



60 years of Finnish Peace Mediation

Creating Security and Confidence in Cyprus

5.3.2024

Speech by Erkki Tuomioja

There is no need here today to present any comprehensive account of the history of Cyprus, which gained her independence in 1960. The constitutional arrangements agreed upon before independence did not prevent communal tensions from erupting into violence, which in 1964 necessitated the intervention of the United Nations.

On 4 March 1964, as the situation escalated the Security Council passed a resolution creating the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) which has continued for 60 years now. Over the course of 40 years during which Finland contributed to the operation over 10 000 Finns have served as peacekeepers in Cyprus.

The resolution also recommended that the Secretary-General designate a Mediator to use “his best endeavor with the representatives of the communities and also with the Governments of Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and the United Kingdom, for the purpose of promoting a peaceful solution and an agreed settlement of the problem confronting Cyprus.”

UN Secretary General U Thant’s first appointment as the mediator was rejected by Turkey after which the SG turned to Sakari Tuomioja who was then the Finnish Ambassador to Sweden. After consulting President Kekkonen and the government, Tuomioja gave his assent and was confirmed as the Mediator. On first hearing the request, Tuomioja, after a period of silence, said, “this is not a request one can turn down.”

U Thant did not know Tuomioja personally, but he was well known at the UN having served three years as the executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe and having served as UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld’s special representative in Laos in 1959 and 1961. Tuomioja’s cooperation and friendship with Hammarskjöld go back to the 40’s when both were leading civil servants in their countries Ministries of Finance. It continued when Tuomioja, with a liberal political background, become



first a minister in the Post-War government in Finland, then General Director of the Bank of Finland, and after several ministerial appointments Prime Minister in 1953. At the time Hammarskjöld was first the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Ministry and then minister without portfolio in the Swedish Government until 1953, when he became the UN Secretary General.

The three guarantors of the Cyprus agreement – the UK, Turkey and Greece – were all Nato countries, but the issue had also wider geopolitical ramifications which made the appointment of a Mediator from a neutral country advisable. Tuomioja's reputation as a conciliatory interlocutor in Finnish politics and as a proponent of quiet diplomacy made him particularly suitable for the task.

He was also known to share the view, that there is no problem that reasonable people cannot work out sitting together in a reasonable manner. Unfortunately even if all of the people will be reasonable some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, all of the people will not be reasonable all of the time. This encapsulates the challenge for all mediation efforts.

Of course, in Cyprus the interests of the US as the leading Nato-country also came into play and the former American Secretary of State was in charge of a parallel mediation process. By August 1964, Tuomioja was ready to present his proposal for a solution, which differed from the American plan. It was never made public because, as he was preparing to tour the capitals concerned, he suffered a fatal stroke from which he never recovered and he died in Helsinki in September.

It is unlikely that his plan would have solved the Cyprus issues, but it is not totally impossible. In the summer of 1964 there was a certain momentum and general support for a solution, which was never put to the test. The past 60 years have not brought us any closer to a solution notwithstanding all the efforts of the UN and later mediators. The fact that Cyprus today is a member of the EU has not, contrary to hopes and expectations, brought us closer to a solution.

I have neither mandate nor competence to offer any advice on how to solve the Cyprus issue, apart from stating the obvious that we all have to give our support to the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy on the Cyprus issue Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar and her work and expect the European Union to do the same.



Tuomioja was the first Finn in a long series of Nordic citizens engaged in mediation efforts, the most well known Finn being President Martti Ahtisaari, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008. Finland also took the initiative to establish the Friends of Mediation group in the UN. But, the other Nordic countries have a much longer history of engagement in Peace Mediation.

There are obvious reasons why the Nordic countries have been able to play a positive role in mediation. We are all small and stable democratic countries with a vibrant Civil Society. And as a key factor in all the Nordic success in various “beauty contests”, where all the world’s countries are ranged according to their achievements in social welfare, lack of corruption, educational achievements, press freedom or even the happiness of the population must always be underlined the role of gender equality.

This is also equally relevant and important in peace mediation where women play a key role in achieving lasting peace. It is essential that they are offered places at negotiation tables as mediators and representatives of the parties of a conflict. Women should be seen as crucial actors in peace processes rather than only victims of conflicts.

None of the Nordic countries are neutral as all of them will be soon in Nato. But even so they can provide reliably non-partisan mediation services, as the example of Norway shows.

Finland’s history involves many wars and my country has a particular misfortune from which our Nordic neighbors were spared in that we were cursed with a bloody Civil War in 1918 immediately after our independence. Today this awful history can be turned into an advantage in mediation as it has taught us many valuable lessons in how to deal with internal strife and how to heal to wounds and become a stable and prosperous democracy.

A true mediator has no other interest than to bring an end to human suffering, loss of life, destruction of the environment and property. This is the most pressing task in any violent conflict but not enough, as a mediator has to try and see that the solution is also sustainable. I will refrain from saying that the solution has to be “just”, because this is often a very contentious term which the parties in a conflict will interpret in quite different ways.

A solution putting an end to a conflict has to be perceived by both parties as just, or maybe just just enough, to be sustainable. There cannot obviously be any “winner takes all” solution, which would be accepted as equitable. Permanent solutions to conflicts can only be achieved by addressing the underlying political, economic and social problems



And as President of Historians without Borders I will add, that this also entails addressing the history of the conflict, because if this is not done openly and honestly with all parties participating the history you think you have swept under the carpet can return later as a zombie to haunt you in a way which in the worst case can renew the conflict.

A conflict can only be sustainably resolved by its parties. A good mediator can help bring the parties together and help to find solutions, but at the end of the day, they have to be accepted and internalized by the parties themselves.

This is why it is not possible to impose solutions. History has examples where a self-appointed mediator will try to use its strength – military or economic – to force the parties to sign on to a solution which it sees feasible (meaning in its own interest). Finland and the Nordic countries can not deploy this kind of strength to impose solutions.

This said the international community, meaning the United Nations, can and should also be able to mobilize not only moral and economic resources but also military ones as a last resort if other efforts to stop murder, rape, killings and War Crimes other Human Rights violations are not working. This is known as the responsibility to protect. To quote the resolution of the UN Summit Meeting in 2005:

The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The R to P principle does not undermine mediation, but on the contrary strengthens the call for and efforts of mediation.

Mediation has to also address the issue of transitional justice, by which is understood as aiming to provide recognition to victims, enhance the trust of individuals in State institutions, reinforce respect for human rights and promote the rule of law, as a step towards reconciliation and the prevention of new



violations. Even if impunity for crimes committed should never be accepted either outrightly or by remaining silent, there are two ways in which the issue can be addressed in mediation processes to facilitate reaching agreement: Amnesty and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

These are only concepts and the possibility, feasibility and application of them vary greatly from situation to situation and finding the right solution is a challenging and necessary aspect of mediation. As the thoughtful report from October 2022 on transitional justice commissioned by the UN Secretary General summarizes:

Transitional justice always operates in deeply political contexts. The timing and reach of any initiative to confront past crimes and respond to victims is determined by the realities and possibilities at hand. This is never more true than during a political negotiation to end violent conflict.