



KURKUM PEACE TALKS

Conflict resolution role play
for Ahtisaari Days





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Conflict resolution role play for Ahtisaari Days

The Ahtisaari Days conflict resolution role play is intended, in particular, for the final classes of comprehensive school and for the upper secondary school. The players have the opportunity to practise the evaluation of difficult conflict situations and the understanding of differing viewpoints, and to train their negotiating skills. The goal of the game is to find a joint solution for the heated conflict of the imaginary country of Kurkum so that all parties can accept the final outcome. Resolving a conflict always requires compromises from the parties.

Duration of the game: about 2 hours

Target group: students in the final classes of comprehensive school and in the upper secondary school

Group size: min. 6 students, max. 30 students

Relevant school subjects: History and Social Studies, Mother Tongue, Ethics, Religion, Performing Arts, elective courses depending on the course selection. In addition, the goals of the game fit into various syllabus entities, such as global education and active citizenship.

Idea of the game

The idea of the role play is to find a joint solution for the conflict in Kurkum and, at the same time, to learn negotiating skills in a seemingly authentic conflict. Each player/team represents one party to the conflict, an associated body or, alternatively, an outside mediator who remains as neutral as possible.

The role play encourages students to think about conflicts, crises, peace and mediation. The aim is that, through their roles, students understand the complexity of various conflicts and the reasons why the resolution of conflicts and crises both between and within states entails many types of challenges.

Through the role play, students train their ability to recognise the interests and motives of the various parties. The game has no winners or losers. In the ideal case, the parties find a solution and reach agreement, but it may also be that no solution is found. Even if the game ends without finding a solution accepted by everyone, this does not diminish the importance of the learning experience provided by the role play.

For the teacher

It's good to reserve at least a double lesson for the game and the debriefing. The time available is divided into four parts: getting to know the game; recognition of the imaginary conflict and its parties; the actual role play; and the debriefing discussion. A certain framework guides the progress of the game, but teachers may also apply the elements of the game freely and condense the game to suit their lesson structures.

It is recommended that the teacher leads the game and chairs the negotiations. The teacher keeps an eye on the time and ensures that the negotiations proceed smoothly and students participate actively.

The role play is a different and inclusive way of learning. It brings an experiential dimension to teaching, activating all levels. It is learning by doing and experiencing. However, it's good to keep in mind that role play is not necessarily the

ideal method for all groups. For instance, some groups may have students who have encountered difficult conflict situations and crises in their own lives. Then this game does not necessarily suit the group. It is therefore important that the teacher, who is the best judge of the students, assesses whether role play is suited to the particular group. Enough time must also be reserved for the debriefing at the end of the game, to enable discussion of the experiences gained.

Props needed

To play the game, the following are needed:

- chairs for all participants and one big table that has seats for seven players and the chairperson around it;
- pencils and paper for writing notes;
- a clock so that the chairperson can keep track of the time and a gavel, bell or similar device for starting and ending the various stages;
- the rules of the game printed out for everyone;
- the role play cards printed out for everyone;
- in addition, various outfits (hats, scarves, etc.) can be brought to the classroom, to make it easier for students to get the feel of their roles.

How to play

Getting to know the game

Start by giving the students time to explore the background to the conflict in Kurkum by printing out pages 6–8 for everyone to read. It's good to ask the students to think what aspects in the background information are certain to cause friction and have the greatest impact on the rise of the conflict. As their homework, the students may also search for general information about the world's conflicts.

Apart from the background information, everyone should read the descriptions of the characters in the game. In this way the students can identify the view-points that each character represents: who are perhaps opponents; who may have mutual interests to pursue.

Warm-up

Before the start of the actual game, it may be good to do a short, playful warm-up practice that helps the group to relax and feel at ease. The aim is to create a constructive and relaxed atmosphere of working together so that it's easier for the students to engage in the role play. Here are a few easy warm-up tasks.

Walking (5–10 min.)

All of the students stand up and start to walk around the classroom freely. The teacher lists various characters and the students try to move about and carry themselves as this character would do. For example, how do these characters walk, carry themselves and gesticulate

- a general?
- a political refugee?
- a resident of a refugee camp?
- a peace negotiator?

More characters can be invented.

Yeah practice (5 min.)

