

Summer of Peace 2012™:

Saul Arbess & Paul van Tongeren

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Matthew: Hello. Welcome back everybody. This is the Summer of Peace telesummit, which is a production of The Shift Network. I hope you've all been enjoying this summit this summer in these final days of the series; there are some great speakers lined up. We're glad you're with us. Stay with us through these great conversations.

My name is Matthew Albracht. I am the Executive Vice President and Director of Programs and Communications at The Peace Alliance, which is a US-based organization.

Today, on this call, we're excited to be joined by Dr. Saul Arbess and Paul van Tongeren. Today's conversation will be around local and national peacebuilding infrastructures. We'll also be looking at ministries and departments of peace and how we can really take the work of peace and peacebuilding and really create the systems and structures that help make it a reality on the planet. So we're really excited about the conversation.

I'm going to start off introducing our two guest speakers, and then we'll dive into a conversation. A little bit later in the call, there'll be a chance for those of you who are interested, either on the phone line with us or in the web – I forget the word, web chat room, whatever it is -- the webcast to ask questions. If you have any questions, jot them down, be thinking of it, and we're happy to answer any of them as we can a little bit later in the call. First, I'm going to introduce our wonderful accomplished speakers.

First, I'll introduce Dr. Saul Arbess, who is an anthropologist and futurist dedicated to creating a new architecture of peace in Canada and the world. He's the co-founder and director of the Canadian Department of Peace Initiative; and in 2006, they hosted the Global Summit for Ministries and Departments of Peace in Victoria. Saul is also one of the co-founders and the director of the Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures for Peace, which is a newer name for that org. From 2000 to 2005, he was a member of the National Board for the Council of Canadians, which is Canada's largest civil advocacy organization. He's also

an environmentalist, especially for temperate rainforest protection, both globally and nationally and regionally.

If you want to learn more about the work that Saul's doing, and I'll repeat these websites at the end of the call. If you go to www.departmentofpeace.ca for the Canadian side of things, and then the other website is for the ministries, departments and infrastructures of peace around the world is www.mfp-dop.org.

Our other speaker is Paul van Tongeren. He established the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, publishing the "People Building Peace" volumes. He was the convenor of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, which organized a conference on the role of civil society in peacebuilding at the United Nations' headquarters in New York in 2005 at the invitation of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Paul was Secretary General there until 2010. These past years, Paul has focused his attention on enhancing infrastructures for peace internationally.

We're really excited to have both of you joining us today. This will be a fun conversation. We've all been in the mix of this big global, national and regional conversation about how to really systematize peace in our life.

I just want to start maybe, Paul, with you, you want to share a little bit for the audience about what is an infrastructure for peace, what does that look like, why is it important, and why do we need them in our countries around the world, and then Saul will share as well.

Paul:

Thank you, Matthew.

In my work as secretary general of the global network, I learned about many peacebuilding initiatives in many countries. I was really very inspired what I heard already some seven years ago about what they were doing in countries as Ghana and in Kenya in gradually establishing an infrastructure for peace. In Ghana, they call it an "architecture for peace."

The background was that, in both countries, they had regularly conflicts. Ghana is not so known for conflict, but there were quite a lot also from ten years ago which really destabilized the country. They thought we need more structurally to work on some infrastructure to deal with those conflicts. We can't go on not only by law and order approach or so then

there's conflict that you don't solve it, but just respond to disorder in the military, in the police. We have really to look, what are the backgrounds of and the roots of those conflicts and how to deal with it and is there perhaps some structures or mechanisms we can better organize it.

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That was the reason also that then I stopped this work for the global network, I thought I like to work on more promoting this model of infrastructures for peace. It is comprehensive. It is a positive approach because it is not countering a lot of what's happening, but to really to set it and to establish such structures and mechanisms.

Another good thing is that in that model is that you try to involve as many stakeholders at peacebuilding, especially also within countries as you'd involve the main stakeholders.

The last thing is it is working for sustainable peace. Many projects or programs are focusing on the small aspects. Here, you are really looking how can we set up institutional mechanisms and structures, that we structurally work on dealing with the conflicts, analyzing them, early response mechanisms to directly respond, and look to what are the key stakeholders we should involve in this whole process. That is a cooperative, problem-solving approach.

