

Atrocity prevention and peacebuilding

Key insights and lessons from a global
consultation convened by Peace Direct



Višegrad Bridge: Bosnia and Herzegovina

About this report

This report presents the analysis and recommendations of atrocity prevention and peacebuilding experts and practitioners from across the globe. Peace Direct held a 4-day online consultation in November and December 2017, in which 96 participants from the field shared their insights and local experiences. 13 contributing experts facilitated 8 sessions over the course of the consultation covering a variety of topics and thematic issues around atrocity prevention.

The report has been edited by Peace Direct while the main sections of this report include contributions from our guest experts, as well as from all participants who engaged in the online consultation. The viewpoints presented represent the consensus of participants and experts, while also noting dissenting views. Where quotes are unattributed, they are from participants in the online consultation.

The contents of this research are the responsibility of Peace Direct. The text in this report should not be taken to represent the views of any other organisation.

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

APB	Atrocity Prevention Board	IPTI	Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative
ATCC	Peasant Workers Association of the Carare River	KNWO	Karenni National Women's Organisation
BINUB	United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi	KWAT	Kachin Women's Association of Thailand
BWU	Burmese Women's Union	KWO	Karen Women's Organisation
CAR	Central African Republic	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CDA	Collaborative Learning Projects	OSAPG	UN Office of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect
CEDAW	Convention on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women	PBF	(UN) Peace Building Fund
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child	R2P/RtoP	Responsibility to Protect
CRSV	Conflict Related Sexual Violence	RSM	Rohingya Society of Malaysia
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
ERRY	Enhanced Rural Resilience in Yemen	TEDiiN	Teens Educational Development and Information Initiative
GAAMAC	Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes Network	TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict	UN	United Nations
ICC	International Criminal Court	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
ICRtoP	International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons	UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	WLB	Women's League of Burma

Introduction and methodology

It has been more than ten years since world leaders at the United Nations World Summit made a commitment to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – a shared global responsibility to protect populations from the risk of mass atrocities. Yet, despite substantial progress in elevating atrocity prevention as a global goal, civilian populations in far too many places across the world are still suffering from egregious crimes.

Atrocity crimes – systematic violence perpetrated against civilians – continue to have devastating impacts on populations in Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq, Yemen, and beyond. The failure to act promptly in the face of these growing crimes, despite strong international norms and national legislation, reflects the limitations of the international system to prevent and stop these killings.

More robust peacekeeping and rapid interventions have shown some promise, but they are reactive and attempt to stop mass violence once it is already underway. Effective prevention will require external responses to be complemented by a longer-term early prevention that focuses on local capacity building and support for actors on the ground, who experience first-hand the early warnings signs of possible mass atrocity and genocide. Indeed, local peacebuilders have long engaged in efforts to bridge divisions in their communities and find local solutions to conflict, despite much hardship.

To explore this further, Peace Direct held a collaborative online consultation for experts and practitioners interested in this area to discuss the nexus between atrocity prevention and peacebuilding. Over four days in November and December 2017, 96 expert participants from diverse contexts and with varied expertise from across the globe took part in a series of discussions around these topics in an online forum set up by Peace Direct collaborated with guest contributors to analyse the consultation findings.

The conversations covered areas such as defining linkages between atrocity prevention and peacebuilding, the role of local communities in self-protection and reconciliation, and the impact of donor practices on atrocity prevention efforts. This report contains key reflections from their discussions, captures major insights from participants and supplements the consultation proceedings with key recommendations from experts in the field. A full list of participants is included on pages 56–59.

The first section of the report focuses on the nexus between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention. Experts from the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) summarise the overlap in purpose and complementarity between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention. This is followed by an article by Steven Leach and Nagwan Al-Ashwal which looks at the different dimensions of inclusivity in the context of peacebuilding and atrocity prevention.

The second section of the report focuses on local initiatives that respond to atrocities. Oliver Kaplan and Cristina Serna explore the effectiveness of community self-protection strategies, while Myles Wallingford and Kate Lonergan look at grassroots reconciliation efforts and their impact on preventing future atrocities in affected communities.

The third section of the reports looks at the role of marginalised groups in preventing atrocities. Dr Sarah Teitt and Visaka Dharmadasa analyse how local peacebuilders can help prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Ehab Badwi then looks at the role of youth as peacebuilders in engaging in atrocity prevention.

The final section of the report centres on the role of the donor community in supporting local atrocity prevention initiatives and focuses on the level of engagement between local peacebuilders and national, regional and international policymakers on atrocity prevention. Brittany Roser reflects on the key opportunities for engagement of all actors on atrocity prevention. Bridget Moix and Landry Ninteretse then assess the effectiveness of the donor community in responding to atrocities, looking specifically at the case of Burundi.

Definitions and International Frameworks

What are atrocity crimes?

The United Nations Framework of Analysis¹ for Atrocity Crimes refers to atrocity crimes as including three legally defined international crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes – and ethnic cleansing, which while not defined as an independent crime under international law, includes acts that are serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that may themselves amount to one of the recognised atrocity crimes.

Genocide: As defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide the term “genocide” refers to acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Even though the victims of the crimes are individuals, they are targeted because of their membership, real or perceived, in one of these groups.

Crimes against humanity: Article VII of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002)² defines crimes against humanity as acts that are part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population.

War crimes: Crimes committed against a diversity of victims, either combatants or non-combatants. In international armed conflicts, victims include those specifically protected by the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocol I. It also includes those protected under the 1977 Additional Protocol II. Protection under international humanitarian law in both types of conflicts covers medical and religious personnel, humanitarian workers and civil defence staff.

Ethnic cleansing: As noted above, ethnic cleansing is not officially recognised as a distinct crime under international law, but entails a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove, by violent and terror-inspiring means, the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas. Thus, ethnic cleansing is encompassed in crimes against humanity, which includes the forcible transfer or deportation of populations.

What is atrocity prevention?

Atrocity prevention refers to a broad range of tools and strategies which aim to prevent the occurrence of mass killings and other large scale human rights abuses committed against civilians. The terms “mass killings” or “mass atrocities” do not have formal legally accepted definitions but are commonly understood to refer to large-scale, intentional attacks on civilians.

What do we mean by prevention?

In terms of prevention, peacebuilding and atrocity prevention can be seen as both a proximate prevention (also referred to as downstream or operational prevention) and structural prevention (or upstream prevention). Proximate prevention³ has traditionally focused on shorter-term crisis response, whereas structural prevention has focused on long-term efforts to address root causes such as economic, social and political exclusion of some groups.

What is peacebuilding?

A variety of official and unofficial definitions⁴ can be elaborated for peacebuilding. United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*⁵, defined peacebuilding as action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict. The 2000 Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (also known as the Brahimi Report⁶) defined it as "activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war."

In 2007, the UN Secretary-General's Policy Committee⁷ agreed on the following conceptual basis for peacebuilding to inform UN practice:

"Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritised, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives."

Responsibility to Protect (R2P or RtoP)

The Responsibility to Protect is a commitment made by world leaders at the United Nations 2005 World Summit⁸ to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. R2P is not a law, but rather a political commitment to guide states and sub-regional, regional and international arrangements in protecting populations from these crimes and violations.

Based on three pillars, this commitment stipulates that:

1. The state bears the primary responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes and violations, including their incitement;
2. The international community has a responsibility to assist and encourage the state in fulfilling its protection obligations;
3. The international community has a responsibility to take appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to help protect populations from these crimes. The international community must also be prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, in accordance with the UN Charter, if a state fails to protect its populations or is in fact the perpetrator of crimes. Such action may entail coercive measures, including the collective use of force, where appropriate, through the UN Security Council.

Sustaining Peace Agenda

In April 2016, the UN Security Council and General Assembly passed the seminal ‘Sustaining Peace’ resolution (A/RES/70/262⁹ or Resolution 2282¹⁰) which defines ‘sustaining peace’ as:

“a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasising that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the Government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three pillars of the United Nations engagement at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention and assistance.”

Across the United Nations system, there is now common agreement that peacebuilding occurs also at the local level and is best sustained through inclusive, people-centred approaches. National ownership is not solely understood as concerning the government but also local individuals, whether they are part of an NGO, belong to a community-based organisation, or are unaffiliated citizens.

Executive summary

The global effort to prevent and stop atrocity crimes – genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing – is enormous and will require a collective, multi-sector approach inclusive of intergovernmental institutions, governments, civil society organisations and networks, academia and local peacebuilding communities. This report presents crucial knowledge from expert peacebuilders across the world that can enrich atrocity prevention efforts, and suggests ways to continue knowledge-sharing.

Our interest in this consultation is first and foremost to support and help improve the efforts of local peacebuilders in preventing mass violence in their local contexts. We also advocate with our partners for national and international decision-makers to strengthen support for local peacebuilding. While “atrocity prevention” has been a growing area of interest for policymakers and donors, little direct engagement with local peacebuilders has taken place to learn what they think works best to avert mass violence.

Our goals for this consultation were to better understand the relationship between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention, create a space for shared research and learning among peacebuilding practitioners, and help bridge the gap between local civil society and international policymakers on these issues. As local peacebuilders are leading preventive efforts to build resilience to and address the root causes of atrocities, we believe that any effort to strengthen and advance atrocity prevention must recognise their contributions.

Without question, the international community, including governments themselves and the United Nations and regional organisations, carry a primary responsibility to prevent and stop atrocities; however, as this report demonstrates, local civil society and locally-led peacebuilding approaches play a critical role. We hope the outcomes of this report will lead to increased support and strengthening for those efforts.

Key findings and recommendations

We asked participants to provide examples and analysis of what types of peacebuilding approaches have worked, what barriers local peacebuilders face, and what it will take for the global community to more effectively prevent future atrocities. Each of the eight thematic sessions generated a series of detailed recommendations, which you can find in each corresponding section of this report. Below, we highlight some common points, key findings, and recommendations. However, this is not an exhaustive list – more thematic recommendations can be found within each section.

Peacebuilding approaches to preventing atrocity crimes

The peacebuilding and atrocity prevention fields of work have historically been considered different, but related fields. A key difference between the fields, and a reason the distinction is often made at the policy and funding levels, is that atrocity prevention is rooted in accountability frameworks such as international criminal justice and human rights, while peacebuilding stems from conflict resolution and prevention frameworks that seek long-term sustainable changes.

Yet, a principal finding of this consultation is that, in practice, on the ground in conflict settings, the distinction matters little. Ultimately, they share common goals, tools, and approaches. The common mission of both fields of work, to prevent violence and mass atrocity, overrides most differences. Indeed, local peacebuilders have worked to prevent genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing long before these terminologies existed. As we heard repeatedly, **“It’s the work that matters, not the labels.”**

Though not exhaustive, below are some peacebuilding approaches identified in this report that can contribute to the prevention of atrocities:

- **Building trust and enhancing opportunities for dialogue**, often between minority and majority ethnic and religious communities, to address the earliest stages of conflict, root causes of conflict, and long-term disputes over grievances, inequalities and trauma that can lead to atrocities.
- **Designing and implementing peace education programmes that seeks to tackle divisions within communities.** These programmes can, for example, contribute to diminishing hate, discrimination, bias and the “dehumanisation of the other” that can unpin the origins of atrocities, promote reconciliation and reduce reoccurrence of atrocities, and diminish the stigma of sexual and gender-based violence on victims and communities.
- **Developing non-violent self-protection strategies.** In the face of impending violence and atrocities, communities worldwide have developed innovative and nonviolent strategies – dependant on the local context and history – including by forming peace communities and neighbourhood watches (some of “ancient” origin), engaging in direct negotiations or mediation with armed forces, and developing early warning capacities to hide and flee from imminent atrocities, among others.
- **Engaging in grassroots reconciliation and healing**, between former insurgents and their communities, to diminish intergroup tensions, deep societal divisions, systematic discrimination and societal trauma that fuel identity-based grievances, contribute to dehumanisation and exclusion through a variety of strategies including cohabitation, building trust and tolerance.
- **Preventing sexual and gender-based violence.** This entails forming networks and coalitions to advocate for legislation, leading in early warning and response, and facilitating training and education to promote gender equality and the changing of bias and negative attitudes toward women affected by SGBV crimes.

