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à propos



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MENA Region –
Forgotten Conflicts?

editorial

How well and for how long can we contribute to violence prevention and peacebuilding in the MENA region?

More than ten years after the Arab Spring, the quest for more democracy, freedom, and peace continues. Countries like Syria, Yemen, Israel/Palestine or Iran are still affected by severe levels of violence, devastatingly impacting the population.

The current situation, especially considering the war in Ukraine offers poor prospects. Inflation and the resulting shift in international attention have exacerbated the region's economic and political instability.

Despite some alarming reports, this edition shows that even in such contexts, promoting dialogue between opposing parties, strengthening local democracy, working early on institutional reforms and providing opportunities for the affected population is feasible and essential.

I wish you a pleasant read.

Sanjally Jobarteh, Editor of KOFF magazine

By publishing the à propos magazine, the Swiss platform for peacebuilding KOFF creates a medium for its members and partners to communicate about their experiences and perspectives. The articles of this magazine reflect the views of the authors only and not those of KOFF or swisspeace.

focus

War in Syria – a never-ending crisis?



Schoolchildren near Damascus: The fact that they can attend classes despite all the difficult circumstances is very important for the future of the country. Hasan Belal/Caritas Switzerland

After over 11 years of war, humanitarian aid is still crucial for the survival of people in Syria. Demand has once again risen sharply due to the increased price of food resulting from the war in Ukraine. The task of aid organizations, however, is to look ahead to the social and economic reconstruction that will await the country after peace has been achieved, including creating long-term prospects.

The war in Syria is one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in recent history. The number of deaths has been steadily declining since 2015 and amounted to approximately 4,000 in 2021. While this does indeed indicate a decrease in the conflict's intensity, a normalization of the situation is not yet in sight. On the contrary, whilst the focus of global attention has shifted to other conflict zones and catastrophes (such as those in Ukraine), the economic situation of people in Syria is worsening to a concerning extent.

Enormous food insecurity

Of the approximately 21 million Syrians, over 6.5 million have fled across the border, especially to the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. In Syria, over half of the working-age population is unemployed and around 80 per cent of the country's residents live in poverty. For 12 million people—in other words, the majority of the population—food security is not guaranteed. For these people, daily life is a question of survival. They have been hit with a five-fold increase in food prices within the space of two

years and inflation is still rising. The economic situation has never been so precarious. In addition to the war in Ukraine, massive crop failures as a result of drought in the country and the coronavirus pandemic have also been a cause. Like many poorer countries around the world, in particular the neighboring country of Lebanon, Syria is suffering from a convergence of multiple crises.

Emergency aid remains indispensable

International cooperation of the sort engaged in by Caritas Switzerland in Syria also constitutes a contribution to peacebuilding. However, the road to peace in Syria appears to be long and difficult. In this situation, intensifying social upheavals must be counteracted wherever possible. Without lasting peace in Syria and an improvement of the economic situation in the region, emergency aid projects remain indispensable.

Vulnerable families are being forced to adopt negative coping strategies to meet their basic needs, such as food and accommodation. They are reducing the number of meals they eat daily, cutting back on healthcare and education, and selling possessions that they still require. Child labor, early school leaving, and child marriage are on the rise, as are domestic tensions and violence. Family relationships are being put under significant strain in the daily struggle to make ends meet. Caritas Switzerland is currently supporting families in cities including Aleppo and Homs by providing cash assistance: For half a year, the families receive monthly cash payments and are provided with guidance by social workers. This cash-based approach means the families who receive it can spend the money on what they need the most, which could be as varied as medication or better insulation for their living spaces to protect against the cold in winter. At the same time, it bolsters local partner organizations that have direct access to those in the most urgent need and ensure the aid is implemented. As pillars of civil society, they are important actors in overcoming the crisis and developing a peaceful future for the country.

Preventing a lost generation

Crucial though emergency aid may be, it is also important to plan for the challenges ahead once peace has been established, whatever form it may take. With respect to education, for example, the state school system is barely functioning and is leaving generations of children and young people without educational prospects. The work of NGOs and international organizations is geared towards preventing the burden of reconstruction from falling onto the shoulders of a lost generation with little or no education. Caritas Switzerland is supporting projects by its local partner organizations that enable children to access education. Teacher training is one central component of this.