In those countries I mentioned, Ghana and Kenya, they had already set up some peace councils at the national and district level where respected leaders of civil society were invited to become part of such a peace council. That helped its respective people because then it is easier that when there is a conflict, when there's polarization in society, they listen, perhaps sometimes more to respected leaders or the chair of the peace council than to the government, which sometimes is involved in conflict.

This is, in short, was very appealing for me in this model and I thought we have to make that more known and to publish about it and looking also for a network in this respect.

Thank you.

Matthew:

Great. Thank you.

Saul, do you want to add to it? Do you want to talk some more about the ministries and the departments and the structures that you've been working on?

Saul: Yes, thank you, Matthew.

The way we fit in, that is to say, the various movements around the world for ministries or departments of peace is that we're focused at the national level. Our initiative, which actually began, the modern initiative really began with your own peace alliance and the work of Dennis Kucinich and the introduction of the Department of Peace Bill in 2001, I believe for the first time. Our inspiration actually in Canada came from that work.

We founded our movement in Canada in 2003. At this time, in 2012, we do have a bill before the Canadian parliament, the Department of Peace Bill, which, since we regard peace as nonpartisan, this bill was introduced by three parties. Usually a bill is introduced by a single political party; but, in this case, it was introduced by actually three of the four major parties in the country. We're very excited about that opportunity and that innovation.

We are working, as I said, at the national level. We wish to create a Ministry of Peace, a minister at the cabinet level that would sit at the cabinet table alongside the Minister of Defense or the Minister of Public Safety or Homeland Security and offer a whole different perspective on issues, especially around conflict, seeing conflict through the lens of what Johan Galtung calls "conflict transformation by peaceful means," implementing a culture of peace, both domestically and abroad. There's been a lot of -- there was a high level meeting this week at the UN on the culture of peace, the first ever one. We are an implementation mechanism for that purpose.

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When we think of the UN, for example, and the UN's system, of which there are many outstanding pieces of legislation: treaties, covenants and so forth, but who implements these when they relate to peace at the national level? In our view, there really isn't anybody.

We need a specific, dedicated person and a full properly resourced department in order to implement a culture of peace, both domestically and internationally because we see that the dual functions here of that department that it would be very important. So, on a domestic level, of course, we're concerned about, as you are, with violence and working with nonviolent approaches; and again, these are married internationally.

We are part of what Paul has been talking about and working with so strenuously with the infrastructures for peace. But, as he points out, it isn't every country that has a stable government that has the respect, if you like the legitimacy of its populations, in order to implement something like this, even if they would consider it. This is very important.

Finally, I'd like to say that because of what Paul has introduced to us, we're very concerned about building these mechanisms at the local, regional, as well as the national level, but that the Department of Peace would be the national mechanism that would be the one that integrated the various approaches to peace and also would assist in supporting those bodies at the various levels. We're very concerned about seeing that civil society innovations are supported very strenuously at the national level, but not taking those things over, enhancing and supporting civil society initiatives.

Paul: Can I --

Matthew: Yeah, please, Paul, go ahead.

Paul: Perhaps I can clarify also some different strategies. I can very much understand what Saul is saying about implementation of UN resolutions, culture of peace and what can be done by countries at the national level, more seen from the perspective of western or northern countries. My focus is more on looking to many countries in the south, in Africa, Latin America, Asia who have not so much stable governments and who have the means to implement such resolutions for a culture of peace. They have even to look to what are in our country, institutions who could work to deal with the many conflicts or potential conflicts in the country.

Our government system, if you look to in the US and in Europe, the governments, the ministries we have is about education, about health, about internal affairs and so on. In our system, there are hardly ministries dealing with what the potential conflicts and how do we deal with it. That is really lacking in our structure that we have, especially down in the countries where they have less well-functioning governments. That is really a danger if there are no institutions that are really looking for the background of conflicts and making analysis of what is happening in countries and how can we respond when conflicts escalate.

That is needed then that there is some structure at the national level, but also at the district and at the local level. I think that is more appropriate

to look for such structures in countries, for instance, in Africa. You also have the point if then the government, the best institution to organize it, to have it implemented within a government structure.

