

ICAR News

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GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Reflections on Syria: Developing A Cadre of Citizen Diplomats

By Marc Gopin, ICAR Professor and Director, Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict,
mgopin@gmu.edu

With an entourage of twenty graduate students I walked down the cold cobblestone streets of the Old City Damascus in mid-January of 2010, still amazed by the reality of the situation. For many years I have traveled alone into this world, in between enemies, in between Syria, the United States, and Israel, crossing borders quietly, with great trepidation and enormous inexperience. The practice of citizen diplomacy in Syria has been one of a carefully choreographed dance with politicians, wonderful peace partners,

and religious figures where every word determined the health or destruction of both social and political relationships. I have engaged in this work solely with my Syrian counterpart, Hind Kabawat, and we both did this unsupported, unfunded, and at significant financial loss. But this year we opened our work up to a much more public process. It included



Syria's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ahmad Hassoun, honors Dr. Gopin for his six years of inter-faith work in Syria with the Grand Mufti of Damascus looking on. Photo: Omar Alkhiami.

Masters and Ph.D. students from George Mason's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Georgetown University, American University, and the Fletcher School. I combined my twenty students in a classroom with Hind's ten Syrian students, and the outcome was extraordinary. The Syrian and Mason students developed an

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Commentary

Pursuing a Practice of Peacebuilding

A Conversation With ICAR Alumna, Cynthia Irmer

By Mike Giusti, ICAR M.S. Student and Graduate Student Services Assistant, mgiusti1@gmu.edu

With the school year quickly coming to a close, an atmosphere of uncertainty is pervasive as another cohort prepares to graduate. Reflecting on the experiences and knowledge gained, how does one negotiate these in such a way as to confidently move forward into what can sometimes seem an ambiguous future? Where do I go? What do I do? What CAN I do? Fortunately, ICAR has an extensive network of successful alumni such as Cynthia Irmer to turn to for practical advice on such matters.

After years of practicing law, Cynthia Irmer returned to school to get her Ph.D. at ICAR. In her own words, "ICAR changed my life, it gave me words to express thoughts, and permission to creatively question the unthinkable." As a result of her education at ICAR, Dr. Irmer was able to pursue her passion for exploring non-abusive ways to better the human condition, and consider the simple notion that not all conflict is negative. With such tools in hand, she was equipped to utilize and implement a diverse range of conflict analysis and resolution principles in her position with the State Department's newly created Office of the Coordinator

for Reconstruction and Stabilization.

Serving as a Senior Conflict Prevention Officer, Dr. Irmer uses an elicitive model to frame the government lens through which she analyzes the dynamics of conflict life cycles. Moreover, she has been able to successfully employ certain theoretical models to establish the now government-wide Interagency Conflict Analysis Framework (ICAF), which enables members of seemingly disparate agencies to support one another and work together toward creatively constructing more effective approaches to conflict.

As of April, the ICAF model will have been applied in fourteen different conflict

areas in the world, and serves as the only comprehensive conflict prevention program in the U.S. government. Dr. Irmer's most recent work has been with the Liberia ICAF, whose team is currently on the ground conducting interviews and briefing various Armed Forces Commands. Prior to the team's deployment, she invited them to ICAR for a planning meeting that brought area experts together for a brainstorming session.



Cynthia Irmer, ICAR Ph.D. alumna and Senior Conflict Prevention Officer at the Department of State. Photo: courtesy of C. Irmer.

"Everyone is an expert in something, you just have to find it, work with it, develop it slowly, build it for yourself, and get your foot in the door somewhere."

—CYNTHIA IRMER

Hoping that this particular ICAF will make a difference in consensus building that other assessment tools could not produce, Irmer says, "it is vital to master the process of articulation." By that, she means taking the theory produced by academics and transforming it into more accessible language for everyday citizens, "Academics and policy makers are brilliant, but the ordinary people that are being affected are not on that level." Her prescription for such transformation

is to elicit a solution from the people.

