

Towards Realizing the Strengths and Mitigating the Challenges of NGO Mediators



FINAL REPORT OF CONSULTATION PROCESS

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I. Introduction and definitions

Following the high-level debate on mediation in the United Nations Security Council on 23 September 2008, the Council requested that the Secretary-General submit a report on mediation within six months. This report will provide a framework for mediation efforts within the UN system and beyond. Among other topics, it considers the unique contributions of NGO mediators as well as possibilities for collaboration and complementary action between NGOs and the UN in mediation processes.

The Mediation Support Project (MSP)¹ was asked by the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the UN Department of Political Affairs to organize a consultation process with fellow NGO mediators with the aim of assessing the contributions of NGO mediators in contemporary peace processes. For this purpose, MSP organized a workshop on 28 January 2009 in Brussels in cooperation with the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). The workshop included the participation of various NGO mediators and experts. Concurrently, MSP sought inputs from mediation practitioners all over the world via e-mail. This consultation process was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ireland.²

For the purpose of this paper, “mediation” is a process in which an acceptable third party assists in resolving a dispute between two or more parties. Mediation is a non-adversarial approach to conflict resolution, the role of the mediator being to facilitate communication between the parties, assist them in focusing on the real issues of the dispute, and generate options that meet the interests and needs of all parties.³ This report covers a broad range of mediation activities including processes with official representatives of conflict parties, middle-range leaders as well as grassroots actors.

“NGO mediators” refers to non-state actors that are not formally part of a government or an inter-governmental organization and who work as intermediaries in conflict settings. For the purpose of the UN report, this comprises all the mediators that do not fall in another category covered in the report, i.e., the UN, its member states, regional organizations, and actors that do not usually count as NGOs, such as individuals, church groups, corporations etc.

Manifestly, the term “NGO mediators” covers a heterogeneous set of actors. It is difficult to categorically classify mediators, but a distinction can be made between international and local mediators; between mediators “inside” conflict societies and those “outside”; and between mediators with close ties to governments and those that are completely independent. This diversity of actors implies a wide-range of mediation activities, often referred to as “tracks”.⁴ Thus, NGO mediators perform a multitude of functions, for instance:

¹ MSP is a joint venture between swisspeace (www.swisspeace.ch/mediation) and the Center for Security Studies at the ETH Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch).

² Opinions and comments in this report are entirely of the responsibility of the authors and do not represent or reflect the policies of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ireland or those of the United Nations.

³ This definition is adapted from the definition of mediation on the UN Peacemaker website: <http://peacemaker.unlb.org/index1.php>

⁴ “Track 1” refers to direct negotiations between official representatives of conflict parties; “Track 1.5” is a process involving official representatives of conflict parties, but this process takes place in an informal setting and representa-

- Some NGO mediators, often international NGOs, facilitate Track 1 negotiations with official representatives of the main conflict parties.
- NGO mediators also frequently provide support services to official Track 1 mediators in the form of expertise, capacity-building, outreach etc.
- Other NGO mediators facilitate informal processes with one or several conflict parties or individual representatives; these processes, often described as Track 1.5, can take place before, after or in parallel to official Track 1 negotiations.
- Some NGOs mediators, often locally based, engage influential persons with the aim of strengthening peace constituencies in conflict societies. These processes are often referred to as Track 2.
- Finally, NGO mediators, again often local organizations, engage grassroots communities in so-called Track 3 activities with the aim of building broad-based support for a peace process.

The primary objective of the present report is to provide substantive input regarding the contributions of NGO mediators for the UN report on mediation. Furthermore, this report aims to contribute to a greater awareness within the UN of the current role and the potential for collaboration with NGOs in peace processes. In so doing, this report makes use of inputs provided by NGO mediation practitioners during the consultative workshop in Brussels as well as via e-mail correspondence.

