Recommendations for UN & UNDP in Ukraine to use Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and Other Social Media to Promote Reconciliation, Social Inclusion, & Peace-Building in Ukraine

Draft: *October 2, 2014*
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Note: this document was submitted to various UN and UNDP staff in Kyiv, Ukraine by a consultant, Ms. Cravens, but it is not an official UN document or strategy.

Introduction

Public communications activities by United Nations programs or UN country offices are never merely to say what actions and events the UN is under-taking. Communications activities also include affirming and promoting particular messages related to the goals of various UN programs in a country.

For instance, if a UN AIDS office is trying to change people's attitudes regarding people with HIV/AIDS, it will send out statistics and messages that contribute to better understanding by the public regarding the disease. If a UN program is working on promoting energy efficiency, it may send out messages that contribute to a better understanding as to why related activities are beneficial to the personal finances of individuals and families.

The UN in Ukraine office and UNDP Ukraine will soon be supporting activities that promote reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building in Ukraine. These are delicate tasks, fraught with risks; a communications misstep, such as being seen as favoring one side or another in a conflict, can lead to misperceptions, misunderstandings, feelings of disrespect and a derailing of the entire process. However, not undertaking communications activities to support peace-building and reconciliation activities would be far worse, as negative messaging on social media – Facebook, Twitter, blogs, other social networking platforms and online discussion areas – is plentiful and is dismissive or hostile to reconciliation and social inclusion efforts in all of Ukraine; in short, there are people actively using these tools to undermine efforts regarding peace, reconciliation, and social inclusion. Therefore, a communications strategy to support social inclusion, tolerance and peace-building activities is vital to ensure related activities are successful and to offer a counterpoint to negative messaging by potential peace spoilers.

That said, this document is not a communications *strategy*. Rather, this document offers considerations and recommendations for social media messaging that promotes reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building in Ukraine, and is to be used as a resource in the development of the overall peace and reconciliation strategy that is ultimately developed. It provides ideas for messaging related to promoting tolerance, respect and reconciliation in the country, and messaging to counter bigotry, prejudice, inequality, misperceptions and misconceptions about a particular group of people or different people among Ukrainians as a whole.

Challenges of Reconciliation

Reconciliation - the agreement of different groups that have been in conflict with each other to, instead, live together without antagonism or obvious, even armed, hostility - "requires completely changing the societal repertoires" of people involved in a conflict such that it creates or evolves "a new repertoire that can serve as a foundation for stable and lasting peace… it lays the foundations for successful conflict resolution and at the same time prepares the society members to live in a state of peace, which can be defined as mutual recognition and acceptance after the reconciliation process, as well as the jointly accepted goal of maintaining peaceful relations characterized by full normalization and cooperation in all possible domains of collective life." Reconciliation, in short, is a psychological process.[1]

The people of Eastern Ukraine have lived in violence or the threat of violence since the Spring of 2014, and in conflict regarding strongly-held political and cultural beliefs and practices since long before that. Different groups within this region have each developed a shared repertoire among the group with which they identify regarding beliefs, attitudes and emotions. This shared repertoire has helped them unify with like-minded people and feel secure against what they see as those that threaten their culture and their security. Each group watches TV channels and reads traditional and online news that reinforce their own group's points of view, and each decries or avoids those media channels that present points of view that are counter to their own beliefs about the situation, regardless of the accuracy of either media. The result is that different people in the region have very different ideas about what has happened, what is happening, and what should happen in the region.