After eleven years of war, financing projects that benefit the people of Syria is difficult. Not even half of the financial needs of large international agencies are being met. The war in Ukraine is absorbing financial resources and intensifying this situation. But rising prices are also having a negative effect on aid. The World Food Programme, for example, has had to reduce its food aid rations for cost reasons.

Political peace is needed in Syria to stop the spiral of poverty. War costs too much. Unfortunately, the prospects of political peace have significantly worsened since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

For this reason, NGO engagement is not only required on the ground: The international community must be reminded again and again that it must intensify its efforts for lasting peace and reconstruction. Switzerland is also being urged to continue and intensify its contributions. As a host country, Switzerland plays a marginal role for displaced people from Syria. But our country is doing a poor job of this: Almost half of the 20,000 Syrians living in Switzerland do not have refugee status and instead have only been “temporarily admitted”. As part of a comprehensive approach, Caritas is pushing to have these people recognized as refugees.

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Yemen – early-on security sector reform in peacebuilding



Geneva, February 2020. DCAF

The Geneva Center for Security Sector governance – DCAF supports security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) processes that aim to ensure countries and societies are safer, thanks to security governance systems anchored in principles of accountability, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. This implies working with and in support of state and non-state structures and institutions, guaranteeing a security system adapted to people’s needs. It also entails ensuring that security providers are effectively under civilian oversight that holds them to account.

It may sound odd to talk about SSG/R under conflict situations in which societies are still struggling to establish the governance system they want and, thus, the necessary institutional foundations to design and launch reforms. Nevertheless, DCAF’s experience shows the importance of addressing SSG/R early on in all conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes.

Internal conflicts, like in Yemen, generate mutual fear and augment the levels of mistrust among conflict parties. Thus, they align behind military solutions to the conflict, believing they can defeat “the other” and negate the source of their fears or the need to build trust

with an opponent. Such a situation allows for non-state actors and hybrid security systems to spread. All this aggravates conflict, not least by creating vested interests through a “war economy”, and hinders conflict parties from compromising and reaching a deal. They rather find themselves in a vicious circle where the longer the conflict, the further parties stay in their respective positions.

Confidence-building measures and guarantees that allow warring parties to trust that joint concessions and agreements can be found and respected are key to enabling progress towards peace. DCAF believes that the more such concessions are made reciprocally, and the more guarantees are seen as built-in into agreements, the more confident conflict parties will be to broker a deal. Corresponding concessions and accepted guarantees become possible when the parties work towards a future vision anchored in minimal common grounds. In security sector governance, this is translated through broad agreements or shared understanding of “what security sector do we want for our future, and how do we want it to be structured, regulated, and governed?”. As long as the parties can see themselves fully included and integrated into such a vision, they will feel in control and, thus, be able to influence the course of events, including the adherence to guarantees. Somehow, they find that each of them is legitimized and empowered to act as a “watchdog” for what everyone else may or may not do. In this way, parties can also trust built-in guarantees much more than any external, often artificial and imposed ones, whose sustainability may be questioned.

DCAF is successfully testing this approach through its support program in Yemen by offering an informed, inclusive, and neutral space for dialogue around short-term security concerns and arrangements, with the view of articulating longer-term security visions among conflict parties.

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reports

Gender-sensitive conflict prevention – reflection on masculinities



Understanding that gender is not synonymous with women is critical for a gender-sensitive approach to truly transform violence. Street art, Beirut, 2022. Yasmine Janah & Leandra Bias

What are the different forms of and approaches to masculinities? What are the risks and potentials associated with working on/with masculinities? How can we ensure the promotion of gender justice in peacebuilding by taking into account masculinities while centring women, LGBTIQ+ people, and other vulnerable communities with diverse needs and concerns?

Incorporating gender as an analytical tool in violence prevention and peacebuilding is vital. At the heart of gender-sensitive conflict prevention is to analyze and address gender as a system of power that is relational. Hence, a gender-transformative approach to peacebuilding provides effective understanding of the power asymmetries and harmful norms that lay the foundation for insecurity and violence. However, what currently prevails is an interpretation of the term gender largely equated with women and conceived from a one-size-fits-all orientation.

swisspeace conducted a new scoping study that explores the relationships between masculinities, violence, and peace. Based on qualitative interviews with various organizations in Lebanon and Tunisia, it aims to provide guidance to inform peace policy by discerning potential avenues and risks with working with/on masculinities and for gender equality in prevention strategies.