Obstacles peacebuilders face in their efforts to prevent atrocities

- **Limitations of working in the context of active atrocities**, especially in communities where groups who are already marginalised and socially and economically disenfranchised cannot organise, advocate or defend themselves.
- **Big-power proxy wars**, where civilians are caught in violent conflicts supported and fuelled by international actors positioning for regional and global influence, coupled with negligent attention and action by regional actors, mean that civilian protection is simply not a priority. The sale of weapons by big powers, and the trade in small arms, only fuels violence further. Local peacebuilding efforts are dwarfed, derailed, and often overwhelmed in these contexts.
- **Insufficient or weak institutional governance** is a common challenge, therefore there may be a lack of policies and programmes to address the deep social divisions that communities face with respect to their religious and ethnic identities, especially in certain countries and contexts where atrocities have previously taken place. In many cases, governments are actively involved in perpetrating atrocities and may perceive local peacebuilding efforts as a threat.
- **The constraints on civil society are ever increasing** with some governments imposing legal barriers on civil society to operate as well as some making direct threats on the physical security of organisations, including harassment, intimidation, attacks, and even death.
- **The prevalence of non-state armed groups**, who may be motivated by local disputes and use them to compel violence against civilians, and recruit children and youth to their forces.
- **Hate speech in the media** heightens tensions and anger and capitalises on social and economic divisions within a society.

Recommendations

- **“Stopping violent conflict can stop atrocities”** is what we heard from consultation participants. Peacebuilding addresses the earliest stages of conflict, root causes of conflict and inequalities that can lead to atrocities. Peacebuilding reinforces atrocity prevention.
- **Take advantage of the early-warning capacities of local communities.** They are especially well prepared to prevent violence before it breaks out and prevent atrocities (in peace or war times). They can be counted on for access to critical information in real time and for observing and documenting signs of impending violence.
- **Engage directly with local communities in the design of atrocity prevention and peacebuilding efforts.** Local communities should lead the design these efforts. Governments and donors should therefore engage in participatory conflict analysis, where “key people” and not “more people” is a priority, and which ensures that there is a proper baseline assessment of the local context.
- **Include all voices in prevention strategies, peacebuilding activities as well as dialogue and peace processes.** This inclusion, especially with the most marginalised groups, is critical to assuring lasting peace. In this same spirit, including government and military (who are often perpetrators of violence) is also important.
- **Improve the funding structures for peacebuilding and atrocity prevention in a way that is not limiting.** Donor funding structures – governmental, intergovernmental and private foundations – should be focused on local capacity building for atrocity prevention by investing in longer-term programming, core organisational support and rapid response funding instruments in the full cycle of conflict, from its root causes to ongoing atrocities to its aftermath.

- **Raise global awareness of massive violations of human rights.** The international community should increase efforts to raise awareness in intergovernmental forums. These efforts should be paired with support to victims, families, and human rights defenders speaking out about the risk of atrocities and SGBV crimes.
- **Undertake advocacy where the Global North is playing a role in fuelling atrocities.** Civil society in the Global North should of the private sector in fuelling atrocities, shine a light on war profiteering and the trade of small arms and weapons, lobby politicians to ensure their governments' proposed policies do not escalate conflicts, and back solidarity campaigns that support the messages and hopes of local peacebuilders.
- **Provide incentives for governments to reform institutions and address disputes that could lead to conflict and mass atrocities.** This will include; prosecuting the perpetrators of atrocity crimes and bringing them to justice; and encouraging warring parties to come to the table through mediation.

Framing session: The peacebuilding and atrocity prevention nexus



Zoomin

Fostering greater cooperation between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention



Laurie Mincieli

Laurie Mincieli is the United Nations Advocacy Liaison Officer & Regional Coordinator for North America at the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)



Pascal Richard

Pascal Richard is Managing Adviser for Policy and Advocacy & Regional Coordinator for West Africa and Southeast Asia at GPPAC.



Jenny Aulin

Jenny Aulin is the Civil Society Programme Manager at Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI), formerly working with GPPAC on this consultation.

Linkages between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention

The peacebuilding and atrocity prevention fields share a common goal of preventing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, and share common approaches. Therefore, the prevention of mass atrocities is sometimes understood as an extension of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding¹¹.

However, a crucial difference between the two fields is that fundamentally, atrocity prevention is rooted in accountability frameworks such as international criminal justice and human rights while peacebuilding prioritises frameworks for cohesion and reconciliation. Therefore, the two fields of practice can also be viewed as “complementary but distinct”¹².

What’s clear, is that the conditions that create risks for mass atrocities also contribute to violent conflict. These include: intergroup competition, political, economic, and/or social grievances, a preparedness and capacity (of at least one party) to use violence, and the perceived lack of legitimate nonviolent options to address issues. Violent conflict and war provides an enabling context for mass atrocities and a large majority of atrocities occur during armed conflicts.

As Mugahed Al-Shaibah pointed out:



“Because atrocities are correlated with conflict, stopping conflict may be one of the most important ways to prevent atrocities,” a view supported by many of the participants.

At the same time, there are instances of mass atrocities occurring in ‘peacetime’ contexts¹³ such as in Myanmar. Proponents of atrocity prevention therefore argue that a specific lens is required to ensure vulnerable groups are protected alongside general, ongoing conflict prevention measures.

Historically, despite the well-established shared goal of preventing violence and mass atrocities, there has been an emphasis on the differences between the peacebuilding and atrocity prevention fields. Emphasising the differences has likely impeded cooperation that could have aided the greater good: the prevention of violence and mass atrocities. This session therefore focused on points of connection and how to foster greater cooperation between the two fields.

As one participant, Jai-Ayla Quest, noted:



“There is an overlap in purpose that would benefit from greater efforts to bring the two communities closer together.”

What did practitioners in the field think?

From early on in the discussion, local peacebuilders expressed that the labels used by the international community to distinguish between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention are not relevant on the ground, where the focus is instead on what the efforts contribute to peace for the local communities.

Throughout the consultation, participants stated: *“It’s the work that matters, not the labels.” And in fact, there is a sense that focusing on differences between the fields has inhibited needed peace work.*

In order to increase cooperation between the fields, the participants (who hailed from both fields) openly articulated challenges to collaboration. These included: the differences in frameworks, audiences and timelines between the fields, a disjointed approach to shared work, a forced distinction between activities of the fields and concern over an organisation’s neutrality or safety.

On the disjointed approach, participant Jessica Olney remarked that this isn’t only an issue for CSOs:



“Within the UN, there has been a highly publicised fracturing between agencies with a development focus versus those with a human rights focus.”

Participants then focused on how peacebuilding approaches can be used to prevent atrocities:

- Tools such as conflict analysis and early warning mechanisms have been used for both conflict prevention and atrocity prevention in Nigeria, Burundi, and Bangladesh.
- Peace education and local mediation, both core tools in the peacebuilding field were identified as critical for atrocity prevention efforts:



“[...] tools like peace media, peace education, community conferencing, or facilitated workshops can be used in a variety of ways to counter inter-group tensions and narratives that may eventually erupt into conflict and lead to mass atrocities.” (Jared Bell).

- Other examples where peacebuilding approaches have proven useful to atrocity prevention included community dialogue in Iraq and Nigeria. In northeast Nigeria, participant Onyekachukwu Ugwu explained that organisations use



“intercultural and interfaith dialogue with relevant stakeholders particularly at the grassroots level to bridge ethnoreligious gaps.”

The most surprising observation from the consultation were the commonalities in conflict settings and mechanisms for prevention across different regions and countries. This finding reinforces the need to share experiences so that practitioners (or academics, or policymakers, or funders) can adapt from one context to another. Consultations like these have proven to be an effective platform for exchanging experiences and lessons.

Across the board, participants also expressed the importance for both peacebuilding and atrocity prevention fields of embracing an inclusive approach that ensures quality engagement of actors at the local, national and international level.

What were their recommendations?

For practitioners

Create formal and informal exchanges

between peacebuilding and atrocity prevention communities to develop analysis, operational frameworks, implementation and advocacy that reinforces the joint prevention objectives. Both fields would also be strengthened by developing a practice-based body of knowledge, experiences, and lessons that can be shared.

Practitioners from both fields should gain increased familiarity with the frameworks, experiences and approaches of the other field. Peacebuilding practitioners, for example, should consider the use of (transitional) justice frameworks in domestic, regional and international contexts as one deterrent for mass atrocity and impunity and a way to disrupt cycles of violence and conflicts.

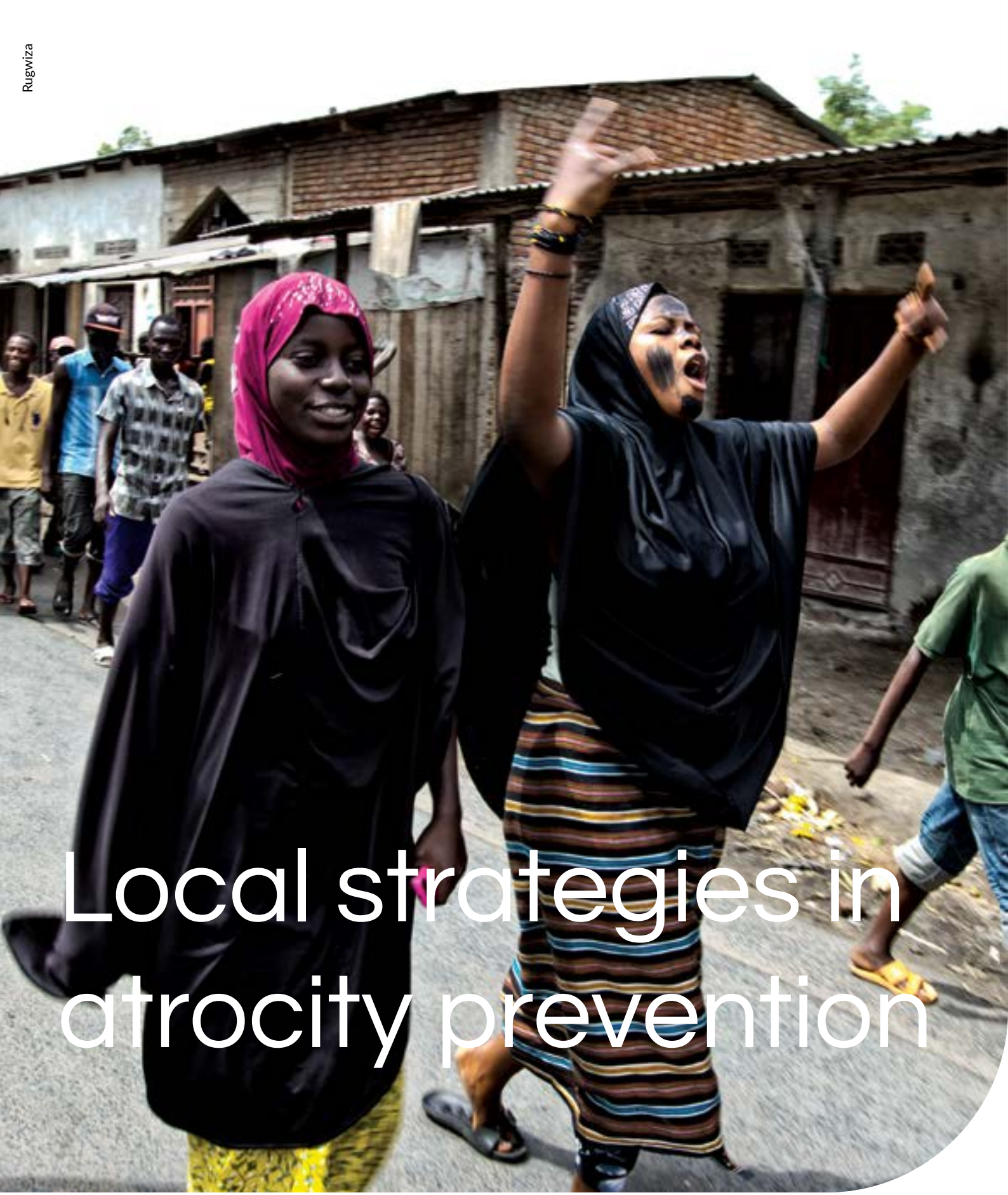
Both peacebuilding and atrocity prevention frameworks should be integrated into the development, implementation and review of programmes.

