Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA.

Welcome to this issue of the GPS Newsletter. As with previous Newsletters, this issue contains a wide range of assessments of confronting and resolving violent conflict. Our three current articles range from a current "real-time" analysis of the daunting challenges faced by the third largest country in Latin America as it seeks to move toward sustained peace, to a provocative analysis based on historical examples of efforts to destroy entire cultures, often accompanied by genocidal attempts to massacre one or more ethnic groups Another article reports on our first effort to elicit the views of you, our readers, about our written products and events.

A few words about the authors and their main messages. We are delighted that our first contribution is from Adam Isacson, "Overcoming the Obstacles to Lasting Peace in Colombia." Adam is the Director for Defense Oversight, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, DC. Readers who attended the two GPS-sponsored workshops on the Colombia Peace Process, held in December 2017 and March 2019, will recall the clear descriptions and assessments contributed by Isacson, who was a panelist at each workshop. Let me also recommend a recent provocative article by Isacson, "To Save Colombia's Peace Process Prove the Extremists Wrong," New York Times, "Opinion," September 2, 2019. As Isacson concludes, while the path forward toward peace is clear enough and there is a sign or two of hope, the hurdles and challenges remain very daunting.

GPS Board Member Anna Amato designed a survey of the views of GPS readers (mainly of the Newsletters and, to a certain extent, the "Peace Dispatch" and as participants in GPS events). The survey was distributed, and, for the most part, returned by email. Anna analyzed and summarized the survey results, which are presented in the second article, "Results from the GPS Reader Survey." We are grateful to the readers who took the time to complete and return the Survey, and its results will be carefully reviewed by the GPS Board. The narrative responses appear to be particularly valuable.

The third article, "Curbing Cultural Destruction," is by GPS Board Member, Dr. Robert Muscat, who is a frequent and thoughtful contributor to the Newsletter. His articles have spanned a wide range of issues, several beyond the "mainstream" of peace and conflict literature (e.g. "Apology: A Cement for Peace?" "Peace and Conflict: Engineering: Responsibilities and Opportunities," and "The Folly of Genocide"). These articles all bring fresh perspectives to critical questions and convey singularly illuminating insights. In the article below Muscat cites examples of attempted obliteration of all vestiges of a culture, resulting in an irreparable loss to the world. Tragically, some of these attempts were successful. Muscat also notes that attempts to destroy culture are often accompanied by violence against the group marked for cultural extinction. In hopes of preventing cultural destruction, the author suggests that international conventions could play a role, such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. But Muscat reaches the sobering conclusion that: "Unfortunately, the world still seems to have far to go before the Convention and the threat of legal liability will begin to have significant deterrent effect."

Overcoming the Obstacles to Lasting Peace in Colombia

Right now, much of Latin America is on fire. Venezuela is in the throes of a historic man-made humanitarian disaster. A brutal crackdown on dissent has killed several hundred in authoritarian Nicaragua. A turn to extremist populism in Brazil carries severe consequences for vulnerable groups, *favela* dwellers, and the Amazon rainforest. Violent crime rates have reached record levels in Mexico. Central American families are fleeing en masse to the United States.

Amid this, Colombia, the region's third mostpopulous country, tends to get viewed as a relative "good news" story. During this century, its violence levels and poverty rates declined sharply. After 52 years of multi-front fighting that killed over 260,000 people, a 2016 peace accord ended the conflict with the largest armed actor, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrilla group. 13,000 FARC members demobilized in 2017, with 7,000 fighters turning in nearly 9,000 weapons to a UN mission. That year saw Colombia's lowest homicide rate since 1975.

But three years after its signing, implementation of the peace accord's commitments is falling behind. If Colombia is not "on fire," it is becoming increasingly flammable and vulnerable to sparks. The August 29 decision of several radical FARC leaders to abandon the peace process and take up arms again is the latest flareup, and the most serious in years.

The most vexing outcome of Colombia's "postaccord" (a more precise term than "post-conflict") period is the government's failure to increase its presence in the vast, sparsely populated, lawless jungles, savannas, mountains, and coca-growing boomtowns that the FARC once dominated. In compliance with peace accord commitments, the government drew up a list of 170 municipalities (counties, out of about 1,100 total) that had been most abandoned by the state and subject to guerrilla influence. Together, they make up about a third of national territory and perhaps 10 percent of the population. There, the accord laid out an ambitious 15-year program to introduce a real state presence for the first time, called "Territorially Focused Development Plans" (PDETs).

