

**A seminar on “The prospects of the Åland example as a tool  
of Nordic Peace Mediation” on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2012 at Pikkuparlamentti**

**Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland**

**Mr. Erkki Tuomioja**

**The role of mediation in peaceful settlement of disputes**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Different aspects of mediation as a conflict resolution mechanism and the Åland example have been addressed by speakers of today's seminar. There is growing interest to enhance the use of mediation in solving conflicts as well as in deterring new ones.

The 2011-2015 Government Programme of Finland gives an important role to mediation. The programme states that *“development cooperation funds could be increased to advance comprehensive security in regions in which Finland supports peace mediation, peacekeeping or crisis management missions”*. Moreover, *“[a]n action plan on peace mediation will be prepared to strengthen Finnish capabilities and participation, taking account of opportunities for the flexible use of resources through the establishment of a stabilisation fund.”*

As stated in the programme, Finland published an Action Plan for Mediation in order to strengthen Finnish expertise and participation in December 2011. The Action Plan emphasizes that new resources and experts must be found on top of the traditional mediation activities. Cooperation with like-minded countries, organisations and civil society actors is essential for increased effectiveness in mediation, and in raising global awareness of its importance. Finland stresses the need for the institutionalisation of mediation mechanisms, the strengthening of UN capacities, making use of regional and civil society initiatives, as well as strengthening the role of women in peace processes.

In September 2010 Finland and Turkey took the initiative to create a Friends of Mediation Group at the United Nations to bring together various actors involved in mediation and to push for enhanced use of mediation. Our aim was threefold: to raise awareness within the international community of the importance of mediation as a means of conflict prevention and resolution; to help build mediation capacity both within the United Nations and also in regional organizations, which are often most well-placed to assume such a mediating role in their own area of responsibility; and to enhance the level of coordination among different actors of mediation with a view to minimize unnecessary duplications and complications.



During its first year, the group has achieved more than most of us dared to hope for. The results have been impressive. We presented a resolution to the UN General Assembly entitled "Strengthening the role of mediation in peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution", which the Assembly adopted by consensus in June 2011. The aim of the General Assembly resolution on mediation was to mobilize more support, both politically and financially, to this work. The UN Secretary-General described this first-ever resolution on mediation in a report to the Security Council as "a groundbreaking development that positions the Organization as a standard setter for mediation". The most tangible follow-up of the resolution is the preparation of the Guidance for more effective mediation, which will be finalized in the summer.

When the Group gathered for the second ministerial meeting last September in New York, the message was clear: there is a strong momentum for enhancing the use of mediation. It was emphasized that regional organizations and civil society play an important role in mediation efforts. There was a strong mutual willingness for more engagement and cooperation. All participants expressed their full determination to take the initiative forward with practical steps and help the Secretary-General in developing the guidance for effective mediation. Now the Group consists of 28 states and 8 organizations.

A key to successful mediation is often the effective cooperation between a variety of actors with different backgrounds and expertise: the civil society, the United Nations, regional and other organizations and governments. The United Nations has enhanced its capacity to offer consistent and professional support to complex peacemaking processes and to support Member States and regional organizations in building their own capacities. In our efforts to promote the use of mediation, Finland has very much focused on strengthening, and even creating, international, regional and local structures and on supporting the development of capacity at various levels.

I already mentioned our firm support for the United Nations in the mediation field. Nordic cooperation in mediation is also very important for us, I will talk about it a bit later. Finland will also uphold the essential role that mediation plays in the European Union's conflict prevention activities, such as in the development of the 2009 EU Concept on Mediation and Dialogue.

Moreover, Finland will do its utmost to find measures to improve cooperation in the field of peace mediation with other regional organisations such as the African Union, the OSCE, ASEAN, the OAS, ECOWAS, as well as IGAD.

For example the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) organized already in 2009 a seminar on strengthening the mediation and conflict prevention aspects of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

At the national level, Finland will continue building on the mediation experience that it already has. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its representations abroad play a significant role in building up our institutional memory. Training has also an important role part. Therefore, more advanced mediation-related modules will be included in the training of Finnish civilian crisis management experts and in the Finnish diplomatic training. Here, the promotion on mediation-related research is also essential.

The information exchange between the different ministerial departments as well as with civil society organisations needs to be continued. The ministry has called together a Mediation Support Network

that identifies mediation contact persons in all relevant national organisations. We hope that the network will systematise the work of all the Finnish actors involved in mediation.

The role of women in peace processes continues to be one of Finland's main priorities, in accordance with resolution UN Security Council resolution 1325. Improving the role of women remains a cross-cutting theme in all of Finland's mediation and research activities. In addition to this, Finland also has thematic and regional priorities. Finland will provide mediation services and expertise in fields that it can demonstrate added value in. Such fields could include human rights, democracy and Rule of Law, as well as questions concerning women, peace and security and the environment. It is also necessary to focus on regional questions, such as North Africa, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, in order to better target Finland's mediation efforts.