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Many countries are weak, fragile, corrupt, not so well-functioning. And sometimes, in many countries, civil society, civil society leaders, churches have more respect, have more weight than sometimes politicians. What we more promote or advocate is that the peace structure is a bit independent from the government, that it is not part of government bureaucracy.

It's good if the government is supporting it and facilitates setting up such a structure. But we have seen several times when polarization is taking place in a country, government is often also then polarized. When it doesn't work, then polarized government has to really bridge the different developments in a country. It is better to have it a bit separate from the government, perhaps as peace councils in which respected leaders of civil society are eminent persons, churches or otherwise who really can help to bridge the divides in a country.

There's some response, what Saul was saying, I can very much see that point more for northern countries. But for countries in the south, there's a great potential of conflicts and sometimes weak or fragile governments, it's going to be better to have it more independent or semi-independent from the government.

Matthew: Good point.

Saul: I think that the way Paul has put that, I think what we're dealing with is really a both-end proposition because how his work has informed us is the importance of, for example, at this point in time, in Canada and in the United States and perhaps elsewhere, we're working on the development of the idea of cities of peace. We have joined the International Cities of Peace organization. We're working very much on the ground here in Victoria, for example, with building the structures of a city of peace. We have resolutions, for example, from the city council, supporting this idea. I think that's very, very important.

What we've learned from Paul is that we need to work with mechanisms that are not only governmental but non-governmental in nature. Our

whole initiative is non-governmental. We are looking to government to implement these proposals.

I do feel that we need to work at all levels. We need to work at the local where people live. Also, the important thing there, I think, is that is at the civic or at the municipal level, that those governments are most responsive to its own citizens, as where people live and where the greatest threat of war exist is people living in cities. So it's a question of a both-end proposition.

In a country, like ours, like the United States and like other countries -- and I do accept what Paul is saying, of course. We are predicating our work on relatively stable countries. It is interesting also to note that in 2007, after more than a decade of protracted civil conflict, Nepal established a Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. That ministry has actually focused on building local peace councils. It's difficult work because, in a sense, the conflict formally is over, but there's still conflicting parties there. So our model can apply, to some extent, in other countries.

A good example of a stable country, of course, would be Costa Rica, which, in 2009, expanded its Ministry of Justice to become the Ministry of Justice and Peace, which is a very good combination, we feel.

The model can work. I agree with the idea that there needs to be a certain level of stability in order to implement it.

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What that national body could do -- go ahead.

Paul: Saul was mentioning Nepal; that could also be a good example of the danger if it's too much in the hands of government. What happened in Nepal is, at one moment, there was one party leading in the government and they wanted the ministry, and then they blocked options where they would have less power.

Secondly, then a year later, the Maoist party was strong and they claimed the ministry. When they had the ministry, they used the ministry also to send the messages to all the regions and say, "You have now to establish a peace council and you look for these people and this and this." It was just messages from the capital and not including -- no consultation process that's seeing this, also the local peace councils, as a way that --

and this time the Maoist party could partly control, in this respect, the peace council. Then, it's failed a bit and more than half of the peace council didn't work because the local people didn't agree with this approach.

That is also an example of how important it is to stay away, to have at a distance party politics and that you can be used by parties. That is really a danger in this because people like then to control from the capital.

Matthew:

Yeah. It's a really complex sort of mix and brew of what needs to happen because if the government completely stays out of it, there's a huge resource and funding that won't be there. Obviously, the downside is when there are parties in power who are not interested really in the values and goals that might be set out.

In the US, I just want to throw this in really quick, one thing that we have been working on at the Peace Alliance is something called the Youth PROMISE Act. It's domestic; it's for here in the United States. It's about youth violence prevention and intervention programs and trying to get funding and resources to communities. I think it's a very interesting model and I think probably a very good one in that all of the decision making is done locally, in the community.

First of all, as you were saying earlier, the people in the community know best about their community. Each community, when it's dealing with violence, there's different issues that they're trying to address. So you create this -- they're calling it a PROMISE Coordinating Council which essentially is a peace council of stakeholders. It's church leaders, it's NGOs, nonprofit leaders, it's school administrators, it's judges, it's law enforcement officials. It's actually a cross section of the community.