Similarly, Dr. Irmer recommended that ICAR students generate their own solutions while mastering individual processes. "Everyone is an expert in something," she told me, "you just have to find it, work with it, develop it slowly, build it for yourself, and get your foot in the door somewhere." How does one do that? "Be willing to take low pay for a while, volunteer overseas with smaller NGOs, and take advantage of the alumni network for informational interviews." In other words, be creative and remember that not all conflict, (specifically the struggle to apply what you've learned and build opportunities for practice), is bad! ■

network

Career Services Offers Upcoming Career Intensives

March 19: "Careers in Community and Organizational Conflict," featuring David Smith, U.S. Institute of Peace; Patricia Maulden, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and Director of the Dialogue and Difference Project at ICAR; and Wanda Wigfall-Williams, Assistant Professor, American University and President, World View Management Group.

April 9: "Careers in International Development" featuring panelists Dave Alpher, ICAR Ph.D. Student, Adjunct Faculty, development contractor in Iraq with ARD; Ramon Daubon, InterAmerican Foundation; and Michael J. Miklaucic, United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Participation in Career Intensives is by application only. To apply send your resume to toicarjob@gmu.edu, or see the ICAR Career Services page at: <http://icar.gmu.edu>. ■

"The Parents of the Field": Archiving Project to be Featured on ICAR's Website

By Christopher Mitchell, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at ICAR, cmitchel@gmu.edu

The field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution is a relative newcomer to academia, with its roots reaching back to the era immediately after the Second World War and the onset of the "Cold War."

While many of the leading figures of that pioneering era are still contributing to the ever-expanding body of work in a fledgling field, several others are "getting on in years." All have important narratives to share about those early days, when it was a struggle just to get a course on "Post-Conflict Peace-building" or "Second Track Intervention" into curricula that were typically dominated by balance of power theories or thinking about "the unthinkable" (aka nuclear war).

For the past seven years, there has been an ongoing effort to obtain interviews with that earlier generation, the "Parents of the Field," who are now passing from the scene, and to make the results of those interviews available to the current and rising generations of scholars, scholar-practitioners, and students of conflict analysis and resolution. The idea for the archiving initiative was originally conceived by ICAR alumnus, Dr. Jannie Botes, now Director of the Program on Negotiation and Conflict Management (CNCM) at the University of Baltimore. Botes, who had previously had a career in television with the South African Broadcasting Corporation, was convinced of the need to record the views and memories of this pioneering generation while they were still accessible. He approached me with the idea and enlisted my help for the project.

Supported by a small grant from the Hewlett Foundation, we spent a good deal of time, between 2002 and 2007, crisscrossing the U. S.

and parts of Europe, carrying a video camera and sound recording equipment along the way, in search of our academic progenitors. Together we interviewed as many "parents of the field" as we could

persuade to talk to us for an hour or two, about the developing field of the 1950s and 1960s, about the world of the Cold War and decolonization, and about institution building (and institution collapsing) in the U.S., Scandinavia, Canada, Britain, and Europe. Once the conversations were collected, our team arranged for the videos to be transcribed and edited, and for the transcriptions to be checked for misspellings, mis-hearings, and misinterpretations.

Finally the fruits of this work are becoming available, on the ICAR and CNCM websites, and as part of Guy and Heidi Burgess' "Beyond Intractability" website. The project includes more than 30 interviews. The first of the video interviews, with their edited transcripts, will be available for viewing, beginning with Elise Boulding, on April 7th, followed by Morton Deutsch, Tony De Reuck, and J. David Singer, who is best known for his work on the "Correlates of War" project. Subsequent interviews, which will be uploaded as they become available, will include conflict analysis and resolution pioneers like: Johan Galtung, John Burton, Dean Pruitt, Betty Reardon, Hanna Newcombe, Herb Kelman, Adam Curle, and Roger Fisher.

Also in the works are two journal articles based on the insights we gained from the project; one on the early history of the field and another on the themes that emanated from the interviews themselves. It has been a long and arduous project, and the hope is that the results will be interesting and worthwhile to the beneficiaries of this rich academic legacy. ■



"Parents of the Field" project leads, Dr. Jannie Botes, ICAR alumnus, and Dr. Christopher Mitchell, ICAR Professor Emeritus. Photo: Paul Snodgrass



"Parents of the Field" created by Paul Snodgrass on wordle.net.

initiatives

CRDC Hosts Dr. Lewis Kriesberg

"Obama, Conflict, and Mediating the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict"

By Abraham C. Houben, ICAR M.S. Student, ahouben@gmu.edu

EVENTS

Introduced by host Dr. Marc Gopin, Director of ICAR's Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, as one of the founding fathers of the field of conflict resolution, Dr. Louis Kriesberg spoke about the Obama Administration's policies on the Middle East and efforts at mediation during a visit to ICAR on Friday, March 5th.