For international donors, policy- and decision-makers

Adopt a people-centred security lens when considering their policy, funding and decision making – including national economic interests (e.g. arms industry or natural resources).

Be pro-active, engaged and inclusive partners in violence and atrocity prevention efforts. Seek to include civil society, national governments, regional and international actors and private sector, with particular attention to youth, women and minorities as partners. Support (politically and financially) inclusive and adaptive efforts in those fields.

Support opportunities to build increased cooperation between the two fields and participate in formal and informal learning exchanges.



Local strategies in atrocity prevention

The role of inclusivity and atrocity prevention



Steven Leach

Steven Leach is a conflict transformation practitioner, facilitator, and scholar who has written on local approaches to early warning/early response, local ownership in development, and the roles of religion in conflict.



Nagwan Soliman El-Ashwal

Nagwan Soliman El-Ashwal is a conflict transformation trainer and practitioner who has worked and supported local teams to design dialogue processes and to establish early warning and rapid response networks in conflict zones such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan.

The dimensions of inclusivity

In the UN Secretary-General's 2012 report, *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict*¹⁴, inclusivity is defined as “the extent and manner in which the views and needs of parties to conflict and other stakeholders are represented, heard, and integrated into a peace process.” To that end, research has identified two directions in which atrocity prevention efforts must be inclusive in order to be effective.

Horizontal inclusivity is essential to atrocity prevention. As touched upon in the previous article, it is essential to include women, youth, religious minorities, migrants and other marginalised peoples. Such stakeholders are often excluded from prevention efforts, especially at the design and planning stages, but they are the most sensitive to escalating social tensions, have access to information beyond the reach of central actors and are also the first groups targeted in the perpetration of atrocities. Migrants in South Africa told of escalating tensions in 2008, before dozens were killed in riots, but their concerns did not reach those with the ability to intervene. Moreover, such groups have access to additional cultural resources and practices that may be critical to successful prevention. Sudanese women called Hakamat provide one example, as they work to ease tensions through poetry – we learned the same is true in the experience of one participant working in Somalia.

The second direction of inclusivity is equally important but more challenging – *upward*, looking to include government and security actors. *Upward* refers to the hierarchical position of government and security actors. Such actors often perpetrate atrocities, which is a key reason they must be brought to the prevention and peacebuilding table at the earliest stages, as implied accountability can deter actions. Their role in committing atrocities is also a reason that there may be reluctance to bring them into conversations about prevention and peace. Whether they are directly party to violence or have only a weak or absent presence, government and security actors are often gatekeepers.

The word inclusivity itself has earned negative connotations in some circles, whether because of failed efforts at inclusivity or the perceived imposition of external norms upon local processes. Nevertheless, the experiences of the consultation participants reflect how critical inclusivity is for effective atrocity prevention.

Horizontal inclusion

Participants generally agreed on the importance of horizontal inclusivity. Sudaba Shialiyeva articulated the importance of including women to positively influence prevention efforts and peace negotiations (see also Schmeidl and Piza-Lopez, 2002¹⁵):



“Women should be involved in peace negotiations, not only because they represent a significant part of the population, but also because they have the competence to conduct such negotiations. The absence of women at the negotiating table – this is not only unfair, but also inefficient.”

In addition Jared Bell described how budget constraints within the Burundian NGO, Human Dignity, meant they didn't have a strong network within the country, which impeded access to critical information. Meanwhile, Marie Lamensch asserted that designing a process that does not give voice to all corners of a society leaves latent grievances that will resurface over time, fomenting future atrocities.

While participants agreed on the value of inclusivity, there was consensus that horizontal inclusivity cannot be prescribed and does not look the same from one context to another. Qamar Jafri argued that inclusivity is often idealised and “Western oriented.” His comment points to an important truth – peacebuilding and atrocity prevention efforts must be context sensitive. Indeed, donors and INGOs often apply rubrics without first building relationships within a community.

Upward inclusivity

With regard to upward inclusivity, participant Anaïs Caput stated:



“In order to promote upward inclusivity, but also to contribute to the prevention of atrocities committed by security forces, Search [for Common Ground] believes in the importance of building or restoring trust, promoting dialogue, and fostering collaboration between communities and security actors.”

In this way, upward inclusivity creates indirect accountability, while also presenting direct opportunities for community engagement.

In creating opportunities for upward inclusivity, David Porter emphasised that humanising child soldiers, refugees and other combatants is connected to positive reintegration.

While the consensus rested on the importance of inclusivity in both directions to prevent atrocities, the other prominent agreement was that inclusivity is not easy¹⁶. There are political, social and cultural barriers to including racial minorities, youth, migrants and women.

A word of caution was also heard throughout the consultation. Whenever people from the margins of a society are engaged, they may become more prominent targets for atrocities. Likewise, involving security actors can compromise the independence of civil society actors working to prevent atrocities.

Without broad inclusion of marginalised populations as well as government and security actors, the pathway to violent atrocities will remain open.

Recommendations

- **Include marginalised groups at the start of prevention efforts.** Horizontal inclusivity is important not only to atrocity prevention, but also to the initial planning and design phase. Since horizontal inclusivity helps provide key information to act upon in prevention efforts, that same information is useful in shaping strategies and activities.
- **Inclusivity requires contextual sensitivity.** What inclusivity looks like in Egypt differs from in Nigeria differs from Timor Leste. The goal remains to incorporate more views, to act with the best available information and to protect those most likely to be targeted.
- **Partnering with government actors** to promote social integration between marginalised communities is sometimes necessary, for example to prevent individuals from joining non-state armed groups. Trust building between local community leaders/practitioners and policymakers may be necessary
- **External actors must be cautious and context sensitive.** Their actions and stipulations can create the impression that “inclusivity” is a forced Western notion rather than an essential component of atrocity prevention. Promoting marginalised groups can also expose them to greater attention and, potentially, atrocities. External actors must walk a careful line, deferring to local actors, supporting local efforts to prevent atrocities and taking care to do no harm.

Self-protection strategies are key to atrocity prevention

In memory of Hector Piñeros of La India, “El Llanero”— “The Plainsman.” May he live on in our hearts and may his life and principled resistance inspire our work for peace.



Oliver Kaplan

Oliver Kaplan is an Assistant Professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver.



Cristina Serna

Cristina Serna is the current President of the Peasant Workers Association of the Carare River (ATCC), one of Colombia's earliest local peace organisations.

What does self-protection mean in the context of atrocity prevention?

Mass atrocities can occur with little warning and the international community may have little capacity (or political will) to intervene. Self-protection strategies employed by civil society actors and local communities offer an alternative to awaiting help and support from the outside.

Self-protection refers to when a targeted or vulnerable community comes together to protect themselves in a nonviolent manner from impending violence and atrocities. Communities worldwide have developed innovative nonviolent strategies to cope with threats and prevent violence and atrocities¹⁷. These strategies range from community strengthening to nonviolent pressuring of armed actors. Examples include:

- Informal, small-scale village and neighbourhood organisations¹⁸ that serve as an organising and mobilisation space to take protective action.
- Formal peace communities and humanitarian spaces¹⁹, such as the “Peace Zones” in the Philippines and the Peasant Workers Association of the Carare River (ATCC) in Colombia.
- In Colombia, the ATCC promotes a culture of pacifist and nonviolent norms within the community while at the same negotiating with armed actors.

The essence of self-protection strategies is that they are locally designed and implemented, yet there are many examples of international actors—from states, to NGOs, to international organisations—successfully aiding communities through accompaniment²⁰ and technical support. Working with external supporters, communities can develop early warning capacities which can help them anticipate impending violence. However, there is a potential risk of soliciting outside support for self-protection: their accompaniment may encourage communities to remain in harm's way or their support²¹ may inadvertently²² reach armed actors.

Sharing experiences of civilian self-protection

All peaceful avenues to prevent and respond to atrocities are worth considering. In this spirit, participants discussed existing approaches for community self-protection to stem atrocities, context, risks and the role of external actors in accompaniment. Participants touched on different elements that positively contribute to a community's ability to mobilise and develop self-protection strategies.

Participants also considered the risks and moral hazards that may arise from external support to local peace movements in times of war.

Early action and early warning

Participants emphasised acting early, and not waiting until “dire circumstances force terrible options on them” (anonymous participant). Even seemingly peaceful communities should organise early and develop measures to protect vulnerable residents.

Daniel Solomon from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum noted that in Zimbabwe, human rights groups that report violations also serve the function of preventively warning about the occurrence of violence.

Serna, of the ATCC in Colombia, stated that early warning is



“Indispensable to both inform the authorities and the entire community about what is happening in the region to counteract future atrocities. Communities must be vigilant and alert to new people and new commanders among armed actors.”

Chikaodili Orakwue of Nigeria noted that neighbourhood watches and local surveillance are mechanisms for gathering information that can then be acted upon rapidly to prevent violence.

Local reconciliation customs for self-protection

Kais Aliriani of Yemen observed that there are “ancient” community arrangements and “traditional mechanisms” to help keep peace. Kazi Nasrin Siddiq mentioned the institution of the “Village Court” in Bangladesh, a common forum for problem-solving.

According to Yusuf Omar, in some countries, such as in Somalia, traditional dispute resolution practices have eroded due to intervention by colonial powers and long-running conflict and political disputes, and new institutions have not yet emerged to “replace the old system.” However, ad hoc and uncoordinated civil society movements are emerging through efforts by diaspora returnees and locals trained by international NGOs. These movements could be aided in rescuing the lessons of the past and rebuilding traditional community protection institutions.

Sometimes reconciliation is even formalised through local peace agreements, like in Burundi when two conflicting communities pursued dialogue and agreed to let their differences go.

Role of leaders

Participants also emphasised the central roles of leaders and local elites to organise communities, confront atrocities and assist with mediation. One anonymous participant noted that, during the 1993 civil war in Burundi, some localities “resisted the violence and killings of people from different ethnic groups because some important and respected personalities said ‘No.’” This point was seconded by Fazeeha Azmi, who noted how leaders help promote community self-protection strategies in ethnically divided societies, such as Sri Lanka.

Discussion moderator Cristina Serna of Colombia noted the importance of community leaders in guiding her community “towards calm and keeping hope alive.”

