

NATIONAL PEACE ESSAY CONTEST 2010-2011 TOPIC AND QUESTION

Governance, Corruption and Conflict

Corruption often compromises the peace and stability of countries in transition. Corruption involves exploitation of power by those who wield it—people who, in their official position, exploit the power with which they are entrusted by seeking private gain, either economic (e.g., stealing money) or political (e.g., stealing votes). While corruption certainly is not the only factor responsible for the destabilization of a country, it weakens public confidence in actors involved in governance, particularly undermining the ability of government officials to prevent or quell conflicts. As Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General, noted in his Foreword to the 2004 United Nations Convention Against Corruption, corruption diverts funds intended for development, undermines the ability of governments to provide basic services, feeds inequality and injustice, and discourages foreign aid and investment.

Some argue that corruption is a concept that is culturally determined and varies from one society to another. Gift-giving to officials may be expected in one country and prohibited by law in another. Good governance relies upon responsible civic participation, equality, and rule of law and it involves political leadership, bureaucracy, civil society, community leaders and others who play a role in or influence decision-making and implementation of laws and policies within society. Corruption can undermine institutions of governance that are responsible for accountability, transparency and oversight, destroy the credibility of the government, and erode the consent of the governed. Without good governance, a society is more vulnerable to destabilization, which can escalate to full blown conflict. In many cases, corruption not only leads to instability, that can trigger tribal, ethnic, religious or even class divisions, but instability leads to greater levels of corruption.

When outside organizations and countries, such as the United Nations and the United States, work to help a state make the transition from war to peace, dealing with corruption is often a major challenge. Outsiders can choose to ignore the corruption (facing certain negative consequences down the road), deal with it directly, or work with the host society to change customs and expectations. For those who hope to prevent violent conflict, how can their efforts to reduce, if not eliminate, corruption best contribute to building sustainable peace?

In 1500 words:

- Choose two cases from the past twenty years of countries in transition from war to peace, one successful and the other unsuccessful. Analyze how third parties handled issues of potential and actual corruption.
- What forms of corruption developed and why? How did corruption affect the peacebuilding institutions and processes?
- Why did one country fail and the other succeed in making the transition from war to peace? How did efforts of outside parties to address corruption contribute to the success or failure?
- Finally, what recommendations would you give to third parties about addressing corruption that would prevent conflict and enhance the prospects of building sustainable peace in countries emerging from war?