"The new administration has changed some direction and shied away from Bush's failing policies in the Middle East," he stated. However, he also noted that it is questionable whether or not President Obama's speech in Cairo and his meeting with Jewish-American groups displays enough effort to make significant improvements in the relationship between Israel and Palestine. Dr. Kriesberg provided his audience with some food for thought when he stated, "A broader perspective is needed to reduce the asymmetry that currently exists. There has to be a better focus on social-emotional relationships between Israelis and Palestinians." Kriesberg wants to focus on the positive things that exist in the region and commonalities between the people, much like his observations during peace talks in South Africa. "When I met with both white and

black South Africans, they all loved to talk about how beautiful their country is." This, coming from a country whose conflict some thought would never end.

Kriesberg enjoyed recounting anecdotes from his latest trip to the region, as well as reflecting on experiences where he encountered ordinary Palestinian people being humiliated while attempting to cross an Israeli checkpoint. He recalled that he sat back as he noted that older generations will swallow this humiliation, but this same humiliation by Israeli Defense Forces generates vast amounts of anger among younger Palestinians.



Dr. Lewis Kriesberg at CRDC presentation. Photo: R. Grimm.

"We must aim to get to a point where laws are enforced without being provocative," he said, before going on to mention his thoughts on how human beings should be treated with respect and not be dehumanized and humiliated, creating even deeper divides across enemy lines.

The discussion turned to the importance of focusing on implementing real and lasting solutions for issues in the Middle East, rather than simply managing the conflict. Dr. Kriesberg pointed to the role that the international community, specifically Turkey and Egypt, could have on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Kriesberg commented that it is a shame that the Palestinian Authority was denied admission to the World Trade Organization. Had it been accepted into the WTO, there would have been a new level of interaction between Israeli and Palestinian people, an interaction that could have become part of a strong peacebuilding foundation.

Dr. Kriesberg implored audience members to "Learn from previous mistakes and keep trying different angles." At one point during the discussion, modesty abounded, as Kriesberg sat back and joked that he doesn't have all of the answers. Regardless of this, his intelligent mix of compassionate storytelling and penetrating insight into past and present conflicts highlighted the reasons why he has been, and always will be, an invaluable leader in the field. As such, Dr. Kriesberg is being featured in the Parents of the Field project (see article on page 3). Dr. Kriesberg's presentation will be available online on ICAR's website. ■

Upcoming ICAR Community Events

Friday, March 19, 2010

Career Intensive

10:00 am - 4:00 pm, Truland Building, 555

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Terrorism: A Panel Discussion & Dialogue

7:00 pm - 9:00 pm, Fairfax Campus, Sub II, Ballroom 1

Friday, March 26, 2010

Grad Student Etiquette Dinner

5:45 pm - 9:00 pm, Original Building, 329

Friday, April 9, 2010

Career Intensive

10:00 am - 4:00 pm, Truland Building, 555

Friday, April 16, 2010

Undergraduate Spring Conference

Confronting Major Challenges in the 21st Century

10:00 am - 9:30 pm, Fairfax Campus, Johnson Center, Dewberry Hall

Thursday, April 29, 2010

ISA Town Hall Meeting

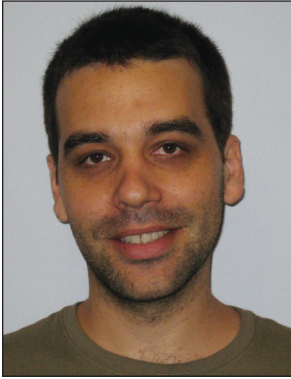
7:30 pm - 9:00 pm, Truland Building, 555

<http://icar.gmu.edu/events.htm>

ICAR STUDENT OPINION

Conflict Resolution, One Book at a Time

By Roi Ben-Yehuda, ICAR Ph.D. Student, rbenyehu@gmu.edu



Roi Ben-Yehuda, ICAR Ph.D. student. Photo: ICAR.

