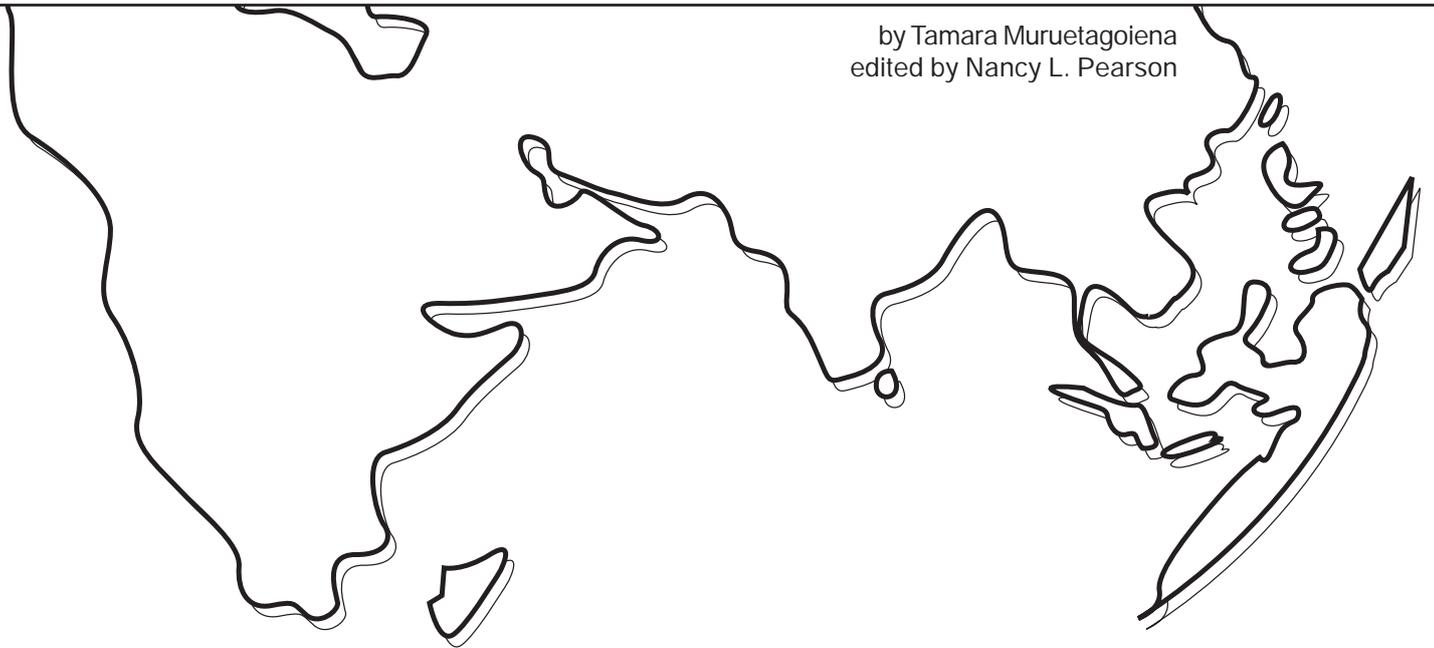


## **Society as Mediator for Conflict Resolution**

Elkarri's Peace Conference

by Tamara Muruetagoiena  
edited by Nancy L. Pearson



A Tactical Notebook published by  
the New Tactics Project  
of the Center for Victims of Torture

Published by  
The Center for Victims of Torture  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project  
717 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455 USA  
[www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org), [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org)

Notebook Series Editor  
Liam Mahony

Layout and Copyediting  
Tricia Cornell

The Danish Institute for Human Rights and The Center for Victims of Torture wish to acknowledge the following institutions that provided support for the New Tactics in Human Rights West Group regional training workshop, of which this and other tactical notebooks are a product:

- The Paul & Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation,
- The United States Department of State,
- The United States Institute of Peace,
- The European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization
- Donors who wish to remain anonymous.

We are also greatly indebted to the work of numerous interns and volunteers who have contributed their time and expertise to the advancement of the project and of human rights.

The New Tactics project has also benefited from more than 2000 hours of work from individual volunteers and interns as well as donations of in-kind support. Some of the institutional sponsors of this work include Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs, the Minnesota Justice Foundation and the public relations firm of Padilla Speer Beardsley.

*The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed on this site are those of the New Tactics project and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders For a full list of project sponsors see [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org).*

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the New Tactics in Human Rights Project. The project does not advocate specific tactics or policies.

© 2004 Center for Victims of Torture

This publication may be freely reproduced in print and in electronic form as long as this copyright notice appears on all copies.