Against the severe polarization and crackdown in Lebanon and Tunisia, feminist and women's-led networks and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been the backbone of peace- and state-building efforts. From this vantage point, they have played a central role in mediation and providing protection and humanitarian support to vulnerable communities to fill the gaps in service provision.

Very importantly, Lebanese and Tunisian CSOs operating at the local, national, and regional levels have pushed to tackle the root causes and impacts of the crisis on women's, men's, and gender minorities' experiences by addressing harmful social norms, values, and structures. This includes the environment where expected roles and practices of men are closely tied to dominant traditional beliefs related to hegemonic masculinity and where many men view militarized attitudes as a viable path for a living. Men are expected to be the providers, the breadwinners, the gatekeepers, and the protectors of the family, community, and larger society.

Above all, these roles are maintained as a significant practice for subjugating women's lives and bodies and reinforcing men's power and control, including over resources. Some partner organizations echoed that these dominant ideal expectations of men are enshrined in social structures (e.g., the household, political parties, religious institutions, and legislation), which fuel drivers of conflict. These structures and militarization reassert the ideal man as a combatant and normalize the general use of force and enactment of political power to perpetrate different forms of violence and dominance. And yet, some men may subscribe to other forms of masculinities. While these are perceived as failing to conform to dominant practices, they are relegated to subordinate masculinity and get sanctioned for breaking with traditional expectations.

The study spotlights a gender-transformative approach to conflict prevention to explain complex drivers of violence based on local concerns. It recognizes that masculinities are multiple, complex, context-specific, and sometimes even contradictory. Accounts of masculinities and how they interact in fragile and conflict-affected contexts encompass opportunities and tensions in elevating feminist peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Most importantly, integrating a gender-transformative approach to conflict prevention, including masculinities, primes agencies, organizations, and practitioners to provide an accountability mechanism, effectively conceptualize programming, better adapt to rapid conflict dynamics changes, recognize early warning signals, and by doing so, mitigate fragility drivers and harm.

Find out more in the swisspeace's research ,Masculinities, Violence and Peace', which will be published by the beginning of November 2022.

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reports

Israel-Palestine – Strengthening communal dialogue



100 years of cumulated experience in facilitating the Israeli-Palestinian encounter. Lausanne, September 2022. Coexistences

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is over 100 years old and has been defined by periods of violence and dehumanization, creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. One of the outcomes is the physical and psychological separation: Palestinians and Israeli Jews in Israel and Jerusalem live within a few kilometres of each other, but in separate communities, study in separate educational systems, and contacts are limited. It is all the more so in the occupied Palestinian territories and even worse in Gaza.

Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups are the only place where meaningful dialogue occurs, rehumanizing the other beyond power asymmetry, negative (media) narratives, political incitation, prejudices, and competitive victimhood. Such spaces at eye level are vital. They enable participants to evolve from delegitimization and ignorance (feeding indifference to the occupation and violence) to a more nuanced, complex vision. In the participants' own words, it leads them to "find sanity and make sense of events," acknowledging their interrelatedness. Dialogue is not an end but a tool for change at personal and structural levels. While dialogue cannot resolve a conflict without direct negotiation, peace is made between people, and no political actor will risk negotiating in the absence of supporting

communities on both sides.

A long-term impact study of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue has demonstrated that 75% of the participants stayed engaged one year after, 53% after three years and 17% will make peacebuilding their profession. Yet a 2019 estimate indicates that less than 2% of the Israeli population has participated in bi-national dialogue in one of 164 grassroots initiatives and that recruitment to encounter groups is becoming challenging. By comparison, in the Northern Ireland conflict, more than one-third of the population had participated in encounters organized by the 6'000 grassroots initiatives in the framework of an international fund over the 12 years preceding the Good Friday Agreement.

Thus, for a constituency for sustainable and lasting peace, many more need to engage in People to People (P2P) work in Israel and Palestine, led by qualified facilitators and funds to scale. Many active facilitators have significant practical experience, yet only an estimated 15-20% have received formal training. No overarching sectoral organization enables cross-fertilization, reflection, and the use of collective knowledge.