A basic fact of conflict is that people's perceptions of each other matter. Viewing someone as subhuman or demonic, for example, reduces people's inhibitions towards using violence against them. Likewise, negative images of the other escalate conflict through engendering fear, misunderstandings, blame, and zero-sum thinking.

Research conducted by psychologist Albert Bandura has demonstrated that individuals inflict much harsher punishments on people whom they view negatively, as opposed to people whom they perceive in neutral or sympathetic terms. Importantly, his experiment also showed that subjects invested with positive qualities were least likely to be harmed.

Because how we imagine others is consequential, it is essential for conflict resolution practitioners to find creative ways to mitigate the destructive influence of negative stereotypes. One approach to tackling this problem was developed by American psychologist Gordon Allport who argued that qualitative contact between conflicting groups is a meaningful way to reduce hostility and prejudice as well as cultivate more positive attitudes between group members. By qualitative contact, Allport meant direct interpersonal relations between participants of equal status who pursue common goals with the help of institutional support. Some great examples of contact theory put into practice are organizations like Seeds of Peace and bilingual Jewish-Arab schools in Israel such as Hand in Hand.

While personal contact is key to transforming threatening images of the enemy, unfortunately, it is not always a possibility. This is because people, particularly during times of conflict, may not be able to meet face-to-face. Obstacles to contact can include restrictions on travelling, legal concerns, or physical danger. Moreover, even if people are able to meet, the contact itself may feel too threatening or emotionally taxing.

In such circumstances, the problem of perception needs to be addressed through other means. One such approach is engagement with literature—a type of vicarious contact theory.

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Recent ICAR Articles, Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor

Israeli Identity Formation and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Election Platforms, 1969 - 2006

By Neta Oren, ICAR Visiting Scholar

Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 47 No. 2, March 2010

Proximity Talks Should be Maximized

By Rawhi Afaghani, ICAR Ph.D. Candidate

Al Arabiya News Channel, 2/11/10

Why Should Israel Care What the Rest of the World Thinks?

By Roi Ben-Yehuda, ICAR Ph.D. Student

Harretz.com, 2/16/10

When Development Meets Culture and Conflict: The Challenges and Paradoxes of the Good Samaritan

By Adriana Salcedo, ICAR Ph.D. Student

Journal of Peacebuilding and Development, Vol. 5 No. 1, December 2009

ICAR Blog Roll

A Blog for Peace in Israel-Palestine

By Aziz Abu Sarah, CRDC Director of Middle East Projects

<http://azizabusarah.wordpress.com/>

Confrontations: Forays Into Political Life as it Happens

By Solon Simmons, ICAR Faculty

<http://solonsimmons.wordpress.com/>

Gone Public: Philosophy, Politics, & Public Life

By Nöelle McAfee, ICAR Visiting Faculty

<http://gonepublic.wordpress.com/>

Instruments of Peace: Communiqués on Conflict, Peace, and Social Justice

By Ethan Finley, ICAR Ph.D. Student

<http://ethanfinley.blogspot.com/>

Marc Gopin.com: Confronting the Challenges Facing Humanity

Marc Gopin, ICAR Faculty

<http://www.marcgopin.com/>

Teach for Peace: Principled, Practical Policy Analysis From a Peace Educator in the Writing Classroom of a Juvenile Detention Home School

Cheryl Duckworth, ICAR Adjunct Faculty

<http://teachforpeace.blogspot.com/>

press

In Memoriam: J. David Singer

"Parent of the Field" 1925-2009

By Christopher Mitchell, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at ICAR, cmitchel@gmu.edu

icar spotlight

The field of conflict and peace studies lost another pioneering and path breaking founder when Emeritus Professor David Singer died just after Christmas as a result of a car accident last September.

David Singer was one of the group of social scientists who helped launch the new field of conflict analysis—as well as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*—at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, in the mid 1950s. However, unlike many of the others in that extraordinary group – Kenneth and Elise Boulding, Herb Kelman, Dean Pruitt, Richard Snyder—all of whom moved on, Singer stayed on at U Mich and helped make it one of the key centers of scholarship for the new field.

