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Cartoon: Never Again, Martyn Turner. The Irish Times, C&W syndicate.
Keeping it simple

This, we believe, is the first ever international magazine dedicated entirely to the relatively new and rapidly expanding field of coexistence. The meaning of coexistence is simple and stark - letting people with arbitrary differences live alongside one another without violent conflict. It is a modest aim - live, let live, don't kill - the very least that should be expected of human beings. The word implies that the other people alien to my particular group actually have a right to exist. This is hardly a startling moral stand for humans to accept in the 21st century, yet the very idea does indeed startle thousands of groups and millions of people around the globe.

This magazine is mainly aimed at the thousands of people now working to promote conflict resolution and coexistence. Some are academics developing theories and practices that help to deconstruct conflict and irrational fears. Some work in a myriad of volunteer and non-government organizations, down at street and door-to-door level.

What the field lacks now is something for all these people to read - something not too dull, not too academic, something preferably authoritative, attractive and informative that enables them to feel part of a coexistence network, not lonely laborers in thankless fields. If a small group in Northern Ireland has succeeded with some project to make groups who still thoroughly dislike one another cooperate to improve the lot of both communities, why reinvent the wheel when such a coexist project is needed in Sri Lanka?

Like coexistence itself, our aim is stark and simple - to bring coexistence workers something nice, informative and attractive to read. This is a first start and a first issue, and we have a long way to go. But we offer you our first best effort, and we introduce you to some of the leading people, and to some of the ordinary people, in the world of coexistence work. We have only two requests - enjoy the magazine, and support us by spreading the word about it.

NOTICE TO ACADEMICS

Coexist International is not a peer review magazine. We accept papers and articles for editing to an appropriate journalistic standard - but one that appeals to a wide readership. However, the original papers and articles, including any footnotes and bibliographies, as submitted, will be loaded on our website www.coexistmag.com for researchers.
Uneasy African neighbors

By Joyce Neu and Karon Cochran

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Neighbors know they have to find a way to peaceful coexistence, even when there are major ideological chasms between the two. They are, as one of the members of the Ugandan team negotiating with Sudan pointed out, "stuck with" their geography.

On December 7, 1999, the phones at The Carter Center's makeshift office at the Windsor Golf and Country Club, just outside of Nairobi, were ringing off the hook. Journalists were calling to ask about rumors of peace talks being mediated between Sudan and Uganda by The Carter Center.

The facts were that eight months earlier, the Presidents of Uganda and Sudan had requested that former president Jimmy Carter mediate a restoration of relations between these uneasy neighbors. Carter Center staff had been traveling to Europe and Africa to hold talks with the governments, keeping the media at a distance since both governments wanted to keep the talks as confidential as possible. There were few leaks until we arrived in Nairobi in early December 1999.

The evening of December 7, Carter arrived in Nairobi for a summit between the leaders of Sudan and Uganda to mediate the final phase of an agreement. After difficult late night and early morning sessions back and forth between the two presidents, Carter announced in mid-afternoon on December 8 that an agreement was ready to be signed. Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi would join Carter in signing as a witness.

Carter Center staff had less than two hours to arrange for the signing at the Kenyan State House, including organizing a motorcade through downtown Nairobi, typing up the final text of the agreement, and - at last - notifying the press we had been keeping at bay for so long. A news conference would mark the signing ceremony.

Chapter one

The signing at State House in Nairobi December 8 was a commitment by Presidents Omar al-Bashir and Yoweri Museveni to uphold the eleven points contained in the agreement. These included committing the governments of Sudan and Uganda to respect each other's sovereignty, promote regional peace, disband and disarm terrorist groups, discontinue support for rebel and opposition groups, refrain from hostile propaganda, and restore diplomatic relations.

Signing such an agreement usually signals the end of a bilateral relations story, but we knew this was only the end of the first chapter. Neighbors know they have to find a path to peaceful coexistence, especially when they are "stuck with" their geography. This does not diminish the difficulty of doing so.

Conflicts between neighbors are particularly difficult because there are usually long histories of grievances...
on both sides, and the country that sits on your border is a real threat. Building trust and resolving the underlying conflict may take years. It starts with small steps that help the parties feel confident the agreement was negotiated in good faith. The leaders who sign an agreement must have the support of their constituencies and their militaries and develop support through confidence-building measures. Without these measures, it is unlikely the agreement will hold.