The PDETs are already running well behind schedule. The governments of Presidents Juan Manuel Santos (2010-18) and Iván Duque (inaugurated in August 2018) have moved slowly, with insufficient urgency, drawing up ambitious plans on paper but leaving territorial governance up to an underfunded, sclerotic bureaucracy in Bogotá. The former FARC territories remain a vacuum, with almost nothing done—beyond holding PDET meetings and making promises—to build roads, distribute land titles, introduce rural police, deploy judges, prosecutors, or investigators, or extend the education and health systems. Statelessness remains Colombia's primordial challenge: it is in stateless territories that armed groups and drug crops thrive.

The consequences are evident in security indicators, which are starting to go the wrong way again. Homicides ticked up by six percent from 2017 to 2018. In 2019, homicide appears to be leveling off, but we are seeing more landmine victims and populations being forcibly displaced by violence. Cocaine production, according to U.S. and UN measures, is at an all-time high. Fifteen years ago, Colombia's armed groups had more than 40,000 combined members, in three main groups: the FARC, a network of rightist paramilitary militias called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and a second guerrilla group: the halfcentury-old, Cuban-inspired, and significantly smaller National Liberation Army (ELN). Today, there are perhaps 12,000, scattered across at least a dozen groups with 200 or more members: the undemobilized ELN, several FARC dissident bands, the Gulf Clan paramilitary network, and many regional groups. 12,000 sounds like progress, but by every analysis—including the Defense Ministry's the armed groups' numbers are growing fast. The territorial vacuum is being filled by the wrong sorts of people.

While it is getting late to get Colombia's peace effort back on track, all is not yet lost. It's still amply possible for Colombia to throw water on the embers, reinvigorate accord implementation, and avoid a relapse into the violence of the country's recent past.

For one thing, the vast majority of the FARC have stayed demobilized. According to government data compiled by the Ideas for Peace Foundation, a Bogotá-based think tank, only eight percent of demobilized guerrillas are currently unaccounted for. Many of them-but not all-may have joined the ranks of FARC "dissident" groups that have sprung up around the country, subjecting populations to violence and engaging in cocaine trafficking. (The dissidents' total strength, including FARC recidivists, guerrillas who rejected the peace accords in 2016, and new recruits, is probably approaching 3,000 members nationwide. Their numbers will get a boost from the few dozen guerrilla leaders who announced their rearmament on August 29.) An eight percent "dropout rate" is a low figure for most peace processes. And even though President Duque and his conservative political party are skeptical about the peace accord, they have actually increased the amount and the pace of investments in ex-guerrillas' reintegration.

But reintegration is just a piece of what needs to be done. In addition to asserting state presence in rural Colombia, the accords call for illicit crop substitution, protections and guarantees for social movements and opposition parties, and a transitional justice system of tribunals to adjudicate war crimes. Implementing these and other peace accord commitments is Colombia's best hope for putting a half-century of fighting behind it. But to do so, Colombia has some daunting obstacles to overcome. Here are seven.

Resources. During a June 2019 presentation in Washington, Emilio Archila, the Colombian presidency official charged with overseeing much of accord implementation, was emphatic about his government's lack of resources. "We need money," he said repeatedly. As it is heavily dependent on revenues from commodities like oil and coal, Colombia's national budget has shrunk by more than a third since 2013, along with these products' global prices. There is less to spend on peace. Meanwhile, a 2011 law sets tight limits on budget deficits, further crimping Colombia's ability to spend on urgent priorities like peace. The current "fiscal rule" limit is 2.7 percent of GDP, lower than the United States' 5 percent. As a result, some agencies charged with executing peace accord implementation, especially efforts to bring the state to rural areas, are facing double-digit percentage budget cuts for 2020.