In the “Village Courts” of Bangladesh mentioned by Kazi Nasrin Siddiq,



“a group of leaders, seniors, educated persons formed a strong local council to solve local problems immediately before going to police or court.”

Inclusivity

As fully discussed in the previous article on inclusivity, participants emphasised the importance of being inclusive whilst setting up protection measures. A lack of inclusivity can further stoke conflict and limits potential impact of the peacebuilding and prevention efforts.

Messaging for community cohesion

There was broad agreement that self-protection strategies depend on the “existing bond within communities before the onset of state-sponsored repression and mass atrocities” (anonymous participant).

Participants noted that messaging strategies can reinforce community cohesion and social ties and serve a self-protection function. Peace media, peace education and social dialogue workshops can promote bridging social capital within communities. By contrast, diverging news sources and narratives can generate ideological divides and impede cooperation among different communities or ethnic groups. This disunity can make it more difficult to influence the behaviour of armed actors (e.g., in Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Armed self-protection

While most of the discussion centred on nonviolent approaches, some participants also highlighted the effectiveness of armed local responses to violent threats. Onyekachukwu Ugwu noted the effectiveness of Community Vigilante Movements in Nigeria to counter threats from the Boko Haram insurgent group. The hunter's guild and neighbourhood watch in Adamawa state was viewed as instrumental for recapturing towns from the insurgents. However, he and others also noted that the "heavy" approach of armed self-defence can bring risks of extra-judicial killings and reprisal attacks. Though a valid form of self-protection, there was consensus amongst consultation participants that such armed approaches depart from more inclusive nonviolent approaches and may invite retaliation.

While the consultation discussion didn't focus on the role of external actors in supporting self-protection strategies, there was clear consensus that international actors can provide support but must take care not to undermine local capacities.

Recommendations

As demonstrated in the examples throughout this section, local, community-based self-protection is an important strategy in both preventing atrocities and reducing the impact of violence. Here are some ways that local communities and the international community can promote community-based self-protection:

- **Organise early at the local level**, even before atrocity threatens, and draw in respected leaders that can positively influence organisation and peace.
- **Peace and mediation committees comprised of men, women and youth, and representing different ethnic and political affiliations, can be trained to respond to violence** and act as a deterrent in communities where atrocity prevention is most needed.
- **Understand the local historical context traditions** which could be relevant to developing civilian self-protection.
- **Communities pursuing self-protection should engage with the state when possible.** However, while state institutions must be respected, communities but also be vigilant about their own protection and would be wise to adopt "trust but verify" stances when interacting with officials.



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A women-led protection initiative in Yemen^{23,24,25}



"Here in Yemen, women are not passive spectators of the conflict in Yemen but are actively involved: from contributing to the war effort and combat, to protecting their families, to leading humanitarian relief efforts, or reducing tensions and promoting cohesion within their communities."

Mugahed Al-Shaibah

As fighting continues between Saudi backed pro-government forces and Houthi rebels in Yemen, life must go on for Yemeni families throughout the country. While men have taken up arms against each other, women are left to take up the responsibilities as breadwinners, care-givers and protectors. In Yemen, as in all conflict situations, women have to negotiate all of these roles under difficult circumstances.

The recruitment of women into both pro-government and Houthi rebel forces in cities like the besieged Taiz in the South-West of Yemen is increasing. This creates a cloak for smuggling and for the movement of military personnel. Men do not search women, nor do they raid homes where women are present, which gives rebel forces the opportunity to move undetected when disguised as women. Recruiting women brings a solution to this problem, and many take up the roles of policing checkpoints to help bring peace to their city.

Asmaa al Sharabi joined pro-government forces when the war broke out and has "worked shoulder-to-shoulder with men on the frontlines, storming houses, because the Houthis were disguising themselves as women to flee." Despite concern from her family Sharabi insists that she will continue her work as she is "fighting for the sake of Taiz."

The majority of women in Yemen, however, want to see an end to the conflict without taking up arms. Individual women and women's organisations work tirelessly to find ways of negotiating life in wartime as peacefully as possible. To find relative peace in Yemen women have been standing up to those looking to bring the conflict to them.

Nusaibah Assaqqaf did just that.

In April 2015 an armed group of young men tried to enter the area in which she lived, an area home to IDPs made up of women and children. Nusaibah knew that the youth in the area would do anything in their power to defend their families from the armed rebels, and that conflict would be inevitable if she allowed this group to pass through. She decided to mobilise a group of senior and influential female community members and marched to where the armed group was stationed.

Defiantly the group of women told the armed men that they could not pass through. At first the young men were shocked; they considered the actions of these women shameful as they tried to undermine the actions of men. The women insisted that the area was populated only by civilians and IDPs and that the men had no reason to be there. After continued negotiation, the armed group was ordered by its superiors to stay away from Nusaibah's area and to not engage with any of the youth from that area. These women had stood their ground and possible conflict had been prevented.

Nusaibah Assaqqaf proved herself an adept negotiator of peace. Since this incident she has continued to practice peaceful negotiation and delivered training to 33 insider mediators in the Tuban district on conflict resolution, supported by the Enhanced Rural Resilience in Yemen (ERRY) Programme.

As the conflict escalates there have been continued calls for women to be present at the negotiation table. As hopes for peace talks fade, the involvement of women is essential for an inclusive peace process to yield lasting results. If one woman can lead a group to stand up against young armed men, the defiance of women in the face of conflict could bring an end to the civil war in Yemen.

Locally-led reconciliation and healing as atrocity prevention



Myles Wallingford

Myles Wallingford is Programme Coordinator for the Post-Conflict Research Center



Kate Lonergan

Kate Lonergan is a PhD Candidate with the Hugo Valentin Centre and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University.

Linking reconciliation to atrocity prevention

In the aftermath of an atrocity, reconciliation²⁶ involves building peaceful relationships and mutual respect between former adversaries. This can happen through both a 'top-down' process, using laws and institutions to create a framework for peace, and a 'bottom-up' process, bringing people together at the grassroots level to build relationships and heal divisions. Grassroots reconciliation takes many forms²⁷ including trauma healing, dialogue, mediation, community development, engagement with arts and culture and documenting the past.

Grassroots reconciliation has great potential to mitigate the social and political factors that create atrocity risk: intergroup tensions, deep societal divisions, systematic discrimination, and societal trauma. If reconciliation efforts can address these risk factors, they may help to prevent future violence and atrocities.

Evidence is mixed regarding the contributions of grassroots reconciliation to the prevention of future atrocities. Some grassroots reconciliation efforts, such as a public photography exhibitions²⁸ held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have shown positive impacts²⁹ on intergroup tensions, social divisions and discrimination. At the same time, another study³⁰ found that a grassroots reconciliation programme in Sri Lanka had limited effect on atrocity risk factors.

The consultation looked at the ways in which 'reconciliation' is suited for atrocity prevention (or not) and the contributions of grassroots and international actors to this process.

How is reconciliation relevant to atrocity prevention?

The discussion identified aspects of reconciliation practice that are most relevant for atrocity prevention. The most common paths mentioned were "trust", "empathy", "forgiveness", "social cohesion" (in its diverse forms), and "mutual understanding" of the past:

- Qamar Jafri pointed out that building bridges through trust can encourage diverse communities to resist violent influences from both state and non-state actors.
- Many participants noted that involving key community leaders in reconciliation processes can help diffuse emerging tensions and address atrocity risks as they develop. Bella Nceke cautioned that risk factors may remain if those in positions of power, particularly the army or police, are not involved in the reconciliation process.
- Reconciliation can also catalyse individual breakthroughs and develop critical thinking around issues that contribute to atrocity risk. While it is often difficult for these individual-level transformations to extend to the group level, they are important first steps to reducing atrocity risks.

Reconciliation at the grassroots and national levels

All participants agreed there is a distinction between grassroots and national-level reconciliation efforts and dynamics. Grassroots and national reconciliation offer different advantages, depending on the context in which activities are implemented, and both may serve important violence and atrocity prevention functions.

Grassroots reconciliation can be implemented within a shorter time frame and tailored to local needs and priorities, and



"they tend to work because they are locally-owned and have more legitimacy among the population." (Marie Lamensch).

National reconciliation was discussed as better equipped to work with communities across the country and to unify diverse populations. National level reconciliation unusually has greater (financial) resources to complete projects.

Timing: long-term and short-term atrocity prevention

Some participants pointed out that the value of reconciliation efforts to address atrocity risks may occur over many years or generations. While these changing dynamics can contribute to long-term prevention, in the short-term society may still remain vulnerable to atrocity triggers. There are examples, though, of how reconciliation can influence short-term prevention. For example, Mariana Goetz said that



"supporting religious leaders or other individuals of influence or targeting key audiences such as youth might be necessary when atrocities are imminent."

Role of the international community

Moses Julius Muganga pointed out that the international community can collaborate with grassroots reconciliation efforts to monitor and support peace building processes, humanitarian interventions and human rights standards. While the international community has the potential to play an important role in atrocity prevention, they are sometimes limited by capacity or willingness. In addition, as Jared Bell pointed out:



"No matter what pressure the international community may put on a State, under international law States still have a monopoly over their own social and political affairs."

Cautions

Reconciliation contributes to atrocity prevention, but participants also highlighted concerns about connecting the two areas, in large part because of how each strategy draws on a different framework.

Transitional justice³¹ seeks to hold perpetrators of mass violence and atrocity accountable for their crimes and provide redress for victims. Transitional justice has the potential to complement efforts to reconcile and rebuild positive relationships, but these processes can also clash. Onyekachukwu Ugwu highlighted the gacaca courts in Rwanda, which held genocide suspects accountable, as an example of effective community-level justice processes that work in tandem with reconciliation processes.

On the other hand, Sawssan Abou-Zahr raised the possibility of reconciliation processes overshadowing justice:



"Reconciliation does not equal impunity, and impunity should not be tolerated or promoted as a necessary quick means of ending wars/conflicts."

While the tone and focus had been on improving reconciliation efforts as a method for atrocity prevention, contributors pointed out that reconciliation might, in some circumstances, be counterproductive. It was mentioned that reconciliation can be “misused and manipulated by governments. It was the case in the Middle East in post-conflict societies... [where] it is deliberately used in official rhetoric to overshadow the principle of transitional justice.” (Sawssan Abou-Zahr). In Abou-Zahr’s view, transitional justice would end the impunity of those who might currently be in power positions.

In some circumstances, it was said that reconciliation can distract from more important post-conflict issues, such as justice. The feelings and emotions associated with reconciliation can overpower a push for justice when



“justice is swept under the carpet under the guise of sheer sentiment”
(Onyekachukwu Ugwu).

This leads to a lack of social cohesion and re-traumatisation. Reconciliation might also carry connotations that alienate local actors, particularly when local processes are thought to be co-opted by external actors.

One participant (anonymous) noted that reconciliation has other shortcomings, including an element of superficiality and a potential “triggering” effect if people have not been given proper time to heal, gain trust, or work through issues. Reconciliation might also not have the commonly believed utility of bridging gaps and increasing inclusivity and instead, could cause further divides.

Recommendations

Strengthen elements of reconciliation practice that work to prevent future atrocities.

- Focus on “key people” as opposed to “more people”; the latter is often the focus of grassroots building activities.
- Interpersonal relationship building should teach empathy and self-awareness skills to reverse the process of dehumanisation.
- Strengthening social cohesion and trauma healing at the community level.
- Spend more time measuring impact, assessing outcomes, and adapting programming to meet emerging local priorities.
- Employ “mass contact” methods (i.e.: cultural events, shared-value dialogue) to build cohesion and bridge diverse communities.