This report is comprised of three distinct sections. The first assesses the characteristics of NGO mediators and identifies their unique strengths and comparative advantages in peace processes. The second section looks at challenges that NGO mediators face, underscoring the need for complementary action and collaboration with other mediation actors. The final section formulates a series of recommendations for the UN aimed at enhancing its support for NGO mediators and strengthening the potential for collaboration between them.

The present report assesses the contributions of NGO mediators against the background of multi-track, multi-phase and multi-topic peace processes. These processes commence before official peace negotiations and continue after a peace agreement. They require a high degree of engagement with official representatives of conflict parties as well as with civil stakeholders and grassroots actors. Furthermore, they envelop a broad range of topics related to the root causes of an armed conflict. And perhaps most significantly, they are comprised of a multitude of actors – the UN, regional organizations, states, and NGOs – who seek to contribute their own unique strengths in cooperation with one another.

tives act in their personal capacity; “Track 2” refers to activities with influential non-official persons on both sides; “Track 3” processes engage grassroots actors on both sides. It is important to note that there is no clear common definition of different tracks; the current report does not aim to contribute to a better differentiation of mediation activities, but uses the Track concept simply in indicative manner.

II. Characteristics and strengths of NGO mediators in multi-track and multi-phase peace processes

This section assesses the characteristics and strengths of NGO mediators against the background of the needs of multi-track peace processes. Each table outlines a specific need of multi-track peace processes, provides a description of the potential characteristics and contributions of NGO mediators, and summarizes the strength of NGO mediators in relation to that need. It bears mentioning that NGO mediators are extremely heterogeneous and that their contributions to peace processes can differ significantly. Thus, the following discussion should not be taken as being universally valid. In fact, a given point may be relevant to one NGO mediator, but not applicable to another.

(1) Early engagement

<i>Need of the process</i>	The formation of an international consensus allowing states or the UN to mediate in a conflict may take a long time. However, it is essential that mediators engage early in a conflict in order to prevent further escalation of violence and to prepare parties for peace negotiations.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators usually have less complicated decision-making procedures and bureaucratic requirements compared with state or UN mediators, which allows NGO mediators to mobilize resources and to act fast. Local NGOs in particular can draw on local networks and insider information. Thus, NGO mediators often get involved in pre-negotiations, for example, by enabling preliminary contact between parties through shuttle mediation or by building capacities of conflict parties in training workshops.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators can react quickly and often get involved at an early stage of the process, engaging with parties to prepare them for peace negotiations.

(2) Flexibility and independence

<i>Need of the process</i>	Peacemaking can be sensitive and politically risky, such as when a state considers mediation as interfering in its internal affairs. States and international organizations are limited in these situations; however, in order to prevent or reduce violence, mediation activities remain essential.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	Although NGOs have formal procedures, they face fewer political constraints than states and international organizations, and as a result, they tend to have a different risk profile. They can therefore get involved in sensitive areas and afford to talk to actors that many consider “spoilers” or “terrorists.” NGOs are particularly skilled at working in a confidential mode and they can undertake missions with less exposure, navigating away from spotlights with agility.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators have a different risk profile and they can get involved where states and international organizations are reluctant.

(3) Engagement with armed non-state actors in asymmetric settings

<i>Need of the process</i>	Many conflict situations are characterized by a lop-sided distribution of power and international legitimacy among the belligerents. It can be difficult for states or international organization to get involved in such asymmetric settings and to engage proscribed armed non-state actors, even if such engagement remains essential to preventing or reducing violence.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	As mentioned above, NGOs face fewer obstacles than states and international organizations and are well-placed to get involved with armed non-state groups that many consider “pariahs”. NGO mediators often manage to gain the trust of the leadership of such groups and can contribute to building their willingness to engage in peace negotiations. At the same time, NGO mediators may appear less threatening in the eyes of the stronger, often state conflict parties, as their engagement is perceived as conferring less legitimacy on their adversaries than that of a state or international organization.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators are often particularly well-suited to engaging in asymmetric settings.