Students are moving about the classroom freely. Each student in turn is allowed to shout proposals, such as “let’s tiptoe”, “let’s jump”, etc. Everyone yells “yeah” and starts doing what was suggested.

Once the students have read the material, have been given their roles and have completed the warm-up, and the necessary props are available and the place is arranged, the game can be declared open.

Starting the game

After familiarisation with the material and any warm-up that may have been carried out, each student is assigned a role. Depending on the size of the group, there are 3–6 students per role. Each group briefly discusses its own strategy for the negotiations and selects a representative from among its members. The representative has the right to speak at the negotiations. When the necessary props are available and the negotiating table has been arranged, the game can be declared open.

During the game, the negotiators may always request a “time-out” when they want to confer among themselves about what to say next.

Peace talks

The first formal peace negotiations

At the start of the negotiations the teacher, who acts as the game leader and the chairperson, refers to the mandate he or she has received from the international community and appoints a representative of the group playing the mediator’s role to serve as the peace negotiator, who then assumes responsibility for leading the talks. Thereafter all representatives of the groups are asked to introduce themselves, to express their own opinion about the situation in Kurkum and to answer three basic questions. The students representing the various characters should justify their opinions well and should try to convince others. It is also important to listen closely to the type of issues the various parties raise in their addresses – which issues are the most important for them?

Informal consultations

After the first round, the groups have time to get together to discuss what they have heard and to formulate a strategy; in other words, how to reach their own goal and how to respond to each situation. This time can also be used for discussions with others.

The second formal peace negotiations

When the game continues, the negotiators must be ready at this stage to present their own proposal for resolution. Each group has the opportunity to comment on the proposals and to try to reach accord through discussion.

Ending the game

The game is ended by drawing up a short summary and by thanking all of the participants.

Debriefing

Acting out a role helps one to think about a conflict from the particular character’s perspective. After the game, it is also important to go through the experiences together and to use the debriefing questions prepared for the teacher to discuss what was learned. Did the role work change one’s own concepts and thoughts about conflicts and the people involved in them?

Material for the game

Map



Background information

Conflict in Kurkum

Kurkum is an imaginary state struggling with a constant increase in violence. The complicated conflict situation did not arise suddenly. Many events associated with Kurkum's recent history underlie the conflict.

Kurkum's recent history

Kurkum's recent history has been darkened by a conflict between the Government and the separatists controlling the eastern parts of the country. The reasons behind the conflict include the cycle of violence between ethnic groups, poverty and social inequality, as well as the valuable natural resources and their uneven distribution in the area dominated by the separatists.

Kurkum still has a rather short tradition of democratic rule. It was not until the late 1980s that various popular movements pressurised Kurkum to adopt democracy. Before that, the country had been ruled by a weak royal house and various rebel movements, which seized power from time to time.

Positive things have also occurred. Surprisingly, Kurkum's national football team made it to the World Cup in 2010, and this gave Kurkum visibility and raised the country's national self-image.

Reasons for the conflict

Kurkum's situation has continued to be unstable for decades.

- **Separatism.** The crux of the conflict is Eastern Kurkum, which is rich in natural resources. Separatists are pushing for the separation of the area from Kurkum. That is, they want to found their own independent region. According to the separatists, Kurkum's political administration does not enable the even distribution of the region's natural resources so that they would also benefit the local residents. The administration is opposed to the split and thinks that the separatists are driving Kurkum into a deepening stagnation.
- **How to divide the scarce natural resources.** Kurkum has much desert, and the scarcity of water has caused unrest on many occasions. In addition, Kurkum's valuable natural resources have not benefited the whole nation; instead, the profits have been channelled abroad or into the pockets of a few rich Kurkumians.
- **Unity of the population.** Kurkum's population is culturally very heterogeneous/diverse, and the Government has not succeeded in its integration policy. The country has a wealth of languages, religions and philosophies of life, and few have a strong Kurkumian identity or belief in a harmonious State of Kurkum. Many feel that the Government favours the ethnic group that speaks Kurma, at the expense of the minorities speaking Turgu or Sipeli. Society is perceived as unequal.
- **Social unrest.** Various strikes, internal unrest and violence have crippled the basic functions of Kurkum's society at regular intervals.