The requirement is simply that it's proven effective or promising programs that would get the funding and they're given funding to show that their programs are actually working, that they're actually decreasing violence, engaging youth in more positive proactive measures, and they have other outlines. The bulk of the decision making and power shift is locally, even though the funding is coming from the federal government, and probably, at some point, state governments as well, the way we're structured in the US.

It's an interesting way to have the highest level of government supporting it, but trying, as much as possible, to shift the decision making to the regions and the communities that are actually most embedded with the

challenges and understand it more uniquely. It might even be an interesting model to start exploring how we craft legislation and pushes for ministers and departments of peace to try to really look at how -- again, there's always going to be inherent flaws when you have a government because in democracies we have elections and different people are brought in and different interests are put into place.

But are there ways inside of these structures to mitigate some of that, so where there's more stability and more long-term fluidity and sustainability in how these programs are working and empowering the NGOs and the local communities to really address it and having completely outside, of course, the government structures?

I think that's a great point, Paul, and it's a really important one.

[0:25:03]

Saul:

On the domestic level, this is precisely the approach that we would anticipate a ministry taking, that is to encourage community involvement and responsibility in taking control of their own issues by amplifying such things as restorative justice, nonviolent communication, alternative dispute resolution and so forth, that these would be funded because they're radically under-funded at the present moment. The cost savings of this kind of work, we know, is enormous compared to a situation that either devolves into conflict or, otherwise, goes through a court proceeding, where no one comes out satisfied.

The point here is that we need to have the funding that's available, but not taking the power away from the local community to address its own issues. It's a tricky kind of work to do. But there are examples and it can be done. So I think this is really important.

I also do not wish to forget, take a country like Canada. Canada is a prosperous country. It is a middle power. It is well-positioned to play an important role on the world stage in terms of peacebuilding. That role in Canada has been seriously declining over the last five or six years under a different government. But historically, we've had a very prominent role to play in these ways.

UN is, for example, always talking about the most important thing is early detection and early response to situations that are emerging into violent conflict. We need a national body, for example, which is able to assess situations that are leading to violence and be able to carry out, in concert

perhaps with other countries, nonviolent intervention in those situations. We need to also have a kind of incubator, if you like, for creative solutions to conflict, which is something that's being worked on all the time, looking at root causes and responding to these as opposed to ad hoc responses.

We have these exquisite well-organized, well-resourced mechanisms of war, and we can see the war drums are beating right now in several parts of the world. But where are the counter responses to this?

We see a national level of response of the type I'm referring to as being extremely crucial and very beneficial to the potential for the nonviolent resolution of these conflicts.

Paul:

The quickest, the fast way also to explain what we are aiming for, that you are saying, Saul, and what I am saying, is we have infrastructures for war, we have infrastructures for health, we have infrastructures for education -- universities, training institutes; with health, hospitals, prevention programs and so on. But we don't have them internationally and nationally, if you look especially also towards the African countries and others, we don't have such infrastructures in those countries and internationally, and they are so much needed. There are some roughly 100 countries which are weak, fragile, or now in a state of close to collapsing.

There are so many countries who are affected by this. Sometimes countries, like Kenya some years ago, many people thought it was a stable country. Mali recently, that was a surprise. There's so much needed to have adequate structures in those countries to analyze what is the potential for conflict.

Can we set it together as civil society, sort of early warning response system and also, then the respected leaders who can respond? Sometimes the police or the military and the government are not the best institutions to respond. But civil society leaders can fulfill such a role. That is needed.

Saul:

I think that's well put, I mean, that the requirement here -- maybe what we're really suggesting here, Paul, is that those countries which are, like ours, for example, which should be obligated and in a position to assist in these formations in way that, of course, is not post-colonial in its nature or violent in its nature, where it is genuinely able and willing to assist

these countries in their formations of infrastructures for peace, not forgetting that we need it at home as well.

I think this is a very important role. That's why I mentioned this idea of an incubator. A national level body would be an incubator for positively addressing issues of conflict wherever they exist in the world.