The role of a mediator is often crucial to reduce tension. Mediator is not meddling in others' internal affairs, but assisting them to reconcile their differences through dialogue. It is about helping the parties to a conflict to reach a common vision for their future and agree to work together to attain it. Local ownership, inclusiveness, impartiality, accountability, legitimacy and reconciliation of peace and justice are the key words for any successful mediation.

Hardly anyone can bring all the necessary competences to a mediation process, as they usually require expertise in a variety of different areas. Moreover, a combination of different actors, serving different roles in the process is often beneficial. For example, one actor can bring the necessary political weight with useful networks and resources to the process, whilst another may bring the capacity to create a dialogue with particularly difficult party. I am convinced that the better we combine our strengths, the stronger the chances are to reach sustainable peace. If we can rely on cooperation, each of us can focus on deepening our particular competences, instead of trying to master all the areas.

The United Nations has international legitimacy which makes the organization best suited for mediation. Sometimes the regional organizations are faster to respond and often have a better understanding of the root causes of the conflict. The United Nations can always offer broader support for those processes through good offices and rosters of experienced diplomats and experts. Partnership and cooperation is essential to maximize complementarity and minimize inefficiencies.

When taking the initiative to establish the Group of Friends of Mediation we wanted to strengthen the culture of cooperation. The group brings together traditional and new emerging mediators as well as regional and international organizations. It regularly interacts with civil society. The activities of the Group promote synergy and prevent overlapping.

The UN Secretary-General is currently preparing guidance for more effective mediation. In the contribution that my Government sent to the Secretary-General for the process, we underlined that there should be clarity in who is responsible for what and how to avoid overlapping authority. A significant step forward would be to nominate a lead mediator for each crisis situation. The mediator should be given the authority and power to coordinate different actions if several third party actors are involved in the mediation process.

Early warning mechanisms are necessary for the mediation actors to respond rapidly to potential or escalating violence. If mediation can be employed as soon as early warning signs of conflict emerge, it has better chances to succeed in preventing violence. The first information of a threat of violence comes usually from the civil society. Mediation would be very difficult without the active involvement of civil society actors. Early warning mechanisms rely heavily on local civil society actors to receive first-hand information from the ground and to analyze the significance of such information. Moreover, as civil society actors often have the best knowledge about the local situation, they can bring the



necessary capacity to the mediation effort to help identify concrete measures to address the root-causes and reduce tensions permanently.

Participation of a wide range of civil society actors in the mediation effort is an important objective in itself. We know that inclusiveness is of utmost importance, if the mediation process is to effectively address the root causes. Those who have been marginalized need to be brought to the center. Such groups can often get their voices heard through civil society organizations. However, this is not enough. It is important that all relevant population groups get a seat around the negotiation table.

Here I would like to highlight the importance of increasing the role of women in mediation processes. It is positive that track II conflict resolution mechanisms have provided women with more entry-points for engagement in many mediation processes. However, women should be part of the formal negotiation teams on equal footing with men, and act as mediators themselves. Increasing the number of women as chief or lead mediators, in the spirit of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, peace and security), is a necessity that would help enhance the effectiveness of mediation efforts.

Nordic cooperation will remain a cornerstone in Finland's mediation programme. Last year I initiated the establishment of a Nordic mediation network. The network facilitates contacts and exchange of information among various Nordic actors involved in mediation and helps to identify possible areas of further cooperation. The network is very informal and flexible without any new structures. The network met for the first time in Helsinki in the end of January at the Foreign Ministry experts level. Sweden will follow-up with the next meeting later this year. The Nordic countries have a common value base and a lot of resources to put to mediation efforts. Together we can have an even better impact for mediation effort.

The Åland island model is one example of Nordic solutions in the field of successful mediation. It can serve as an inspiration for other conflict areas. We are well aware that it is not a model that could be used in general terms. All conflict situations are different and unique. There are different elements in the Åland island example which can be studied individually and could be applied to different situations by different actors.

Since the conflicts are different mediation processes need to be adapted to the circumstances. Mediators need a lot of different skills and support from a professional team to get to know the root causes and the conflict dynamics.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs established already more than 10 years ago a Contact Group between the Åland Government and the Ministry. One of the main purposes of the Contact Group is to increase and develop the use of the Åland example in international connections and occasions. In this respect the Contact Group has been active through several years and has organized various events to promote the knowledge of the Åland example, including the demilitarized and neutralized status of Åland Islands. The Contact Group has also advised on the study "The Åland Example and Its Components" discussed here today. Likewise it has contributed to organizing of this seminar. In the spirit of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Åland Islands solution an historic exhibition on "The Åland Islands Solution" was opened in June last year in the United Nations head Quarters in Geneva. A roll up - version of the exhibition continues its way from New York to Washington and further.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Åland Example is actively promoted in various occasions and I believe it can serve as a source of inspiration in mediation and other means of conflict resolution.