

Speech delivered at the

Consultative Meeting on Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention into Development Practice: Toward a Global Applied Research Network

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to welcome all of you to IDRC. I am particularly pleased to learn that IDRC is co-sponsoring this meeting with two U.K.-based NGOs: International Alert and Saferworld, and that the participants to the meeting come from very diverse sectors and institutions with a common interest in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This consultative meeting is very much in the spirit of IDRC's philosophy which is to convene people from different backgrounds and different nationalities to work together and benefit from each other's knowledge, analysis and experiences.

For those of you who are new comers to Canada and to IDRC, I would like to say a few words about who we are and why we are a unique organization both in Canada and internationally. Only last month IDRC celebrated its 30th anniversary which gave us a great opportunity to reflect upon our role and accomplishments.

IDRC is a public corporation created by the Parliament of Canada with the specific mandate to support research for development. We report to Parliament through the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have a 21-member international Board of Governors, composed of 11 Canadians and 10 non-Canadian members appointed by Cabinet. The leadership and perspective provided by governors from outside Canada help to keep the Centre's programs relevant to the developing world while setting them within a broader international context.

IDRC was created under the basic premise that a country can develop only when its citizens have acquired the capacity to address their own development problems. We help communities in the developing world find practical solutions to important development challenges. In doing so, we support the work of Southern researchers and scientists in such diverse fields as the environment and natural resources, information and communication technologies, social and economic equity.

We believe that this assistance has had multiple repercussions and considerable significance in terms of research capacity building, institution building, knowledge creation and utilization. As well, it has contributed to evidence-based policy development. We think that we have been innovative in the way research is carried out in the developing world. We place a premium on a participatory and multi-

disciplinary approach which tries to take into account and address the inequalities between men and women. Now, more than ever, we look for opportunities to support researchers working on issues where there is the possibility of influencing policy change and changing ways of doing things at all levels.

In this context, the topic of your meeting is a good case in point. Increasingly, conflict prevention and peacebuilding have emerged as critical areas of interest to the international community. As a development research donor, IDRC responded to this interest in 1996 by creating a new program on Peacebuilding and Reconstruction designed to support a program of research in selected regions on the twin challenges of peace and development. One of the early insights of our Peacebuilding Program was an acknowledgement of the role that all development actors, including IDRC, play in politically precarious contexts, through their development work. Conflict, peace and development are not unrelated phenomena; and efforts to deal with them as artificially distinct areas of work have been less than effective. In fact, because the international development community deliberately stayed away from issues of peace and conflict throughout the Cold War, we found ourselves relatively ill-prepared to deal with the series of conflicts that came to centre stage of international affairs in the wake of the Cold War. Belated as it is, the international community's current interest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is a necessary and salutary development which will benefit from solid research and analysis, both in the South and in the North.

Our Peacebuilding Program already supports a strong portfolio of research projects on peacebuilding in Central America, Southern Africa and the Middle East. In addition, IDRC is keen to explore with other partners how best to improve international thinking and practice on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We participate actively in various fora and support emerging networks. For example, in March 1998, we hosted a major international meeting at IDRC on the Role of Regional Organizations in Conflict Prevention. In June 1998, we organized an international meeting on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment. More recently, in April of this year, I participated at a meeting hosted by the International Peace Academy entitled "From Reaction to Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System in the New Millennium." Finally, I am happy to announce that IDRC will be hosting the newly-created International Commission on Intervention and Political Sovereignty which was announced by the Prime Minister of Canada at the Millenium Summit in New York in September.

In short, your deliberations are part of an ongoing effort by the international community to bring the two strands of its work on peace and development together through research, analysis and policy development. We are happy to host you. I wish you all success and look forward to the results of your work.

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