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bulletin

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Economic determinants of conflict

Civil wars are now far more common than interstate wars. Of the 27 major armed conflicts globally during 1999, all but two took place within national boundaries. My colleague, Paul Collier from the World Bank, and I have investigated the causes of civil war using a global data set from 1960 until 1999, including nations at war as well as peaceful countries.

According to popular perceptions, grievances are often seen as the main causes of rebellion. However, we suggest that those factors that determine the financial and military viability of a rebellion are more important than objective grounds for grievance. In order to create and maintain a rebel organisation the rebels have to be paid and military equipment has to be purchased. To test these alternative hypotheses we constructed two competing models: a 'grievance' and a 'greed' model. The 'grievance' model examines inequality, political oppression, and ethnic and religious division as causes of conflict, while the 'greed' model focuses on the sources of finance for civil war.

We found little evidence for grievances as a determinant of conflict. Neither inequality nor political oppression increase the risk of conflict. However, we found some evidence that societies characterised by 'ethnic dominance,' i.e., where one ethnic group makes up 45–90 percent of the population, have a systematically higher risk of civil war. Our 'greed' model provides much better explanatory power. We are able to identify several sources of finance for rebellions. Income from natural resource predation, such as diamonds in Angola, drugs in Columbia and timber in Cambodia, are often quoted as important sources of finance for rebel movements. Our empirical analysis confirms that countries with abundant natural resources have a higher risk of conflict. However, the relationship between natural resources and conflict risk is non-linear. Countries with a very high depen-

In this issue on corporations and violent conflict . . . Dr Anke Hoeffler sets the context, Harriet Fletcher examines the business case and why corporations should participate in conflict-reducing strategies, and Dr Gunther Faber presents a corporate perspective, exploring the appropriate roles of various actors. In addition, Nick Killick examines how corporations are perceived, Rory Sullivan discusses how human rights can be applied, and Toby Kent identifies the future direction of the debate.

dence on natural resource incomes not only represent a source of rebel finance but also of government revenue. In poor countries, governments often tax primary commodities at high rates and can use this income to strengthen the State. Furthermore, we find some evidence that countries with a large diaspora abroad experience higher conflict risks. Diasporas, such as the Kurdish community in Europe, the Lebanese in West Africa and the Tamils in North America, often have the ability to use large financial resources and publicity to keep combatants active in their native countries.

web*watch*

Below are some useful websites referring to corporations and violent conflict.

www.cdainc.com
The Corporate Engagement Project provides companies with clear ideas about how their work with communities relates to the broader socio-political environment.

www.societyandbusiness.gov.uk/government/activities/foreign_office/conflict.htm
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development help leading businesses and conflict-focused NGOs become more aware of their influence.

www.pelc.net
Provides solutions to governments and corporations confronting politically sensitive environments.

www.globaldimensions.net/conf_1.html
A research programme at the LSE to develop policy responses to globalisation issues.

www.dse.de/ef/business
High-level international policy dialogue on economic dimensions of conflict.

In spite of the relatively low explanatory power of the 'grievance' model we cannot reject it in favour of the 'greed' model and thus combine the two models. In addition to the factors mentioned above we find that poorer countries are more likely to experience civil wars. The opportunity costs for potential rebels are low and thus make recruitment easier. A high enrolment rate of males in secondary school also reduces the conflict risk. We also find that 'history matters'. If a country experienced a conflict recently the risk of recurrent conflict is high, however, this risk falls proportionately to the length of the peace period. Sustained peace makes the renewed rebellion less likely. Contrary to the 'grievance' theory, social fractionalisation, measured as religious and ethnic diversity, *lowers* the risk of conflict. Typically rebel organisations recruit their members from similar backgrounds and *diversity* may make it more difficult to generate a large rebel force and to maintain cohesion during the war. Diversity would thus reduce the risk of conflict. We also tested for geographical characteristics since they are likely to influence combat strategy and thus the relative military capability of the regular and rebel forces. We found the risk of civil war to be higher in more mountainous nations and countries in which the population is unequally distributed.