Allow local stakeholders to guide and shape reconciliation processes

- Local actors should define what reconciliation means and outline their priorities and needs within a reconciliation process.
- Conditions attached to foreign aid should allow for flexibility in local implementation methods.
- Rules of engagement and monitoring mechanisms should be locally-established to ensure benefits are provided to grassroots initiative’s end users (i.e. victims).

Consider reconciliation and justice in tandem

- Ensure that reconciliation does not overshadow or obscure accountability efforts and is not imposed on victims actively seeking justice and truth.
- Carefully consider sequencing of reconciliation and transitional justice processes.
- Where appropriate, include restorative justice in grassroots reconciliation processes to promote perpetrator accountability and address impunity while working towards better relationships. Some efforts may include working with both perpetrators and victims to promote trauma healing.

Tailor responsibilities of international and local actors

- International and local actors should identify and delegate their best-suited responsibilities.
- Internationals should monitor and promote human rights, democracy, good governance, humanitarian intervention, and accountability.
- Local actors should provide education, dialogue training, and local community support.
- National reconciliation process should implement cease-fire and peace agreements, citizen consultations, legal development, and appoint truth commissions before they can be brought to citizens.

How can sexual and gender-based atrocity crimes be prevented?



Dr Sarah Teitt

Dr Sarah Teitt is the Deputy Director and Researcher at the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in the School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland.



Visaka Dharmadasa

Visaka Dharmadasa is the founder and chair of the Association of War Affected Women and Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action.

Sexual and gender-based violence as a 'weapon of war'

Sexual violence is often used strategically in the perpetration of atrocity crimes. Perpetrators engage in systematic rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation and other forms of sexualised violence in a calculated manner as a means to punish, terrorise and destroy individuals and communities. In 2008, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820, which recognised that widespread sexual and gender-based violence can constitute an act of genocide, a war crime or a crime against humanity. When used as part of a strategy to displace or expel opposing ethnic, religious or other identity groups, SGBV is a tool for ethnic cleansing.

Although women and girls arguably face greater risk of sexual violence in atrocity situations, the widespread and strategic use of SGBV is not a 'women's issue'. Men and boys are often silent victims of sexual violence³², and are particularly vulnerable to sexualised forms of torture in detention. Moreover, an uptick in patterns of sexual violence against identity groups can be an early warning sign³³ of preparations for the broader targeting of those communities.

The following are known risk factors associated with sexual and gender-based atrocity crimes:

- weak protection of women's rights
- lack of accountability for perpetrators
- limits to SGBV data collection and reporting
- the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW)
- the marginalisation of women in transitional justice mechanisms

Strengthening accountability

Impunity emboldens perpetrators, silences victims and makes it more difficult to deter future attacks.

As David Porter noted:



“Atrocities take place when people believe they can do whatever they want and there will be no consequences. Crimes go unreported because people have no faith that anything will ever be done, or worse [that] they will be attacked again for speaking out.”

Prosecution for SGBV crimes is important for ending cycles of violence and can prompt institutional changes that can provide long-term protection from future gender-based atrocity crimes.

Tatiana Gos remarked:



“In Latin America... ground-breaking judicial cases on SGBV (within and outside the context of an armed conflict) have opened avenues to influence different government departments to adopt measures to combat structural discrimination against women that is rooted not only in social values and beliefs but also reflected in norms and governing practices.”

Participants further emphasised the importance of strengthening accountability for SGBV in the security sector, citing research which shows that less SGBV occurs in situations where military commanders and military units prohibit³⁴ sexual violence, and where military institutions³⁵ endorse norms against sexual violence in their training and education. As Marie Lamensch asserted, there needs to be a clear message to security forces that

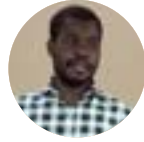


“Rape is a crime and you will be prosecuted. It is an abuse of power.”

Building coalitions to support local actors

Building coalitions and alliances can galvanise social and institutional responses to SGBV crimes in important ways.

Onyekachukwu Ugwu stated:



“When CSOs, development partners and local groups come together in the form of a coalition, it becomes easier to identify unseen gaps and weaknesses as well as highlight them for policy remedies. Coalitions can facilitate advocacy for the passage of bills relevant to SGBV at the national level and accelerate their domestication at the state and grassroots level.”

Participants likewise emphasised that networks of local organisations focused on gender and women’s rights should lead early warning and response efforts.

Nicholas Dickson shared his belief that:



“Women’s CSO groups are key to understand potential early warning of SGBV...if you don’t consider women’s CSOs, or seek to understand their networks, influence, you will miss a huge portion of the data out there, and decisions made under such circumstances will be questionable at best.”

Engaging men

Jared Bell highlighted that it is



“Especially important to include young men in SGBV prevention efforts, because unfortunately, SGBV stems from notions of patriarchy and misogyny that exist in many societies across the world. Working with young men is an important part in transforming their narrative and the risks of SGBV.”

Including men in SGBV education can help deconstruct the ‘militarised’ patriarchy that normalises sexual violence and instead cultivate more even-handed social perceptions of women in society.

Participants agreed that across regions, SGBV and women’s rights training and education programmes at the community level often target only women.

Cecilia Deme offered strategies for addressing this problem:



“The environment in which the course is organised makes a huge difference. For instance, in small village South Sudan, a SGBV course would only have female participants. Inside an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, however, both women and men participated.”

Context sensitive training and education

There was consensus amongst consultation participants that education is key to SGBV prevention. This education can logically take place in schools, reaching the population of young people in formal school settings, and should be a curriculum developed for both young women and men. This emphasis on education was especially surprising as so much of the focus internationally has been on deterrence and legal accountability.

For consultation participants, context-sensitive educational and public awareness programmes are the most effective route to long-term prevention. Programming must highlight the consequences of SGBV on victims, communities, society and broader peace and development. While participants recognised the vital role of training for community leaders and government agents, they offered new insight into the need for more ‘bottom up’ approaches to training and education that incorporates gender peace education in national curricula.

Ultimately, education can alter social perceptions of women, according to Jane Obiora:



“Transforming mindsets and changing the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of people that commit SGBV”.

Recommendations

- **Offer better guidance** on the timing, sequencing and coordination of SGBV prevention efforts in order to identify which strategies and/or policy options work best in a given context and how to combine them effectively.
- **Prioritise education and training**, ranging from scenario-based training for the military to community-level dialogue, to help build public awareness of the damage caused by SGBV.
- **Engage men in SGBV prevention efforts** and integrate SGBV training as a core component in existing programmes rather than offering them as stand-alone courses.
- **Provide support to SGBV victims' support networks** so that individuals can feel more empowered to come forward and tell their stories, thereby increasing the chances of successful prosecution.
- **Link atrocity prevention to UNSCR 1325**, which calls for women's full and equal participation and gender mainstreaming in all peace and security initiatives at all levels.
- **Make gender-sensitive training mandatory** for all security sector institutions.



Defiant in the face of fear: women's organisations standing up to SGBV in Myanmar

Since clashes broke out in late August 2017, the Burmese military has mounted a brutal campaign targeting the Muslim Rohingya, killing thousands and forcing over 600,000 to flee the predominantly Buddhist country to neighbouring Bangladesh. The UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has called the situation "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing." With the mass persecution of the Rohingya in the international spotlight, Myanmar's history of mistreatment against minorities has finally come to light.

Myanmar has a long history of brutalising ethnic minorities, including the Kachin, the Karen, the Karenni, the Rohingya, the Shan, and other minority groups, as part of a government's policy of 'Burmanisation' – an ultra-nationalist Burmese ideology based on racial purity and the Buddhist faith.

As part of this policy, sexual violence has become an institutionalised practice of Myanmar's armed forces. Indeed, a prominent and disturbing feature of the Burmese military's campaign against the Rohingya has been the widespread and sometimes systematic use of rape by Myanmar's military against Rohingya women and girls. This is consistent with growing evidence that the Myanmar military are using SGBV to expel ethnic groups, intimidate witnesses of crimes against humanity, and incite violence between groups; constituting acts of genocide.

This practice reflects many of the structural barriers affecting women and girls of minority groups in the country. Some of the risk factors that contribute to the prevalence of SGBV include a culture of impunity, a lack of adequate reporting and accountability, a complete lack of transitional justice, and no support system for victims; all of which are compounded by gender inequality, especially in positions of political power and influence.

Burmese women's civil society organisations have long been pushing back against persistent, violent abuse against women and girls, each taking a different approach to mitigate SGBV in their communities and each challenging a different risk factor that needs to be removed from Burmese society.

Widespread gender inequality compounds these risk factors as the experience of women and girls is not treated with due respect. In peace processes, and in positions of political power and influence in Myanmar, there is a distinct lack of women. The Burmese Women's Union (BWU) seek to empower women and change this gender imbalance across Myanmar. Community discussions and exchanges encourage the development of women's ideas on how to prevent SGBV. BWU also offer training on community leadership, law administration, voter education and other skills to promote women into positions of power within their communities. If women can occupy positions of power, they can offer far greater assistance to victims of SGBV but getting there is also fraught with danger.

The Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) has interviewed many female chiefs across Myanmar who have become targets of SGBV by the Myanmar military. Crimes including extra-judicial killings, torture and rape are continuously being covered up and silenced through the perpetual use of SGBV against female chiefs. The courage of the KWO and the women across Myanmar whom they represent demonstrates the power that women have in standing up against the atrocities of the military.

Where the military can be held accountable in civilian courts, a culture of impunity would not be allowed to persist. The Women's League of Burma (WLB), a Thailand-based umbrella organisation in exile, continually advocates for a change to the law where the Convention on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (of which Myanmar is a signatory) would be integrated into domestic law and the military could be held accountable.

A lack of transitional justice and accountability from previous conflicts leaves victims of SGBV unsure of whether they will ever find justice. The Kachin Women's Association of Thailand (KWAT) works on advocacy at the national and international level to highlight the awful situation for so many women in Myanmar. KWAT is trying to bring justice to victims, and also highlights the extent to which the military has gone towards covering up atrocities in the past.

A change in the law can help bring justice to victims and works to prevent a further perpetuation of SGBV, but a large part of what fails women and girls is a complete lack of treatment and assistance to victims. In January 2018, the Rohingya Society of Malaysia (RSM) opened a safe transitional home run by refugees for Rohingya refugee survivors of SGBV and their families in the Klang Valley. The shelter is managed full-time by a team of trained Rohingya refugee workers and is led by a Rohingya refugee named Kushida. A similar house has been opened by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Shamlapur Refugee camp in Bangladesh that offers a safe space for the thousands of victims of SGBV.

Likewise, the Karenni National Women's Organisation (KNWO) has set up a safe house in Karenni state for survivors of gender-based violence who need emergency assistance and protection. The organisation offers protection as well as legal guidance and support to help bring the perpetrators to justice.

In the face of countless atrocities, women's CSOs are standing up to the Myanmar government and military to challenge the use of SGBV. The international community is failing in Myanmar, but local organisations are demonstrating the power of women in processes of peace and security. Continued advocacy and calls for change will not cease until the world takes notice and the Myanmar government removes impunity and give justice to victims of SGBV.



Youth, peacebuilding and atrocity prevention



Ehab Badwi

Ehab Badwi is the Regional Focal Point – Middle East and North Africa – Humanitarian Affairs for the UN Major Group for Children and Youth and President and Co-Founder of the Syrian Youth Assembly (SYA)

The United Nations' 2015 World Population Prospects report estimates³⁶ that there are 1.3 billion youths aged 15–24 in the world, and nearly one billion of them live in developing countries where conflict is more likely to take place. Despite their demographic importance, youths are frequently overlooked when it comes to discussions on conflict. For a fuller analysis of inclusion in atrocity prevention.