Bar-Tal cites the consequences of, in any society in conflict, different people living together but holding widely different beliefs about history and current events: "This infrastructure includes a collective memory of conflict as well as an ethos of conflict with themes such as the justness of the goals of conflict, the delegitimization of the adversary and a positive collective self-image as the sole victim in the conflict. In addition, the infrastructure includes shared emotions such as fear, anger and hatred that mutually reinforce the described system of beliefs... Expressed in public ceremonies and imparted to the young generation in the school system, it eventually permeates into cultural products such as books, plays and films, until it has become a pillar of what can be called a culture of conflict. "[2]

Intractable conflicts may seem impossible to solve or, at least, to transform into tolerant societies, but in fact, many have been resolved thusly, such as in South Africa, Rwanda[3] and Northern Ireland. These changes required "changing the socio-psychological repertoires comprising the culture of conflict that fed the intractable conflict and served as a barrier to the peace process." These repertoires did not change once leaders had stopped armed conflict and signed a peace agreement. "The reconciliation process is long, gradual and nonlinear, and it requires reciprocal planned and active efforts in order to overcome the inevitable obstacles and

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1   Daniel Bar-Tal, "From Resolution to Reconciliation in Postconflict Societies," Sept. 25, 2012, Featured in World Politics Review, downloaded from http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12360/from-resolution-to-reconciliation-in-postconflict-societies
2   Daniel Bar-Tal, "From Resolution to Reconciliation in Postconflict Societies,"
3   One of the organizations working in Rwanda was International Alert, which is now working in more than 25 countries http://www.international-alert.org/

facilitate its solidification." It isn't that the different sides in these conflicts now *like* each other. It isn't that the different sides in these conflicts now get along perfectly, living together in complete harmony. Rather, the different people in these conflicts have accepted that there are people in their countries that have very different ideas from them, and that what is best for the country is that they work together, even as they hold different beliefs. Ongoing efforts are made by all to, as much as possible, celebrate common causes rather than points of difference.

Communications plays a key role in reconciliation processes but is, of course, incredibly tricky:
- Messages meant to be neutral can, instead, be seen as favoring one side over another.
- Debunking misinformation can be seen as an attack on an entire group.
- Encouraging tolerance for a group can be seen as asking for appeasement to an oppressor or abuser, as going against one's deeply-held values, or relinquishing any demands for justice for atrocities committed.

In addition, local Ukrainian staff being asked to undertake these communications activities are very likely biased themselves regarding the conflicts in the East, and may hold hostile feelings about a group or various groups. It can be a challenge for local staff to engage in reconciliation and peace-building activities, especially communications activities, because of their own deeply personal experiences regarding conflicts in Ukraine, to be entirely neutral and abandon their own repertoires regarding people with whom they disagree. A series of exercises, regarding reconciliation, respect and tolerance may have to be done with local UN staff (not just communications staff, but all Ukrainian staff) before they can effectively manage such projects elsewhere, including before they undertake communications activities that support the goals such projects.

Using Twitter, Facebook, and other social media
to support efforts related to reconciliation, social inclusion,
and peace-building in Ukraine

Social media – blogs, text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites - has been both a blessing and a curse regarding communication. When it is a blessing, social media provides and widely distributes necessary, accurate information, in a timely manner, and may even contribute to welcomed changes in behavior. When it is destructive, it fuels hostilities and misinformation, it widely distributes such negativity, and it leads to more misunderstanding, more prejudice, and even physical harm to people.[4]

An organization engaged in initiatives related to reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building ignores social media at its own peril. While negative messaging via social media cannot be blocked, it can be countered with alternative messaging. For someone to support messages related to reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building, one needs to only to "like" or share a Facebook message, or retweet something seen on Twitter.

While there are several peace-building organizations that have a presence on social media – on

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4   Jayne Cravens, "Folklore, Rumors (or Rumours) & Urban Myths Interfering with Development & Aid/Relief Efforts, & Government Initiatives (& how these are overcome)"
    http://www.coyotecommunications.com/development/folklore.html

just Twitter, for instance, there is Search For Common Ground / @SFCG_, Conciliation Resources / @Crbuildpeace, International Alert / @intalert, theHive on Conflict / @theHiveConflict, and the Alliance for Peacebuilding @AfPeacebuilding. However, these accounts are more about what projects the agencies are doing rather than any social media and traditional media messages meant to build peace and tolerance (though any of these organizations have expertise in this area, at least with regard to traditional media).