4	Author biography
5	Letter from the New Tactics project manager
6	Introduction
7	The Basque Country and its culture
8	Elkarri's social mediation process
10	Steps for implementing the Peace Conference
13	Lessons learned and challenges
15	Conclusion



The Center for Victims of Torture  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project  
717 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455 USA  
[www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org), [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org)

### Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the following individuals in the preparation of this document:

- Jonan Fernandez, founder and coordinator of Elkarri
- Gorka Espiau, spokesperson and director of the International Department of Elkarri
- Mariano Ferrer, peace conference mediator
- Itziar Fernandez Beaskoetxea, program officer in Elkarri's International Department
- Koldo Zuazua, producer of La Pelota Vasca: La Piel Contra la Piedra
- Nancy Pearson, New Tactics training manager
- Mark Holterhaus, New Tactics project assistant

### Contact information

Bizkaia

Arenal 5, Office SVRNE 209

48005 Bilbao

Tel. +34 94 479 03 16

Fax +34 94 415 80 03

E-mail: [info@elkarri.org](mailto:info@elkarri.org)

Web site: [www.elkarri.org](http://www.elkarri.org)

### Tamara Muruetagoiena

Born and raised in the Basque Country and Madrid, Tamara Muruetagoiena received a bachelor's degree in political science from Washington State University and a master's in business administration from the University of California, Berkeley.

Beginning as an assistant to a member of the European Parliament from the Greens/European Free Alliance Group, Ms. Muruetagoiena spent three years as a policy advisor for the Green Group in the European Parliament. She has also been Elkarri's representative to the European Union. She is now an advisor to the International Committee of the Green Party of the USA and Elkarri's coordinator in the United States.

Ms. Muruetagoiena is currently living in New York City, working for Columbia University as an environmental researcher.

### Elkarri

Elkarri ("Together") defines itself as a "social movement for dialogue and agreement." It was founded in December 1992 with the goal of transforming the existing situation of stalemate, conflict and violence in the Basque Country into one of communication and consensus. Elkarri aspires to a dynamic and realistic approach to peace not as a static, isolated event or magic formula but as a continuing process. Since its founding, Elkarri has been working to reform the language, relationships and structures integral to the continuing Basque political conflict and its violent manifestations. Elkarri is working to establish dialogue and agreement by broadening the processes and avenues for social participation at all levels.



September 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series. In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic that was used successfully in advancing human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, including nongovernment and government perspectives, educators, law enforcement personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, women's rights and mental health advocates. They have both adapted and pioneered tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have used tactics that, when adapted, can be applied in other countries and other situations to address a variety of issues.

Each notebook contains detailed information on how the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think tactically — and to broaden the realm of tactics considered to effectively advance human rights.

In this notebook you will learn how Elkarri, a group based in the Basque Region, has used a form of dialogue they call *social mediation* to encourage the broadest possible participation from all arenas of society to discuss solutions to the conflict. Community members were given a broad choice of ways to get involved: from signing a petition to becoming a member to participating in and organizing discussion groups. But however people chose to participate, they learned that they had a role to play in mediating the conflict that affected their lives and created pressure on the groups in conflict to make steps toward seeking peaceful resolution.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org). Additional notebooks are already available and others will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners and information about our workshops and symposium. To subscribe to the New Tactics newsletter, please send an e-mail to [newtactics@cvt.org](mailto:newtactics@cvt.org).

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture and grew out of our experiences as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position — one of healing and reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that you will find these notebooks informational and thought-provoking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Kelsch".

Kate Kelsch  
New Tactics Project Manager

## Introduction

There are more than forty significant ongoing political conflicts in the world today. One of these is the continuing conflict in the Basque Country.<sup>1</sup> More and more, civilian populations find themselves caught in the crossfire, powerless to influence the conflicts that profoundly affect their daily lives. Elkarri is attempting to empower all elements of Basque society, constructing a “space” wherein the people of the Basque Country can mediate for their own well-being.

Across the political spectrum, all public opinion surveys conducted over the last 10 years reflect consensus amongst Basques on several principal points. Foremost, the population firmly rejects the use of violence to achieve political aims. Even as the Basque population recognizes that there are serious political problems requiring resolution, the population strongly supports dialogue as the path to resolve these differences and wishes a voice in determining the future of the Basque Country.

In the last twelve years Elkarri has taken up this mandate and sought to promote a culture of dialogue and peace. In an effort to overcome the dynamic of confrontation, the organization has worked to create an atmosphere of cooperation, leveraging public sentiment toward the establishment and maintenance of a continuing viable dialogue. In this sense, Elkarri's endeavors have been directed toward society as a

whole: the citizens, mass media, political parties, institutions and all the actors in the conflict.

Given the context of extreme political polarization in the Basque Country, the founders of Elkarri felt it was essential, from the start, to clearly establish the independent character of this social group along with its complete independence from all of the involved parties. A fresh outlook and a new vocabulary have proven fundamental in creating spaces for meeting and discourse instead of the common attitudes and expressions of hostility, coercion and intractability. Elkarri does not adhere blindly to rigid criteria such as “neutrality” or “equidistance.” Rather, the movement is guided by an active commitment to the establishment of conditions favorable to a balanced and democratic process of dialogue. This social movement is continually evolving its own language and modes of action, unmistakably distinct from the concepts, words and methods employed by the parties embroiled in the conflict.

Elkarri provides an “a la carte” menu of participation to maximize grassroots support. Rather than dictating one or two prescribed means of involvement, Elkarri aims to maximize accessibility by providing a wide range of options. Because the pace of contemporary society limits the amount of time, energy and

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://www.flashpoints.info/FlashPoints\\_home.html](http://www.flashpoints.info/FlashPoints_home.html).