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Eventually what we envision, of course, is that there will be a system of ministers of peace, just like there are ministers of environment, ministers of health and finance and so forth who meet periodically to deal with issues on a global scale. By the same token, we'd see that happening with ministers of peace who will meet periodically, not just in times of crisis -- that's I think very important, not just in times of crisis -- but routinely so that they can address issues that are potentially going to create a violent situation, a war or something or a broader conflict. I think that that is absolutely missing at this point in time.

Paul:

It is really a shame that some years ago, and I've been many times to Canada, years ago Canada was one of the leaders, Sweden was one of the leaders, Holland, my country, was also quite active. Several of those countries give it now not so much priority anymore, different priorities or more conservative government. So that is also lacking at the international stage.

It would be good if say, several countries from the north would take the lead in this respect, with some countries as Ghana, Kenya, some others, and that they would cooperate and then also cooperate with some key civil society networks and organizations and some UN agencies. That is, I think, is needed.

It is more flexible. It shouldn't be one government only, only civil society or the UN. It should be also at the international level and it's governments from north and south, UN agencies and civil society networks cooperate how can we enhance infrastructures and ministries for peace, more and more countries what is needed there that you really can push that on the international agenda and so on.

Matthew:

I'm curious if either of you feel like are there any signs of hope in terms of this conversation evolving into more and more understanding, whether it be through governments or even the NGO community of it really taking form.

In know, in the United States, we now have an Office of Genocide and Mass Atrocities Prevention, which is essentially trying to do peacebuilding work. Even in our own government, in our congress, there was a call to -- in recent congress anyway, the current one got a little more conservative and less excited by it -- to add peacebuilding as one of our major objectives for international foreign policy work. There's a growing awareness and a growing understanding of the importance of it, even if it's very young and fragile and not fully structured.

Are there any other signs of peace that you guys have noticed around the world that you're seeing sort of an emerging understanding and appreciation for this kind of systematized --

Paul: There is a growing awareness. There is also more learning about best practices, what works, what works less that is growing. But I find that it is going very slow. I had hoped that it would go faster. But there is a growing awareness also that is affecting now what I said, some 100 countries have these difficulties, have these potential of conflict. There is also growing awareness that elections are becoming more and more contested and that there are no structures in place how to deal with it. There is a growing awareness that the cost of establishing such infrastructures is peanuts compared to the interventions, military or other interventions what's done sometimes the last year.

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Establishing of the infrastructure for peace in Ghana the first two, three years was only \$2 million, \$3 million. It's nothing compared also to sometimes the cost. I don't know what was the post-election violence in -- or seven or eight that happened in Kenya that was several billion that was the cost of that conflict and the damage and so on.

There is some progress in cost analysis. But still the step, we have much more to invest in these policies that is not modern. There is some slow development.

Saul: I would echo that feeling that things are going far too slowly. On the other hand, it's very interesting that in one field, that is to say, the potential for nuclear disarmament and a comprehensive treaty in that regard, I think there's quite a lot of positive movement at that level now in the world. This would be a major breakthrough should we achieve it.

I'm seeing that the five-point plan, for example, of the Secretary General, his constant work towards this objective, the Middle Powers Initiative and other organizations around the world, the parliamentarians' body and so forth, I think that there's finally a convergence that's happening and I do believe that we're going to see progress in the next while on that front.

Let's think. Again, at the national level, we have an ambassador for disarmament. Most Canadians would not know that person's name or any awareness of what that person is doing. But should that function be incorporated into a cabinet level minister of peace, we would have a much more powerful voice to proceed towards this inevitable and crucial objective. This is another way of coming about it.

So there is some optimism here. There is a tremendous amount of work going on now in that field. That's a long way from local peace councils. But let's face it, the local peace councils would be as dramatically affected by any nuclear conflict as would at any other level and every country on the planet.

Matthew: Also, Saul -- go ahead, Paul.

Paul: No, no.

Matthew: We haven't talked a lot about the Global Alliance, Saul, which I think in the last few years it's become a presence, something that's helping the people to organize movements around these sorts of things in their own countries. Can you share a little bit about sort of the evolution of it, what it's about, how it's evolved over the years, where it's at now?