Amid decent but not robust economic growth forecasts, this obstacle can be overcome by borrowing more or taxing the wealthiest more. Unfortunately, the fiscal rule stands in the way of a New Deal-style deficit spending package to implement the peace accord. And the idea of taxing large landowners, industrialists, and elite urban families is anathema to the right-leaning Duque government.

leaders. Rural insecurity and social The proliferation of armed groups in formerly FARCinfluenced territories is becoming a major obstacle to implementation. In particular, these armed groups, along with local political and economic powers (landowners, political bosses, extractive industries, and others with one foot in the legal economy and one foot in organized crime), are behind a shocking wave of threats and attacks on independent human rights defenders and local civilsociety leaders. The very people on whom peace accord implementation depends, at the municipal level, are some of Colombia's most endangered people right now. Village community advisory board leaders, land restitution activists, coca substitution program participants, victims' advocates, and women's, indigenous, and Afrodescendant group leaders are under constant threat. Colombia's Human Rights Ombudsman reported that, as of the end of February 2019, 462 such leaders had been killed since the beginning of 2016: one every two and a half days. It is impossible to speak of "peace" or "post-conflict" if the people doing the local-level work—the reformers and victims—cannot participate due to sheer terror.

It won't be easy because the phenomenon is nationwide, but there are ways to overcome this obstacle. One is improving rural police coverage: Colombia, a country the size of Texas plus California, has only 10,000 mobile rural police and desperately needs more. Government protection programs for the most threatened have helped keep hundreds of human rights defenders, journalists, labor leaders and others alive; this National Protection Unit needs the resources to expand its coverage. Most of all, Colombia's justice system needs to identify and imprison at least some of these killings' masterminds. Increasing the probability of punishment is the best way to dissuade would-be assassins and especially their paymasters.

Rampant impunity. The probability of punishment, however, remains too low for nearly all crimes in Colombia, where the justice system remains weak and underfunded. The bimonthly Gallup poll of Colombians now finds between a quarter and a third of respondents identifying corruption as the numberone problem facing the country, up from 20 percent or less between 2004 and 2016. Scandals have hit the military, the highest courts, and many top politicians, but the general sense across public opinion is that most official graft and organizedcrime collusion go unpunished. Impunity also means that human rights abusers too often walk free. Increasing state presence in ungoverned territories is important-but it could do more harm than good if the state's representatives are corrupt or abusive and get away with it.

This obstacle is not insurmountable, but it requires that the justice system be far better integrated into accord implementation and any other solution. Colombia's courts and prosecutors, absent from about a third of municipalities, need to be expanded territorially, and they need more personnel to reduce staggering caseloads. Colombia must continue to invest in physical protection so that honest judges, prosecutors, investigators, and witnesses can do their jobs without risking their lives.

Politics and polarization. Urban Colombians, nearly 80 percent of the population, did not feel the conflict's effects during its latter years. Getting them to care about peace accord implementation will take decisive leadership. So will convincing wealthy Colombians to contribute more to rural governance. But Colombia's current leadership is growing weaker. President Duque's approval rating hovers around 30 percent. He has had difficulty getting Congress to pass some legislation. A centerright technocrat, Duque is weathering frequent attacks from his own party's right wing, which is fervently populist and headed by Álvaro Uribe, a hard-right ex-president (2002-2010). Uribe is popular in Colombia because-unlike what has happened in most of Latin America-violence levels fell when he implemented iron-fist security policies.

To overcome this obstacle, Duque and moderates in his party need to get out from under the Uribe hard line and work across the aisle with moderates in other parties. This isn't impossible: Uribe, whose rhetoric has become ever more radical and Trumpian in recent years, is less popular than he used to be. (Gallup gave him a 61 percent unfavorable rating in August, not much lower than Duque's 64 percent disapproval rating.) Reaching across the aisle may be eased by the formation of an interesting movement, calling itself "Defendamos la Paz," which incorporates establishment politicians, elite media figures, civil society leaders, and former FARC leaders now participating in politics. What started as a WhatsApp group to coordinate actions is now a vital space for monitoring compliance with the accords and influencing public policies. If President Duque wants to reach across the aisle, Defendamos la Paz is there. The recent FARC leadership defections give a further impetus. Coalition-building is unlikely, though, until after October 27, when Colombians go to the polls to elect new governors, mayors, and local legislatures.

Venezuela and its refugees. Venezuela's crisis is hitting Colombia hard. At least 1.5 million Venezuelans have migrated to Colombia in the past four years, and thousands more arrive each day. This is putting a big strain on the government's scarce resources. In March, the Treasury Ministry raised the "fiscal rule" deficit target from 2.2 to 2.7 percent of GDP, citing the need to attend to Venezuelan refugees as the emergency circumstance requiring the extra spending. In addition to budget burdens, Venezuela's disorder contributes to Colombia's internal security dilemma. A stain of ungoverned space now stretches across the northern Andes, going roughly from northern Ecuador across southern Colombia and southern Venezuela to Guyana and Suriname. In this network of cocainetrafficking and illicit mining corridors, many of the same armed and organized-crime groups operate: ELN and FARC dissidents, paramilitary bands, Venezuelan groups like "pranes," "colectivos," and others. Even if Colombia were to bring order to its countryside, Colombians would continue to be vulnerable to groups operating with impunity across a 1,400-mile border.