Therefore, starting with the facilitators of the 33 groups Coexistences has hosted since 2006 (who knew very little about each other and the other programs and approaches offered by the organization), Coexistences developed a two-year pilot program to create a virtuous circle of exchange and deepening conversations around issues practitioners face (such as trust, safe space, power asymmetry, external events, group work and dynamic). Seventeen practitioners from Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank, cumulating 100 years of practice, learned from each other and became a group during the first seminar in early September.

Two interest groups have formed and have met twice since their return, proving that the program meets a clear need. A program of local meetings will bridge into the second and last seminar planned in 2023, which the participants will design themselves.

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Libya – challenges in bridging the gap



Workshops with change agents in Libya. Interpeace

Over the last ten years, Libya has been subject to several political and economic conflicts. The country suffers from a deep crisis of leadership, where the outcome is a grave disconnect between State authorities and its citizens. Multiple polarising actors dominate the political scene and aggravate social and economic grievances. Additionally, the international community has been fragmented as different entities pursue interest-driven, narrow objectives.

Interpeace has been focusing its peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level in Libya since 2011 and, more recently, in Yemen. One of our peacebuilding approaches (“track 6”) focuses on bridging the gap between local communities, civil society, governments, and the international community. It helps ensure that high-level policies reflect local realities and benefit from local knowledge. However, this approach is greatly challenged in many places across the Middle East and North Africa because of deep political and social fragmentation. Without legitimate political processes, grassroots peacebuilding proves efficient at the local level but cannot achieve a greater impact at the national and regional levels. In Libya, our peacebuilding interventions have created trust at the local level and identified solutions to local problems, but this has not percolated to the high-level decision-making (“track 1”).

During the 11 years of work in Libya, Interpeace has witnessed the different phases of regional and local conflict and has adapted its programming to this reality. Through the

“peace-mapping” project, Interpeace analyzed why some communities stayed peaceful while surrounded by instability. This project laid the foundation for Interpeace’s follow-up work, which sought to strengthen local capacity for resilience through dialogue and gradually build pockets of stability across the country. The program established and trained a network of change agents – Libyans of all ages, genders and social statuses that are embedded and central to their communities. The change agents received training in conflict analysis and transformation, dialogue facilitation, and mediation.

While change agents are making a difference by addressing issues in their communities, ranging from garbage collection to addressing the trauma of the war, there is an inability to engage in political issues at a national level. As a result, although our peacebuilding interventions have succeeded in creating pockets of stability across the country, political and economic instability has limited our ability to project local stability to the national level through the network of change agents.

Renée Larivière, Interpeace Senior Director for Program Management, explains the reasoning behind our peacebuilding approach as we face the challenge of bridging the gap in Libya: “In this context, we have focused our efforts on building resilience for peace, as this is central to the ability of communities to manage their divisions and tensions legitimately, inclusively and non-violently. In Libya and now also through our program in Yemen, Interpeace continues to invest in grassroots change agents to make a difference in their own communities, but also to elevate efforts into more systematic civic engagement.”

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reports

Egypt – health care and economic opportunities for migrants



Service users, staff, and volunteers of the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) in October 2021. ERC

Cairo has nearly 22 million inhabitants and is struggling with overcrowding. High population growth and a poverty rate of about 25% mean that many people must compete to access jobs, housing, and public goods such as health care, education, and sanitation.

Among the most vulnerable population groups in Cairo are migrants and refugees. Egypt's location between the Middle East, Africa and Europe makes it a key transit and destination country for migrants and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa and Syria. Living in impoverished urban areas where local Egyptian communities are already struggling with difficult living conditions, migrants often face discrimination, rejection and violence. They have limited options for economic activities and struggle to access public goods. Linguistic barriers, especially for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, further contribute to their marginalization and risk of exploitation.

In 2017, the Swiss Red Cross (SRC) teamed up with the German Red Cross and the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) to work on community resilience and social cohesion in Cairo's neighborhoods with a high ratio of migrants. With back-donor funding from the EU^[1] and SDC, the ERC has been running six community hubs where migrants and Egyptians can

access free-of-charge health services and get support to enhance their economic opportunities. The hubs, run by a mix of ERC staff and volunteers, also recruit volunteers among the different migrant groups, who increase access to the communities and provide translations when needed.