In this global context, youths are commonly seen by policymakers and donors in over-simplified terms, either infantilising or demonising them. On the one hand, youths are perceived as vulnerable, impressionable, powerless and in need of protection. On the other, they are seen as potentially dangerous, erratic in behaviour and prone to violence and destruction. This simplified way of viewing young people fails to consider their potential to become positive change-makers and peacebuilders in their society. Fortunately, a growing research literature – underpinned by the 'agency' perspective – has increasingly recognised youths as effective political and social actors in post-conflict societies.

In December 2015, the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security recognised the positive contributions that youths make towards peace and set an overall framework to support their efforts. Indeed, in May 2016, the UN Peacebuilding Fund started its first Youth Promotion Initiative, which encourages youth leadership in peacebuilding. This is indeed a positive trend, but success will depend on whether or not such initiatives can also respond to the wider socio-economic, cultural and political barriers that young people face.

When engaging youth, it is pivotal to avoid the cliché of youth as 'future leaders'. Youth should be considered as leaders today. The consultation participants appreciate the valuable contributions that youth can make now towards preventing atrocity and contributing to peace.

Youths in conflict settings

Youths are often at the forefront of conflict crises and are most affected by poor governance, unemployment and poverty. Marie Lamensch stated:



"Individuals who take part in conflicts are often young, and the reasons why they join are engrained in local problems, bad governance, lack of employment and lack of political participation."

Before, during, and after conflict there is a breakdown of social support systems, a disruption in schooling and a general weakening of communal bonds. With a lack of alternatives, youths are victims of circumstance, experience extreme hardships and are more prone to radicalisation and active involvement in the conflict itself. Highlighted an anonymous participant:



"Young people are often turned into instruments of violence through the manipulation of warmongers who rely on their lack of experience, unemployment and false promises about a bright future."

Youth vulnerability persists long after the end of conflict, but their situation is often ignored for more immediate concerns. Ignoring youths can directly undermine post-conflict peacebuilding and exacerbates the very issues peacebuilders seek to mitigate.

Jared Bell rationalises,



"We can talk about peacebuilding and reconciliation, but this is for naught if young people can't make an adequate living."

Youths are the demographic key to reconstruction, peacebuilding and long-term development.

Participant Nicholas Dickson refers to this dilemma in Afghanistan:



"the 'youth bulge' seems to be one of the most common critical civil vulnerabilities discussed in [military] operations involving stability tasks. My Afghan experience was almost solely based on the concept of 'take care of the youth and things will eventually work their way out'."

Youths can shape a peaceful future

Youths can shape the transition from war to peace, either as positive actors for change or as peace spoilers.

For youths to be active, positive, participants in reconstruction, atrocity prevention and peacebuilding, there needs to be a re-shaping of stigmas and how youths perceive themselves.

Participant Bella Nceke asserted that youths can only play a positive role if they can



"separate themselves from the history of the conflict, otherwise they will see themselves as part of its continuation. Therefore, it is important that the new generations see themselves not as victims or parties to the conflict, but rather as those who have the potential to change history and write a different one for future generations."

The Post-Conflict Research Centre in Sarajevo explained that "young people have the potential to be natural leaders in the field of reconciliatory activity, since many of them do not hold onto historical prejudice in the same way that older generations do."

James Offuh insisted that



"youths be given a priority focus by equipping them with the communication and leadership skills necessary to address the root causes of hatred, discrimination and violence." The topic of training for youths is discussed more fully below

The potential of youths

Most participants further agreed that life skills training can enable young people to manage risk more effectively, be productive members of their families and their communities, break stigmas and bridge a generational divide. Such skills training could include youth-focused vocational training; civic awareness and income-generating activities; and sports and cultural programmes.

Yusuf Omar stated,



"We should provide young people what we would like them to give us back (constructive knowledge, life skills and expertise), through which they can help themselves as well as their families and society at large."

Participants also raised the importance of civic networks and churches which can provide stable structures in unstable environments.

Qamar Jafri explained,



"Civic spaces in local communities can transform the minds of young people via skill development, education and local forums that allow them to express their needs and concerns."

Participants recognised that youths present an untapped source of innovation and creativity who need to be brought into existing political spaces. Currently there is limited space for them to participate because of existing social norms and hierarchies.

Marie Lamensch asserted that



"other sectors of society must take youth leadership seriously. This is the first step. They must be invited to policy meetings and consultations; they must be allowed to sit at the table."

Recommendations

- **Develop short-term employment-promotion activities and long-term activities** to address structural inequalities shaping youths' livelihood opportunities.
- **Create training opportunities for youths:** vocational training, income-generating activities, life skills, civic-awareness and trust-building exercises
- **Governments should integrate peace education in schools** and these programmes should be permanent and continue from one generation to another.
- **Develop policies to reduce gender-based disadvantages** for young women, but that also include men and boys to combat gender discrimination and sexual violence.
- **Engage youth in peacebuilding through the arts, culture, tourism, sports and education** in an effort to building bridges between divided communities and ensure a viable reconciliation process.
- **Create access to political spaces for youths.** Implement quotas on the number of seats in the legislature allocated to youths.



Teaching a generation how not to hate in Nigeria



“The youth can play an active role in atrocity prevention, lead social change, build bridges and improve community relations. All they need is a sense of meaning and belonging, safe space to thrive, mentorship and empowerment then they can positively shape the society they live in, promote active tolerance and foster reconciliations”

Jane Obiora

There has been an alarming rise in hate speech and division throughout Nigerian society. Attitudes towards the government have manifested themselves as divisions along the lines of rich/poor, Muslim/Christian and Northern/Southern. There is mistrust across ethnic lines

where stereotypes are being allowed to enter everyday spaces; “Igbos are supposed to be tricksters, Yorubas are supposed to be traitors, Hausas/Fulanis are religious fundamentalists. Ijaws can only be militants.” The dissemination of hate speech across the internet and throughout the media has added fuel to the unrest that is felt by most Nigerians.

Young people are most at risk to the effects that mistrust and hatred breeds. Armed groups, particularly Boko Haram, preys on youth by exacerbating hate speech that exists in society for recruitment. Young people in Nigeria are growing increasingly vulnerable to the lure of armed groups as they have no community to be a part of. The feeling of disillusionment with

neighbours, villages and governments creates the perfect space for young people to be indoctrinated into violent groups that make them feel empowered and important.

Local civil society organisations recognise this risk and labour to create an environment where young people feel powerful without the need for violence.

The Teens Educational Development and Information Initiative (TEDiiN) was created to prevent recruitment into armed groups by giving young people something to be a part of. Preventing hate speech from descending into violence means engaging with local youth to promote peaceful coexistence. To that end, TEDiiN works through community engagement to give young people a role in their societies, removing the lure of violent groups.

By running educational workshops TEDiiN teaches young people to stand up against violence. Promoting creative alternatives to youth socialisation, TEDiiN offers children and young people safer means to engage with community development and education, away from violent groups and toxic hate speech.

An example of these workshops is the #IStandForPeace Club which meets bimonthly to brainstorm efforts against hate speech. Feeling empowered through non-violent defiance is a way to engage young people in Nigeria. TEDiiN teaches young people how to identify violence and how to stand up against it. The #IStandForPeace ambassadors are young people taught not to bow to peer pressure and the lure of violent groups, and who are proud of saying no to violence.

The workshops that TEDiiN provides teach alternatives to violence and give confidence to those with a voice to stand up against violence. When one act of violence is prevented it has the potential to prevent reprisal attacks and further violence in communities. The work of TEDiiN creates leaders, not soldiers, and represents a future of Nigeria that is free from conflict and hatred.

The small acts of young people will prevent violent outbreaks that continue to cripple Nigerian communities. Civil society groups like TEDiiN create spaces for youth to lead social change. Offering a sense of meaning and belonging is vital in preventing recruitment into armed groups and the violence it brings. Hate speech across social media leads to violence, but communities coming together have the power to prevent future atrocities.



Engaging the international community in funding and response

How can local peacebuilders engage with local, national and international policy makers on atrocity prevention?



Brittany Roser

Brittany Roser is the Communications and Outreach Associate at the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP).

The current landscape

Currently, national governments, regional and international organisations, and civil society organisations and networks partner and engage with the goal of improving their individual and collective capabilities to protect populations from atrocity crimes.

Local, national, regional, and international actors all have different areas of expertise and varying levels of access to information and resources, which can influence their abilities to prevent conflict and atrocities in any given situation. A benefit of working collectively is the pooling of shared experiences, resources and information in order to learn and better assess best courses of action. In this vein, actors at different levels may have different roles to play.

For example, national actors may be well positioned to identify and connect the appropriate local, regional, or international actors to analyse and implement conflict-specific peacebuilding and prevention measures. In addition, national actors can engage and mobilise stakeholders from varying sectors, within the government, but also within the legal and justice system, national security forces, economic and development sectors, as well as parliamentarians. Conversely, regional and international actors, who may be slightly more removed from the domestic political and social agendas of a specific area, may have an enhanced reputation, garnering more trust and cooperation from local actors, as well as a potentially greater influence and capacity for policymaking and implementation than their national counterparts.

Examples of frameworks for collaboration include:

- National Focal Points³⁷ for the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P) in 59 countries throughout the world³⁸. R2P Focal points are senior officials appointed within national governments, which focus on facilitating atrocity prevention mechanisms domestically and cooperating internationally on these issues within the Global Network of R2P Focal Points.
- Parliamentarians can utilise their influence working with governments to help domesticate and strengthen State support for prevention and capacities at the national level through introducing an atrocity prevention lens into future policies and resolutions, allocating funds for peacebuilding and prevention, and conducting hearings and publishing reports on government capacities to prevent atrocities.
- Some States have gone even further, such as establishing National Mechanisms for the Prevention of Genocide and other Atrocity Crimes, established mechanisms that include officials from various areas within different government bodies relevant to mass atrocity prevention, such as the Atrocity Prevention Board (APB)³⁹ in the United States and the National Mechanisms for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and all other Forms of Discrimination in the Great Lakes Region, among others. All such mechanisms seek to develop a unified and coordinated State policy on the prevention of atrocity crimes.

- An example of regional policy cooperation for atrocity prevention is the Latin American Network for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities⁴⁰, created in 2012 and led by Argentina and Brazil. The Latin American Network now includes representatives from 18 different States throughout the region and seeks to establish the national and regional foundations to better prevent mass atrocities and to elevate Latin American States' capacities to become leaders in atrocity prevention within the international community.
- At the international level there is the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes Network (GAAMAC)⁴¹, a global state-led initiative which has brought together representatives from the UN Office of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)⁴², regional organisations, non-governmental organisations and atrocity prevention experts in an effort to improve prevention efforts.
- Since 2009, the President of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) has convened an annual informal, interactive dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect⁴³ where Member States and civil society organisations are able to come together to discuss R2P developments and recommendations as well as reflect on the Secretary-General's annual report on the norm.

Reflecting on key opportunities for engagement

Although actors working on peacebuilding and atrocity prevention agendas across at national, regional and international levels agree that collaboration is essential for more holistic and sustainable approaches to peace, and examples of such collaboration do exist (see above), challenges remain. This consultation benefited from the participation of individuals working at these different levels and was an opportunity to focus on ways to address the current challenges. The shared goal is enhanced atrocity prevention.

Participants identified the following challenges to collaboration: the need for a truly local participation in peacebuilding and atrocity prevention processes, increased capacity building and trust building.