Although he could write with wit, knowledge, and insight about arms control, strategic issues, social science methodology, and peace research in general, David Singer was best known for his work on the “Correlates of War” project. Building on the earlier work of Quincy Wright and Wright’s massive (and pre-computer) “Study of War,” David and his historian colleague, Melvin Small, determined that the theoretical assertions of international relations’ “balance of power” theorists tended to be anecdotal at best and in need of testing against systematically gathered, comparative data. In the “CoW” Project, Singer and Small set out to gather carefully defined, carefully categorized, and carefully measured data on all wars and war related phenomena (alliances, military expenditures, demographics) post-1815, in order to see what actually correlated with the various types of war that had take place during the period after Napoleon.

Facing criticism from traditional historians as well as from some of his own colleagues in the field—who were happy at the hypothesis proposing aspects of theory but unwilling to go to the data collection and hypothesis testing stage—David defended his ideas and resultant findings with gusto and much humor. The CoW project continues at the University of Illinois to this day, and its influ-



J. David Singer pictured with Kenneth Boulding. Photo: courtesy of Diane Macaulay.

ence endures in its many offspring, not the least of which is the Conflict Data Program at Uppsala University and their annual “States in Armed Conflict” reports.

In many ways, Dave Singer’s legacy to our field also survives, as he was constantly requiring that conflict and peace studies should proceed on the basis of clarity of argument, rigor of definition, and above all the support of empirical evidence for theoretical statements. His many colleagues will miss his critical eye, friendly dissent, and huge sense of humor. Fortunately, Jannie Botes and I managed a long video interview with him three years ago for our “Parents of the Field” project, so future generations will soon be able to get some measure of him as a scholar and as a generous human being.

I was looking forward to having a drink and a good laugh with him at this year’s International Studies Association meeting, but now—much to my sorrow—I won’t.

—CRM.

Dr. Singer is survived by his wife, Diane Macaulay, his daughters Katie and Annie Singer, his grandchildren Kayla and Jake—and as Diane remarked, “he belongs to the entire discipline.” ■

Gehey and Jennings Express Gratitude for Support

ICAR students, Laurence Gehey and Yves-Renée Jennings, who were featured in the ICAR Spotlight section of the February edition of ICAR News, have asked that we extend their thanks and appreciation for the emotional support offered to them by the ICAR community and for the financial support contributed on behalf of their families in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Haiti. Both of their families are well and rebuilding. As we go to press Jennings is in Haiti working with groups of displaced children.—The Editor ■

Reflections on Citizen Diplomacy in Syria

Continued from page 1



Marc Gopin is a professor at ICAR and Director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict. Photo: GMU Creative Services.

intensive and amazingly close working social network of partnerships, and a level of emotional bonding that astonished both me and Hind. It has resulted in a Syrian/American alliance of alumni dedicated to small projects creation and mutual aid in the development of a social network for peacebuilding, and other joint projects of positive social change.

The week of intensive training in Damascus combined class lectures, joint innovative project creation, as well as high level meetings with significant figures in Syria, including Dr. Bouthaina Shaban, and Michel Smacha, Presidential Advisors, and the President of Damascus University. The week also included a special meeting with the Grand Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Hassoun, as well as the Grand Mufti of Damascus, and the Chief of the Religious Legal Courts (Sharia Courts) of Syria. That meeting was an emotional reunion for me and Sheikh Hassoun, a heartfelt review of the results of the devastating wars of the region, which we both had tried to prevent. Iraq has always been front and center, and the Grand Mufti of Syria had simple and profound messages for President Obama as to where the United States should put its future efforts in the region. It became a joint

call for life-affirming American contributions to the region and its suffering refugees, with wonderful student engagement with the Mufti. In all my 27 years of interfaith peace work in the region, never have I seen such a high level and profound engagement of shared humanity as was expressed in that room with the Grand Mufti. To see so many prominent clergy weeping together with students over the losses of children to war in the region was the greatest testimony I have ever witnessed to the true spirit of Islam and the Abrahamic Faiths.