Members and supporters of Elkarri march with representatives of political parties and the government, including the Basque minister of justice and the founder of ETA (although he is no longer involved in ETA). The banner reads, “Dialogue and agreement among all

resources that people are willing and able to commit, we allow people to tailor their involvement to match their capacities.

The effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by the broad support for Elkarrri's Peace Conference of 2001-2002. While it culminated in a single event, the Peace Conference encompassed a year-long, four-part process operating on three levels—among the general population, among political parties and internationally. It began with a signature drive that netted 50,000 signatures and small donations that added up to US\$500,000. Eventually more than 4,000 people joined the organization as members while 1,200 volunteered their time and 180 ongoing local workshops and one-time events were held throughout the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre, as well as in Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels and New York.

This notebook is an attempt to share some of the valuable insights and experience we gained through this process of social participation. We hope that this information will be useful to others seeking to broaden the base of participation in conflict resolution.

## **Background: The Basque Country and its culture**

Some familiarity with Basque history and culture is helpful in understanding the current conflict and the tactics employed by Elkarrri in the quest for peace.

Considered a cultural and geographic region by some and a "stateless nation" by others, the Basque Country comprises 2.7 million people in seven provinces, three in France and four in Spain, and is roughly 8,200 square miles. It is situated along the northern coast of the Iberian Peninsula stretching from Bayonne and the Adour River westward along the Bay of Biscay to Bilbao and inland to the Ebro River which forms its southern border.

The Basque language, known as Euskera, is at the heart of Basque culture. The Basque name for the country is Euskal Herria, "land of the Euskera speakers." Although the exact origin of the Euskera is unclear, it is may well be the oldest living European language, perhaps dating from the early Bronze Age. It is unrelated to the Indo-European languages of Europe or to Finnish, Estonian or Hungarian. Whatever their origins, it is generally accepted by scholars that Basques have occupied their corner of the world for thousands of years.

The Basque country has a long tradition of self-determination. Basque lands were divided between France and Spain during the Renaissance and eventually the French Revolution brought an end to self-government in the northern Basque region. The end of 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a burgeoning of Basque nationalism which

culminated in a brief period self-government of the autonomous region of Euskadi, which existed from 1936-37 during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Franco's victory in 1939 ushered in 40 years of dictatorship; his government's efforts to homogenize Spanish culture resulted in the loss of the Basque Country's autonomy and presented a serious organized threat to the continued existence of Basque language and culture.

In 1959, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), an illegal organization of militant Basque separatists, was founded in response to systematized repression by the Spanish government. ETA is committed to the independence of the Basque Country from both Spain and France. More than 800 deaths have been attributed to the group since 1968. Despite the fact that the end of the Franco regime in November 1975 brought an end to governmental suppression of Basques, restoration of Basque cultural and linguistic freedom and the creation of an autonomous Basque region in Spain, ETA continues its actions, fighting for full independence and socialism. During this period of violence, only one complete, unilateral and unconditional ceasefire was declared.

That ceasefire ushered in talks in May 1999 between ETA and the Spanish government held in Zurich, Switzerland. The meeting failed to produce an agreement when the Spanish police summarily arrested the ETA delegation. That effectively ended the ceasefire in December and in January 2000 violent activity resumed and continues to the present. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the government made ETA's "political wing," Herri Batasuna, illegal; suppressed publications sympathetic to ETA's views; and continues efforts to apprehend and prosecute individuals with suspected ties to the organization. In the present debate on the search for peace there are three main positions represented by ETA, the Spanish government and the Basque population at large, all with different and competing perspectives regarding the situation.



## Elkarri's social mediation process: Goal, strategic plan and tactical decision

The philosophy behind Elkarri's goal to transform the conflict and violence in the Basque Country into a situation of dialogue and eventual agreement is the concept that peace is not a static, isolated event but is a constructive process—a process that Elkarri calls *social mediation*.

Elkarri determined that a strategy to build a civil society movement for social mediation was essential and the Peace Conference mentioned above was one of the tactical means to move that strategy forward. In order for a viable solution to be reached, civil society must take part in the construction of the dialogue and agreement, *making Basque society itself the mediator*.

The people of the Basque country hold a wide range of political opinions but share *the demand for a peace process based on nonviolence and talks involving all political parties*. Surveys that have been carried out on this subject over the last 10 years show that the majority of Basque society (and Spanish society too) supports dialogue as a way of approaching the conflict. Incredibly, no previous dialogue has taken place between the political forces embroiled in the dispute. The creation of the necessary conditions for holding such talks continues to be one of the greatest challenges for Basque and Spanish society. Elkarri set out to vigorously pursue this alternative to the current situation.

### Phases of the Peace Conference

**The Word:** Equality (see Figure 1)

**The Book:** Opinions gathered from 12 roundtable events with community and international experts

**The Dossier:** A summary of more than 5,000 citizen opinions

**The Page:** Nonpartisan moderators working with political parties to develop the basis for agreement

### Lessons Learned from Northern Ireland

In September 1994 an Elkarri delegation traveled to Northern Ireland to learn the details of the peace process that was in progress. Elkarri met leading members of the political parties, Irish social movements, trade unions, journalists and others. The booklet *Elkarrikasi* (*Elkarri Learning*) sums up the details of this peace process and the conclusions drawn.