(4) Expertise and support

<i>Need of the process</i>	Official peace negotiations are complex processes that require local knowledge, expertise and support.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators often have topical and regional expertise, which can be deployed in official mediation processes. Local NGOs in particular have an extensive knowledge about the conflict, its actors, stakeholders and key issues. Furthermore, NGO mediators can contribute process expertise based on their previous experiences organizing and designing dialogue processes. NGO mediators are also skilled in providing tailor-made support services to official mediators and conflict parties, whether it is logistical assistance, training and capacity building, or substantive inputs.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators often have important topical, regional and process expertise and they can provide support services for official mediators as well as conflict parties.

(5) Trust and a safe environment

<i>Need of the process</i>	Peace negotiations are risky endeavors for conflict parties, as they potentially erode their source of power and require a fundamental change in mentality. Thus, it is important to create a safe environment, separate from the official negotiating table, where parties can confidentially test ideas and acclimate to the process.
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<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	NGOs have their own motivations and reasons for getting involved in mediation, but they generally do not pursue geo-political goals and they do not use coercive means as part of the mediation process. As a result, NGO mediators appear less threatening and are well positioned for gaining the trust of conflict parties. NGO mediators can therefore provide a confidential and low-pressure environment in which conflict parties can build relationships and feel safe to test ideas, knowing they can subsequently deny them.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators are often perceived as trustworthy by conflict parties, allowing NGO mediators to create a safe environment in which the parties can test ideas and build relationships.

(6) Moral credibility and values

<i>Need of the process</i>	Mediation processes are supposed to herald the democratic transformation of conflict societies and bring about reconciliation between different groups in a society. An essential function of a peace process is to foster a culture of peace and to contribute to spreading values regarding the peaceful resolution of disputes.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	Many NGO mediators are particularly value-based. As such, their work can foster the perception that mediation is not just about cutting a deal between armed protagonists in a conflict, but rather that it can signify the democratic transformation of a conflict society such that future disputes will be resolved peacefully. Thus, certain NGOs, particularly those locally rooted, can foster a genuine culture of peace owing to their honest motivation, persuasiveness, passion for peace, and insistence on the fair treatment of belligerents within a mediation process. Also, NGO mediators can identify, engage and empower agents of peace in a society, laying the basis for sustainable peace in the future.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators, many of them locally rooted, are often recognized for their moral integrity, allowing them to contribute to fostering a culture of peace in conflict and post-conflict societies.

(7) Local roots and cultural competencies

<i>Need of the process</i>	In-depth knowledge of the local context is indispensable in a mediation process. However, many official mediators are unfamiliar with the local context, which requires them to draw on the work of locally rooted actors.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	Many local NGO mediators are “insiders,” who have been involved in a given context for many years. They are familiar with the language and cultural practices in conflict countries, and they are well-connected to a broad range of societal actors. Thanks to these qualities, NGO mediators may have an easier time gaining the trust of conflict parties, enabling NGOs to facilitate an effective process.

<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators may improve a mediation process thanks to their local roots and knowledge of the cultural context.
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(8) Outreach and peace constituencies

<i>Need of the process</i>	Participation in official negotiations is often restricted. Nevertheless, support within the broader populace of the conflict society remains a necessary component. It is therefore essential to engage with grassroots actors and to link these processes to official talks. Outreach is all the more important in the implementation phase of a peace process.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators, in particular those that are locally present, are well suited to engaging with grassroots actors in order to build constituencies of peace. They are also skilled in fostering a dialogue between middle-range leaders, who can then use their influence to convince conflict parties to make peace and/or to implement a peace agreement. NGO mediators also have an important role in terms of linking dialogue processes with civil stakeholders to official peace negotiations. Also, local NGOs have a crucial role to play in monitoring the implementation of a peace agreement after official negotiations have ended.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators can contribute to building constituencies for peace by engaging influential people and grassroots actors in conflict societies and by linking these processes to official peace talks.