An example of an organization using Twitter to promote tolerance and respect is Common ground news, @CGNewsService, a project of Search For Common Ground. What follows are examples of the ways they use the service to promote tolerance and respect and to counter bigotry, prejudice, inequality, misperceptions and misconceptions about a particular group of people or different people within a community or a country:

Unified Campaign

The author of this document recommends that UNDP meet with its government partners and partnering civil society organizations, first to agree that working together to create and promote messaging regarding reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building is important, and that they would support such an initiative.

It will take more than one meeting for multiple civi society organizations and government offices to buy into such an initiative, for all to agree to send out these messages via social media regularly and to contribute ideas for additional messaging, and for all to launch and maintain the campaign for several months, consistently. But getting this buy-in and active participation from many different entities is key.

The goal is to not only get these partner organizations to agree to participate, but to get their social media followers – which, collectively, is in the millions in Ukraine – to resend out these messages as well to their friends and followers.

All partners for such an initiative could be encouraged to use a hashtag phrase so that all social media messages are marked for easy reference. Possible hashtag phrases, in English, include:
> #oneukraine
> #ukrainetogether
> #ukrainediversity
> #ukrainemosaic
> #ukraineinharmony

However, there should be just ONE hashtag phrase that is agreed to. The pros and cons of these and other hashtag phrases should be explored by the core group that will promote this social media initiative, in order to pick the best one to use in association with reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building.

Ukrainian and Russian versions would need to be created for whatever tag theme is chosen.

The goal is for the hashtag phrase to not only be used by UN agencies, government offices and officials, and partner organizations, but also for individuals to embrace the campaign and to contribute their own messaging using the hashtag phrase. For instance, the #Everydaysexism social media campaign was started by everydaysexism.com, an NGO based in London. The NGO encourages anyone who has a story regarding sexism, harassment and assault encountered in the course of their regular day to share such on social media using the #Everydaysexism tag; hundreds of women have done so, spreading the message of the NGO even farther. The NGO monitors use of the tag and retweets appropriate messages, and collects data to show how widespread and frequent the problem of sexism for women is.

The ultimate goal is that everyday Ukrainians, with no UNDP nor government affiliation, feel strongly enough about the tag to use it themselves to promote messages of peace and to counter messages against such. In short: the goal is for whatever tag is chosen, and the message behind such, to go viral.

Initiative partners would need to agree:

- Regarding who will be the lead agency for writing and sending messages (though all would be encouraged to write messages that could be sent by all participants)

- To regularly retweet and share messages from other participants

- To ensure a new message is sent out at least 2-3 times a week via social media

- Regarding who will be the monitor of the effort and will offer data and analysis regarding the campaign at the one month, three month and six month points

It is important to accept that people and organizations who do not want reconciliation between groups in conflict in Ukraine, that do not want an end to conflict or prejudice in Ukraine, and/or that want to undermine the government of Ukraine or the work of the UN, will use whatever tag is chosen to send out their own counter messages – such people that try to hijack an online campaign or message board for their own negative purposes are called *trolls* in Internet lingo. This is a reality that cannot be avoided. However, with several organizations using the tag and building support of individuals in Ukraine to use the tag as well, it should be possible to effectively counter negative messaging whilst never directly replying to such.

Twitter, Facebook & Blog Content

The demographics of users on Twitter and Facebook are quite different in Ukraine (and worldwide); Facebook reaches far more youth and is more widely used, while Twitter is used by the most tech-savvy of the country, including politicians and media, and messages can go viral more quickly.

While it is easy to share the same messages from Twitter on Facebook, the reverse is NOT true: Twitter allows for only 140 characters, so a message from Facebook, reposted to Twitter, might not make sense, as it may be truncated.

Messages sent via Twitter – tweets – and via Facebook need to be absolutely neutral, never favoring one group over another. These need to be messages that any Ukrainian would feel comfortable posting or retweeting. They should be presented in Ukrainian and again in Russian. If they could be presented as well in English, that would help such messaging have even wider appeal beyond the borders of Ukraine.