While migrants can theoretically access governmental health providers, there are, in reality, many barriers, such as language, discrimination, and quality of service. Therefore, the services at the hubs include primary and secondary health care (e.g., paediatrics, gynaecology, dermatology), provision of free medicine, screening for communicable and non-communicable diseases, and health education seminars.

The mental health burden of migrants is high, given the circumstances they faced in their homelands and on the journey, and the often difficult resettlement in their new environments. Thus, psychosocial support is part of the essential services provided at the hubs.

To improve their income opportunities, migrants and host community members can also benefit from vocational skills training (e.g., sewing, mobile phone maintenance) at the hubs and partner training centres. Graduates receive seed funding to start their micro-enterprise. Further, employability training help migrants find paid employment to secure a steady income for themselves and their households.

The SRC notes that the services provided at the different hubs in Cairo improve the users' health and economic opportunities, thus strengthening their overall resilience. Social cohesion in the neighborhoods is tackled by providing services not only to migrants and refugees but also to local Egyptians, which excludes nobody and fosters positive contact between different groups.

[1] [EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa](#)

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reports

Palestine – social work as a contribution to peace



Special school at the Star Mountain Rehabilitation Centre in Abu Quash/Ramallah, 2017. Mission 21

Against the backdrop of the current global crises and wars, the Israel-Palestine conflict—which has been ongoing for decades now—has somewhat vanished from the radar of European public life. Yet incidents and violence occur almost on a daily basis in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel. In Palestine, one demographic group in particular has also fallen through the cracks as a result of the conflict: Very little attention is being paid to people with mental disabilities. Governmental support is just as lacking as awareness of their rights. In many parts of Palestinian society, the topic is taboo. Families with children with disabilities are therefore faced with having to care for and support them without any help, which is often more than they can cope with. As a result, people with disabilities live on the fringes of society, sometimes severely neglected. They are often deprived of education and the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

The Sternberg Rehabilitation Center, backed by Mission 21 and based near Ramallah, has supported children and young people with mental disabilities for over four decades. The center's services range from an inclusive kindergarten, schooling and vocational education to advocacy for the inclusion of people with disabilities in society.

In the midst of a politically unstable region, this charitable work also makes an important contribution to reconciliation: Reconciliation of families with their children with disabilities and reconciliatory work between Christians and Muslims. People with mental disabilities are supported irrespective of their religion or creed. Christian and Muslim employees work alongside each other as a matter of course and without problems. They strive for the individual development of the children and young people entrusted to them, regardless of background or religion. The institution is supported by the Moravian Church. This small but global evangelical church has worked in the region since 1866. At first, Christian, Muslim and Jewish people with leprosy were cared for there and, starting in 1980, children with disabilities, regardless of religious affiliation. Neither religious nor political convictions are at the heart of the work; rather, it focuses on individual human beings and their abilities and needs. The children and young people benefit from this interreligious social work. This cannot solve the long-drawn-out Middle East conflict. The work, however, significantly fosters the recognition that including all people can contribute to reconciliation and peace.

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reports

Tunisia – the media building participatory democracy



During a media training session of the PACT programme (Active Participation of Tunisian Citizens) in April 2022. Asma Ben Garga/Fondation Hirondelle

After more than half a century in which the media were under government control, one of the first achievements of the 2011 Tunisian revolution was securing the independence of the press and the free flow of information. The media landscape was transformed as the Tunisians developed their new blueprint for society, which introduced into the 2014 Constitution the two key concepts of decentralization and participatory democracy. Against this backdrop of creating links in a polarized and long-muzzled country, the Fondation Hirondelle first became involved, between 2011 and 2016, after the fall of ex-president Ben Ali. We supported the reform of several regional channels of the Tunisian public radio to promote access to independent, reliable and useful local information.

Since 2020, our teams have been working to promote dialogue between citizens and governors within the civic space to facilitate a genuinely collaborative planning process around public action in newly created or isolated municipalities. In a consortium with the Danish organization NIRAS, the Fondation Hironnelle is implementing the media component of the PACT program (Participation Active des Citoyennes et Citoyens Tunisiens) for the 'Active Participation of Tunisian Citizens'. This program, financed by the SDC, is part of the Swiss Cooperation strategy for Tunisia.