- **Distrust in democracy.** During the time of the democratic system, internal disputes have toppled the Government many times. Voter turnout is low, and the suspicion of election rigging has been expressed.
- **Dissatisfaction with the Government's policy and suspicion of corruption.** Especially in the rural areas of Eastern Kurkum, the policy pursued by the Government has given rise to much dissatisfaction. The Government has expropriated farms and has given oil companies the right to use land areas. Breaches of environmental legislation by the oil companies have polluted land areas.

The main opponents in the conflict are the Government of Kurkum and the separatist movement.

Most members of the separatist movement come from the Turgu-speaking ethnic minority. This minority accounts for about 30% of Kurkum's population and is in an economically weaker position than the majority. The separatist group is not religiously uniform; the members have different religions.

The current situation

The separatist movement's soldiers controlling the eastern regions of the country and the Government's troops are heading towards a situation resembling civil war. During the past eight months, about 1,500 people have been killed in battles and bomb attacks.

The separatist movement has long propagated the separation and independence of Eastern Kurkum. Government troops have resorted to increased violence. In consequence, society's functions have become paralysed and Kurkum is on the verge of civil war.

The southward migration of civilian refugees from Kurkum has gained momentum and the countries bordering on Kurkum to the south are considering whether they should close their borders both to curb the influx of refugees into their countries and to exert pressure on Kurkum. The international community has turned its attention to Kurkum in order to stop the vast humanitarian crisis and stabilise the situation in the region.

The conflict has now escalated so much that the parties involved and an outside mediator have been invited to negotiations in Harmon, the capital of Kurkum, to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Why an outside mediator?

The intervention of an outsider in a dispute may affect the dynamics between the parties and may change their perceptions and behaviour, thereby making the negotiation process more effective. By participating in the negotiations, the mediator strives to break the deadlock and work out a good solution between the clashing parties.

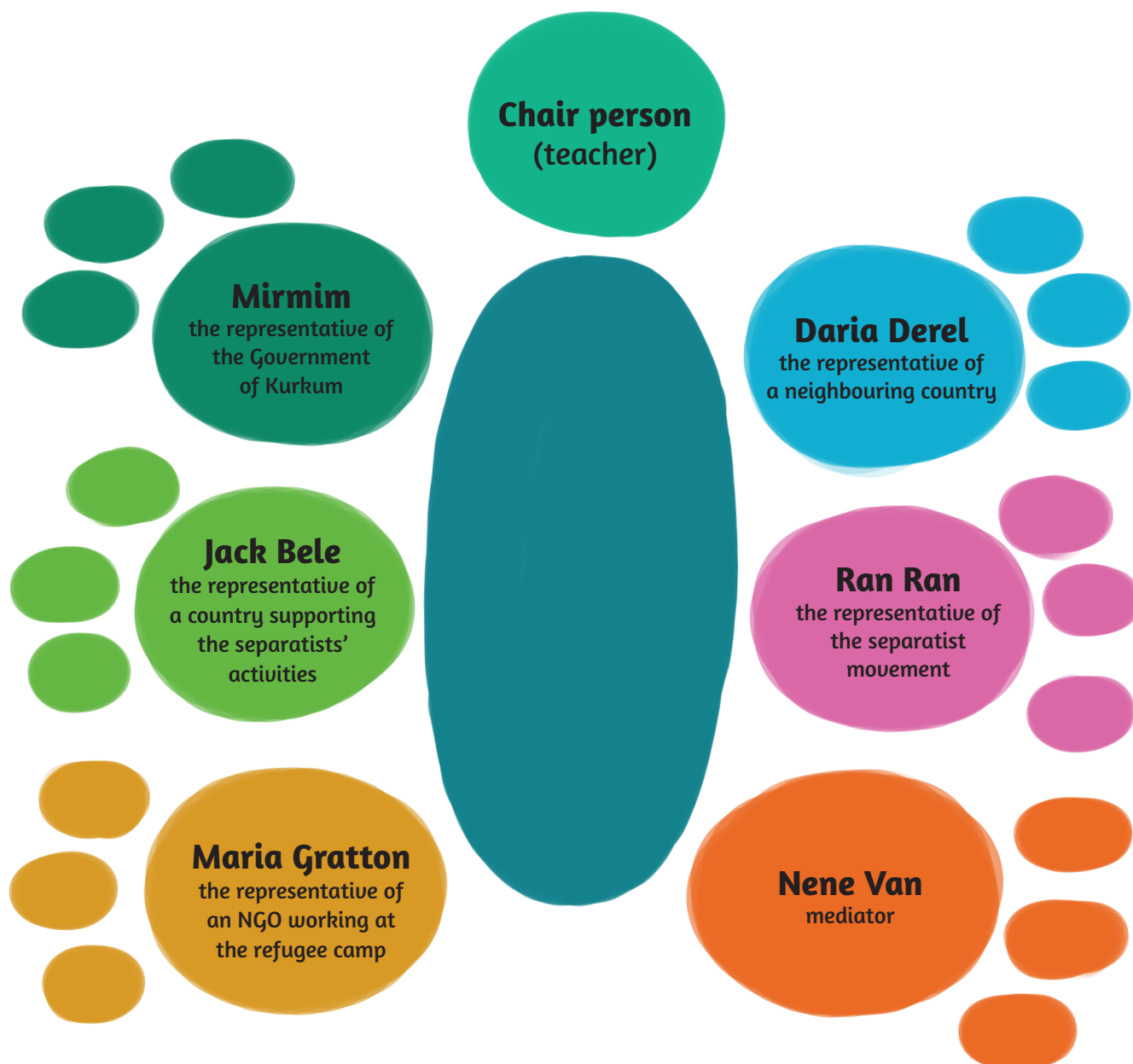
The mediator must have the international community's mandate for the task. Moreover, the parties to the conflict must accept the mediator. In the role playing, the teacher may represent the international community that gives the mandate to the mediator.

