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### "The Role of Belun and CICR's Early Warning, Early Response system in Ensuring Effective Warning and Response to Conflict Risks in Timor-Leste"

Presentation for Early Warning for Protection Conference, November 2010

## Relevance of the presentation of the system to the conference

The Belun and CICR Early Warning and Response conflict prevention system in Timor-Leste provides an excellent example of a working model of an Early Warning system that seeks to address many of the conceptual and empirical dilemmas in the Early Warning field by engendering effective response to identified conflicts through the engagement of local actors.

## EWER Objectives

The EWER system was conceptualized and designed as a means to increase early responses to conflict and to prevent isolated instances of violence from escalating at the national and community level. In order to realize its overarching goal, the system is structured to achieve two intermediary objectives, namely, to strengthen programmatic and policy responses to conflict and to reinforce state and community preparedness and responses to conflict so as to minimize the potential for violent conflict.

## EWER Methodology

This Early Warning system was designed combining best practice from around the world to create a model system that integrates early warning and conflict analysis with conflict preparedness and response. The EWER system is a 'Third Generation'[1] EWER System, where both data gathering and analysis are based in the field and early warning is accompanied by response to both macro and micro conflicts.

The system monitors conflict dynamics across the country to provide evidence on which to base geographically targeted analysis of potential conflict triggers. EWER uses a people-to-people approach to establish networks on the National and Community levels for identifying conflict factors and working together to design context appropriate response activities.

## The types of conflicts that the system seeks to address

In its efforts to identify and respond to conflicts as they arise, it is hoped that disputes can be addressed before violence escalates into larger-scale conflicts. Issues of conflict that the system currently responds to include conflicts between families, ethnic groups, martial arts groups and communities. The causes of these conflicts sometimes come from disputes between individuals; claims to ownership of land for housing or agriculture or over border delineations between communities. Some conflicts have their roots in historical conflicts; others relate to recent changes in group dynamics such as those between new religious groups. The project also seeks to address ongoing concerns such as domestic violence and undercurrent tensions that increase vulnerability to future conflict. The system has also sought to respond to imminent international concerns between Timor-Leste and Indonesia with regard to promoting the peaceful resolution to unresolved border agreements. The system will draw on BELUN's previous experience in monitoring electoral violence in association with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2007 in order to prepare for monitoring potential political conflict in the run up to the next elections in 2012.

## Systems and mechanisms that need to be put in place to ensure effective early-warning is given

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[1] Kumar Rupesinghe, 'A New Generation of Conflict Prevention: Early Warning, Early Action and Human Security', paper presented at the Global Conference on the 'Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding', New York, July 2005.

Effective early warning depends on the ability to effectively monitor the changing conflict dynamics on multiple different levels. Ongoing data gathered by the program provides situational analysis and incident mapping, displaying ongoing trends and particular issues of concern. This is complemented by comparison with monitoring of other forums of external research and media.

Key to the effectiveness of this early warning system is the linking of warning and response. Provision of early warning requires effective networks with forums that can distribute alerts and flash reports to a broad audience including various forms of media and effective distribution lists, perhaps more important however, are the networks which are able to convene to discuss the findings and promote response activities with national actors. This system depends greatly on its extensive Conflict Prevention Networks as well as mobilising at the national level to bring appropriate actors together to respond. The nurturing of strong networks is a process that takes long-term commitment, time and support.

Effective early warning is also dependent on flexibility in the system that is sufficient to keep regular activities running while also being able to conduct additional research and mobilisation of response when unforeseen incidents occur.

**Establishing partnerships for response**

The people-to-people approach is a key element in the design of the EWER system toward realization of reinforced state and community preparedness and responses to conflict toward preventing the escalation of violence. Engaging both state and civil society actors the program has facilitated the establishment of community Conflict Prevention and Response Networks (CPRN) at the national and sub-district levels. Each CPRN is comprised of monitors and targeted local government, security, and civil society actors, including motivated individual citizens with a capacity to promote peace in their communities. Where possible, the networks are used as a means to provide support to existing organizations and individuals already working to advance peaceful responses to conflict.