(9) Inclusiveness and gender sensitivity

<i>Need of the process</i>	Peace negotiations are often exclusive processes, in which the future of a country is decided by a narrow range of political and military elites. It is essential for a mediator to counteract the exclusive nature of peace negotiations by seeking the inclusion of the interests of a broad range of civil stakeholders.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators, as members of civil society, are better able to reach out to civil stakeholders not traditionally included, thus bringing their perspectives to bear and enhancing the diversity of official peace negotiations. These typically excluded constituencies comprise women, youth, victims, displaced people, and ethnic minorities. NGO mediators may also be well positioned to promote gender sensitivity, for example by raising gender-relevant topics in peace negotiations, by nominating women mediators, or by encouraging parties to have quotas for women in their negotiating delegations.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators can convene different civil stakeholders and ensure that their voices are heard in a peace process; NGO mediators can also promote gender sensitivity in peace negotiations.

(10) Informal processes

<i>Need of the process</i>	Engaging in high-profile formal peace negotiations can be risky for conflict parties, in particular in highly escalated contexts where belligerents have fought each other for decades. In these contexts, confidential informal processes that feed into or run parallel to official negotiations can be useful for advancing a peace process.
<i>Characteristics of NGO mediators</i>	Where NGO mediators are close to, but not formally affiliated with official actors, these personalities can take advantage of their proximity to the main actors to test the waters before any of the conflict parties commit to entering the formal processes. In fact, their lower and less conspicuous standing allows NGOs to work with considerable discretion, an important attribute when acting as an intermediary in informal processes. NGO mediators can also facilitate these informal processes during official peace talks, allowing parties to establish secret communication channels and test alternative ideas.
<i>Strength of NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators often facilitate informal processes that feed into or run parallel to official mediation processes.

III. Challenges for NGO mediators in multi-track and multi-phase peace processes

This section assesses challenges to the work of NGO mediators against the background of multi-track peace processes. Similar to the previous section, each table begins with a brief sketch of a particular challenge of peace processes as a whole and follows with a synopsis of the implications of this challenge for NGO mediators. Again, these points are not universally valid, but are meant to reflect the diversity of the roles of NGO mediators in peace processes.

(1) Sticks and carrots

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	In some instances, the incentive structure of conflict parties is such that they are not interested in making peace. In this case, there might be a role for external actors to “ripen” the conflict, that is, to bring material incentives and threats to bear in order to initiate or advance peace talks. However, using sticks and carrots carries the risk of undermining the parties’ perception of a mediator as impartial or even-handed, a fact that could potentially jeopardize the entire peace process. It could also call into question the sustainability of the process, as the parties may abandon a peace process when sticks and carrots are removed after the signature of a peace agreement.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators generally have little material inducement or coercive means at their disposal. This can be seen as positive, as it induces NGO mediators to facilitate a sound process based on trust and the fair treatment of the parties. However, NGO mediators should be cognizant of their limitations and realize that in some

	instances, they should probably defer to states or international organizations who can utilize financial, political and military resources to ripen a conflict, advance negotiations, or guarantee a peace agreement.
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(2) Competition

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	In some contexts, mediation is a crowded field, where a multitude of actors, some of them NGOs, compete with each other for the most spectacular mediation engagements and the most privileged access to conflict parties. The danger with so many would-be mediators is that it provides conflict parties with the temptation/opportunity to switch their mediators if and when they are dissatisfied with the terms of the process. This behavior can significantly undermine and impede peace processes. Such competition can also contribute to the fragmentation of conflict parties.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	Negative competition is obviously of concern to all mediators, not just NGOs. However, when competition is counter-productive and serves to undermine an existing process, it seems clear that NGO mediators should restrict and/or better coordinate their involvement. This is not to say that competition cannot be positive, especially in Track 2 and 3 mediation. In fact, forum-shopping and multiple processes can add value, provided that these processes complement and do not undermine each other. Another challenge for NGO mediators is to engage more often in conflicts that do not receive the same degree of attention and/or resources as some causes célèbres.