Roles

The conflict in Kurkum has several parties. The persons invited to these simulated talks are representatives of the five key parties to the conflict plus an impartial outside mediator, or peace negotiator. Thus, the simulation has altogether six representatives. Depending on the number of students, each representative has 1–5 assistants. The group is represented by the person who has the right to speak. Other group members support and assist their representative.

Extra-roles

If the group of students is large, or if there is a wish for more dynamics in the talks, some extra roles may be included in the game. The extra roles are journalists following the negotiations, who also bring news from the outside world. The idea is that the journalists represent two media that see the situation differently. From this it follows that their analyses of the situation are also slightly different. Halfway through game stage 4, the media representatives report on a terrorist attack that has taken place in Harmon, the capital. The separatist movement is suspected of being responsible for the attack. The news may have an impact on the course of the talks.

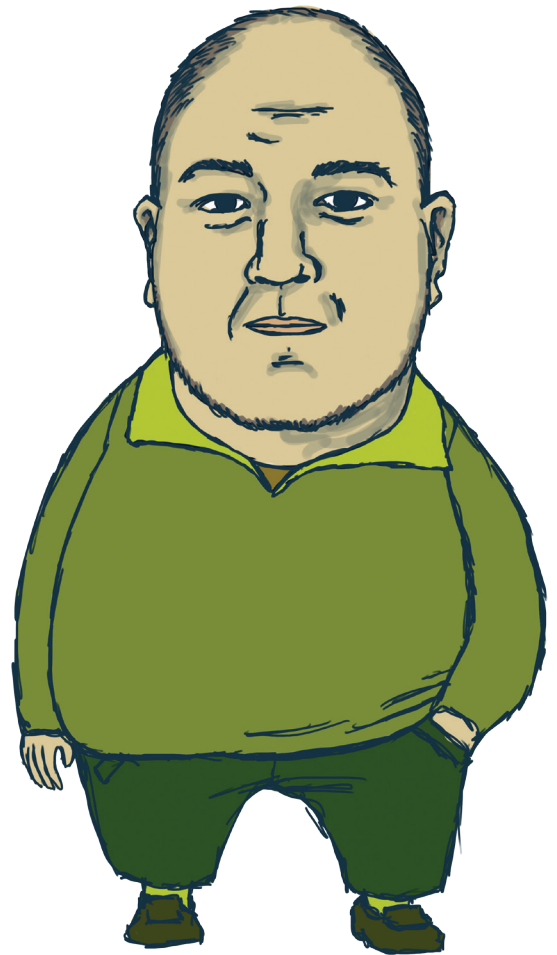


Ran Ran

the representative of
the separatist movement

Ran Ran is a member of the Turgu, the local ethnic minority in Eastern Kurkum. His group advocates the region's separation and independence from Kurkum. According to Ran Ran, the Government of Kurkum exploits the abundant natural resources in the area so that the local population gains no benefit from them. Ran Ran has been involved in the planning of bomb attacks that have also killed civilians. In general, Ran Ran is not keen on having outside mediators in the negotiations.