Over time, these networks develop increased capacity to assist community members as they seek to address tensions without violence and stimulate change at the broader community level, providing a critical contribution to security and peaceful development locally. As such, the cumulative impact of the series of initiatives planned by the CPRN's will be much greater than the individual parts alone. Only by working together on the myriad issues of concern in a given area will there be an impact on the conflict dynamics of the community at-large. No one agency alone can prevent violent conflict, but a range of people and institutions using a people-to-people approach can collectively provide a strong response aimed at reducing tensions and resolving disputes before they escalate into violence.

**Harnessing, coordinating, and utilising the sometimes overwhelming amount of information available**

The EWER system harnesses, coordinates and utilises a vast amount of information by bringing all of its monitoring findings back to the communities. The system measures peace and conflict potential through monitoring and weighting of the 63 situational indicators as well as recording incidents of violence. Many of the indicators include a gendered analysis of the perpetrators and victims of violence and of situational change. Through the analysis process, particular trends are watched closely to ascertain the extent to which convergence of these trends indicates increased vulnerability of the context to triggers of violence.

Conflict Prevention Networks review and verify monitoring findings of situational change and incidents in their area and national trends, as well as reviewing the relevance of the specific themes to their communities. These networks prioritise issues of concern and design context-appropriate response activities. A conflict prevention and response fund is available for these networks to apply to with activity proposals.

**The role of new technologies in conflict early warning and their interaction with more traditional monitoring systems**

The EWER system depends largely on traditional approaches of communication but also utilises technology in gathering, analysing and sharing of data. Mobile phones are also used for basic communications both for coordination and for the relaying of important and urgent events. The system also relies on a specially designed data management system to store and process data collected by monitors. The database is designed for user-friendly data entry and analysis based on pre-determined indicators and reporting criteria.

**Coordinating effective cooperation between the humanitarian sector and communities at risk once early-warning has been sounded**

The EWER system is linked into the InterAgency Contingency Plans for Resposne to crisis at the National level in order to facilitate response to crises. The EWER system provides the only consistent data gathering processes, tracking conflict risks in the country. This resource provides a unique bridge between the humanitarian sector and communities by providing up to date, geographically nuanced information about the types of issues that communities are facing, enabling targeted and coordinated response strategies to be designed. Lack of information often promotes the spread of rumors and strategies that are not able to address the real challenges that exist and as they vary according to geographical area.

Through advancing early responses to conflicts, the system strengthens state and civil society preparedness for conflict, serving to prevent the escalation of violence and minimize its impact across communities. Accumulated practice by local and national actors in identifying issues and designing and implementing response strategies strengthens pathways between state and civil society actors for accessing opportunities for preventing and responding to conflict. Preparedness for conflict is enhanced by the training of monitors in Conflict Transformation theories and skills.

**Bringing about changes in attitude and behaviour at a policy level in order to forestall a descent to violence**

The EWER system provides an integrated approach to warning, response and preparedness by sharing all monitoring findings with both the stakeholders and response actors. The program provides warning through both formal and informal mechanisms. When an incident is reported, the program first telephones directly to the relevant partners among state ministries, international and civil society actors. Formal warning is provided through alerts and reports that highlight concerns for underlying or future conflict with relevant actors at the community and national levels to encourage preparedness and response. Recommendations to the national level for addressing critical longer-term conflict prevention issues are made in relevant policy briefs with a view to mobilizing action among competent bodies to respond to the recommendations made. EWER reports are used as focal points for convening relevant national state actors, security forces and international development partners to share findings and discuss response strategies. Linkages are also made with mechanisms for disaster preparedness.

**Key lessons for effective early warning and response**

There are some key lessons that have emerged through the implementation of the EWER program and some challenges that still remain in working to ensure effective early warning is given and response is mobilised.

- *Changing conflict dynamics need to be monitored on multiple different levels including the impact of national issues on grassroots perceptions*

The integration of quantitative socio-economic and political situational analysis with incident mapping and more flexible qualitative reporting with opportunity for community verification and feedback provides reliable analysis which can inform local and national programming for conflict prevention.