(3) Accountability

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	The ultimate beneficiaries of mediation efforts are people living in conflict societies, who bear the brunt of armed conflict. It is these people to whom mediators should be accountable. However, this may not be the case; for example, when a process fails, international mediators often fly off and never return to the country whose people they are supposed to have served.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	A lack of accountability concerns all mediators including states, international organizations and NGOs. Also, a distinction needs to be made between local and international NGO. Local NGOs are directly accountable to the in conflict societies in which they continue to live given that their reputation depends on how they are perceived by people in these societies in the long run. International NGOs, on the other hand, are accountable as well, but this accountability often flows to donor governments and international organizations, rather than to the people whom the mediation is supposed to be helping. Therefore, it is a challenge for international NGOs to ensure that their work truly benefits people in conflict societies.

(4) Dependence

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	Successful mediation processes require patience, long-term involvement, and low-key engagements in situations that are not on everybody's radar screen. However, donors are often more willing to fund and provide support for processes that are visible and take place in countries that have already received a lot of traction.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators are particularly skilled at operating in a low-key manner and they are often involved in peace processes for the long-term, beyond the international media attention that official peace talks may generate. Nevertheless, there is a danger that donor requirements may induce NGOs to seek more visible and short-term engagements. Thus, the challenge for NGO mediators is to avoid having their donor dependency preclude them from realizing their unique strengths with regards to low-key and long-term engagement. In addition, a selected number of international NGOs are founded and led by eminent individuals, often former statesmen, and depend on their founders' access to decision-makers. The challenge for these NGOs is that their work continues even without eminent individuals and that their celebrity does not crowd out funding for lower-key, often local NGOs.

(5) Insider and outsider

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	Local ownership of peace processes and outreach to local stakeholders are key for the success of mediation in the long run, all the more given that official peace talks are often exclusive with influential roles being carved out for international actors. However, in some extremely polarized conflict contexts, all local stakeholders, including NGOs, may be tainted and international actors, without a past in a given conflict, may have the best chance to gain the trust of conflict parties.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	A unique strength of NGOs, particularly local ones, is their connection to local stakeholders and their ability to garner their support and participation in a given peace process. However, in some highly polarized societies, there is no space for local intermediaries because everybody is tainted by the conflict and perceived to belong to one side or the other. A key challenge in mediation processes, in particular for NGO mediators, is to find the right mix between outsiders and insiders in a given context. It is important to keep in mind that international NGOs may sometimes be associated with the political agenda of their home or donor country, which may impede their ability to function as an impartial intermediary. The challenge is for NGO mediators to be aware of their perceived and actual biases and to make responsible decisions about when and where to become engaged.

(6) Linkages

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	Peace negotiations are usually most effective when different processes – formal and informal, Track 1, 2 and 3 – are linked to one another and designed to reinforce one another. However, these links are often non-existent in part because those in charge of the official peace talks are not sufficiently aware of the potential for contributions through informal processes and by local intermediaries.
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<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	NGO mediators often facilitate informal processes before, after or in parallel with official Track 1 peace negotiations. As previously discussed, these processes can be effective in terms of building peace constituencies and fostering popular buy-in. However, Track 1 mediators often do not sufficiently recognize or take advantage of informal processes. A challenge for NGO mediators, therefore, may be to be pro-active in terms of seeking channels of information and influence with regards to formal processes and official mediators.
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(7) Safety and security

<i>Challenge to the process</i>	Peace processes can be perilous endeavors, given the various actors in conflict societies who may have something to lose if peace takes root. This may pose a risk for local mediators, especially when peace negotiations fail and international actors withdraw from a conflict.
<i>Challenge for NGO mediators</i>	Local NGO mediators are an integral part of the societies they are working to reconcile. Conflict societies can be extremely polarized and may propagate a logic of war that dehumanizes the “other.” In this context, mediators may be portrayed as selling out to the enemy and their reputation and security may be jeopardized as a consequence. The challenge for international NGOs, who work with local intermediaries, is to put measures in place and act in such a way that the safety and security of local partners are protected.