Goals: Separation and the independence of Eastern Kurkum; improving the position of the local population in Eastern Kurkum.



Mirmim

the representative of
the Government of Kurkum

Mirmim is leading the battle against the separatist movement controlling the eastern part of Kurkum. Direct talks with representatives of the separatists have been held unofficially, but without result. It is in the interests of the Government of Kurkum to resolve the conflict, but so far it has not wanted outside countries to intervene in the situation. For Mirmim, it is impossible to accept that the eastern regions would split off from Kurkum because there is then the risk that the whole country would descend into political and economic instability.

Goals: To prevent the separation of an area rich in natural resources from Kurkum; to avoid the outbreak of full-scale civil war.



Maria Gratton the representative of an NGO working at the refugee camp

Maria Gratton works for a non-governmental organisation helping people at the refugee camp. A large camp without enough food and water has arisen on both sides of Kurkum's border. There is a considerable risk of epidemics spreading among the refugees, and people at the camp are already suffering from diseases, such as diarrhoea and measles. Conditions at the camp are miserable, and Maria Gratton demands that outsiders intervene in the situation in Kurkum. The number of refugees is growing constantly. Most of them are women and children. They do not represent any single ethnic group.

Goals: To get help for the acute situation; health care for the camp; a peaceful solution to the conflict in Kurkum so that the refugees can return home safely. By using all means possible, the parties must be pressurised to seek peace.



Daria Derel the representative of a neighbouring country

From the start, Kurkum's neighbouring country to the south has supported the Government of Kurkum but does not approve of the human rights violations and harsh measures taken by the Government in Eastern Kurkum. The poor neighbouring country cannot help the refugees crossing the border, and Daria Derel sees the growing refugee camps as a threat to the stability of his own country. Daria Derel is afraid that extremist movements in his own country will awaken and join Kurkum's separatists.

Goals: A peaceful solution, possibly also the armed intervention of outside powers to calm the situation and to curb the influx of refugees.





Jack Bele

the representative of a country supporting the separatists' activities

Jack Bele represents a country that provides money and weapons for the separatist movement. Maintaining instability in the region is in Bele's interests. Relations between Bele's country and Kurkum have been cool for decades. Underlying the present situation is an armed conflict that took place with Kurkum some decades ago. Neither Jack Bele nor the country he represents is officially a party to the conflict, but they are indirectly involved as they help perpetuate the conflict by supplying money and arms to the separatist movement.

Goals: To keep the conflict going; continuing the profitable arms trade.



Nene Van mediator

Nene Van's task is to chart problem issues and to guide the parties towards realistic objectives. In some situations, the mediator may also act as a scapegoat and assume responsibility for unpopular decisions. The mediator's task is to keep the talks moving in terms of both practical issues and substance questions. Nene Van is searching for opportunities to find a compromise.

Goals: Peaceful resolution of the conflict and acting as a facilitator of dialogue between the parties.





Extra role

Harmon News reporter

The Harmon News is published by the State-owned media house and takes a favourable stand on the policy pursued by the Government of Kurkum. The Harmon News analyses the state of the peace talks from a partisan perspective.

News flash: A bomb has exploded in Harmon, the capital of Kurkum. The number of casualties is yet to be confirmed. According to various information sources, it can be suspected that the separatist movement is responsible for the bomb attack.

The Harmon News makes its own interpretation of the news.