Message content can be:

- about community activities that bring people from different backgrounds together to build something, to clean up something, to celebrate something, to learn from each other, etc. (pictures, short messages, and links to more information)

- about government activities that promote human rights for all people of Ukraine

- images that promote inclusion of all people in Ukraine and celebrate different cultures and identities of Ukraine (not just one in particular). For instance, this graffiti from an

underground passageway in downtown Kyiv:

The center image has the words "united colors of Ukraine." The image at the viewer's left, with the miner's helmet, has "Donbas" written at the top, while the image to the viewer's right, with the lion, has the words "Liviv." The message is clear: Ukraine is made up of a diversity of people, from the largest city in the East to the largest city in the West, all equal and beautiful, and together, they make up one nation: Ukraine.

General messages

Messages can also focus on the general benefits of kindness, tolerance, and respect. Such messages focusing on these general benefits do not have to be Ukrainian-specific. These can be prepared in advance, ready to send with more specific messaging regarding community activities, events, etc. in Ukraine are not available.

Below are examples of messaging regarding the general benefits of kindness, tolerance, and respect that could be used for such a campaign on Twitter; all have enough room to include a hashtag phrase that would be developed in association with this campaign. Longer messages just for Facebook (too long for Twitter) could also be developed.

It would be good to have messages about the benefits of kindness, tolerance, and respect, and against prejudice, from both Ukrainian and Russian writers, philosophers, celebrities, etc. - such are not listed below:

> Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. - Franklin D. Roosevelt

> Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible. #MayaAngelou.

> Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs… it condemns the

oppression or persecution of others. - John F. Kennedy

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men #FrederickDouglas

Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery & apartheid it is man made and can be removed by the actions of human beings. #Madiba

Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts. - E. B. White

Prejudice… means you don't see the other human being anymore, but only your own concept of that human being - Eckhart Tolle

If people are informed they will do the right thing. It… when they are not informed that they become hostages to prejudice. - Charlayne Hunter-Gault

What is tolerance?.. We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly - Voltaire

Tolerance is giving to every other human being every right that you claim for yourself - Robert Green Ingersoll

Tolerance is you saying something crazy and me smiling and saying, 'That's nice.' - Penn Jillette

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see. - Mark Twain

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted. - Aesop

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Hatred is corrosive… (can) destroy a society's tolerance and humanity, and block a nation's progress to freedom and democracy. - Liu Xiaobo

I am a lover of truth, a worshipper of freedom, a celebrant at the altar of language and purity and tolerance. - Stephen Fry

"It is not power that corrupts but fear' - Aung San Suu Kyi

"Peace is a never ending process... It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests." - Oscar Arias

"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." - Mother Teresa

Evaluation

Evaluation of efforts will be somewhat difficult; it is doubtful someone will say, "I was convinced to reconcile with my neighbors because of a tweet I read from the United Nations."

Evaluation measures could include:

- The kinds and numbers of organizations that formally partner with the UN regarding this initiative, and that actively participate by contributing messages and delivering those messages regularly via their own social media.

- The number of people and organizations on social media retweeting or sharing messages.

- The number of retweets or shares a message receives.

- Number of people and organizations using the hashtag associated with this endeavor.

- Commentary in newspapers, on blogs, and in other media not affiliated with the effort.

Conclusion

As part of an overall campaign strategy regarding reconciliation, social inclusion, and peace-building in Ukraine, social media has an important, even vital, role to play. This document provides recommendations meant to help contribute to that strategy. Getting multiple civil society organizations and government offices to participate in the initiative, both by contributing ideas and by using their own social media channels to deliver messaging, consistently, will be key in creating a viral campaign that individual Ukrainians also support and in which they also participate. The goal is to not only get these partner organizations to agree to participate, but to get their social media followers – which, collectively, is in the millions in Ukraine – to resend out these messages as well to their friends and followers.