Saul: The Global Alliance was formed in 2005 in London, England and Paul attended that inaugural meeting as well. Since that time, our primary work has been to encourage other countries to become party to this movement to, of course, create ministries or departments of peace within their own country. We've had some success in that.

In fact, although it is fraught with difficulties, it is true that the Ministry of Peace in Nepal came together directly as a result of a meeting that happened in Victoria, actually, in 2006, where a young man named Manish Thapa went back to Nepal and began to organize youth actually, which eventually led to the formation of the ministry. Another example is in Costa Rica. Our people in Costa Rica worked for three years to bring about the development of the Ministry of Justice and Peace.

Our primary vehicle is through our summits for departments of peace. We have now met on five continents over our five initiatives; and we'll go back to Europe next year. These bring together the countries that are involved in this movement, which is now numbering something over 40. We have representatives in the organization that number something like 40 countries are involved in some way in this and about half a dozen have serious campaigns for departments of peace.

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It's a body that will meet next year in Geneva. It's a body that we're very proud of that we've been able to get this far. We can see the membership growing over the year and more and more of these campaigns becoming serious on the ground towards that objective.

By the way, I just want to mention that the website that you mentioned actually has changed for the Global Alliance, which is now the Global Alliance for Ministries & Infrastructures for Peace. Blissfully, the web address is simple, it's gamip.org.

Matthew: Perfect. Thank you for that.

I know that the mission of the group, this last meeting I've heard that it expanded a little bit in terms of the infrastructure being a little more broadly thought of than just having it be ministries and departments. Is that correct?

Saul: That's reflected in our name. Paul was central to that work. Our meeting was in Cape Town. We deliberately met in Africa because of the important initiatives for peace that are happening in the African continent that are very little heard of elsewhere. We hear about the wars, we hear about the internal conflicts, but we don't hear much about peacebuilding. So we wanted to enhance those initiatives.

Costa Rica is where we expanded our focus really to embrace infrastructures for peace, not simply national levels, departments of peace, although that is still our primary focus.

Paul: The point that I raised first in Costa Rica in the summit and later in Cape Town is to more reflect on the ambivalent position of a government in a weak or fragile state and how in many of those countries it's the winner takes all with election. There's a lot at stake. There's a lot of pressure to

keep the power, to get it and to otherwise to perhaps to incite these elections, conflicts that you can use the police or the military so that you can stay in power, especially when political positions to be part of government is so important. Often also there's a lot of corruption, the government is perceived by many as not so neutral, not doing well.

If you look to the development, how many local peace councils and others came in existence is because the government neglected issues as peace and justice. There was no justice. There was no peace. There was no security in regions in the country. Then people were organizing themselves. We established local peace councils so, at least in our community, there is some security.

The government is often not the best partner of civil society. It can be useful really to cooperate with the government, but to have the structure, the peace councils and so on, a bit more independent or semi-independent from the government. That is still a process in which we are looking for the different arguments and what are the best methods. We can learn a bit from Ghana and Kenya.

I think it is an important discussion and it is also how we in the Global Alliance also learn more and see also the weaknesses and strengths of different structures.

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Saul: One thing, as an anthropologist, I must mention, and Paul has thought of this of course, is that when we're talking about local peace councils, we're also, where appropriate, invoking traditional peacemaking structures and processes so that it's not simply something that is ad hoc and built at the moment without reference to the traditional patterns of peacebuilding and peacemaking in a given country and area.

Paul: In the policies of Ghana and Kenya, it's explicitly mentioned what you say, Saul, that they want to include in the peace structure also more the traditional mechanisms and structures. They want to make a link with what has been done in the past and that they will look for what is still useful from the things we have had and perhaps they should partly be revived or we should have a combination of it.

Matthew: Great.

We're getting close to the end of the call. I just want to say if there's anybody that has questions or maybe comments, those of you on the line can use the *2 key to raise your hand. I don't know in the webcast, if any folks are listening in on the webcast, I don't know actually how to get your questions. Jeffrey, if you see anything good and want to jump in.

Jeffrey: On the screen, on the left-hand side there's an opportunity to send a question.