Overcoming this obstacle requires untangling Venezuela's crisis, and nobody has come up with a formula for doing that yet. The best current hope is the Norway-brokered negotiations that may lead to new elections and a soft transfer of power in Caracas. But even if the Maduro regime exits, it may be many years before Venezuela is viable again, and before conditions change in vast ungoverned areas. In the meantime, Colombia must improve state presence in volatile border regions like Arauca, Catatumbo, and La Guajira, which suffer from a history of government abandonment and neglect.

A military adrift. After decades of conflict, Colombia has Latin America's largest army and second-largest armed forces. But the FARC's demobilization reduced the scope of counterinsurgency, their main mission. The powerful military are looking for new roles, and underwent some interesting doctrinal changes during the Santos government. The armed forces sought to develop a post-conflict identity as a professional force that can cooperate with international missions while accompanying efforts to bring the government into abandoned territories. This process, though, has suffered setbacks, as the Duque government brought in some leadership that does not share this reformist vision. 2019 has been a year of bad press for the armed forces. The new high command instituted a system of "body counts" as a main measure of success, obliging units to report more combat kills—a revelation that raises urgent human rights concerns. Media have reported a series of corruption scandals, with high-ranking officers accused of embezzling funds. Officers have voiced anger over promotions that appear to be based more on connections than on merit.

Notably, the source of all of this year's scandals and bad press has been military officers themselves, blowing the whistle on their backwards-facing or corrupt colleagues. The military has a modernizing generation of officers who were taking cautious but important steps toward reform. Overcoming this obstacle requires that they be brought back into top leadership.

Mixed messages from the United States. The Obama administration offered full-throated support for Colombia's peace process, and financial support for the accord's implementation. Today, the U.S. message is far more muffled and muddled. The Trump administration's recent engagement with Colombia has focused mainly on the twin priorities of coca eradication and confronting Venezuela's regime, with peace-accord implementation rarely mentioned and relegated to a low tier. If Congress didn't keep reversing it, the Trump administration would have slashed U.S. aid to implement the accord by more than a third, as it sought to do in the 2018, 2019, and 2020 foreign aid bills.

The answer to overcoming this obstacle lies mainly in the 2020 election outcome. In the meantime, Congress needs to stand firm and stay the course on aid, on rhetorical support for the accord, and on demanding protection of social leaders.

These are daunting obstacles. Overcoming them, and thus bringing Colombia's violence and illicit economies to a definitive end, would require a big mobilization: a "moon shot" or a Marshall Plan. That is unlikely, at least under current U.S. and Colombian leadership. Without it, Colombia's peace defenders and their international friends need to muddle through, and keep the window of opportunity open a crack. They will have to do so until elections bring leaders who are more willing and able to break through the obstacles, follow the blueprint laid out in the peace accord, and prevent the country from rekindling and becoming one more of Latin America's currently raging fires.

✤ Adam Isacson

Results from the GPS Reader Survey

In an effort to better get to know our readers' interests and priorities, Global Peace Services recently conducted a survey of our readership.

A primary survey finding was that the topic that most interested you (our readers) is Climate Change, followed by Peace and Engineering, and Religion and Peace. Since we are planning to continue activities in these areas, these were affirming findings. The survey found that most readers had heard about GPS via personal contact with a board member. The length of their connection to GPS ranged from three years to the time of the organization's beginning in 1998.

In terms of becoming active with GPS, several people were interested in writing a newsletter article, and there was also interest in doing research and helping to organize an event. Unfortunately, the survey was anonymous so we did not get the names and contact information of most of the people interested in being more active, so we ask that you contact us (see contact info below) to work out how you can help.

The survey also asked about the kinds of events newsletter readers would be interested in attending. By a large margin, respondents said they would be interested in attending events about the newest thinking around Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding. Other events that came out on top were

• Picnics and Community Building with Discussion

- Talks on Current Conflict Areas
- Workshops on How to Have a "Contentious" Conversation.