Students were astonished at how quickly they would become immersed in and responsible for high level meetings and the mechanics, challenges, and surprising breakthroughs of citizen diplomacy, all under the watchful and quixotic eye of Middle Eastern media, including Iran's television stations. They did not just study citizen diplomacy. After an intensive interview process to be accepted into the program, they were quickly called upon to be diplomats themselves, agents of positive change, in highly sensitive and challenging environments. They were also treated to a night out at the opera by the Spanish Ambassador, in addition to celebrations with their fellow students almost every night, a dinner sponsored by the United States Embassy, and a beautiful dinner at the ancient home of Hind and Samer Kabawat in the Old City.

When you go to places and you make yourself vulnerable and listen, you learn much more than you can learn in books. This is the opportunity I wanted to extend to the participating students. Even the most eloquently articulated narrative in a book cannot compare to

the students' experience of sitting before the Grand Mufti of Syria and hearing his words of unity and peace and optimism about a different future. No written narrative could likewise portray the range of emotions students might experience as they leave one of the most incredible religious experiences of their lives, only to find out within 24 hours that some members of the media, and numerous jihadi websites, had manipulated words of peace and love into that of religious heresy. The students were on the front lines of a public relations battle and stepped up to the plate passionately in response to the media through written and verbal interviews, and online responses. The students were afforded a hands-on introduction to the challenges of "doing peace" in the context of political and social realities on the ground that are less than desirable.

The week of study and touring of cultural and religious sites culminated in the Syrian students' gala graduation celebration, attended by a number of Syrian dignitaries and embassy representatives, especially from Spain, the EU, and the United States. Plans for the future include a similar course to be held in Israel and Palestine this summer and next year's program of new students and citizen diplomacy tourism to the region, videos, op-eds, and the development of an international social network of students committed to conflict resolution and citizen diplomacy. ■



Dr. Gopin with the Grand Mufti of Syria, the Grand Mufti of Damascus, the Head of Shari'a Courts, and GMU and Syrian students. Photo: Omar Alkhiami.

ICAR Student Opinion

Continued from page 5

The novelist Iris Murdoch once said that the purpose of literature is to “prove that other people really exist”, meaning that literature calls on people to generously insert themselves into the lives of others. In so doing, books (especially those that deal with the problem of dehumanization) can help children and adults to (re)-develop their capacity for broad empathy and sympathy.

Echoing and amplifying this idea, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has written: “Narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than the casual tourist’s interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusal at visibility.”

Highbrow as it may seem, there is empirical evidence to back up the pro-social value of literature. In the United States, for example, studies done with white elementary school students have shown that reading stories with multi-ethnic and multi-racial characters significantly reduces negative perceptions and attitudes. Other studies found that reading fiction (as opposed to non-fiction) correlates with a high level of empathy, and that putting yourself in other people’s shoes is one of the most effective ways of reducing stereotyping and in-group favoritism.

Reading novels and storytelling may seem like a poor substitute for person-to-person contact, and to some degree this is true. But, there are also advantages. Chief among them is that literature provides a uniquely safe space for identification. Moreover, contact on the pages of books also has the advantage of allowing the reader to withdraw—

emotionally and cognitively—when identification becomes too strenuous.

This is not to suggest that reading ought to replace direct contact, but rather that because an engagement with literature can prepare people psychologically for the difficult work of reconciliation, it should serve as a handmaiden to the practice of conflict resolution.

Some recommendations for incorporating literature into conflict resolution practices include selecting a canon of relevant literature. Books such as Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Fawaz Turki’s *The Disinherited* and S. Yizhar’s *Khirbet Khizeh*, are some examples.

In addition, it is important to create guidelines—a springboard for discussion—so that the messages in the great books may be properly internalized. And where possible, it would be best to work with education ministries to develop a curriculum for widespread use in classrooms.

Alternatively, book clubs and workshops can be formed, both within communities and among conflicting parties—thus combining both direct and indirect contact.

To be sure, negative attitudes and perceptions of the other are not going to be altered overnight. However, if we are to prevent, manage, or transform conflicts it is essential that we find creative ways to do so. Reading literature is not a bad place to start.

Conflict resolution, one book at a time. ■

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