IV. Recommendations for enhanced cooperation and support between UN and NGO mediators

A multi-track approach to mediation encompasses a multitude of actors working in concert with one another. Consequently, NGO mediators often find themselves engaged in the same processes as the UN. While there are undoubtedly already laudable efforts to share information and coordinate between NGOs and the UN, more can be done. First and foremost is the realization that NGOs can enhance the work of UN mediators, and that the UN in turn has a number of assets which can potentially benefit the work of NGO mediators. For example, the UN can convey legitimacy to actions undertaken by NGO mediators; it can provide funds or help mobilize funds for such activities; and it can provide high-level support to mediation processes led by NGOs.

The following section includes a number of concrete recommendations for how the UN can improve its support of NGO mediators in the spirit of realizing multi-track peace processes. These recommendations grew out of the consultation process with NGO mediation practitioners and as such, contain a vision to foster long-term complementary action and mutual support between NGOs and the UN. This vision presumes the UN’s willingness to recognize the value of multi-track processes, whereby official peace negotiations facilitated by the UN are complemented through the engagement of civil stakeholders led by NGOs. This vision also includes a spirit of

cooperation and togetherness among the different mediators regardless of their background, institutional affiliation or role in the process, even as it ensures that the autonomy of each actor, in particular NGOs, is respected and promoted.

(1) Recognizing the work of NGO mediators

<i>Aim</i>	In its statements and reports on mediation, the UN explicitly recognizes the contributions of NGO mediators.
<i>Explanation</i>	The already fruitful cooperation between the UN and NGO mediators could be given more visibility by including references to the work of NGO mediators in official speeches and reports of the UN. This would grant greater legitimacy to NGO mediators and ensure that their work is increasingly appreciated within the UN and diplomatic circles.
<i>Specific recommendations</i>	In particular, the UN could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Include in the final report by the Secretary General on mediation, a statement that affirms its commitment to a multi-actor approach to mediation and highlights the specific strengths of NGO mediators; ➤ Acknowledge the important work of NGO mediators in periodic Secretary-General reports regarding situations of armed conflict as well as statements in UN bodies; ➤ Directly support NGO mediators before, during and after official peace processes by granting visibility and recognition for their work; one idea in this regard is to hold “hand-over ceremonies” at the end of UN mediation mandates, whereby NGOs are acknowledged for their work “in the shadow” of official peace negotiations.

(2) Complementary action from the outset

<i>Aim</i>	In the beginning of an engagement, the UN draws on the resources of NGO mediators in the spirit of a multi-track approach.
<i>Explanation</i>	As mentioned above, contemporary peace processes are highly complex and involve multiple actors who come to bear at different stages of the process in accordance with their specific strengths. At the beginning of the process, the contributions of NGO mediators can be particularly useful, given that UN experts do not yet possess the network and experience that allow them to act effectively. In the spirit of a multi-actor approach, the UN should seek partnerships and complementary action with NGOs from the outset of a process.

<p><i>Specific recommendations</i></p>	<p>When the UN gets involved in a mediation process, it could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify relevant NGO mediators in the country and the region; consult them before getting involved to identify relevant local stakeholders and to carry out a conflict analysis with the support of NGO mediators; ➤ Establish a Joint Facilitation Team that includes NGO mediators; involve the joint team in analysis, planning and process design; ➤ Call upon NGO mediators to develop a strategy for outreach to grassroots actors as well as for the inclusion of civil stakeholders in official peace negotiations; ➤ Analyze gaps in stakeholder representation within negotiating teams and collaborate with NGO mediators to involve them in efforts to compensate for under-representation in official peace negotiations; ➤ Ask that the Mediation Support Unit include among the stand-by list of experts a specialist in structuring inclusive peace processes, who would ensure effective collaboration with NGO mediators and leveraging of their inputs; ➤ Refrain from trying to coordinate and control the activities of NGO mediators, but take advantage of their contributions in a pragmatic manner.
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(3) Consultation during the process