Readers found the information on peace -related publications to be the most helpful item in the *Peace Dispatch*, and more than half of the respondents said they had shared GPS information with others.

Recent memorable articles from the GPS newsletter were Dr. Marisa Ensor's article "Young People and Climate Change in the World's Newest Nation," Dr. Ronald Ridker's article "Addressing Climate Change: A Washington, DC Metropolitan Area Response," and articles showing the unique angle that GPS brings to conflict/peace issues, such as its discussion on the impact investments in engineering technology can play in addressing conflicts.

And finally, here is a quote from the open comment section at the end of the Survey:

"It would be great if you could provide a way for the community supporting GPS to interact with each other and build the relationships necessary to promote peace services."

If you would like to get more involved with GPS USA, here's how to contact us: via email at <u>globalpeaceservicesusa@gmail.com</u> or by phone: (301) 681-6968.

✤ Anna Amato

Curbing Cultural Destruction

No matter what form violent conflicts have taken – genocide, ethnic cleansing, wars of conquest, wars of ideology or religion – destruction of the cultural embodiments of the opponents/victims has long been a form of deliberate "collateral" obliteration. To cite a few examples, in recent years we have seen the dynamiting of the 6th century Bamiyan rock Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001; the 1993 downing of the 16th century Mostar bridge in Bosnia by Croatian forces; the Nazi burning of Poland's historic wooden synagogues during World War II: the destruction of ancient ruins in Palmyra in Syria in 2015 by the Islamic State; the destruction of mosques in Bosnia by Serb irregulars in 1992-1994, and the extensive cultural destruction in the sieges of Vokovar and Dubrovnik in Croatia; as well as the fire-bombing of historic cities, like Dresden (by the Allies) and Coventry (by the Germans) in World War II. In the 1966-76 Chinese "Cultural Revolution," and under the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-79) in Cambodia, temples, manuscripts and other religious objects were destroyed as part of official campaigns to extirpate religion and create a revolutionary new culture.

Deliberate cultural destruction goes far back in time. The Bible condones Hebrew destruction of pagan religious sites. The Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE; the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE. Christians desecrated and destroyed pagan temples in the mid-300s. In the 16th century, Protestant mobs in Germany destroyed Catholic church art deemed to be idolatrous. Martin Luther advised Christians to burn Jewish synagogues. During the Balkan wars before the First World War, there was widespread destruction of churches and mosques. [For a long list covering many countries and struggles (along with earthquakes and other natural causes, and ostensibly positive deliberate destruction like the drowning of entire old communities behind hydroelectric dams), scan the "List of Destroyed Heritage" on the Wikipedia website.]

While each case of cultural destruction as a deliberate tactic in a violent conflict is different, the large literature on this subject cites a number of major common motivations:

- Perpetrators of ethnic cleansing may believe that destruction of cultural, religious and historic structures and objects will discourage the victims from wanting to return to the "cleansed" communities.
- The destruction may facilitate cleansing or genocide by making the victims feel ashamed and powerless because they were unable to protect their cherished symbols of identity.
- Cultural destruction serves as propagandistic reinforcement and incitement for rank and file supporters.
- The destruction satisfies and justifies the feelings of fear and aggression aroused by the conviction that the victims constitute an existential threat.
- Where there is competition between rival parties for the adherence of supporters who share hostility toward a common Other, one of the parties may make spectacular destructive gestures to outbid its rivals and firm up base allegiance, or to signal impunity and challenge to the external enemies (in what has been called "performative iconoclasm").
- In large-scale conflicts, mass targeted cultural destruction has been employed (often without success) to break the morale of the opposing population.
- Destruction may be driven by religious zealotry for its own sake.

In a further desecration, demolition is often followed by opportunistic looting of cultural objects. The post-conflict recovery and restoration of damaged or destroyed cultural structures and objects has become a major international concern. While the technologies continue to improve, the scholarly journals and international conclaves focusing on this subject have been marked by debates over both technique and philosophy. Should damaged structures and monuments be restored to their predamaged condition or to the condition when they were originally built? Should modern (presumably more resilient and durable) materials be used or should reconstruction be "true" to the original, using only the same materials as the original? Should the original surface coloration be restored or should surfaces be made to appear as they did just before the deliberate destruction, even if long faded? There are comparable differences of view about how to restore paintings, books and manuscripts, and how to restore damaged archeological sites. (Many of questions also address problems these of deterioration caused by heavy, or as it is now called, "over-tourism," atmospheric pollution, and even sea-rise threats from climate change.)