Overall, these results are consistent with economic models of conflict risk in which the critical parameters are the financial opportunities for rebels, the social and geographic constraints of which they face, and the financial capability of the government to provide defence and other public services. They are harder to reconcile with accounts of conflict which stress ethnic, religious, political or economic grievances.

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The business case: why should corporations participate in conflict-reducing strategies?

Almost half the world's emerging markets, approximately 72 countries, experience significant levels of battle-related deaths or are at serious risk from violent conflict. It is critical for companies with investments in these markets to understand the nature of conflict, its impact on business operations and the potential role that the private sector can play in mitigating or exacerbating conflict. Before 11 September, a relatively small number of companies were concerned with conflict prevention and addressing issues of exclusion and disaffection, but the targeting of the World Trade Centre emphasised that any corporation is potentially exposed to terrifying acts of violence.

Although conflicts are often attributed to ethnicity or religion, in many cases, the trigger for disputes to erupt into violence or extremism is poverty. In developing countries significant sections of the population are being increasingly excluded from the benefits of a global economy. The core skills of the private sector can be effectively used to address this challenge through the transfer of technology, skills and standards, and ultimately job and wealth creation.

The business community faces two main risks from being involved in conflicts. Firstly, violent conflict can obviously result in damaged property, equipment, and products; disrupt market-routes; and effect the safety and morale of employees. Secondly, the revenues generated by investment can be misappropriated to fund war efforts, and companies can be accused of complicity with human rights abuses. Examples of where corporate reputations have been seriously damaged by such accusations are well documented. But the private sector can also play a positive and important role in peace building—often helping to address root causes of conflict through wealth creation, skill transfer and the empowerment of local communities.

Working with business to prevent conflict—a cheaper, better and more effective option to managing crisis or reconstruction—has been one of the key roles of the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) for the past four years. Collaborating with member companies and non-governmental organisations, such as Amnesty International, IBLF has helped companies develop a business case and models for leadership and implementation.

In September 2000, IBLF published *The Business of Peace: the private sector as a partner in conflict prevention and resolution*, with International Alert and Social Accountability International. The report charts the business case and management practice for business engagement in the three stages—conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. The report also documents the full spectrum of different levels of corporate engagement, while giving brief illustrations of where this has worked in practice.

Core business activities

• Using the workplace as a venue for reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, the organisation Counteract runs reconciliation and trust building workshops in factories and workplaces with the aim of alleviating the incidence of sectarianism and intimidation in the workplace and the community

• Ensuring responsible security policies. A group of UK and US Mining/Energy companies signed up to a set of voluntary principles on human rights and security in London on 20 December 2000. The group is now exploring how best to implement these principles in the complex contexts of Indonesia, Colombia and Nigeria. The group will be expanding to include non-US/UK companies.

companies, with essential support and advice from governmental and civil society actors, can develop partnerships and activities which address some of the root causes of violent conflict

• Encouraging commercial joint ventures by former combatants. The New York based company 'Peaceworks' markets gourmet food products made jointly by Israelis and Palestinians.

Social investment

• Addressing economic exclusion—one of the causes of the on-going conflict. In the Muslim areas of Southern Philippines, companies are volunteering managers to provide free training and mentoring services to support small enterprises of the Muslim population

• Contributing to the long-term stability and development of the country. In Azerbaijan, Western oil companies led by British Petroleum (BP) and Statoil are exploring ways to ensure that the significant levels of foreign direct investment in the oil industry also have a positive impact on the high levels of unemployment and lack of investment in the non-oil sectors.

• Transferring technology and donating products in humanitarian emergency situations. In the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis, Microsoft employees helped UNHCR develop a refugee computer-based registration system, Yorkshire Water, (the UK based Water and Sewerage Company) donated water purification equipment, and a consortium of telecommunications companies gave mobile phone equipment.

Policy dialogue and institution-building

• Using pressure to encourage the government to adopt higher standards of governance and address corruption. Statoil recently organised a visit by a group of Azeri government officials to Norway to learn first-hand how they developed the Norwegian oil fund and ensured fair and transparent allocation of revenues.

• Addressing issues of concern regarding human rights and corruption. The British–Angola Forum in the UK has provided a venue for UK companies with investments in Angola, involving both the UK and Angolan governments.

