

## BUSINESS NETWORKS

International Alert helps businesses and business networks to leverage their comparative advantage in building peace by maximising their resources and influence to help address the economic and social dimensions of violent conflict.

### WHO WE ARE

We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding organisations, with nearly 30 years of experience laying the foundations for peace. We work with local people around the world to help them build peace, and we advise governments, organisations and companies on how to support peace.

### WHAT WE OFFER

We help business people in conflict-affected countries to enhance their contribution to peace by collaborating more effectively in business associations and networks. We support them in developing the skills and knowledge they need to play this role by:

- Providing training on non-violent communication and advocacy, and on 'conflict-sensitive business practice', i.e. strategies for businesses to avoid exacerbating conflict and to support peace;

- Facilitating the formation of pro-peace networks that link business people from different sectors and across geographical and ethnic boundaries, and helping them to identify actions that they can take to promote peace;
- Supporting business networks to design and undertake economic activities that build peace, along with local and national advocacy campaigns to further peacebuilding goals; and
- Helping business networks to collaborate with others in civil society to further progress towards peace.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Peace can only be built through the efforts of broad, diverse coalitions. Business people are often leaders in society. Their trading role and networks make them important 'connectors' in society. Also, while some economic actors prosper during violent conflict, most

businesses have a strong interest in peace. These factors give business people a particular comparative advantage in peace processes. However, this potential is not always recognised and they are therefore often not brought into peacebuilding coalitions.

**“The Galle district has been burdened by communal strife over many years. However, through BPA, we have been able to address the causes for tension between the various communities in our district. We have been able to win the confidence of all communities and bring about goodwill and friendship among all.”**

**SRI LANKA, VICE-CHAIRMAN, GALLE DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**

Individual businesses and networks of business people can address the economic dimensions of conflict by engaging in economic activity that aids reconstruction, rebuilds livelihoods, and connects individuals and communities across conflict divides. The business sector is also a resourceful and influential lobby, with a reach from the grassroots to the highest levels of government. The sector can lend support to or lead advocacy with civil servants and politicians to promote peacebuilding goals. Partnerships between business people and other civil society actors engaged in peacebuilding can also give civil society greater legitimacy.

## WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

### South Caucasus

In 2005 we helped to establish the Caucasus Business and Development Network (CBDN), a pioneering initiative that promotes regional economic cooperation as a peacebuilding strategy across conflict divides in the Caucasus and with neighbouring Turkey. CBDN is made up of and works with local entrepreneurs, businesses and international partners to support a variety of projects. These include regional marketing events, regional sectoral dialogue and cooperation, and the creation and promotion of regional brands that symbolise peace and cooperation. We have helped

network members to research the obstacles to and opportunities for economic cooperation, and to begin to address them. Our key achievements to date include:

- Helping to create a locally owned and credible cross-divide regional advocacy network, which is the only institution actively promoting regional cooperation (including between business communities from the disputed territories) as a peacebuilding strategy;
- Supporting CBDN to develop and promote four regional products – cheese, tea, wine and honey – under the name Caucasian Brands. These products bring together ingredients and producers from across the region in support of a common goal: peace and cooperation; and
- Helping to organise public events across the South Caucasus where people can sample and give feedback on Caucasian Brands, which are promoted as symbols of an economically connected and cooperating South Caucasus. These events have exposed thousands of people to the commercial and peace messages of this initiative, and are organised jointly with local actors and local authorities.

### Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, from 2002 to 2009, we supported the formation of a Business for Peace Alliance (BPA). This alliance brought together business owners from 17 regional chambers of commerce representing all of Sri Lanka's provinces and ethnic communities. BPA-led activities fostered inter-ethnic reconciliation, trust-building across divides created by the civil war and greater regional representation in peacebuilding efforts. Key achievements of the project include:

- Establishing an inter-regional trade and investment fair, the 'Peace Bridge', to promote peaceful economic cooperation and share different cultures through food and music; and
- Organising business exchange visits between Jaffna Chamber of Commerce and chambers elsewhere in the country, to generate inter-ethnic understanding and promote cross-regional economic activity.

## FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about what we offer, please visit [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org) or contact Debbie Ball on [dball@international-alert.org](mailto:dball@international-alert.org) or +44 (0)20 7627 6800.

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