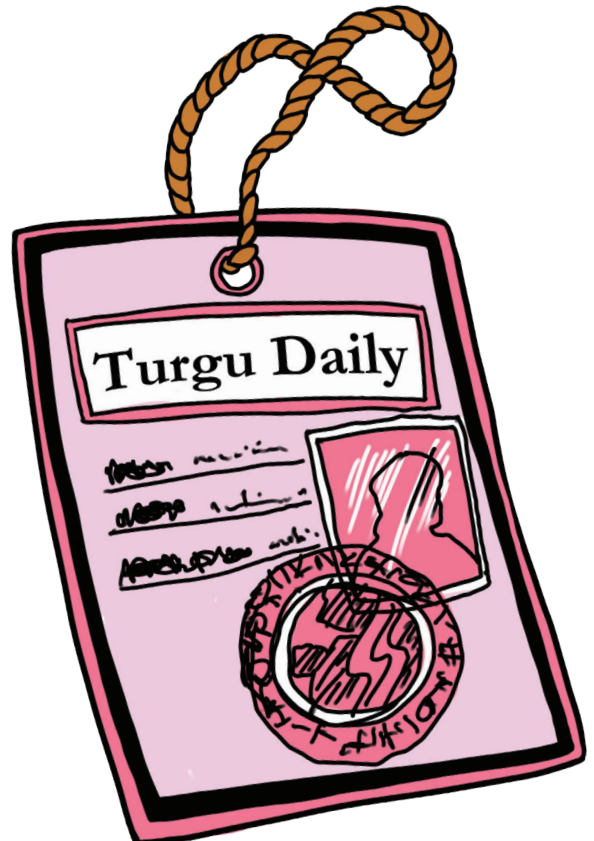
Extra role

Turgu Daily reporter

The Turgu Daily is a local newspaper published in Eastern Kurkum. It is the only news medium in the Turgu language. The Turgu Daily claims to be politically independent, but in fact it supports the separatist movement's political objectives.

News flash: A bomb has exploded in Harmon, the capital of Kurkum. The number of casualties is yet to be confirmed. According to various information sources, it can be suspected that the separatist movement is responsible for the bomb attack.

The Turgu Daily makes its own interpretation of the news.



Jack Bele
the representative of
a country supporting the
separatists' activities

Maria Grattton
the representative of an NGO
working at the refugee camp

Mirmim
the representative of
the Government of Kurrum

Nene Van
mediator

Daria Derel
the representative of
a neighbouring country

Ran Ran
the representative of
the separatist movement

Playing the game

Stage 1:	Stage 2:	Stage 3:	Stage 4:	Stage 5:	Stage 6:
20 min.	25 min.	10 min.	20 min.	15 min.	30 min.
Presentation of the objectives of the game and learning about the conflict in Kurkum and the various roles	Negotiations, acquisition of information	Informal consultations	Negotiations, proposals for solutions	Ending the game	Debriefing

Stage 1: Presentation of the objectives of the game and learning about the conflict in Kurkum and the various roles

Duration about 20 min.

The teacher presents the idea and objectives of the game. The first thing is to declare “a ban on information”, i.e. the use of mobile phones etc. during the negotiations is prohibited. The students are divided into six groups that represent the six participants in the peace talks. The students read the description of the conflict in the imaginary State of Kurkum, its background and parties. The groups prepare for the talks by reading the descriptions of the participants so that everyone knows what groups take part in the negotiations. The groups try to answer the three initial questions from the perspective of their characters.

Stage 2: Negotiations, acquisition of information

Duration about 25 min.

The first peace negotiations start. The whole group sits down around a big table so that all six representatives have their own designated seat. The chairperson (teacher) sits at the head of the table. For the negotiations, each group selects a representative who has the right to speak.

As an authorised representative of the international community, the chairperson (teacher) appoints Nene Van (one group’s role) to act as the peace negotiator and assigns the leader’s role to him . It is recommended that Nene Van starts by explaining why the talks have been initiated and what his own role will be.

The representatives of the groups introduce themselves, present their views of the situation in Kurkum and answer the three initial questions.

1. Why should the conflict be resolved?
2. What does this require of the parties?
3. What is proposed as the solution?

During the negotiations, the other members of each group sit close to the official representative, giving him or her advice and background support, whenever needed.

Stage 3: Informal consultations

Duration about 10 min.

After the speeches, the groups may conduct informal consultations, negotiations or talks in the corridor with each other. Here they may also bargain with each other, find allies or search for a joint solution.

Stage 4: Negotiations, proposals for solutions

Duration about 20 min.