The difficulty of finding common ground between two such different countries is what led the presidents of Sudan and Uganda to request the third party assistance of Carter. A third party allows parties to maintain some space between them and bring a degree of impartiality to the discussions. In the case of Sudan and Uganda, the eight months of discussions were frequently heated, with one side or the other threatening to walk out of the talks. Crafting an agreement that would actually implement was going to be a challenge, and so the eventual signing marked only beginning of new efforts by Sudan and Uganda to find a means of living side by side in peace, while recognizing their fundamental differences.

From neighbor to enemy

Sudan and Uganda severed relations on April 23, 1995 after years of accusations that each side was violating the common frontier and supporting rebel groups in each other’s territory. Both governments acknowledged their moral, sometimes logistical, support for the respective rebel groups – the Ugandan Lords Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony, and the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) led by John Garang.

The LRA is known for terrorizing its own region in northern Uganda and had abducted approximately 15,000 children from this region and from its own ethnic group (Acholi). The LRA is purportedly a Christian organization calling for rule by the Ten Commandments after the overthrow of Museveni. Sudan has hosted the LRA for five or more years, sometimes using them to fight their main own opposition group, the SPLM/A.

The SPLM/A has been fighting the Islamic government of Sudan for 17 years in a civil war that has killed an estimated 1.5 million people and displaced as many as 2 million. The war is about governance and ideology. The north of Sudan is primarily Muslim, and the current government in the north supports rule by sharia (Islamic law). Many people in Sudan are not Muslim, many in the south are Christian and animist, and strongly object to living under Islamic law. Factions splintering off in both north and south have complicated the war between the government and the south. In the south rival groups have actually been fighting and killing each other. All efforts to end the war have failed.

Although it appears clear the SPLM/A would survive with or without outside assistance because of its popular support within Sudan, the assistance it gets from other countries is substantial, in the form of logistics, training, food, weapons, or safe havens. This is not so with the LRA – it was only support from Sudan that saved them from extinction in 1995. They do not have wide support in Uganda and cannot recruit fighters - hence they abduct children to serve as soldiers in their struggle.

Before the break of diplomatic relations in 1995, each government accused the other of border violations and plans for invasions. Rabid propaganda ran wild, rooted in religious and ethnic differences. The overt hostility has been religious - Sudan being Muslim and Uganda Christian - but Ugandan propaganda added a common East African ethnic theme – an alleged "Arabization" of Africa. The net result has been a deep mutual dislike between Sudanese and Ugandans.

Recreating neighborliness

The Nairobi agreement is now just over a year old, and is still holding as we write, though on many days, by a thread, it seems. Many points of the agreement have yet to be implemented.
The overt hostility between the neighbors is religious, Sudan being Muslim and Uganda Christian, but Ugandan propaganda has added a common East African ethnic theme - the alleged "Arabization" of Africa.

A group of slaves gather in the shade to await their freedom July 3. A controversial human rights group (Christian Solidarity International) said it freed a record 2,035 slaves in a seven-day trip to southern Sudan. Photo: Reuters.
The Carter Center remains engaged, continuing to act as a third party to bring the governments together. Center staffers have worked continuously, since the agreement was signed, to help implement it, assigning staff temporarily to the two capitals in the interest of pushing the parties in that direction.

The Carter Center has encouraged both rebel groups to engage in serious peace processes with their own governments. Several meetings between the two governments have been held under the auspices of The Carter Center to discuss further implementation of the agreement.

However, few people have much hope of the agreement being fully implemented any time soon. We were more optimistic in the early phases because both governments took steps to establish some small degree of trust. In January 2000, Sudan returned some children taken by the LRA, and Uganda returned all Sudanese prisoners of war to Sudan. But the ultimate goal of re-establishing diplomatic relations remains out of reach.

Neither side is convinced of the other's seriousness or commitment to this agreement - but neither is ready to abandon the agreement either. Unlike past agreements between Sudan and Uganda, neither side has disavowed this one, and the two neighbors, with so many differences, are once again seeking common ground. It is the inevitability of being neighbors and of needing to find peaceful avenues to coexistence.