*Elkarrikasi* is available in Spanish and Basque at [www.elkarri.org](http://www.elkarri.org).

## CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR DIALOGUE: THE PEACE CONFERENCE

In order to both engage Basque society and put them at the center of the dialogue, Elkarri needed to focus on spreading the idea of dialogue and agreement. Elkarri put this idea into practice with concrete proposals and methodology to encourage public participation. The participatory process was promoted on three critical levels—social, political and international. This tripartite approach has made possible the identification and refinement of viable scenarios for dialogue and defining agreement.

In developing the Peace Conference, Elkarri looked at other conflicts, resolutions and accords all over the world to gather information and experiences. Two peace processes were particularly instrumental to Elkarri's work in developing the Peace Conference: the Northern Ireland Peace Process and the Oslo Accords between Israelis and Palestinians.

**Northern Ireland Peace Process.** All-party negotiations held in 1998 produced the **Belfast Agreement** (more commonly known as the **Good Friday Agreement** and also known as the **Stormont Agreement**). It was signed in Belfast on April 10, 1998, by the British and Irish Governments and most Northern Ireland political parties. It was subsequently endorsed by the voters of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in separate referenda.

Due to the similarities between the two situations, Elkarri has kept regular contact with the main players involved in the Irish peace process: the political parties, governments and civic movements.

**Oslo Accords.** These were a series of agreements negotiated between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO, acting as representatives of the Palestinian people) in 1993 as part of a peace process and officially called the *Declaration of Principles*. Despite the high hopes expressed in the Accords and in the subsequent agreements, which also promised the normalization of Israel's relations with the Arab world, the conflict clearly has not been resolved. The talks leading to the agreement were initiated by the Norwegian government, then on reasonably good terms with both parties. The mediators chosen by the Norwegian government were Johan Jørgen Holst (the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs), Terje Rød-Larsen and Mona Juul. The negotiations were undertaken in total secrecy.

Elkarri gleaned lessons from both: from Northern Ireland came the idea of all-party talks directed toward forging a formal agreement, and from the Oslo Accords came the idea of nonpartisan moderators working with the parties.

Through the Peace Conference Elkarrri has acted as a facilitator to the social, political and international realms, by promoting dialogue, designating points of public recognition and evaluating progress toward peace. The Peace Conference was launched in two phases, the preparatory stage and the implementation stage, and made up of four distinct but interlinking projects known as the "Word," "Book," "Dossier" and "Page." (Detailed information on all four levels can be found at <http://www.elkarri.org/en/pdf/PeaceConferenceFolder.pdf>.)



Collecting signatures: Asking people to endorse equality and dialogue.

### THE WORD

In the preparatory stage, the Word was designed to gauge the will and sentiment of the Basque population as well as international support for a process of dialogue toward peace—the "word" being "equality." (See Figure 1.) The public signed on for a dialogue toward peace based on "the word" or the concept of equality as the starting point and a minimum level of consensus expected. Following the initial public support for this mandate, Elkarrri mailed information on this equality principle as the basis for dialogue. This principle also became the starting point for discussions distributed in the "participation folder," a guide for local-level discussions. Over the course of the one-year implementation phase, Elkarrri organized more than 180 local events to engage public participation. Thousands of contributions from the public were generated as a result of these local discussions.

In addition to the signature campaign, support for the process was gathered in a variety of ways such as mailings, e-mail and web contacts and networks of organizations.

Over the last 12 years, Elkarrri has gathered a database of the names of people who want to receive information through signature drives, demonstrations, local workshops and political party talks, among other initiatives. These people were mailed a package inviting them to contribute their signature, become a volunteer, participate in a workshop, make a donation or become a member. People are given a wide range of ways to participate in Elkarrri's work. Given a choice, many people readily do more than just sign something and want to participate in other ways as well.

This preparatory stage, promoting the concept of the Peace Conference, was announced by Elkarrri on the February 11, 2001. In the eight-month preparatory process, Elkarrri collected 50,000 names, along with 1,000 pesetas (a little more than US\$7) from each person who signed the petition. This concrete indication of public support for a process of dialogue toward peace through their signatures and willingness to provide a small monetary donation provided the backbone of the mandate and financial resources (US\$500,000) to implement the Peace Conference. The preparatory process culminated on October 7, 2001, in a public event at the Palacio Euskalduna in Bilbao with 2,500 people. This officially launched the Peace Conference methodology, which was conceived and developed to find the widest possible consensus among the public and political forces concerning their participation in dialogue.

Elkarrri has gathered lists of e-mail addresses in very similar ways. It has also used the many directories listing political parties, members of parliaments, government officials, organizations working on human rights and peace, etc. From these lists Elkarrri amassed a da-

FIGURE 1



*I believe Elkarrri's Peace Conference is a very important path to take, it is fresh air in a situation of blockage, violence and intransigence.* — Javier Madrazo, Secretary General, Izquierda Unida-Esker Batua (left-wing party) and Minister of Housing and Social Affairs, Basque Government, quoted in the book and film, *La Pelota Vasca: la piel contra la piedra /Euskal Pilota: larrua harriaren kontra*.