Local participation in peacebuilding and atrocity prevention processes

There is a definitive lack of diversity in the "locals" included in local peacebuilding and atrocity prevention processes. Participants pointed out that inclusion of "locals" in peace processes often results in the participation of only local elites or those living in major urban areas, and not those living in the at-risk or conflict-affected communities. According to Fazeeha Azmi:



"Local people with valuable practical ideas are not included most of the time in policy related discussions due to their ethnic, language, religious, and geographical bias, etc.,"

Local and community-based actors have a unique vantage to observe and assess early warning signs of atrocities as they arise on the ground long before national, regional, or international actors are aware of the situation. Local and community-based actors also provide a vital context-specific understanding of situations, which is imperative for a sound assessment of appropriate early response actions.

Qamar Jafri points out:



"If locally-led civic organisations actively engage the youth, women, children, and community leaders in building trust and cohesion, then conflicts become locally owned and local knowledge is harnessed in preventing major atrocities"

Capacity building is crucial for cooperation

According to Jared Bell:



“Capacity building is the key and foremost way to connect local actors to a larger stream of actors and funding”.

Many participants agreed that training, education, shared research and analysis and open dialogue for the sharing of best practices can all contribute to building local peacebuilders’ capacities for atrocity prevention. A benefit of working collectively is the pooling of shared experiences, resources, and information in order to learn and better assess best courses of action from other actors with complementary and/or supplementary knowledge or access.

Building trust increases engagement and capacity for implementation of prevention measures

Consultation participants also noted that mistrust between actors from different levels and backgrounds remains an obstacle to cooperation in many situations across the world.

Marie Lamensch pointed out that,



“Some local community leaders and peacebuilders do not easily trust policymakers. Building these relationships can take time, diplomacy, and compromises. But with a common agenda, these coalitions can truly work.”

Forums for cooperation at national, regional and international levels, such as those described earlier in this section, provide good examples of initiatives seeking to increase trust and cooperation, as well as to build their individual and collective capacities to prevent atrocities. Consultation participants working at the forefront of atrocity prevention agreed that establishing connections and truly inclusive mechanisms for dialogue and collective action between local peacebuilders on the ground and national, regional, and international actors is high priority.

Recommendations

Local, national and international actors have the opportunity and the responsibility to serve as a bridge, connecting actors from a broad range of backgrounds to one another. These are concrete steps these actors can take:

- **Ensure locally-owned peacebuilding and atrocity prevention processes are inclusive and diverse.** Local communities would define their priorities and lead in the design and implementation of any peacebuilding and/or atrocity prevention programming.
- **Work together in partnership**, utilising the strengths of other actors to learn and better prevent and/or respond to atrocities and their early warning signs.
- **Join and maintain regular and sustained dialogue and information sharing platforms** to build trust and relationships among actors and policy makers working in atrocity prevention. Peacebuilders can engage with their governments, national R2P focal points (in 59 countries), or other national mechanisms in atrocity prevention.
- Local, national and international actors should **familiarise and connect with international global initiatives** supported by governments such as the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes, as well as regional mechanisms for atrocity prevention, such as the National Mechanisms for the Prevention of Genocide and other Atrocity Crimes in the Great Lakes region, and the Latin America Network for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities.

A birds-eye view of donor funding for atrocity prevention



Bridget Moix

Bridget Moix is the US Senior Representative at Peace Direct



Landry Ninteretse

Landry Ninteretse is a civil society activist from Burundi

The challenges to donor support for atrocity prevention and local peacebuilding

Donor funding can play an important role in helping to prevent atrocities, mitigate violence against civilians and promote recovery and long-term peace. In recent years, the UN and a number of donor governments, including the US and UK, have sought to improve their funding mechanisms, policies and practices to better support prevention of atrocities and local peacebuilding.

These efforts are encouraging, but challenges to support atrocity prevention remain:

- donor funding can be difficult to mobilise before atrocities break out and can quickly dissipate when immediate violence subsides; funding is not rapid response nor long-term, both which would be more valuable for peace and prevention efforts
- local knowledge and perspective isn't taken into account or trusted;
- and in some cases, donor funding can also exacerbate conflict or even fuel atrocities.

Assessing the risks of atrocities, deciding how, when and where to prioritise funding and finding local actors who can manage their funding requirements – particularly in a high-risk conflict context – can all be challenges. Further, donors struggle to understand what specific kinds of programmes and initiatives are most needed and impactful in a particular context. Even the best intentions of donors to support atrocity prevention do not yet match the needs and escalation of violence against civilians in recent years.

A recent study by the World Bank⁴⁴ notes:

Preventing entry and relapse into a cycle of conflict holds the potential to save lives and avoid the immense losses in human and economic capital that accompany conflict—and safeguard considerable development gains. It is also cost-effective: according to a background paper commissioned for this report, targeting resources toward just four countries at high risk of conflict each year could prevent \$34 billion in losses (see box 1). In comparison, spending on peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in 2016 was \$8.2 billion and \$22.1 billion, respectively.

Rapid response and long-term funding

For local peacebuilders working in volatile conflict environments, longer-term funding, core organisational support and rapid response financing are needed to ensure maximum flexibility and context-specific approaches that can both address root drivers of violence before it erupts and respond adequately in the midst and aftermath of crises.

Cecilia Deme offered this example:



“An example of restricted funding was in South Sudan, in the situation where the majority of the civilian and IDP women population experienced CRSV or SGBV. Children lost their parents and were in need of trauma healing. There was a huge need for psychosocial support and the organisation could not provide these services. In the case of a conflict or a civil war, local peacebuilding organisations need flexible funding mechanisms, so that based on the needs and the conflict trends, they could use it for prevention and response as well.”

As donors seek to improve their funding mechanisms, they need to find ways to link rapid response with long-term sustainability. One participant from an INGO pointed out that there are some encouraging new practices developing among donors in this regard, including new rapid response mechanisms and dedicated pots of funding within large grants. The challenges of sustainability, however, remain.

Anais Caput commented:



“Rapid response mechanisms and dedicated pots of funding are increasingly included in large grants and contracts, especially within the U.S. However, the challenge of these types of rapid response mechanisms is that their funding is always small and short-term, so while it can play a key role in mitigating immediate risks of violence within a given area and among the targeted group, it often fails to address the actual underlying causes of this violence, and thus is less likely to be sustainable.”

Understanding and trusting local perspective

Participants in the consultation encouraged donors to conduct a thorough baseline assessment of the local context in a given country through the help of trusted and respected local organisations. They also urged donors to collect more evidence from successful cases to inform their funding structures.

As Yusuf Omar of Somalia explained:



“A Somali saying tells us war helaa talo hela. That means the one who gets information gets a way to solve. Each problem is unique and cannot be understood without understanding its context from local perspectives and experiences.”

Another challenge identified by consultation participants was the lack of coordination and sharing of information among various stakeholders working within a conflict context. There is a sense that the lack of information sharing between donors and local actors is due to a lack of trust of local perspectives. The issue of trust is a theme that emerges repeatedly in many of discussions with local peacebuilders and is one that needs much greater attention.

Participant Nicholas Dickson commented:



“Donors must trust local perspectives, because these perspectives are formed in the tapestry of the human terrain that they live in. Almost exclusively, donors are not a true part of this terrain, and without as much understanding as possible, programmes/donor funds applied to this terrain haphazardly stand to make more of an issue than to solve a problem.”

Donors doing harm

Finally, throughout the consultation, a reoccurring theme of discussion was the role that donors and governments in the global North sometimes play in actually fueling atrocities and violence through other policies or practices. Governments can unintentionally increase the risks of mass atrocities and gross violations of human rights by turning a blind eye to authoritarian regimes, exporting weapons into conflict zones and engaging in military campaigns that embolden or spur recruitment for extremist groups.

Qamar Jafri explained:



“The cost of violence and terrorism in the world is in trillions of dollars every year. Most of this money is spent on purchasing weapons, training military and conducting counter-terrorism security operations. These counter-terrorism strategies have more violent retaliations from the terrorists because terrorists found their recruits within the affected communities.”

Recommendations

The consultation identified a number of immediate recommendations, but a major new initiative such as a multi-donor global fund for peacebuilding is likely needed to push the field forward to more impactful and effective change.

- **International donors should establish and invest in innovative financing structures to support locally-led prevention and peacebuilding throughout the conflict cycle.** These include more rapid response funding, long-term prevention and peacebuilding to address root drivers and core organisational support to strengthen local capacities for peace.
- **Donors should build stronger partnerships with local actors** who have expertise in prevention and peacebuilding, consult them for trusted information and conflict analysis and work toward a culture of increased trust between local and international partners.
- **Funding mechanisms should be designed in ways that provide greatest flexibility** for local actors within volatile conflict environments. This includes finding ways to combine rapid response with longer-term funding and reducing barriers and bureaucracy for shifting programme approaches to respond to changing local needs and conflict dynamics and allow for seizing opportunities for peace and prevention.
- **Donors should take a Do No Harm approach to prevention and peacebuilding** and conduct comprehensive assessments or their own policies and practices within conflict environments to understand potential negative impacts or unintended harm. Donors should prioritise prevention of mass atrocities, protection of civilians and supporting long-term sustainable peace as fundamental to their foreign policy strategies, not just a matter of specific funding streams.

A failure in response: the case of Burundi



Landry Ninteretse

Landry Ninteretse is a civil society activist from Burundi

Political context

Following the start of the Arusha peace process, Burundi was quickly declared eligible to receive support from the United Nations Peace Building Fund (PBF). The PBF is designed to address the most pressing challenges that face post-conflict countries, while preventing a relapse into conflict.

Between 2007 and 2016, Burundi received a total funding of USD \$65 million, jointly managed by the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) and the Government of Burundi. These funds were to address priority areas, including: governance and peace; the rule of law and the security sector; justice, human rights and reconciliation; the sustainable socio-economic reintegration of vulnerable groups; continued political dialogue; social cohesion; and the democratic exercise of human rights. Other donors invested heavily to strengthen community-level reconciliation and build a strong foundation for civil society in the country alongside a political agreement.

However, despite this massive financial investment in Burundi's peace and stability, the country returned to violence in April 2015 after President Nkurunziza announced his running for a third term, in contravention to the Burundian constitution. The crisis culminated in the deaths of over 1,200 Burundians and led to the arrests of some 3,400. More than 400,000 civilians were forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The government's aggressive tactics were tantamount to 'crimes against humanity', thereby prompting the opening of investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in November 2017.

Despite prior warnings made by local and international actors about the risks of atrocities and the urgent need to invest in conflict prevention, Burundi finds itself in a dangerous and vulnerable position today. The crisis is ongoing, with repeated human rights abuses, disappearances and killings, a lack of political dialogue and a growing sense of donor fatigue.

Lessons for donors

The country has not suffered from massive inter-communal violence thanks in part to the grassroots work of non-state actors who have assumed the role of “firefighters”. As it turns out, relatively small investments in locally-led early warning and early response mechanisms have been most successful in preventing further mass atrocities.

Based on the Burundian experience, where large amounts of international donor funds have not led to peace and stability in the country, consultation participants identified ways that donors can adopt a more consistent and coherent strategy and use flexible monitoring mechanisms in order to tackle atrocity prevention more effectively.

- Hassan Mutubwa suggested that a response strategy should focus on cooperation and communication between civil society and country governments at the global level, effectively translating early warning into early action. Moses Julius Muganga from Tanzania asserts that transitional mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa and the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland are most effective not only in preventing atrocities but also in



“leading to the increases of development, gender equality, equal distributions of resources, political stability, availability of employment, as a way of promoting and respect of human rights, democracy and good governance.” He added: “donors should adopt strategic coherence, flexible and adapted monitoring mechanisms to prevent atrocities by working closer with local civil society’s organisation and also providing short-term and long-term plans in in all agendas which can be the root causes of mass atrocities.”

