

From the Founders, June 2005

Dear Friends and Colleagues

We debated and discussed for more than three years before deciding to create a consulting company. From Timbuktu to Freetown, from Yugoslavia to Afghanistan, from Sri Lanka back to Rwanda and Liberia, we have been involved in some of the most vicious trouble spots (not forgetting Darfur) and we believe we have worked out some solutions.

So we created EPES Mandala.

Violence destroys lives, hopes and prosperity. Peace is good for Business.

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Between us, the Founders have spent several lifetimes working for peace and sustainable development. We have worked on four continents. We have spent years neutralising revolting combatants, disarming terrorists and transforming conflicts into sustainable peace. Sometimes we have failed, but mostly we have been pretty successful in one of the world's most difficult professions.

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EPES Mandala Consulting was incorporated as three companies in 2004, in Europe, in America and in Africa, because this format seemed to provide the best mechanism for pursuing our work for peace and disarmament.

In the short time since we registered EPES Mandala we have already carried out consulting missions in Afghanistan and Liberia under the company name, and we have been involved in discussions for a dozen other possible contracts. In the meantime we have all continued personal research and field work on disarmament issues and made our modest contributions to ongoing peace education.

During the period 2003-2005 we have become increasingly involved in global security issues and international policy debates - Henny van der Graaf has been working on the NATO Stability Pact, Tore Rose has been winding up the International Peace Forum, Dennis Brennan has been coordinating legal texts on small arms on the regional level, Robin Poulton has been synthesizing international weapon collection experience and working on African Union policy orientations.

We are a bunch of idealistic realists, with vast experience that we need to share. We have been together so often since the Malian adventure and the first Flame of Peace, that we have discovered a lot about what works and what doesn't work.

One of the world's greatest conundrums is how to communicate Lessons Learned to other people. How can we share research and improve impact? How do we stop people repeating the mistakes of their predecessors? Institutional memory is short, political objectives are usually short-term, political decision makers are often short sighted.

By coming together as a multi-national and poly-cultural team of people with mutual respect and huge experience of working together under pressure, and with a cohort of younger partners, we think we can add value and make a difference. Insh'allah!

We are specialized in the niche area of weapon management and control. We offer non-military solutions for collecting and destroying weapons, as part of an overall plan of action to build peace. This means writing and applying laws, engaging in security sector reform, and launching all the complex elements involved in DRRR: Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. This business is always complex and often dangerous, but we are prepared to take risks to create positive peace.

Peace is good for business. Sustainable development creates the conditions for sustained peace, just as poverty and exclusion create the conditions that promote violence and terrorism.

EPES Mandala recognizes that peace brings economic development, and vice versa. Even before we start, our conflict transformation strategy assumes that post-conflict disarmament actions will give way to economic development activities. There is no smooth progression, but it has to happen. Yesterday's small arms emergency will become tomorrow's development opportunity. Our strategy has the flexibility to embrace both. From the very beginning, building confidence to stimulate local economic investment and encourage sustainable development is a cornerstone of the peace building strategy. Measuring economic progress is the best way to evaluate a peace and disarmament programme.

The Failed State Syndrome is a failure of the international community. We must find mechanisms that allow the modern nation state (an invention of 18th century Europe that has been imposed on the rest of the world) to work more efficiently. We must stop states failing and becoming havens for violence that spills across international frontiers.

Through our wide experience, the EPES Mandala team has evolved a strategy for conflict transformation that takes the disarmament project forward from security to development.

- We address the fundamental structures of the social economy.
- We attack all aspects of DDRRR together, transforming conflict into peace.
- We rebuild government administrative and security institutions while working coherently with civil society organizations to promote decentralized democratic governance that brings disenfranchised citizens into the economic and political process.
- Through a participative action-research methodology, we constantly evaluate the impact and quality of our work, the quality of our ideas and our forward strategy.
- Our recruitment takes account of the need for rigor and our staffs are constantly challenging their original assumptions. This ensures sensitivity to the political and cultural challenges of all project stakeholders. Societies are not static, and neither are we.