

# Foreword

## John Paul Lederach

I began exploring conflict transformation as a concept in the 1980s. For the practitioner-scholar most key insights emerge from the unexpected, usually a crisis or a surprise that shifts and awakens the reflective mind. Mine came in the form of a simple question in the midst of a planning seminar in Central America. “You speak of conflict resolution,” a participant noted, “but what does this really mean? I have to say, your use of the word *resolution* bothers me. If you are coming here to fix things, to have us look for quick solutions that do not really *change* anything, we are not interested. We don’t need fixing. We’ve had too much of that before.”

My insightful colleague had gone to the heart of the matter on more than one level. It is possible to solve a conflict and not change much, and we certainly live in a world where those arriving from outside settings of protracted conflict seem to carry carpet bags that mix funding along with approaches, ideas and answers. Thirty years ago his question shifted mine: how do we transform those things that damage and tear apart human relationships to those that protect and build healthy communities? That question has remained the North Star, the flickering light to navigate the ever-challenging rough seas of deep-rooted conflict and violence.

Over several decades the practice, research and conceptual development has substantially increased our understanding about conflict transformation and the range of tools, approaches and frameworks that guide the navigation. The research and materials from Berghof have singularly contributed to this endeavour. With the arrival of *Advancing Conflict Transformation. The Berghof Handbook II*, I would suggest that we will find the most comprehensive overview of conflict transformation compiled to date. Let me justify this statement by noting the key challenges transformation as a paradigm poses and what we find in this volume.

First, transformation must respond to, but not be limited by, the symptomatic parameters of a dispute. In other words, a transformative lens must attend to structural and systemic complexity. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this *Handbook* emerges by the way

it holds together the wide-ranging set of authors (who all speak from years of experience), each entering this bejeweled challenge of human conflict through a different facet. It is rare to find a book that links traditional methods and human rights, systemic thinking and mediation, or gender, security studies and evaluation of training and practice.

Second, transformation must provide creative ways to integrate the multiple levels of change processes unfolding in and outside the settings of protracted conflict. Thirty years back the field was dominated by a state-centric understanding of response, responsibility and change. This *Handbook* provides a lively interchange depicting the centrality of interdependence, but one that each author rightfully suggests requires *critical reflection* into all levels of society affected by and responding to the conflict. The overall conclusion proposed in this volume, articulated by numerous authors and supported by empirical research is simple: no one process, level, organisation or state actor is capable of birthing and sustaining the movement from violence to constructive change on its own.

Third, deep understanding – the kind that engenders respect for the difficulty of the transformational aspiration – requires commitment to wallow and wade in the real-time messiness of violent conflict and oppressive structures and an equal commitment to engage the hard intellectual coal-face work of building knowledge and theory with empirical rigour. Taken together, the chapters of this *Handbook* enrich our understanding of both what has been gained and what more remains to be explored, unpacked and discovered.

The best handbooks are those the reader feels compelled to keep close at hand. *Advancing Conflict Transformation* has integrated three decades of practice and theory and will be looked back upon thirty years from now as a foundational account of the field. I plan to keep it close at hand.

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