*I would say that the current conflict in the Basque Country has arrived at a moment of hope. For example, Elkarrri has made a proposal that I believe opens a door to dialogue among political parties.* — Father Alec Reid, Spokesperson in the peace talks in Northern Ireland.

*Elkarrri is one of the many things that Basque society needs. A group of citizens that, at least, in this ocean of confusion, has clear ideas... Elkarrri proposes that if the solution is sought, it can be found.* — Mariano Ferrer, journalist and moderator during the Peace Conference, quoted in the book and film *La Pelota Vasca: la piel contra la piedra /Euskal Pilota: larrua harriaren kontra*

*I would say that Elkarrri, fundamentally, fights for a course of action that I would call healthy and fresh, and that it is more concerned with the search for a process in which all participate, than in the ultimate outcome of that process.* — Ramon Etxezarrieta, elected official from the Socialist Party, threatened by ETA, quoted in the book and film, *La Pelota Vasca: la piel contra la piedra /Euskal Pilota: larrua harriaren kontra*.

tabase of potential positive contacts. However, Elkarrri sends information to private individuals—those not associated with an organization—only if they have agreed to receive information.

E-mail is also important in collecting signatures. Elkarrri has a large mailing list of people who might be interested in our initiatives and they forward our e-mail messages to their own contacts, creating a much wider network. People also give their signatures on our web site. We also collect signatures through a wide network of organizations that sympathize with us, including Gesto por la Paz, Hegoa, Bakea Orain and others. Much of the work of collecting signatures is done by volunteers. Moreover, we did not underestimate the power of word of mouth in attracting people to give their signature.

Having gained initial public support for this guiding principle in the preparatory stage, Elkarrri was ready to launch the next phases— the Book, the Dossier and the Page—the processes that engaged people on the social, political and international levels of the Peace Conference.

### **THE BOOK**

The Book is a compilation of 36 opinions gathered in 12 roundtable events. Victims, political representatives, social players, international experts, opinion leaders and conflict-resolution experts who have been involved in other peace processes compared and reflected upon their ideas for achieving peace.

### **THE DOSSIER**

This document summarizes and groups the opinions of more than 5,000 citizens. These were expressed by individuals or organizations or were gathered through opinion surveys from October 2001 to May 2002. The Dossier outlines the basis of consensus—or principles—and some possible procedures for implementing those principles. On a fundamental level, this process linked the principle of peace to the tool of human rights, pluralism to dialogue and equality to democratic rule.

The task of ordering and interpreting these opinions, though complex, proved feasible, as the vast majority of the contributions tended to converge, or at least share basic characteristics. Fortunately, there is considerable common ground in Basque society, as we have observed in all the surveys made in recent years. This makes our work somewhat easier and constitutes the principal asset of the peace movement and the strongest antidote to social division.

### **THE PAGE**

The Page of agreement was a core objective of the Peace Conference. Eight moderators drew up a document reflecting what they considered a positive vocabulary and a proposal for rules that would govern the process of developing an agreement between political parties toward the goal of peace and coexistence.

### **Steps for implementing the Peace Conference**

Elkarrri specifically addressed the three levels mentioned above—social, political and international—in the Peace Conference because these are the levels that affect and are affected by the ongoing conflict in the Basque Country. Elkarrri wanted to reach as many levels as possible in order to bring in as many active participants as possible.

### **SOCIAL LEVEL**

Elkarrri as a social movement espouses the idea that participation has to be encouraged at all levels with great emphasis placed on local work. Providing information to society and in return getting society's support, opinion and participation has been one of the four core elements of the Peace Conference process.

The goal of our work on the social level was to reach as many people as possible. Because Elkarrri is a social movement, it has to engage people from all over the region who agree with the principle of dialogue but, in fact, hold divergent political views. To do this, we had to determine how people *want* to be involved. We know how hard it is for people to be active in processes like this, so instead of presenting just a few inflexible means of participation, we created a flexible à la carte system. From the very beginning we

offered several levels of public participation, but as the organization grew the number of workshops, contributing members, volunteers, etc. increased exponentially.

Before starting the workshops, we looked around the world for examples of best practices and found a methodology used in El Salvador for local conflict-resolution forums. Using this model, we instituted a process that did not limit the number of participants or local workshops. For example, a town might establish one local workshop whereas a city might have several to cover several neighborhoods. The idea was that a flexible structure would most fully engage people's lives and interests. There is nothing more grassroots than local gatherings where decisions are made directly affecting people's lives.

At these ongoing local workshops a wide range of people meet, discuss, debate, study and develop arguments, proposals and initiatives related to the conflict that affects the Basque Country. Some of the common issues discussed have been:

- The cause of the conflict,
- Proposals for specific solutions,
- Living together in harmony,
- Local contributions and initiatives to construct a peace process,
- Individual and collective human rights and
- Tolerance in the Basque Country.

By the time the Peace Conference began, Elkarri had established more than 100 workshops—one in almost every major town in the Basque Country and even in Madrid, Barcelona and Brussels, home of the institutions of the European Union. So an established, vital social network had already been in place for several years. The Peace Conference was a departure from the ongoing workshop network and a step beyond previous grassroots initiatives, in that there was a very ambitious goal and a specified timeframe. The positive social objectives and ambitious goals of the Peace Conference energized the general public. This was just a few years after the peace process in Northern Ireland and the longest ETA ceasefire in history. Basque Society was, and still is, tired of violence and political confrontation. This process provided vision, opportunity, and *possibilities*. The idea that people themselves could present a solution to the problem was very exciting and the existing grassroots support grew even stronger as new people became involved. The initial levels of participation—small donations, signatures, signature collecting, answering questionnaires—all served as gateways to much greater levels of participation.