- ***Accurate, consistent and timely information is essential***

Some challenges in the implementation of such programs relate to the processing of monitoring data and the speed of reporting. This program has committed to a thorough verification practice which involves a detailed process of manually checking reports and re-confirming indicators with monitors and stakeholders. In its efforts to provide well verified data and high quality recommendations, the Alerts produced by the EWER system may not always be produced in advance of flash reports by the media. Nonetheless, this superior quality of information gives the Alerts a higher legitimacy around which to mobilise effective response activities.

- ***Long-term data sets are needed to draw insights about situational and social change. They are not a quick fix for addressing all conflict***

As a program that has been designed as a long-term system structure that seeks to identify trends as they change over time, it is difficult to meet expectations that the system could prevent all violent conflict and anticipate or predict its occurrence. Rather, the continuing data provided offers a unique opportunity to determine whether there are trends and patterns in the annual cycle of violence in Timor-Leste.

- ***Early warning needs to be linked to networks and mechanisms ready to design tailor-made response actions***

An ongoing challenge of the program is managing social perceptions and ensuring that publication of information on particular issues of conflict does not serve to highlight and therefore exacerbate the conflict in public perception. It is hoped that providing verifiable data, linked to recommendations and mobilisation for response will always contribute to diffusing and responding to conflict rather than bringing attention to issues without any recourse towards response.

The system is highly dependent on acting in coordination with Government, civil society and international partners in monitoring and responding to issues of conflict. It therefore depends on preserving legitimacy and relationships with key actors and so needs to be managed patiently and link to existing mechanisms creatively and engage with the political environment with sensitivity.

National conflict in Timor-Leste has historically been linked to political dynamics in the country. Such dynamics are monitored through media monitoring but are the most sensitive to respond to. The EWER system relies both on relationships within the Government and with national and international security forces as recipients for alerts if the program detects indications of potential political crisis, but the system's conflict prevention networks at the sub-district level provide alternative partners for response and diffusion of conflict at the local level to prevent centralised conflicts spreading across the country.

- ***Response requires networks which are able to convene to discuss the findings and promote response activities. Strong and Resilient Partnerships and Networks need time to develop.***

The EWER system is still currently completing its second year of implementation and over that period has begun setting up Conflict Prevention Networks in each of the sub-district in which it monitors. EWER's experience shows that it takes some months before these networks begin to be active in

designing response activities. It is essential that CPRNs are accompanied through follow-up processes to initiatives for response. Depending on the approach taken by the CPRN, some issues cannot be resolved in one session and require extensive follow-up through accessing official responses to clarify confusions over government policy at the local level or additional conflict transformation sessions to continue to assist communities in acknowledging the root causes of conflict and finding ways to accept one another in the future.

Through these networks, local actors are empowered to become aware of issues and respond to them, drawing on local strengths and skills to reduce tensions and resolve conflict, rather than avoiding issues altogether or waiting for external actors to intervene. These networks reduce the dependency on government systems of response, strengthening civil society's capacity, connectedness and collaboration to identify and respond directly to issues arising in order to prevent the escalation of conflict at the local level.

- ***Systems need to be flexible to fulfil ongoing activities and respond to emergency issues***

Effective early warning is dependent on flexibility in the system that is sufficient to keep regular activities running while also being able to conduct additional research and mobilisation of response when unforeseen incidents occur. Key to the effectiveness of this early warning system is the linking of early warning and early response. Provision of early warning requires effective networks with forums that can distribute alerts and flash reports to a broad audience including various forms of media and effective distribution lists, however, perhaps more important are the networks which are able to convene to discuss the findings and promote response activities with national actors. This system depends greatly on its extensive Conflict Prevention Networks as well as mobilising at the national level to bring appropriate actors together to respond.

Third Generation EWER systems are therefore well placed to facilitate timely, appropriate and sustainable mechanisms for responses to conflict through the trust and links they develop with local networks. Well designed systems are able to provide accurate analysis and warning regarding short and long-term conflict risk factors. Links into existing contingency plans for protection and response to crises allows the system to inform humanitarian planning of community issues, and long-term accompaniment of communities in conflict prevention activities builds local capacity and preparedness to respond to conflict before it escalates in their communities.