• Improving judicial systems. The US mining company Freeport McMoran has worked with the Indonesian government to develop the country's court system.

The issues surrounding business investment in conflict-affected areas are hugely complex and controversial. However, the IBLF believes that companies, with essential support and advice from governmental and civil society actors, can develop partnerships and activities which address some of the root causes of violent conflict, and ensure that company operations do not exacerbate existing tensions.

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Appropriate roles: a corporate perspective

In a world dependent on global trade and driven by the objective of enhancing material wealth, there is growing expectation amongst global citizens to attain a better standard of living. Exacerbated by modern communications, individuals within developing countries are aware of global standards of living and are less prepared to except the status quo. Governments of both developed and developing countries realise the importance of promoting business and are increasingly involved with global companies.

Given the fact that major global enterprises control budgets and generate revenue greater than most developing countries' national economies and that these corporations are, and could become, significant major investors in the developing world, there is no doubt that global companies do have considerable influence in nations and regions. Furthermore, a company's investment or potential investment is particularly significant in a country with a poor economy frequently associated with instability and conflict. One can therefore conclude that global companies have the ability to play a significant part in the economic health of most nations and regions where violent conflict exists.

It is extremely challenging for global corporations to conduct business where conflicts exist. 'Freedom fighters' or the 'economic underclass' frequently view global companies as supporters of the regime in power, and therefore employees and assets of these companies are often seen as fair targets for aggression. Conversely, when corporations advocate rights and promote equality that may disrupt the status quo, governments can view corporations as agents of unwanted change. As such, corporate staff members are seen as dangerous subversives representing a necessary evil at best. Necessary—because governments of these countries realise that multinational corporations pay taxes, develop business partnerships and provide employment.

If we accept the above, we acknowledge the fact that major corporations have some 'standing' in this debate leading them to question what is an appropriate role for corporations and other key actors to play in areas of violent conflict and instability?

International agencies

United Nations (UN) and regional international state groupings such as the European Union, and African Union have both a philosophical and practical role to play. For example, it is the number and breath of nations that make up the UN that gives the UN its moral authority. Whilst the Declaration of Human Rights, for example, is of fundamental practical importance in determining whether a state is considered a legal entity or not. International conventions, declarations and mandates form the framework for decision-making on which corporations decide whether to do, or continue to do, business with or within a particular country or region. However, the UN or other international bodies are not the only actors that influence such a decision.

Governments

From the corporate perspective, there are two dimensions to consider when assessing a government's role in areas of conflict. Firstly, there is the question of what is a suitable role for 'external' governments vis-à-vis other countries and regions where violent conflict and instability exists. Secondly, there is the question of what is a suitable role for the 'host' government in the country itself.

External governments have a role to play in protecting their citizens in countries of instability or violent conflict. This ranges from giving advice to political lobbying or even, in extreme cases, armed intervention. In addition, prior to investment in a given country, external governments have a duty to advise the citizens representing corporations on the stability of states and regions.

'Host' governments have a duty to uphold the rule of law within their established legal systems. A distinction needs to be made between those countries where legal systems have broken down entirely, and those where appropriate legislature exists but where barbaric acts are still regularly committed by governments or due to their inaction. Both of these types of 'illegal regimes' are inappropriate business environments for global corporations.

Furthermore, no corporation should enter into contract with a national government if there is an expectation or obligation that the corporation will act illegally (under national legislation). Corruption is an example of a typical offence committed but even more sinister examples are evident whereby global corporations have provided illegal regimes with military equipment and other instruments of degradation and physical torture.

'Host' governments also have a duty, if only a moral one, to protect, as 'guest workers', the employees and property of major corporations conducting business in their countries.

NGOs

NGOs play a very significant part in drawing attention to areas of the world where human suffering is greatest including areas of violent conflict. They do, and have the potential to do, much work in raising public awareness and lobbying politicians and corporations. In addition they are able to organise massive relief programmes in these areas.

An oil rig in Heglig, southern Sudan. Canadian, Chinese, Malaysian and Sudanese companies have spent around $1 billion to bring Sudan's oil online. Critics claim that the money is fuelling the 18-year civil war.

