such processes by providing creative options for effective conflict resolution, process design and policies, by building the capacity of conflict parties and others involved in the negotiations, by sharing lessons learned, by strengthening mechanisms, by bringing our networks and relationships to bear and by offering technical and logistical support.

7. Readiness to commit for the long term

Achieving peace is typically a lengthy endeavour. For this reason, HD places a high degree of importance on building trust with key stakeholders by developing networks, keeping communication channels open and fostering discreet channels of communication in order to engage once all relevant parties are ready to enter into a dialogue.

HD is ready to commit to long-term processes and does not withdraw at the first signs of a stall or breakdown in peace talks. Following any agreement, HD supports parties to navigate the implementation phase, transferring to them where appropriate the methodologies and approaches that can help sustain peace and ensure an efficient and responsible exit strategy for the organisation.

8. Inclusivity

At HD, inclusion means striving to ensure that the needs and views of conflict parties, stakeholders and affected communities are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort.

Inclusion is not a template. It is an attempt to bring the views of communities that have typically been excluded, but are important to the sustainable resolution of a conflict, into a process.

These communities can be different in different contexts and may include women, young people, civil society, religious or ethnic minorities, business actors, opposition parties or diaspora. HD staff should continuously ask themselves “Who needs to be involved, consulted or connected to the process, at what stage and how in order to ensure a sustainable solution?”

9. Works at all levels of conflict

HD’s added value comes from its ability to engage at and connect all levels of conflict, on issues ranging from the geopolitical to the provincial.

A strong field presence with access to hard-to-reach or marginalised actors, working in tandem with advisors who can mobilise their networks and reach senior decision-makers, allows us to combine effective engagement in local contexts with high-level private diplomacy at the national and interstate levels.

In some cases, solid working relationships, or even partnerships, with the right multilateral or state actors are indispensable. Where useful, HD builds on local peacemaking efforts, which can be important for the sustainability of peace.

10. Humility

HD works with humility and does not seek credit or visibility. Many of HD’s greatest successes lie in quietly working behind the scenes, injecting creative ideas into official processes and liaising discreetly between parties.

