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PRIVATE SECTOR PEACEBUILDING: A REVIEW OF PAST CASES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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This report provides an introduction to the existing research covering where, why, and how private sector actors (including individual business leaders, small firms, transnational corporations, and private associations) can contribute to peace. It is intended to complement the Peacebuilding Fund's (PBF) guidance note on the private sector and peacebuilding by presenting a set of concrete cases in which private sector actors engaged in peacebuilding activity. In complement with that guidance note, UN actors interested in promoting private sector engagement can use this report to identify pathways to private sector partnerships in peace and cases that may provide specific examples of how this has been done in the past.

This report presents twelve cases of peacebuilding activity by the private sector, deliberately chosen to represent a diversity of actors, historical moments, and strategies. Not all of these interventions were successful, but collectively they provide a foundation of cases demonstrating where, why, and how private sector actors have attempted to contribute to peace. The twelve selected cases include the following:

- Nepal, 2006–present: The Nepali National Business Initiative, a coalition of business associations and companies, developed a collective strategy for both conflict-sensitive approaches to business practice and external communications supporting peace.
- Colombia, 1999–2002: Business leader Luis Carlos Villegas, the president of the National Association of Industries, participated in two rounds of peace negotiations between the government and Colombia's largest guerrilla rebel group, in an effort to bring to an end the Colombian armed conflict.
- Nigeria, 1969: Vice president of Nestlé Alimentana Enrico Bignami acted in the role of special representative of the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to conduct negotiations between the

Nigerian government and the ICRC around humanitarian aid delivery during the Biafran conflict.

- Israel and Palestine, 2002–present: PeaceWorks, a US specialty food distribution company with a “not-only-for-profit” philosophy, initiated profitable joint ventures between Palestinian and Israeli businesses in a bid to increase economic cooperation and promote intergroup contact.
- Colombia, 2011–2015: The Colombian Coffee Growers' Federation developed and executed a multidimensional training and economic development program focused on supporting peace in partnership with international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation.
- Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2011–present: The Virunga Alliance is a conservation-focused peacebuilding public-private partnership. The Alliance emphasizes sustainable development of natural resources of the Virunga National Park, mostly through clean energy, ecotourism, and sustainable agriculture with the goal of promoting economic peacebuilding in eastern DR Congo.
- Cyprus, 2002–2013: The Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry initiated a series of coordinated work on cross-Cyprus unification issues, which facilitated the official peacebuilding process through economic integration and humanized contacts between the two sides.
- Northern Ireland, 1996–1998: A coalition of industry associations and other groups representing business and economic interests in Northern Ireland, the “Group of Seven,” engaged in a sustained push for peace through public messaging and private diplomacy based on the economic benefit peace would deliver.



An adult male gorilla looks at a park ranger as a group of rangers conduct a gorilla population census, on the slopes of Mount Mikeno in the Virunga National Park on November 28, 2008. Photo: ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP via Getty Images

- India, 2001–2002: At a period of extremely high tensions between India and Pakistan, concerns about a loss of international corporate investment led the Confederation of Indian Industry to lobby the Indian government to avoid conflict.
- United States, 1996–2008: A coalition of business leaders, eventually expanded to political actors and others, advocated for a reduction in US military spending through public advertising campaigns.
- The Netherlands, 1941–1943: Frits Philips, head of the Philips Company, deliberately hired Jewish workers and attempted to protect them from the Holocaust by using his work with the Nazi government to keep them from deportation.
- India/Pakistan, 2013: Coca-Cola set up linked video machines in India and Pakistan that encouraged individual citizens from each country to engage in joint games or activities designed to promote interpersonal connection and intergroup contact with the goal of reducing prejudice.

Across these twelve cases, general themes and lessons learned can be identified. These include the following:

- **Private sector engagement in peacebuilding includes a spectrum of activities.** Consistent with the recommendations of the PBF guidance note, peacebuilding that engages the private sector can include a broad range of activities, such as inclusive economic development for peace and industry self-regulation to address root-cause issues. More than that, they can include direct diplomacy or messaging support for peace, technical support to peacebuilding work, and other points of engagement. Peacebuilding actors should consider a broad range of potential engagement with private sector actors.
- **Business association engagement is correlated with more consolidated peace.** Because sustainable peace requires systemic change, sustained peace in these cases is more often associated with institutions able to operate at scale. Business associations or industry groups appear to be more effective partners for sustainable peace than individual firms, and peacebuilding actors should consider issues of scale and capacity when identifying institutions to target for outreach.

- **Individuals matter.** Many of the cases involving successful work are characterized by active engagement by specific individuals passionate about work for peace. Past research suggests the inverse is true, and that when individual business leaders don't see a legitimate role for private sector participation in peacebuilding then it is harder to motivate positive work. Together, this suggests that actors interested in supporting peacebuilding should consider weighting partnerships that involve passionate and active individuals more heavily than those requiring more active work to identify partners.
- **Successful interventions require multiple actors.** Consistent with the emerging understanding of what sustained peace requires, the cases with the most positive outcomes are characterized by the fact that the private sector is one partner in a coordinated collective push for peace. Peacebuilding actors interested in working with private sector partners should work to embed their strategies and specific projects in a larger mechanism for coordinated peacebuilding, and should consider bringing their private sector partners more formally into that system.
- **Innovation has not replaced tried-and-true methods.** The more successful cases in this set are also the activities most closely aligned with existing understanding of sustainable peace. Cases in our set characterized by coordinated diplomacy, public messaging for peace, and sustained inclusive development are associated with more effective outcomes than unilateral or one-off activities. While innovations in approaches can be valuable, these cases suggest that systemic, coordinated work is the most effective approach.
- **There are multiple motivations for intervention, but economic interests persist across cases.** It is not true that the actors in these cases are motivated solely and only by profit, and there are many examples here of businesses or individuals taking principled stands for humanitarian purposes. At the same time, the most consistent element visible in why firms and associations say they are interested in peace is economic. Understanding the specific motivations of potential private sector partners is a necessary first step to designing and delivering effective partnerships.

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