Photo: Associated Press

Yet, within the plethora of NGOs and the many types of activities they carry out, it is also known that the work of NGOs can lack focus, be misplaced and, on occasion, put resources into the wrong hands. Thus without distracting from their importance, NGOs, like all actors who have a role in conflict reduction, need to be rigorously monitored and made accountable to those they claim to support.

Corporations

International corporations have a great responsibility. There is no doubt that the growth of these companies will continue and that this century will witness a continuation of the trend of company merges where more of the world's commerce, trade and industry will be owned by fewer large multinational companies. Inevitably, this will lead to an increase in their political economic and social power and with this increasing power comes increasing responsibility.

Conclusion

Business relies on law as the basis of its structure and power, and in order to set the competitive parameters on a level playing field. Business without legal sanction and control would allow one to trade in any commodity and by any means. The renowned monetarist economist, Milton Friedman, famously said: 'The business of business is business'. He was of course making the point that business should not concern itself with other things. However, he was also saying that business is only properly and truly constrained by the law, whether that be simply working within a 'legal regime' or relying on the 'law of contract'.

Yet with the globalisation of business, there is a tendency for people, especially in the developed world to feel that they have the right to expect more. Where cultural norms of one society are imposed on another through business this is indeed worrying. For example, in the UK most citizens would agree with the idea of 'animal rights' and the associated legislation. Yet if we were to attempt to impose this cultural norm in Asia, South America, Africa, or even in some parts of Europe we would find ourselves at complete odds with the cultural norms that operate in these areas.

It is with this in mind that one can return to just two things that 'business' can expect of any environment in which it seeks to operate and that is *legality of action* within a *legal regime.* International agencies, national governments, non-governmental organisations and international corporations all have a separate role to play. Yet, within a country or region where there is violent conflict, all share a common aim and that is to create a stable and law abiding environment in which business can operate and generate wealth to the benefit of the population.

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Applying human rights

The business costs of companies operating in conflict zones are increasingly well understood. Doing business in conflict areas can result in higher insurance costs, delays to projects, withdrawal of export guarantees, and a damaged company reputation. In addition it can increase the risk of sabotage or extortion and bring danger to company personnel.

The recent Amnesty International report, *Business & Human Rights: A Geography of Corporate Risk (February 2002)* mapped the exposure of major trans-national corporations to countries where human rights violations are occurring. The sectors considered and the types of exposures identified included:

- ***IT, hardware and telecommunications*** [exposures in the Democratic Republic of Congo regarding metallic ore Columbite-tantalite, 'Coltan' used in cell phones, laptops, pagers and other electronic devices and economic inequality as a consequence of the digital divide];
- ***Extractives*** [presence in countries where human rights violations are occurring (e.g. Nigeria, Colombia, Sudan, Sierra Leone), unequal distribution of the benefits from resource extraction, environmental degradation and displacement of indigenous peoples];
- ***Food and beverages*** [supply chain issues such as child labour, poor working conditions, constraints on freedom of association];
- ***Heavy manufacturing and defence*** [arms trade e.g. use of equipment by oppressive governments to facilitate repression, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment) and supply chain issues e.g. poor working conditions]; and
- ***Utility and infrastructure*** [security management, corruption and lack of access to essential services such as water].

Human rights

Human rights are fundamental principles that allow individuals to lead dignified lives, free from abuse and violations and free to express independent beliefs. The basic building block for international law on human rights is the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* 1948 (UDHR). The UDHR has formed the basis for subsequent international human rights standards, the two most important of which are the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* 1966 and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* 1966. These Covenants, together with the core Conventions of the International Labour Organisation, represent the most widely accepted codification of human rights standards as enshrined in international law.

The UDHR calls on 'every individual and every organ of society' (an exhortation that clearly encompasses companies) to play their part in securing the observance of the rights contained within it. Specifically, companies must protect human rights within all of their areas of operation. This relates to issues such as discrimination, slavery (i.e. no individual should be held in slavery or servitude of any kind), freedom from torture (i.e. no individual should be subjected to physical mistreatment or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), privacy, freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of association, the right to a safe, healthy and clean workplace and the payment of fair and just wages. In addition to these 'civil and political rights', companies human rights responsibilities are increasingly being recognised as including respect for national sovereignty, ensuring the rights of individuals and communities to health, adequate food and adequate housing, and the protection of the environment. Companies also have a responsibility to support human rights protection more generally through activities such as public statements supporting the protection of human rights, government lobbying, and the integration of human rights considerations into all decision-making processes.