Matthew: I don't know how to see it. It'd have to be Jeffrey that hops in and tells us because I don't know where that is.

Anyway --

Jeffrey: We do have a question that came in. Let me just pull it up here.

Matthew: Okay.

Jeffrey: This is from [Participant] in Ottawa and says, "The idea of a DoP is challenged by governments and corporate lobbyists because it will open debates in parliament on issues not being discussed now that demands accountability on budget distribution and offer reasonable alternatives to current action. Do you think this is surmountable?"

Saul: This is certainly an ongoing -- this is the political process and we do have enormous obstacles to overcome. But it's like everything else. It's always been social movements that have brought about transformative change and this is what the Canadian Department of Peace initiative is really all about, that we continue.

We're in it for the long term. It's going to take a long time. But we are dedicated to the idea of creating this Department of Peace and so that it stands alongside the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Public Safety, et cetera and provides a whole different even a world view as to how to address issues that come before cabinet. We want to change, in other words, hopefully, the nature of debate and decision making that's made at the cabinet level towards a culture of peace. That would be our ultimate objective.

We know it's a long way to go, but we've made some starts with some outstanding parliamentarians, those that support our bill. We continue to be optimistic that we will succeed.

In the long term, we will be successful in this, in a properly resourced ministry, not just something that feels good but really has no power. It must be at the heart of government, at a senior level cabinet position.

Matthew: The thing that Congressman Kucinich in the United States says this a lot, and we do too, right now that the conversation is at a large scale in our nation and around the world, it's almost nonexistent. People don't even know that there's something off. And when you have a large structure in government, like our State Department in the US or the Departments of Defense and Education, et cetera, there is a mission set up for those agencies. They obviously can be shifted by administrations, the priorities can be shifted.

But at least, there's a conversation that something -- when you have, say, the Department of Peace or something at that level, people know that there's something to be questioning. It at least puts the conversation in a spotlight on something that can then begin to grow on multiple levels beyond even the agency. Whereas now, where we have almost nothing that people even know to point to that's something's either right or wrong, that social movements can really move around pushing for -- with our Environmental Protection Agency, sometimes they're a help to the environment, sometimes they're not, depending on who's in power. But there's always been a spotlight on that and so, people have something to work for or to push for improvement around.

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Saul: That's an important point.

Paul: It would be --

Saul: That's actually right. Where do you address yourself when you're dealing with government, Paul?

Paul: It would be great. Hopefully, within some years when we would have one or two governments who perhaps have taken some -- say one or two in the north who've taken some steps along the lines of what you say, Matthew, and what you say, Saul, some northern governments and corporations and governments, as Ghana and Kenya and one or two more, and civil society organizations that really would impress people and then you can make it more clear, this is needed in the world.

At this moment, it is still too fragmented. But it would be really great. I hope really that, within some years, we can have some core group of some governments in the north, perhaps willing to do this or taking some steps already in this and some governments in the south, establishing such peace structures, then I think such a joint leadership would really have great possibilities to make further steps and a more clear message.

Matthew: Paul, where I think all of us are looking to leadership from people like you -- in the United States, for us to get a Department of Peace is imminent. It's not going to happen anytime soon, regardless of how much we push. Although, we still push for the concepts and ideas and work hard for it.

What are some great examples of what, it might be through Cities of Peace, but something that also internationally that are not quite as big of a bite for activists who are pushing for things but that could really show multiple systems working together, multiple nations working together to really help create that? I think that's the big question.

What are some short-term achievable, tangible structures and infrastructures that aren't maybe at the large level we'd like but at least something that could be, again, another example of showing what's effective that we could use to champion?

Paul: I hoped some years ago that some governments, like Sweden, Norway, Canada, Netherlands that that could be a group in the north focusing on this together with some in the south. At this moment, I don't see directly so many governments in the north taking really an important leading position.

At this moment, I hope that some governments, like Ghana, Kenya, Costa Rica, perhaps the Philippines, with some civil society networks that that could be possibility perhaps in two years, that we will have some leadership of governments, civil society and UN agencies. It would be great. There are some governments, like Switzerland is very supportive, Sweden, but they will not take the lead; they will support it.