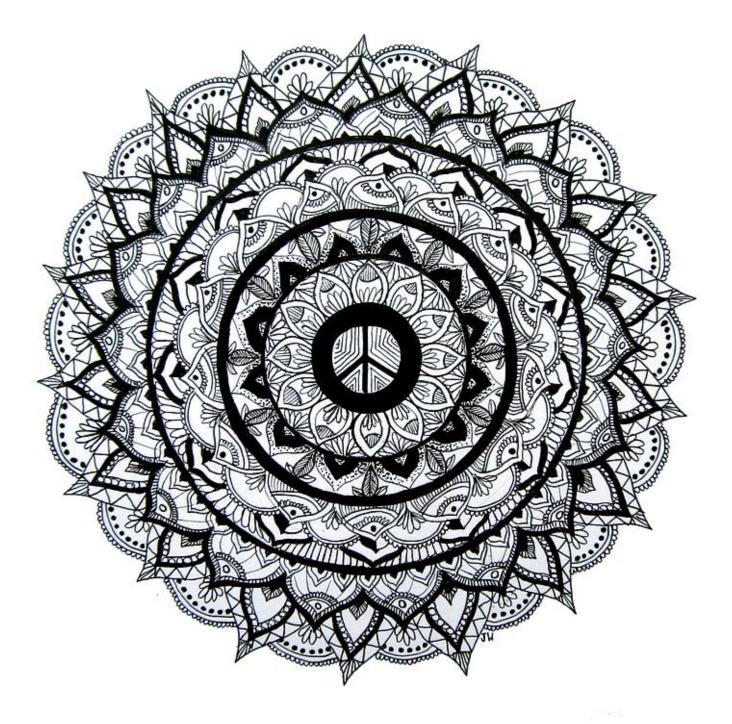
A number of international conventions have been promulgated over the years under the auspices of UNESCO and of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMUS). A World Heritage Fund has been established to provide financial support for restoration in countries or communities with only sparse resources for repair. [ICOMUS maintains an open archive website that lists and posts these conventions and resolutions for anyone looking to dig deeply into the international framework for problems of preservation and restoration.]

Most important is the question of prevention. How can cultural violence and destruction be discouraged or prevented? The main answer, of course, is to try to stop the violent conflicts that entail this destruction as a tactic or a byproduct. But some more pinpointed efforts have been developed to provide cultural structures and objects – as the heritage of all mankind – with specific protection. The principal instrument, promulgated under UNESCO sponsorship, has been the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. As of late 2018, 133 countries (including the U.S.) had ratified the Convention. Many of these had also signed on to the two implementing Protocols. The 1954 Convention built on various precursor agreements dating back to 1899.

Many cultural sites have been designated by UNESCO as having World Heritage status. This international profile, and the international concern and potential prosecution under the Protocols may serve to restrain deliberate destructiveness. Such restraint may become more effective as violations are adjudicated under the Protocols. In a case involving the destruction of Muslim tomb shrines in Timbuktu, in Mali, in 2011, the perpetrator was prosecuted by an international criminal court and was sentenced to nine years in jail. In 2001, three leaders of the destruction in Dubrovnik were tried and convicted. In the case of the Mostar bridge, six defendants were convicted in 2006. Whether any Khmer Rouge perpetrators of cultural destruction will be prosecuted for that specific crime remains uncertain.

Since 1996. an international network of organizations has emerged to help implement the Convention. Local committees in 36 countries, and their umbrella organization, the Blue Shield (which was given formal responsibility under the second Protocol), have provided protection or repair in various ways to assets threatened in numbers of ongoing conflicts. Besides giving training to military personnel on asset protection, for example, the network has removed museum and other assets at risk for safekeeping in other countries. While the creation of this international law and its multicountry implementation machinery is highly commendable, it also attests to what deplorable lengths humans can go when engaged in violent conflict. Unfortunately, the world still seems to have far to go before the Convention and the threat of legal liability will begin to have significant deterrent effect.

✤ Robert J. Muscat



Global Peace Services USA

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published regularly. GPS USA is incorporated in the State of Maryland and is tax-exempt. Current board members are: Anna Amato, John Eriksson, Robert Muscat, Mindy Reiser, Ronald Ridker, and Sovan Tun. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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