Applying human-rights principles to conflict situations

When operating in conflict zones, companies should:

- Ensure that pre-investment risk assessment processes explicitly look at conflict issues;
- Ensure that staff are adequately trained for operating in conflict zones;
- Work in partnership with other companies, NGOs, community groups and government bodies on projects such as community development;
- Engage in dialogue with government and other stakeholders on issues related to conflict prevention or resolution;
- Ensure that security forces comply with international standards for the use of force in policing;
- Screen the military and police assigned for their protection to ensure that these personnel have not been involved in human rights abuses;
- Ensure that, whenever credible allegations of human rights abuses are raised, any suspected soldiers and officers are immediately suspended and appropriate internal and criminal investigations are launched; and
- Contribute to enabling frameworks for conflict prevention or resolution. Areas where companies should use their advocacy and influencing abilities are in good governance, anti-corruption, mechanisms for ensuring the effective delivery of health, education and infrastructure, and capacity building for local civil society organisations.

Overcoming the barriers

In broad terms, a barrier to companies assisting in conflict resolution is that companies do not

Photo: Associated Press

A child soldier with the Sierra Leone army holds a British rifle while patrolling the town of Ropath. There is concern that many children may be supplied with UK guns and uniforms.

see conflict resolution as a part of their corporate social responsibility strategies. Furthermore, companies frequently view conflict resolution as something that is 'the responsibility of government' and even when they acknowledge it as part of their remit, companies are often unaware of the steps that they can take to help resolve conflict.

The barriers prohibiting companies assisting in conflict resolution demand a number of immediate measures that could be adopted by the UK government. Clearly, there are other actors that may also exert an influence including host governments (i.e. where conflict is occurring), neighbouring country governments, international institutions (such as the United Nations), and companies themselves. However, the following four recommendations are practical measures that could be adopted immediately and that would make a significant contribution to addressing the barriers to action decribed above.

1. Pass the proposed Company Responsibilities Bill 2002 (supported by Amnesty International (UK) and other leading UK NGOs) which provides a framework for corporate accountability. The key elements of the Bill are that:

- Companies must produce and publish reports on their social, environmental and economic impacts;
- Companies must consult with their stakeholders on company activities and impacts, in particular prior to new projects (for instance, in conflict zones);
- Company directors must consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of their operations and must take the interests of all stakeholders into account when making decisions on these aspects;
- Directors of companies must take all reasonable steps to minimise any negative social, environmental or economic effects of their operations; and
- Stakeholders will be able to require companies and directors to meet these obligations.

2. Pass legislation requiring the disclosure of payments made by oil, gas and mining companies to national governments, as a means of ensuring government accountability (the 'Publish What You Pay" campaign).

3. Actively use its economic power to require companies to meet minimum standards of human rights performance. This should include the integration of human rights criteria into areas such as purchasing and export-credit and other forms of insurance.

4. Ensure that human rights protections that recognise the primacy of international human rights law are integrated into the rules of the World Trade Organisation and other international agreements and processes, such as within the European Union.

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Perceptions of corporations

Foreign direct investment can be a critical element in poverty alleviation, economic development and indeed peace-building. However, it can also exacerbate conflict, and, as a result, many companies with operations in unstable countries have found themselves the focus of intense international scrutiny and often criticism.

The allegations directed at companies concern their impact both at a local level and a national level. At a local level, a company may compete with local communities by drawing on resources in short supply or may damage local resources through their operations. At a national level, revenue streams may be used to sustain repressive or illegitimate regimes. Given the speed of modern communications and the growing interconnectedness of civil society organisations around the world, it is not surprising that the image of the private sector, at least in many conflict zones, has been predominantly shaped by these negative experiences.