- Participants proposed some ways that could improve the effectiveness of large funding mechanisms such as PBF, such as: the harmonisation of institutional rules and procedures between donor institutions and donor countries; the development of funding channels to meet competing demands; and, the allocation of funds to clusters to meet the diverse needs of recipient communities.

- Anais Caput offered other considerations for donors:



“There should also be a stronger focus on prevention of mass atrocities by addressing root causes and structural issues that are contributing to fuel the cycle of crisis in Burundi. Strengthening institutions, promoting positive leadership, combatting corruption, addressing land issues, promoting alternative livelihoods etc are critical elements of peacebuilding in Burundi.”

- Participants suggested that core values and conditions should be applied by the donor community for impactful and sustainable interventions. Karoline Caesar argued that such values are “more important than financial support” and donors need to change mindsets and operating procedures in order to prevent atrocities. For Karoline Caesar, the application of values such as ‘Do No Harm,’ combined with a rigorous conflict analysis, a coherent strategy, a strong long-term and unbiased relationships with local actors at all levels, an understanding of local context and conflict drivers, better coordination of interventions and solid knowledge of mediation and alternative dispute resolution, are indispensable to reach tangible and durable results.
- Almost all participants insisted on the central role that local actors play, especially civil society organisations. A careful effort should be made to ensure funding is allocated properly to diffuse tensions, not compromise the work of local organisations or divide them. A strong and united local leadership is another critical attribute to local peacebuilding networks, as Karoline Caesar pointed out,



“If networks bring a tangible and practical benefit to their members, are inclusive and non-hierarchical, and if a positive, known and powerful person is in favour of uniting different actors, they can help build trust and bridge divides. It needs this objective, better is not to be too technical but let it be organic, living, creative.”



Author biographies



Pascal Richard

Pascal Richard is Managing Adviser for Policy and Advocacy & Regional Coordinator for West Africa and Southeast Asia at The Global Partnership of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). He leads GPPAC's international advocacy on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.



Laurie Mincieli

Laurie Mincieli is GPPAC's United Nations Advocacy Liaison Officer & Regional Coordinator for North America.



Jenny Aulin

Jenny Aulin is the Civil Society Programme Manager at Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI). As lead for Knowledge and Practice, she organised collective learning processes and co-produced practice-based resources on a variety of Human Security and peacebuilding topics.



Nagwan Soliman El-Ashwal

Nagwan Elashwal is a conflict transformation trainer and practitioner who has worked and supported local teams to design dialogue processes and to establish early warning and rapid response networks in conflict zones such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan.



Steven Leach

Steven Leach is a conflict transformation practitioner, facilitator, and scholar who has written on local approaches to early warning/early response, local ownership in development, and the roles of religion in conflict.



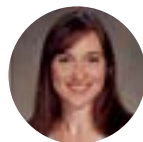
Oliver Kaplan

Oliver Kaplan is an Assistant Professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. He is the author of the book, *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves* (Cambridge University Press)⁴⁵, which examines how civilian communities organise to protect themselves from wartime violence.



Cristina Serna

Cristina Serna is the current President of the Peasant Workers Association of the Carare River (ATCC), one of Colombia's earliest local peace organisations. She has worked on issues of civilian self-protection, community organisation, and development and has networked with local peace movements across Colombia.



Kate Lonergan

Kate Lonergan is a PhD Candidate with the Hugo Valentin Centre and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. Her research focuses on reconciliation and peacebuilding after mass violence and atrocities.



Myles Wallingford

Myles Wallingford studied journalism and political science at the University of Colorado at Boulder where he organized the annual Conference on World Affairs. His multidisciplinary background includes work with social enterprises, business development organizations, political advocacy groups, local government, and various news publications.

**Sarah Teitt**

Dr. Sarah Teitt is the Deputy Director and Researcher at the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in the School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland. In this role, Sarah is responsible for advancing research and building partnerships aimed at the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities in the Asia Pacific region.

**Visaka Dharmadasa**

Visaka Dharmadasa is the founder and chair of the Association of War Affected Women and Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action. Specifically, she raises awareness about the importance of soldier's identification tags and treatment of prisoners.

**Ehab Badwi**

Ehab Badwi is the Regional Focal Point – Middle East and North Africa – Humanitarian Affairs for the UN Major Group for Children and Youth and President and Co-Founder of the Syrian Youth Assembly (SYA)

**Brittany Roser**

Brittany Roser is the Communications and Outreach Associate with the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), where she carries out a wide range of research and outreach on atrocity prevention and related topics.

**Landry Ninteretse**

Landry Ninteretse is a civil society activist from Burundi.

Peace Direct authors

**Sapna Considine**

Interim UN Representative

**Bridget Moix**

US Senior Representative

**Dimitri Kotsiras**

Research and Advocacy Officer

**Samuel Lobb**

Research Assistant

Editorial review

**Jessica Berns****Ruari Nolan****Joel Gabri****Claudia Elliot**

Participants

Allen Hester

Policy and Peacebuilding Fellow, Peace Direct

Amy Rebecca Marsico

Conflict and peacebuilding practitioner

Anaïs Caput

Africa Programme Development Manager,
Search for Common Ground

Ann Marie Hager

Conflict Researcher

Anne Connell

Assistant Director, Women and Foreign Policy,
Council on Foreign Relations

Ashley Greene

Assistant Professor of Holocaust and Genocide
Studies, Keene State College

Bella Nceke

Programme Officer, American Friends Service
Committee (AFSC)

Boubacar Issa Traoré

Executive Secretary, Peace One Day Mali

Bridget Moix

US Representative, Peace Direct

Brittany Roser

Communications and Outreach Associate,
International Coalition for the Responsibility
to Protect

Bunly Soeung

Cambodian peace practitioner

Byron Cabrol

Research Assistant, Peace Direct

Catherine Bartenge

Researcher, African Leadership Centre

Cecilia Deme

Social scientist

Charlotte Fraser

Communications Officer, Peace Direct

Chikaodili Orakwue

Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Conflict
Resolution Abuja, Nigeria

Christina Hasenhuettls

Post-Conflict Research Centre

Christine Mutisya

International development practitioner

Claudia Elliott

Communications consultant, Peace Direct

Comfort Attah

Peace Ambassador

Cristina Serna

President, Peasant Workers Association
of the Carare River (ATCC) - Colombia

Cynthia Cohen

Programme Director - Peacebuilding and the Arts,
Brandeis University

Daniel Solomon

Research Assistant, Simon-Skjoldt Centre for the
Prevention of Genocide

David Porter

Peacebuilder

Dimitri Kotsiras

Research and Advocacy Officer, Peace Direct

Ehab Badwi

Regional Focal Point (MENA) - Humanitarian Affairs,
UN Major Group for Children and Youth, and
President of the Syrian Youth Assembly (SYA)

Erick Achola

Programme management professional based in Kenya

Fazeeha Azmi

Sri Lankan peacebuilder

Florence Kayemba

Programme Manager, Stakeholder Democracy Network

Hakizimana Eric

Peacebuilder

Hassan Mutubwa

Project planning and management professional coordinating peace and conflict transformation projects.

Jai-Ayla Quest

Programme Officer (Mass Violence and Atrocities), The Stanley Foundation

James Offuh

Peace advocate, social dialogue and reconciliation facilitator

Jane Obiora

Peacebuilder and gender advocate in Nigeria

Janvier Bigirimana

Burundian lawyer and human rights activist, Central and East Africa Legal Officer at Minority Rights Group International

Jared Bell

Assistant Professor of International Relations, International University of Sarajevo

Jean Baptiste Niyongabo

Peacebuilder

Jean Bosco Harerimana

Peacebuilder

Jenny Aulin

Civil Society Programme Manager, Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI)

Jessica Berns

Advisory and communications consultant

Jessica Olney

Programme Director, Centre for Social Integrity

Joel Gabri

Peace Technology Officer, Peace Direct

Joel Obengo

Administrator, Kenyatta University, and a member of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) Youth Group

John Dada

CEO (volunteer), Fantsuam Foundation

Jonas Ecke

Researcher

Kais Aliriani

International development consultant, and founder of the Yemen Social Fund for Development

Karoline Caesar

Senior Programme Officer, Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH

Kate Ferguson

Director of Research and Policy, Protection Approaches (UK)

Kate Lonergan

PhD candidate, Uppsala University

Kazi Nasrin Siddiq

President, Education and Cultural Society (ECS), and Country Coordinator (Bangladesh), Peace Revolution

Kim Bode

Community Editor of Geopolitics, News Deeply

Landry Ninteretse

Burundian peacebuilder

Laurie Mincieli

UN Liaison Officer, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)

Lumenge Lubangu

Peacebuilder in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Maha Alsakban

Pediatrics consultant and human rights defender

Maher Falak Sher Tahir

Aid practitioner in Pakistan

Mamoun Karbash

Executive Director, Sudanese Organization for Nonviolence and Development (SONAD)

Mariana Goetz

Head of Programmes and Learning, Aegis Trust

Marie Lamensch

Project Coordinator, Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS)

Matt Unger

Chief Product Officer, News Deeply

Michael Olufemi Sodipo, Ph.D

Project Coordinator, Peace Initiative Network (PIN)

Mollie Zapata

Research Associate, Simon-Skjodt Centre for the Prevention of Genocide, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Moses Chasieh

Burundi Country Representative, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Moses Julius Muganga

Founder and Director, Alpha and Omega Reconciliation and Peace Building (AREPEB), Tanzania

Mugahed Al-Shaibah

Yemeni peacebuilder

Myles Wallingford

Programme Coordinator, Post-Conflict Research Centre

Nagwan Elashwal

Chairperson, regional Centre for Mediation and Dialogue (RCMD)

Nagwan Soliman Elashwal

Research Associate (Middle East Directions Programme), Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Natalija Fisher

Expert in water security, youth engagement, and social cohesion

Nawal Osman

Sudanese activist

Sadia Hameed

Managing Director, Nexus Fund

Nicholas Dickson

Active Duty Civil Affairs Officer, United States Army, currently assigned to the 85th Civil Affairs Brigade as Commander

Nneka Ikelionwu

Research and Policy Analysis, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution

Obi Peter

Civil society leader

Oliver Kaplan

Assistant Professor, Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver.

Oluwasanmi Fademi

The Fademi Jacobson Foundation

Omer Al-Shareqi

Researcher and human rights advocate

Onyekachukwu Ugwu

Peace scholar and conflict analyst with penchant for research

Pascal Richard

Managing Advisor - Policy and Advocacy, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)

Patricia Morris

Researcher

Patrick Sigei

Research Assistant, National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Kenya

PCRC Intern

Post-Conflict Research Centre

Qamar Jafri

PhD candidate, RMIT University, Australia

Rene Claude Niyonkuru

PhD researcher, University of Louvain (Belgium)

Ruairi Nolan

Head of Research and Engagement, Peace Direct

Sapna Considine

Interim UN Representative, Peace Direct

Sarah Teitt

Deputy Director, Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect,

Sawssan Abou-Zahr

Lebanese journalist, editor and consultant

Simeon Alozieuwa

Researcher and scholar

Stephen Oola

Advisor - Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC)

Steven Leach

Conflict transformation - consultant, researcher, facilitator

Sudaba Shiraliyeva

Director, Center Women and Modern World

Tatiana Gos

Academic Programmes Officer, Auschwitz Institute

Visaka Dharmadasa

Chairperson, Association of War Affected Women

Yogesh Mishra

Researcher

Yusuf Omar

Research Associate, SOAS University of London

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Craig Funnell

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