



United States Department of State

Under Secretariat for Civilian Security,
Democracy, and Human Rights

Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

September 14, 2012

Colleagues and friends:

We can do a great deal to reduce violent conflict and manage crises. To tackle such challenges more effectively, last November Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton created the [Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations](#) (CSO) under Maria Otero, the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights. In this newsletter and those to follow, I would like to share with you the progress we are making.



CSO strives to break cycles of violent conflict by encouraging joint independent analysis, pushing for integrated strategies that emphasize specific priorities, and leveraging resources to advance creative initiatives from a range of partners—all as a catalyst in the first 12 months of a crisis.

We champion local ownership and bring the sense of urgency that is appropriate when lives are at stake.

In the past four months we have redirected a third of our budget to the deployment of staff and resources, obligated \$30 million of programming to top-priority countries, expanded the contracting capabilities of the U.S. government in places facing crisis, and provided fresh talent and customized initiatives to embassies in need. We have done this by bringing a “conflict-prevention” lens to U.S. policy discussions. With a goal of making a difference in places that matter most to the United States, CSO is dedicating 80 percent of its effort to four major cases.

[Syria](#) is one obvious priority. During her recent visit to Istanbul, the Secretary of State met with some of the resourceful and resilient men and women leading the opposition. The United States is supporting these unarmed activists to help make them more capable and better prepared for the day when the change in government comes—with Syrians in the lead.

Quickly expanding our list of Syrian contacts and base of knowledge, the CSO team in Turkey is helping the unarmed opposition build a solid network of activists.



Photo courtesy of ARK

Syrians at a CSO workshop on media skills in Istanbul

We are training hundreds of Syrians in nonviolent civil resistance, personal security, and governance. To help activists come together, we are providing vital communications gear. Creative Syrian opposition TV ads and social media, promoting unity and tolerance, are reaching broader audiences as a result of our support.

In a recent weeklong workshop on countering sectarian violence, we trained 34 Syrians, including Sunni, Alawite, Christian, Druze, Kurdish, and Ismaeli. Two prominent religious figures, speaking via Skype, drove home the importance of unity. With the death toll mounting, one of the Arab trainers called the workshop “the most important thing you could be doing.”

Our other three priorities this year are:

- [Northern tier of Central America](#), where a growing wave of violence, due mainly to gangs and transnational criminal organizations, destabilizes the entire region. CSO is tackling this unique problem by deploying rule-of-law experts and mediation trainers to work with local partners on investigations, prosecutions, and citizen empowerment that will help restore public confidence. In Honduras, CSO is working with important national initiatives to improve policing and community responses.
- [Kenya](#), where preparations are underway for the first national elections since the deadly violence that followed the disputed December 2007 presidential election. We are working with the U.S. Embassy to support Kenyan government and civil society efforts to reduce the likelihood of violence in March 2013 by enhancing electoral security planning in the at-risk hot spots of Coast and Rift Valley.
- [Burma](#), whose reform goals include addressing long-standing ethnic conflict. Using the concerns about landmines as a unifying force, CSO hopes to build confidence and expand dialogue.

We are working in more than 15 other countries, including [Afghanistan](#), El Salvador, Libya, Somalia, and [South Sudan](#). These are some of the world’s toughest challenges, so we need to find new approaches where the old ones are not working. With each engagement, we learn ways to improve our model. If you would like to join us in helping nations and their citizens succeed, we would welcome your ideas and your energy. All of us have a stake in the outcome. Please write us at CSOpublic@state.gov and forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation.

Best,
Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

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