With that said, clearly the perception of corporations in conflict zones varies according to the perceiver. Host governments, for example, inevitably welcome multinationals as a source of investment and revenue, often as much for personal gain as for national benefit. Those in opposition to governments tend to see companies as driven solely by profit and as a prop for the status quo. The consequence is that companies are often regarded with suspicion before they have even invested their first dollar.

In recognition of this and of the very real challenges they face in such countries, many companies have developed sophisticated strategies to try and minimise their negative impact and maximise the positive benefits of their investments. However, there remains an enormous gulf in the way companies and their many critics understand the nature of the private sector's roles and responsibilities. Finding ways of narrowing this divide presents an important challenge.

The key is *dialogue.* Many of the perceptions that people have of companies are the result of misunderstandings. Others, of course, are the result of bad practice. Nevertheless, encouraging dialogue can go a long way towards changing the dynamic between companies and different groups within the society.

While this is increasingly understood—dialogue and consultation have become integral parts of company investment strategies—it is not always the case that companies are talking with the right people. The reasons for this are often related to the company's relationship with the government. Engaging in dialogue with rebel movements is obviously fraught with danger but even political and social critics find themselves avoided by companies anxious not to alienate the government. The inevitable result of excluding these important voices is a strengthened perception that companies are essentially in the pocket of governments, a perception that simply serves to expand rather than narrow the divide. In other words, the problem is not just the way corporations are perceived but also how corporations perceive local and national actors.

In recent years, there has been a sea change in relations between NGOs and companies at the international level, with both sides increasingly recognising the value of ongoing dialogue even when their views remain poles apart. The same approach is required at a national and local level. As long as people feel that they and their concerns are being ignored, companies will continue to struggle to change the way they are seen by the societies in which they are investing.

Nick Killick
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Future direction, future strategy

The roundtable discussion *Spheres of Influence—The Role of Corporations in Situations of Violent Conflict* held at the Conflict, Security & Development Group (CSDG) on 17 July 2002 provided a forum for bringing together the views of significant actors addressing business and societal needs in conflict areas. The focus was on the role of multinational corporations whose desire for peaceful operating environments is the same as 'local' businesses but whose interests and influence are of a different nature.

There is general consensus that prosperity is good and that violent conflict undermines societies' opportunities to prosper, albeit that some individuals may gain from instability. It is recognised that there is a systemic interest in stability and that the global market economy punishes unstable regions through lack, or withdrawal, of investment, possibly exacerbating insecure situations.

Despite such consensus, there is lack of agreement or clarity about how best to achieve stability and prosperity in areas undermined by violent conflict. Whilst there is increasing usage of terminology such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), conflict is inherently complex in nature. Building schools or attending to other humanitarian needs may be within corporations' capabilities but can they really be expected to directly influence levels of conflict in areas in which they operate?

Corporations have unprecedented power in the international system relative to many states or other actors. The more troubled a country the greater the potential for any one corporation to influence events within it but, although it may be in their interests to do so, corporations cannot bring peace to conflict zones unilaterally.

Business interests influence politics at all levels. However, corporations rarely participate in open political debate even though they are coming under increased pressure to act in ways that support, or in some cases take over, traditional governmental roles. Initiatives such as the Global Compact have been set up to assist corporations in addressing societal needs in ways that benefit them and the global community at large.

Perhaps, as suggested at the CSDG meeting, such loose and non-binding initiatives are not sufficient to force corporations to meet humanitarian needs. Governments could assert their powers using international bodies, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to regulate corporations in ways that ensure net benefits for members of all societies in which corporations operate.

However, devising legislation to enforce or enable corporations to reduce levels of violent conflict could become impossibly complex and will be undoubtedly opposed by both corporations and many leading governments. Nevertheless, the case for peace—whether on business or humanitarian grounds—is clear. What remains to be determined is the type of frameworks and forums for promoting holistic, and above all effective, means of delivery.

From the CSDG meeting it emerged that better impact assessment tools need to be developed to fully understand the roles and effects of the activities of all parties involved in areas where there is conflict. The debate about corporate responsibilities and regulation will continue, but there appears to be a demand to devise constructs, possibly legal ones, that can drive conflict-reducing initiatives involving corporations. In doing so, the challenge, and the hope, is to create strategies that prohibit violent conflict but not commerce.

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