## **POLITICAL LEVEL**

A politically diverse eight-person moderating team was asked to draw up, in language that could be accepted by all, a proposal on the rules of engagement for developing a process for agreement between the political parties toward the pursuit of peace and coexistence—what was known as the Page.

The work began discreetly, with no publicity. The parties involved used an interactive methodology to explore means of creating the Page—an agreement we hoped would be capable of unlocking the current situation.

Each of the moderators was carefully chosen by Elkarri and accepted by each political party, with the exception of Batasuna (the political wing of ETA), which elected to choose its own moderator. The parties' trust—essential to the process—was built on the fact that the moderators were respected or even well-known individuals. Some were members of the parties they represented while some only shared a general ideology. The moderators also had to be independent enough from the party to be objective and able to work with the moderators from other political parties.

When Batasuna decided not to comply with the method proposed and chose a moderator who was indeed an active member at the executive level of the party, Elkarri's reaction was very flexible. The movement decided to accept the demand with a view toward the larger goal of working toward agreement. The other moderators also agreed to accept this departure from the rules.

### **Peace Conference Working Levels**

#### **SOCIAL LEVEL:**

- The Word, the Book and the Dossier
- Memberships: 4,000
- Local forums: 100
- Volunteers
- High-profile contacts

#### **POLITICAL LEVEL:**

Research and work forum with political parties

- The Page—Exploration of grounds for dialogue and agreement
- Interactive methodology
- Discretion, no publicity

#### **INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:**

- The Book
- High-profile supporters
- Cooperation with international institutions and organizations, including the European Union
- Shaping international public opinion



An additional hurdle was the fact that the Partido Popular—the dominant conservative Spanish political party—was not interested in the Peace Conference at all. The Partido Popular denies the existence of a political problem and the need for dialogue, considering the Basque conflict an “internal (Spanish) policing problem.” It could not engage itself in a project searching for a solution to a political problem it does not believe exists and using a methodology it does not support. The Partido Popular did not produce a document of its own; moreover, it did not agree to a moderator and thus there was no way we could produce a document agreed upon by *all* political parties.

So we had to be flexible and seek an intermediate solution. We found a person who was a trustee of the Partido Popular but independent of it. This person did not work as a moderator (since there was no feedback from the party) but was instrumental in drafting the joint document. We realized that in order to engage as many political parties as possible, the project had to allow room for modifications and a certain level of flexibility. We could not forget that these political parties are very antagonistic and at present would

not even consider sitting across the table from each other, let alone working on a common project.

The methodology was straightforward but laborious, consisting of the following steps:

- Debate: The moderators selected the issues that might serve as a basis for an agreement;
- Consultation: The moderators worked with the parties to refine these ideas;
- Drafting text: Texts were developed for submission to the political parties for their further consideration;
- Text revision and resubmission to the parties: Texts were prepared integrating the contributions received;
- Consultation: a new round of consultations followed, continuing until the greatest possible rapprochement was reached.

The provisional balance of the process illustrated two points. First, that reaching a multilateral agreement in the service of peace was not an impossible mission. Second, that a climate of adversity can impede what is possible, necessary and urgent.

## Political Participants

The following are some comments made by the major political parties in the Basque Country and Navarre regarding the drafts prepared by the eight moderators (the Page).

**EAJ-PNV:** (Ruling party in the government of the Basque Country) “considers it essential that a process be initiated toward reaching an agreement between the political forces, with the aim of overcoming the serious problems and conflicts that our peoples suffer. The PNV subscribes to the totality of the text.”

**Socialist Party (PSE-EE):** (Basque chapter of the present governing party of Spain) “in order to develop any process of agreement, a basic assumption is the cessation of all terrorist activity and the climate of coercion and threat suffered by a part of our society. Many of the subjects the proposal addresses require a higher degree of definition.”

**Batasuna:** “unfortunately, it has become common practice for the majority of the political forces participating in the Conference to refuse to debate or subscribe to any agreement or even to hold talks with Batasuna.”

**Esquer Batua (IU/EB):** (Basque wing of Izquierda Unida Spanish Left Party) “commits itself to both the principles and the objectives of Elkarri’s Peace Conference.”

## INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The Basque conflict is a very local conflict, but Elkarri’s aim has also been to inform and engage the international community, so it was important to make the Peace Conference a project with international prestige. We got the support of high-profile people devoted to peace and human rights, creating a chain reaction and exerting a positive external influence on the parties in the conflict. This high-profile support both attracts the attention of people who would not otherwise be interested and reminds the local political parties of the importance of the process in which they are participating.

Gaining the support of several Nobel Prize winners was in part due to the reputation that Elkarri has among Basques. However, it was the commitment of the members of Elkarri to make personal contacts that led to the signatures of support from high profile people. It is important to remember that the people involved with Elkarri, by and large, feel very strongly about the need for a peaceful solution to the Basque conflict. They are extremely active people who are devoted to Elkarri’s cause. Elkarri asks little of its supporters and yet their energy and enthusiasm are the true engine of the movement towards peace.