It would be great if this is developing more in Africa and northern countries that some governments, as Sweden and Switzerland and some others, really say, "This is important." We facilitate meetings. We help them with lobbying in the UN and so on. That is more of what I think.

Saul: You know, Paul, I'm glad you said that because this gives us definitely an idea and a theme, really, for the meeting next year of the Global Alliance

in Geneva because Geneva, of course, being a highly significant locale in the first place. But all these other countries, if we could achieve kind of a gathering, bringing together, both the civil society organizations, of which we're one and are organizing this, and those countries to send representatives, it may be a forum where that dialogue can be continued and maybe develop some kind of a movement forward of exactly what you're speaking of because there's a dire need for this.

[0:55:19]

War has not gone away. The nuclear threat has not gone away. Civil conflicts have not gone away. They won't go away.

We must work as humanity. We need to work on these issues. We need to grow to our own maturity from what people call our infancy or even our adolescence. This is the moment because the time is precious and the time is now.

Paul: Hopefully.

Matthew: We are almost out of time. I just want to leave just a tiny bit of space for are there any specific tangible actions people can take that either of you want to share, just very quickly around something the average person, who might be listening to this, could do to help move things forward?

Saul: What I would say in countries, like Paul has indicated, in countries that have relatively stable, legitimate governments, that a movement for a ministry or a department of peace consolidates many parts of the peace movement by providing an umbrella for it that all can fit under. It has kind of has a unifying possibility which allows for a more coherent, stronger approach to government to actually implement these structures.

Paul: I would add that in campaigning for national, in your case, a national ministry or department of peace, please formulate as a second goal that you want to enhance the development and establishment of peace structures in as many as possible countries. That is one thing to a national level. The other is it is really needed and it should be within the ten core points for a combined program, a joint program that you say, and we want to enhance internationally how in more countries in Africa and so, such peace structures are facilitated and funded. That would make sense that you not only look to your own peace and security in your country, but also say, "We have to make the whole world more safe and let's help and let's fund more of those structures."

Matthew: That's great, Paul. Thank you for that. And for you as well, Saul.

Paul, I think that's a great thing for the Peace Alliance to be considering as well. Maybe you and I can talk in another time about that and some other things you have; I know you have literature.

Is there any way for folks to follow you guys?

Let me say quickly. For those of you in the United States, you can also go to the Peace Alliance. We have all kinds of actions you can take, from writing members of Congress to push for domestic-based peacebuilding programs that we have here, to doing some important international -- there's budget funding for things like the US Institute of Peace, which is a somewhat independent agency of the government that's working on some peacebuilding stuff. It's not perfect, but it's doing some good work, and there's a huge threat of being eliminated altogether. So there are actions you can take on our website.

Where can people go? I know Saul, for the Canadian, people can go to www.departmentofpeace.ca, and then for the Global Alliance it's www.gamit.org. Where else, Saul?

Saul: M-I-P, you have that P at the end, G-A-M-I, P for Paul.

Matthew: Got it, sorry. I had T, I don't know why.

How about you, Paul? Is there any way that folks can learn more about what you've been up to? Is there anywhere people can go?

Paul: At this moment, we don't have a website because that is still in discussion between civil society organizations and also the UN, so it's not so easy. The best contact, I think, is Global Alliance.

Matthew: Thank you both so much.

Saul: Paul, give them your email address.

Paul: My email address is easy, it's paulvtongeren@gmail.com.

Matthew: Great.

Thank you both for all the work you're doing. We're inspired by it here in the US and those of us in our network are inspired. I hope folks that listened to this conversation will engage and really dive into these issues and think about how we can build these sorts of structures around the world and in our own country because we need them.

Thank you all. Be sure to keep tuned in. We still have the rest of this week. There's a great conversation tonight that we're going to have with Mary Stata from Friends Committee on National Legislation in the Prevention and Protection Working Group, looking at what our government here in the United States can do and is doing around peace and peacebuilding and ways that you can get involved even more deeply and grapple these issues. Check into that. Tomorrow there's some great conversations, too.

Thank you all for attending. Thank you, Paul and Saul, very much.

[1:00:50]

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