<p><i>Aim</i></p>	<p>During a peace process, the UN consults NGO mediators and seeks their input and support in the spirit of a multi-track approach.</p>
<p><i>Explanation</i></p>	<p>The effectiveness of a mediation process can be hampered by insufficient links between formal processes, often facilitated by the UN and states, and informal processes, frequently led by NGO mediators. In the spirit of a multi-track approach, the UN should consult NGO mediators regularly during a mediation process, be open to their inputs and seek ways in which to connect informal and formal processes.</p>
<p><i>Specific recommendations</i></p>	<p>During a mediation process, the UN could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Communicate with NGO mediators on a regular basis; seek their feedback about the process; consider including topics and actors in formal peace negotiations based on NGO mediator suggestions; ➤ Suggest the establishment of an extended Group of Friends, including not only state actors and international organizations, but also NGO mediators; this group could share information, plan a common strategy and ensure the linkage of peace initiatives at different levels; ➤ Solicit technical inputs on draft agendas as well as draft texts of peace agreements from NGO mediators;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Draw on networks of local mediation NGOs to get a sense of conditions on the ground in terms of how peace negotiations are being perceived among local communities and what impact they have had so far; ➤ Seek links between informal and grassroots processes led by NGO mediators and official peace negotiations.
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(4) Strengthening the local ownership of peace agreements

<i>Aim</i>	The UN draws on and supports NGO mediators to promote local ownership and to monitor a peace agreement after official peace negotiations have ended.
<i>Explanation</i>	Peace processes require the ownership of the parties and the people who have to live with a peace agreement after it has been signed. The UN should recognize that the period following the signing of a peace agreement is as crucial and potentially fragile as the time before it. Thus, the UN should support NGO mediators – financially and politically – to build constituencies in support of peace and to negotiate disputes during the implementation phase.
<i>Specific recommendations</i>	<p>In particular, the UN could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognize that the seeds of local ownership of a peace process are sown during official peace negotiations; thus, the UN could cooperate with NGOs during peace talks in order to include the positions of civil stakeholders; ➤ Cooperate with low-key local NGOs during the implementation phase (in addition to well-known international mediation NGOs, whose connections and resources have already put them on the radar of the UN); ➤ Support NGO mediators in disseminating the content of a peace agreement and in conducting public education campaigns about peace agreements during and after negotiations; ensure funding for such activities; ➤ Pragmatically support the work of NGO mediators in the peace consolidation phase, for example through rapid action funds that can be disbursed by UN peacekeeping missions.

(5) Encouraging common learning

<i>Aim</i>	The UN establishes a common learning forum that allows mediators to come together and learn from past and ongoing mediation processes.
<i>Explanation</i>	Mediation is usually a fast-moving business and there is little time for critical reflection and lessons learnt during and after a process. However, it is crucial to develop capacities for learning, in particular regarding the cooperation and linkage between different mediation actors. The UN is well placed to convene mediators to engage in these types of learning exercises.

<p><i>Specific recommendations</i></p>	<p>In particular, the UN could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish and fund joint debriefing sessions, allowing mediators to reflect on their work and on cooperation and complementarity between them; ➤ Sponsor evaluations of peace processes that include an assessment of the cooperation and complementarity between NGO mediators and the UN; ➤ Publicize broadly successful experiences of UN-NGO cooperation in peace processes; ➤ Refrain from absorbing skillful NGO mediators into the UN system, but rather strengthen their standing locally through capacity-building, political support and funding.
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NGO mediators have established themselves as effective peacemakers, especially on the local level. As the merits of multi-track approaches in mediation are increasingly being appreciated, there is a large potential for cooperation and complementary action between the UN and NGOs. The upcoming report on mediation that the UN Secretary General will submit to the Security Council in March 2009 will hopefully provide further momentum for such an approach. In recognizing the important role of NGO mediators, the report can prepare the ground for enhancing the contributions of NGO mediators and for extending the collaboration between the UN and NGOs in mediation processes.