The second phase of the peace negotiations starts. The representatives of the groups present their proposals for resolving the crisis in Kurkum and for alleviating the suffering caused by the crisis. The rest of the discussion is used for finding a joint proposal for a solution, where the participants decide what is agreed, what is required of each party, etc. There is no clear-cut model of what peace agreements should contain and, conversely, what should be left out. The parties and the mediator can decide the themes and outlines.

However, a solution or unanimity is not necessarily found; this is what often happens in real-life peace negotiations, too. The most important thing is to get a feel for the negotiations and the search for solutions, and to learn how a challenging situation can be seen from different viewpoints.

Stage 5: Ending the game

Duration about 15 min.

The role play is ended. Mediator Nene Van, who acted as the outside negotiator, can end the game by thanking all of the parties and by briefly summarising the results of the talks. The teacher can help by supplying additional information. All of the participants thank each other for the well-conducted talks by shaking hands. By banging the gavel, the chairperson ends the game and everyone can discard their roles and become themselves again.

Stage 6: Debriefing – What did we learn?

Duration about 30 min.

After the role play, enough time should be reserved for both debriefing and discussion. The underlying themes of discussion are: what was learned and how it felt; how the experience can be reflected in relation to the themes of peace and conciliation; and how the lessons learned can also be applied in everyday situations.

For instance, the following topics may be discussed with the group after the game:

1. What feelings did the game arouse in the players?
2. Was it difficult to construct the given role?
3. Were the character's viewpoints perhaps completely at odds with one's own thinking? If yes, did the role play feel uncomfortable?
4. What did the participants learn about themselves and their negotiating skills?
5. How do the participants perceive the various stages of the negotiation now?
6. What did the participants learn about conflicts and their resolution?
7. How realistic did the game and the given situation feel?
8. Was everyone able to participate?
9. How can the lessons learned be applied in other situations?
10. Could the game be developed further? If yes, what in particular needs development?

What happens after the peace agreement?

Finding a compromise, the peace agreement, is only the first step on the road to peace. The road ahead includes the fulfilment of the terms of the agreement and the stabilisation of society after the conflict. In fact, the peace process must be understood as a continuum.

Peace agreements are often concluded after a prolonged violent conflict when many things still need to be sorted out: distrust that has taken on structural dimensions; hatred; and the crimes committed by the parties against each other. The peace agreement should list measures that help build a more just society. The underlying reasons for the conflict must also be identified and people must be compensated for their losses. It should always be kept in mind that rebuilding society does not only benefit the privileged few but the whole nation.

Glossary

Democratic system: In a democratic system, decisions about the most important governmental issues are made by the people themselves or by a body elected by the people.

State: A political system formed by people, that exercises power in a certain territory and that can itself decide about its own affairs.

Conflict: Disagreement, controversy, strife.

Separatist: A person seeking independence for an autonomous area. Often a member of a movement or organisation in pursuit of independence.

International community: Refers to a number of countries or international organisations, depending on the situation. The term has no established definition but it is much used in political debate and in the media. It is often used to indicate that one country's actions differ from those of other countries.

Popular movement: A mass movement, for instance, a religious or revolutionary movement.

Rebellious movement: A popular movement that rises against a system or its leadership. For instance, a rebellious movement striving to gain independence.

Corruption: General moral decline, especially a system of accepting and offering bribes. For instance, corruption prevailing in a bureaucratic machinery.

Royal house: A royal family.

Vital functions of society: The most important functions for the working of society, such as the judicial system, education, health care, energy supply, monetary transactions, telecommunications, a healthy environment, transport, and information.

Humanitarian crisis: An event or events that cause a critical threat to the health, safety or well-being of the people in a certain area. Such events can be, for instance, an armed conflict, famine, epidemics or natural disasters.

Mediator: A person who tries to help the parties to a conflict to reach a consensus.

Dynamics between the parties: Relations between the states or their leaders and other actors (such as mediators) who are involved in a conflict. In the background, there may be, for instance, historical, cultural and linguistic factors.

Strategy: An overall plan of action, the art of conducting and directing military operations. Examples: A plan of action followed in conflict resolution; what the goals are and how are they to be attained.

Ethnic minority: An ethnic group or nationality that has fewer representatives or a lower status than other groups within a certain state, sphere of influence, or society.

Mandate: A commission given or received, an authorisation. In particular, in a democratic system, the authorisation received from the people to govern the country. The authorisation given to a country to rule some other country or area.