In addition to getting support from high-profile individuals, Elkarri also sought the cooperation of international collaborating institutions, including the European Union; worked to inform international public opinion; and followed the development of peace processes in other countries to gain insights to apply to the Basque conflict.

Elkarri set up support committees of high-profile individuals representing a wide range of backgrounds in Brussels, Barcelona and Madrid and engaged a highly respected group of people to serve as honorary committee members of the Peace Conference. It also made contact with organizations and experts who could engage directly in debates on the social and political level including Harry Barnes (MP), Father Alec Reid from Northern Ireland, and representatives from the Carter Center in the United States. Federico Mayor Zaragoza instantly understood the need for such a project and through his involvement several other Nobel Prize winners supported Elkarri's efforts.

Elkarri's web site was launched in 1996 as a rudimentary page that has slowly evolved. Currently, a monthly newsletter is sent to more than 30,000 international organizations (a number which has increased by 80 percent since the Peace Conference.) The web site is interactive and attracts about 10,000 visitors a month. People can become volunteers, participate in workshops, get information, answer surveys, become members, give their signatures, etc., all through the web site. A visitor can see the development step-by-step of the Peace Conference and other initiatives; in many cases just seeing how many signatures have been collected, gets people involved collecting more. At present the web site is offered in Basque, English, French and Spanish.

### Lessons learned and challenges

It is difficult to make generic recommendations about use of this tactic in other contexts because each conflict is defined by its own specific characteristics. Accepting this limitation, a process of direct comparison and contrast may be productive. In this way, other organizations can draw from our experience those aspects that seem most pertinent and feasible in their own situations.

There are several general principles that have been useful to Elkarri and may prove so for others. The most important of these are:

- a) The movement structures all activities around three levels of work: societal participation, involvement of the full range of political parties (or proxies if necessary) and the garnering of international recognition, input and influence.
- b) Elkarri activities are not reactive; they are not oriented toward protest or symbolic gestures. About 90 percent of our activities are proactive, aimed at generating opportunities, creating spaces for exchange and shedding light on possibilities often obscured by opposing rhetoric.
- c) Elkarri clearly established and diligently guards its independent character and recognized lack of bias through economic independence. The 4000 mem-

### Honorary Committee

Includes six Nobel Peace Prize winners:

- Mairead Maguire, 1976
- Adolfo Perez Esquivel, 1980
- The Dalai Lama, 1989
- Rigoberta Menchu, 1992
- Jose Ramos-Horta, 1996
- John Hume, 1998

Additional figures of international prestige:

- Danielle Mitterrand, President of France Libertes
- José Saramago, Nobel Literature Prize winner, 1998
- Cora Weiss, International Peace Bureau
- Federico Mayor Zaragoza, President of the Culture of Peace Foundation

### Media Coverage

The Peace Conference garnered significant media coverage with journalists attending events and press conferences. Television coverage was considerable, and headlines in major newspapers included:

"New peace process in Basque Country brings rival factions together in dialogue"

*El Pais International*, October 5, 2001

"Elkarri will include a public opinion poll in its Peace Conference"

*El Correo*, December 6, 2001

"A Peace Conference"

*Sud-Ouest*, February 13, 2001

"Elkarri declares 'enough attacks against human lives in the Basque Country'"

*El Correo*, May 19, 2002

"Elkarri mobilizes 100.000 people and demands that ETA 'listen to society'"

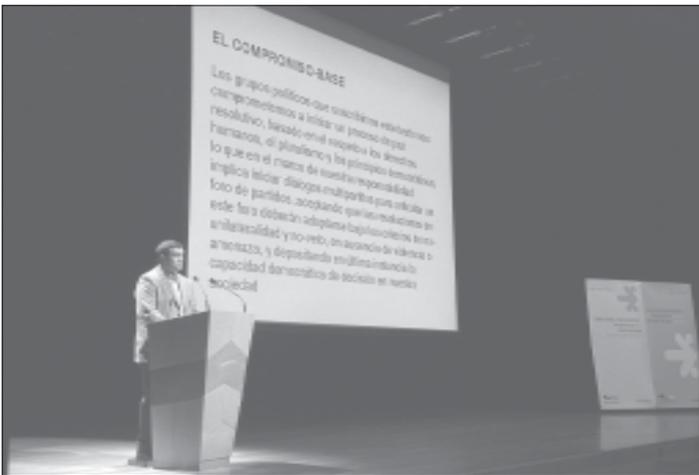
*El Mundo*, May 19, 2002



A presentation at the Peace Conference in Euskalduna Palace, Bilbao.



A presentation at the Peace Conference in Bilbao. The number on the screen, 50,847, is the number of signatures collected in support of the process.



Jonan Fernandez, coordinator of Elkarrri, explains the basis for compromise among political parties.

bers of our organization comprise its entire infrastructure: personnel, offices, newsletters, mailings and web activities are completely independent of external financing. Donations and contributions from businesses are applied directly and completely to the funding of initiatives.

d) Any independent social organization must establish means of direct communication with society. Established avenues of mass communication may be useful but they do not often allow the dissemination and exchange of ideas with the frequency or degree of detail desirable. For this reason, Elkarrri established its database of approximately 150,000 individuals and a large number of organizations interested in our work, allowing direct contact by e-mail, telephone or mail whenever necessary.

