Some of the earliest civilizations in human history were founded in the region of the Middle East around 3500 BC in what was called Mesopotamia (Iraq today). Throughout its rich and diverse history, the Middle East has been a major center for world affairs because of its geographic, economic, political, cultural and religious importance. It is the geographic origin of three of the main religions in the world today: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is no wonder then that many nations have tried to claim it. While Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians were among its first inhabitants, many others have sought to establish their dominance over the region including the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Crusaders and Mongols, and the Ottoman Empire.

Given the importance of the region, it is no surprise that the Middle East has been saturated with conflicts throughout its history. It is likely that at the time you read this text, there will be at least one Middle Eastern conflict that is salient in the media and in public awareness. However, what is often underemphasized is the region’s long-standing history and tradition of tolerance and constructive approaches to conflict resolution.

The field of Conflict Resolution as an area of scholarship and theory-based practice is relatively new but has been developing rapidly, especially in Western cultures. For the last two decades, Western governmental and nongovernmental organizations have intensified their efforts to expose and train Middle Eastern academicians, professionals, and politicians in various democratic approaches – motivated largely by the end of the Cold War. Often, Western trainers travel to the Middle East in order to introduce various intervention models and strategies to promote constructive and nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution in troubled areas.

This has lead some scholars to critique the field of conflict resolution for being “too Western”, and for trying to impose procedures and values that are culturally irrelevant if not inappropriate in non-Western settings. For example, the third-party model in many Western conflict resolution techniques encourages the involvement of facilitators or mediators who are not personally involved in the conflict and therefore perceived as neutral by the disputants. However, third parties in many Arab-Islamic models of conflict resolution are typically respected figures in the community, often with a vested interest in the outcome of the dispute and intimate knowledge of the issues, who sometimes use their authority to force particular settlements on the disputants. Without a doubt, scholars and practitioners alike still have work ahead of them to ensure that all conflict resolution processes and techniques are culturally sensitive and appropriate. However, despite these challenges, what is important to note is that constructive conflict resolution methods have been and are still well established in the many cultures that make up the Middle East.

For example, Middle Eastern scholars have found that processes of arbitration (tahkim), consultation (shurah), and settlement (sulh) have been practiced in Middle Eastern cultures for centuries. The presence of arbitration represents an enshrinement of
the principle of pluralism and tolerance of diversity from the very beginning of the Muslim and Arab community. This is one of many examples that illustrates the tradition and embeddedness of constructive processes for resolving conflicts within communities in the Middle East.

Despite the well-rooted traditions and techniques of managing conflicts within the Arab community, what has been lacking is a robust and systemic theoretical framework of constructive conflict resolution that is grounded in scientific research. One of the great values of the Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice is that it provides the fundamental theories and research about the psychological and social processes that occur in conflicts which helps the reader to better understand the basic dynamics of constructive and destructive processes taking place in conflict settings. Gaining such knowledge is vital for any conflict resolution practitioner. Furthermore, the selected chapters, while offering theoretical knowledge on constructive and destructive processes, do not prescribe specific intervention techniques, but rather offer orientations and guidelines which leave room for cultural adaptation of practice.

The current translation project emerged as a result of repeated requests to have conflict resolution educational materials available in Arabic. Specifically, in 2006, conflict resolution practitioners working in national and international non-governmental organizations in Arab-speaking countries (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel-Palestine, Syria), expressed an urgent need to have conflict resolution resource materials translated into Arabic for the purposes of providing scientifically sound peacebuilding models that were also locally and culturally informed. Realizing the importance of the availability of the material in Arabic, we decided to initiate the translation project. The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice edited by Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus includes thirty seven chapters. Due to a limited amount of funding, we decided to translate selected chapters from the handbook that were perceived as most relevant to the population of the Middle East.

In order to select these chapters, we worked with local Arab professionals and asked them to identify those chapters that they perceived as most useful and culturally relevant and sensitive. In the chapter Cooperation and Competition, Morton Deutsch develops a theory on cooperation and competition in order to better understand the underlying processes of conflicts and the way to resolve them. In a later chapter Justice and Conflict, Morton Deutsch explores the relationship between conflict and injustice. He identifies the various types of injustice, and addresses their implications on the practices of resolving of conflicts. Roy, J. Lewicki’s work on Trust, Trust Development and Trust Repair highlights the importance of trust in managing and resolving conflicts, and offers techniques to manage distrust and work on rebuilding it. In the chapter Power and Conflict, Peter T. Coleman develops the concept of power, and discusses the implications of power differences on conflict dynamics, power strategies and offers implications for training. Ronald J. Fisher’s chapter Intergroup Conflict offers a social-psychological approach to better understand intergroup conflicts and implications on interventions. The chapter Aggression and Violence by Susan Opotow discusses the various forms of violence and their relationships to conflict and conflict resolution. In Matters of Faith: Religion, Conflict and Conflict Resolution, Bridget Moix examines the role religion can potentially play in both causing and resolving or preventing conflicts. Barbara Benedict Bunker in her chapter Managing Conflict through Large-group Methods illustrates large-
group methods for conflict intervention. Finally, in their chapter *Intractable Conflict: Applications of Dynamical Systems theory* Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, Bui-Wrizinska, and Bartoli discuss the applications of dynamical systems theory for addressing difficult, long-term conflicts, using the case of Mozambique for illustration.

It is important to say that the current translation project fits well with the overall objectives of the *International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution*, at Teachers College, Columbia University to increase public awareness of constructive methods for conflict prevention and resolution in families, organizations, and communities worldwide. Our staff worked hard to ensure a translation that is both accurate and culturally sensitive.

Finally, I would like to say that this project would have not been possible without the outstanding support of key individuals. My deepest thanks go to Bashar Helou, Ayman Medarwash, and Mateel Musallam, for their accurate translations and editing. Special thanks goes to Thomas Hill who has inspired and encourage me to oversee the translation project, and finally to Peter T. Coleman, Morton Deutsch, and Marla Schaefer for providing the funds, and for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this project.