



[Front page](#) > [Current affairs](#)

Speeches, 5/23/2012

Statement by Minister Tuomioja at a High-Level Meeting on Mediation in New York

**Statement by Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland
Informal High-Level Meeting on Mediation, New York 23 May 2012**

Check against delivery

The Role of Member States in Mediation

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this informal High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the role of Member States in mediation. Your leadership in advancing mediation during the 66th session is commendable. This high-level meeting is an important occasion to further share knowledge and visions on how to use mediation more effectively for conflict prevention, management and resolution. As a co-chair of the Group of Friends of Mediation I am glad to present you some Finnish experiences in mediation.

Over decades, Finland has played various different roles in mediation processes.

The most visible part of these efforts have been the high-level mediation assignments carried out by Finnish mediators in various conflict areas around the world. In 2008, the efforts to bring peace in Aceh, Kosovo, Namibia and elsewhere brought the Nobel Peace Prize to the former President of Finland, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari. The first Finn to serve as a UN mediator was appointed as early as in the 1960s in relation to Cyprus. Also, Finnish senior officers in various peacekeeping operations have served peace in different ways. These and other mediation assignments have provided inspiration to several generations of Finns. In recent years, Finland has been active in supporting peace for instance in Northern Ireland, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Horn of Africa.

Ever since those days, mediation has been an integral part of the Finnish foreign policy. A few years ago, we decided to reinforce our efforts in this field. Strengthening international mediation structures is our central goal. Our partnership with Turkey, which led to the establishment of the Group of Friends of Mediation in 2010, has proved to be extremely fruitful. We have been encouraged by the enthusiasm with which this initiative was received. The group has already achieved more than most of us dared to hope for. The resolution "Strengthening the role of mediation in peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" that was adopted by consensus in June 2011 has become a living document. The most tangible follow-up of the resolution is the preparation of the Guidance for more effective mediation. The manner in which the Secretariat is preparing this document with wide consultation rounds, is commendable.

Earlier, I mentioned the work of individual mediators. It is important to underline that none of these mediators worked alone. President Ahtisaari has stated that working in isolation is a recipe for failure. As shown by successful mediation efforts such as the case of Namibia, a peace process is largely a matter of cooperation and partnership between different actors: parties to a conflict, other mediators, governments, the civil society and international organizations.

I couldn't agree more. Effective mediation requires a multi-stakeholder approach at various levels, each actor bringing their specific expertise to the joint effort. No one can bring all the necessary competences or roles to a mediation process. For example, a prominent individual can bring the necessary political weight with useful networks and resources to the process, whilst those closer to the conflict can bring the capacity to create a dialogue and the necessary in-depth expertise to find solutions to the situation. 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 areas.

This is why networking is a key element in Finland's mediation strategy. Finland acts very seldom as a mediator itself. Rather, we support the activities of Track Two actors and other partners in reconciliation and peacemaking. Very often, we support efforts based on a partnership between a Finnish and a local actor.

We see Finland's role very much as a facilitator for peace. We want to support local actors to build the necessary capacities or platforms to create peace. Local ownership is of key importance. Finland is currently preparing ways to support the capacity of the local actors in Myanmar to engage in the peace process. There is a strong willingness among various actors in Myanmar to start a genuine national political dialogue, and we, like many others, wish to support it. An International Peace Support Group has been formed to coordinate this effort. This is a very welcome development. An important dimension in our involvement is cooperation with Norway which for a long time has been active in promoting peace in the country and continues to play a key role.

In Somalia, Finland has since 2008 been supporting the positive role of Somali religious and traditional leaders in mediation. This work has been carried out by civil society actors who have been working in the country for years and thus have the needed trust, access and skills to work jointly with local actors. Through this work several local conflicts in Somalia have been identified and Somali elders have been successfully empowered to carry out their traditional role as mediators.

Achieving sustainable peace in Somalia requires not only grass-roots engagement but also a functional dialogue on all aspects of peace between local and international actors, Finland has since 2010 supported the efforts of UNPOS (UN Political Office for Somalia) to reach out and benefit from the views and grass-root legitimacy that Somali elders have in peace- and state building. The role of non-state actors in implementing the activities and fostering effective dialogue between the elders, UNPOS and the Transitional Federal Government has been essential. Building bridges between different actors involved in mediation – donors, international actors with clear mandates, Governments, local actors and NGO's – is not an option but a necessity in effective mediation.