Perhaps the paramount factors which must be considered before implementing a tactic like this one are the desires and demands of the public. To transform society from collective victim or powerless bystander into empowered protagonist it is essential to identify the areas of consensus that can energize the majority and empower the people in their role as active mediators.

Several characteristics endemic to Basque society which positively affected the Peace Conference and may not be present in other contexts include the following:

- a) Basque society is highly politically and socially active.
- b) Basque society is wealthy, open and democratic.
- c) The Basque conflict is ethno-political in nature.
- d) Like the rest of Western Europe, Basque society has widespread contemporary communication technology: mass media, the Internet and diverse outlets for the free press.

Acknowledging those conditions, it nevertheless seems entirely possible and practicable to modify the tactic for effective use in other contexts. This approach might prove most effective where the following criteria are present in one form or another:

- a) Violent conflict, especially terrorist activity by a relatively small but highly motivated segment of society;
- b) A politically and socially active society;
- c) The possibility of getting funding and maintaining impartiality through contributions from individuals.

The three levels of work—social, political, international—were extremely important in the Peace Conference. It was a very ambitious undertaking requiring tremendous resources and involvement. Elkarri generally operates with a staff of 10 to 12, however during this period we increased that number to 15. Financial support for the Peace Conference was raised through the signature collection process, adding both legitimacy and public investment. This was critical to the overall process and the outcome on the social level and far exceeded Elkarri's expectations.

One of the main objectives at the political level, however, was not fully achieved: The consensus drafts were never transformed into an explicit agreement—the Page. Although Elkarri did succeed in creating a process and the conditions for a convergence of points of view, it was not able to bring about a practical consensus that could be carried to the next stage, which would be talks among the political parties. It was exceedingly difficult to engage some political parties in any aspect of the process, particularly the Partido Popular, at the time the ruling party in the Spanish government, and the Unión del Pueblo Navarro, the ruling party in the government of Navarre. Neither produced a draft of their positions for Elkarri since both parties deny that a political conflict exists in the Basque Country. It was difficult to engage them in a process meant to resolve a political conflict they decline to acknowledge.

There is almost nothing Elkarri would have changed in conducting the Peace Conference, because the outcome actually far exceeded expectations. It would have been naïve to think that all political parties were going to sit down together and talk based on an Elkarri initiative. However, the goals and the capacity to engage people to put pressure on as many of the political parties as possible was a great achievement.

## Conclusion

Based on the lessons learned during all four stages of the first Peace Conference and at the culminating event, Elkarri is undertaking a new Peace Conference process involving the right to petition recognized in Article 29 of the Spanish Constitution. Citizens and social organizations have the right to collect signatures on proposals that must then be processed and responded to by parliament. Elkarri plans to make a formal petition to both the Basque and Navarre parliaments to create leverage for all-party talks on the conflict. The formula will build on the process used in the first Peace Conference but with legislative implications. Elkarri launched the new Peace Conference campaign on March 6, 2004, with a massive signature drive. The result was 44,000 signatures collected in one day in the Basque Country and Navarre.

Other areas of the world experiencing political and violent conflict due to ethnic and cultural causes could benefit from Elkarri's experience in engaging society at large, the political arena and the international community in seeking solutions to the ongoing conflict. Elkarri is continuing to move the process forward with a new Peace Conference and is refining the original process based on lessons that were learned.

*Elkarri is trying to create a new political culture and stop the hatred spiral that is present in the ideology and politics of the Basque Country.* Alberto Surio, journalist, *El Diario Vasco*.

*I was one of those who supported Elkarri's initiative, not because I believed in miracles, but because I believe that all that could be done to search for encounters and rapprochements is a good solution for the Basque conflict.* Inaki Gabilondo, journalist.

*I am participating in Elkarri's Peace Conference, and I can tell you that people are working rigorously and in good faith. Different political positions and concerns are being expressed clearly.* Ramon Mugica, notary.

*Elkarri's Peace Conference is an action in which civil society is making great efforts to convince the political world that something needs to be done.* Antxon Lafont, president of Baiona's Chamber of Commerce (French Basque Country)

(The quotes above were taken from the book and film, *La Pelota Vasca: la piel contra la piedra / Euskal Pilota: larrua harriaren kontra*.)

*I have to say that Elkarri's cause is also my cause. I feel dialogue is the only way, and in fact the only way that has not really been explored yet.* Julio Medem, writer and director of the book and film *La Pelota Vasca: la piel contra la piedra / Euskal Pilota: larrua harriaren kontra*, quoted in *Elkarri Magazine*, January 2004.



To print or download this and other publications in the Tactical Notebook Series,  
go to [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org).

Online you will also find a searchable database of tactics and  
forums for discussion with other human rights practitioners.



The Center for Victims of Torture  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project  
717 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
[www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org) / [cvt@cvt.org](mailto:cvt@cvt.org)  
[www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org) / [newtactics@cvt.org](mailto:newtactics@cvt.org)

