



The EU and Peacebuilding 3

The role of Civil Society

Background Information

The European Union was founded on a desire to create and maintain peace in a war-torn Europe and over 50 years later peace and security are still of the utmost importance to the EU. Quakers are well known for their commitment to peace, laid down in the Quaker Peace testimony and QCEA has been actively involved in much peace-work at an EU level over the years. To ensure that peacebuilding is approached in the most effective way it is important that the EU consults and uses the expertise of civil society, especially civil society specialising in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The role of Civil Society

‘The role of civil society in peacebuilding has gained increased recognition in the last decade’ a World Bank report claims, ‘there is now a general consensus that national actors should take the lead in peacebuilding, and that outside intervention should be limited to their support’¹. There is wide acceptance on the importance of civil society involvement and expertise in conflict management and peacebuilding. Consultation with civil societies is one of the European Commissions duties laid down by the Amsterdam treaty, and the European Parliament has several times called on the Commission to provide better consultation within EU external action. Despite this, however, EU consultation with civil society on peace and conflict issues is currently ad hoc, unstructured and fluctuates hugely. Structured dialogue with both on-the-ground civil society organisations in areas of conflict and civil society organisations with longstanding expertise in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is crucial if the EU wants to truly promote peace through its external action.

QCEA’s recommendations to the European Parliament

QCEA has signed up to the recommendations put forward by a network of organisations specialising in peacebuilding and conflict called professional Nonviolent Third-Party Intervention (ProNTI) <http://www.civilpeace.eu/>.

1. QCEA recommends that the EU, and in particular, the European Commission should create a more systematic and better organised consultation with civil society on peacebuilding issues, to improve coordination and cooperation and thus improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its policies for peace. The European Parliament can be instrumental in making this happen.

¹Social Development Department, The World Bank, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding Potential, Limitations and Critical Factors*, February 2007, Accessed May 2009 at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/3182370-1164201144397/ESW_Civil_Society_and_Peacebuilding-web.pdf

Questions for MEPs

- Will you call for the next Commissioner for External Relations to better structure dialogue with civil society and make sure adequate resources are made available to make this dialogue feasible and efficient?
- Will you call on the European Parliament to pass a resolution demanding that the European Commission and the Council of the EU clarify the minimum standards of consultation with civil society in EU external affairs?