Implementing the Security Council resolution 1325 in all activities relating to peace- and state building as well as mediation is a priority for Finland. We welcome the efforts of the UN Secretariat to advance the implementation of 1325 with regard to mediation and are actively considering to support a training programme on gender and mediation.

Regardless of the context, an enhanced role for women will result in more sustainable results. While

supporting Somali elders (all men), Finland has at the same time consistently emphasized and supported the inclusion of women in decision-making and women's participation in future democratic structures of Somalia. Often the best results derive not through international pressure, but through genuine local ownership and long-term engagement. One example is from June 2011 when as part of the UNPOS work, the Somali elders decided that they want to establish a traditional elders council, Guurti, to South-Central Somalia. Perhaps contrary to expectations of some, the elders announced that at least 25% of the members of the Guurti should be women.

Networking is also useful at the national level. At the beginning of this year, we established a national Mediation Coordination Group in Finland. Led by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the group comprises government representatives, civil society organizations, research institutions, universities and others involved in mediation. The group serves as a platform for sharing information and identifying new areas of cooperation in the field of mediation. In its first meeting the Group identified a number of issues as "trademarks" of Finnish mediation that should be further developed. The establishment of the coordination group was extremely well received. The participants considered the meeting an historic event. I can warmly recommend the establishment of a similar structure in other countries. Another useful initiative at the national level was the adoption of an Action Plan for Mediation last December that helps to focus on developing those areas where Finland has particular expertise.

One of the key message that we have promoted in different fora is that mediation is highly relevant throughout the conflict cycle. More attention has to be paid to the role of mediation in conflict prevention. Early identification of conflicts is crucial, and early identification should lead to early action.

It has also become evident that parties to a conflict should not be left alone after the signing of a peace agreement. There is a high risk of relapse into violence during the fragile period following the conclusion of a peace agreement. These are reasons why we felt so strongly that the GA resolution should adopt a comprehensive approach, underlining the relevance of mediation throughout the conflict cycle.

An illustrative case in point is Aceh, Indonesia. After the conclusion of the peace agreement between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement in Helsinki, Finland in 2005, a Monitoring Mission was established to monitor and support the peace process. This EU-led Monitoring Mission completed its mandate successfully at the end of 2006. In addition, regular political dialogue between the parties to the agreement has been sustained even six years after the conclusion of the peace agreement by the mediator, president Ahtisaari and the CMI. It should not be forgotten that the peace process must be rooted in the society itself. It is the right and the responsibility of the people themselves to make the best out of the hard won peace. A long way still remains in ensuring that the fruit of peace and development will benefit future generations. All parties, including the international community, continue to support the development of Aceh.

Based on these positive examples, we proposed in our contribution to the Guidance that an authoritative mechanism should be set up to monitor the implementation of peace agreements. The mediator should have a role in this, but the monitoring mechanism may require a bigger and more complex structure than the mediation process. We also proposed that peace agreements should include an arrangement for how disagreements on the implementation of the provisions shall be settled. Possibly the mediator could be called upon again, but the dispute settlement mechanism should be able to function even if the mediator is not able to take part in it.

I would again like to emphasize the importance of civil society actors, especially in preventing violent conflicts from breaking out. The first information of a threat of violence and the underlying causes come usually from the civil society. 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 the tensions permanently.

Lot of work remains to be done in improving coordination between different actors. I will save my comments on that issue for the afternoon session, when I will discuss the importance of nominating a lead mediator for each crisis situation.

Mr President, Excellencies,

The United Nations is a key actor in the field of mediation. Through the General Assembly resolution initiated by Finland and Turkey the normative framework for mediation, based on the UN Charter, has already been established. Mediation could deserve more attention also in the work of the Security Council. Finland is a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for 2013-2014. If elected, Finland would be committed to carry on the excellent work already done by others, such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Turkey and Lebanon, to advance mediation also in the Council. For that opportunity we seek your support.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the United Nations, particularly to the Department of Political Affairs and its Mediation Support Unit, for their efforts to develop UN's capacity to better serve and conduct mediation. We are committed to continuing our support to these efforts.