PACT's overall objective is to strengthen local democracy within the framework of the decentralization process by promoting a structured dialogue about local government that involves all stakeholders. These thematic discussions aim to improve local living conditions, redefine collective local priorities, and build new relationships between municipal local government, decentralized government (regional directorates and government delegates), citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs). In this first three-year phase, our activities will focus on five governorates of the central region: Kairouan, El Kef, Siliana, Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid (representing almost 20% of the Tunisian population).

In concrete terms, seven municipalities have received support in organizing community forums to set up public interest projects addressing local priorities. On the back of these practical initiatives, the Fondation Hironnelle has created a sustainable network of 18 local journalists, including correspondents of the semi-state agency Tunis Afrique Presse. We aim to improve their knowledge and professional skills so that the media can really be instrumental in informing and monitoring public policies, leading to greater accountability, more dialogue and increased mutual respect – a quality at the heart of the project's overall approach. To help young elected officials exercise their democratic mandate with greater autonomy, the Fondation Hironnelle has provided them with 'media training' sessions to equip them to create or consolidate a network of exchange between themselves and the press, favouring good public information and debate at the local level.

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reports

“New Profile” movement against the militarization of Israel

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New Profile meeting after a group of young people were exempted from military service, Tel Aviv in June 2019. New Profile

Since 2012, Frauen für den Frieden Schweiz (Women for Peace Switzerland) has been supporting the feminist and antimilitarist organization New Profile, which has been active in Israeli society for over 20 years. New Profile believes that militarism is a threat to civil and democratic values, is an obstacle on the road to peace and to ending the Israeli occupation, and that it encourages human rights violations against Palestinians and other people.

The organization supports those resisting the army—especially conscientious objectors, for whom conditions are particularly difficult in Israel. “People who want to avoid military service without attracting attention are often able to do this with relative ease. People who make their refusal into a public act (especially conscientious objectors), on the other hand, are severely mistreated and often imprisoned,” establishes a report by New Profile.

In Israel, serving in the army (the Israel Defense Forces or IDF) is considered a duty, a necessity and an opportunity, as the Israeli military has been publicly portraying itself as a progressive body due to the range of deployment opportunities it offers for women. The same applies to the involvement of LGBTQ people. According to New Profile, the reality is much more problematic. The culture remains predominantly aggressive and masculine.

New Profile also criticizes the presence of the IDF in the social and civilian spheres. Soldiers are present on the streets, in universities, train stations and shopping centres, and the army is omnipresent in the media and commercial advertisements. New Profile also finds the IDF’s interaction with schools particularly disturbing. For example, schoolchildren between the 10th and 12th grades would be sent on an experiential trip where they would live in the military base, learn to shoot, and be commanded by soldiers to simulate the experience of basic training. This makes recruitment a slow and constant process that begins in preschool and makes the military a normality that remains present later in life.

Raising awareness via social media, publications, and, if possible, direct contact (e.g. at schools) is, therefore, an important concern of New Profile. In addition, the organization offers opportunities for those affected to learn with educators and therapists and to

critically engage with this reality. Through this exchange, young people should get to know a different perspective on militarism.

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reports

Interview – Health care assistance in a new Afghanistan



Khadija (right), midwife, weighs Nooria's (left) baby. Tdh midwives provide medical care for women and babies from the 12th week of pregnancy until the sixth month after delivery. Tdh

An interview with Erhard Bauer, Head of the Terre des hommes (Tdh) delegation in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

What is your scope of action in Afghanistan?

Terre des hommes (Tdh) has been providing mother and child healthcare in Afghanistan since 1995. Our work addresses the lack of access to healthcare, partly due to certain Afghan traditions limiting women's mobility. We employ mobile teams of midwives and social workers who visit families and provide them with health care and social support services (e.g., examinations, advice on preparing for childbirth and newborn care, hygiene instructions, and guidance on family planning). With this approach, Tdh has significantly contributed to reducing maternal and child mortality.

Another essential part of our work in Afghanistan is child protection. We support children and their families on the move within Afghanistan and returnees from Pakistan and Iran. The armed conflicts in Afghanistan have caused enormous population movements over the past 21 years. To this day, land and property occupation and droughts affecting livelihoods

have prevented many internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees from returning home. Thus, they stay in areas offering better living conditions (mainly in the big cities or in the eastern part of Afghanistan). Children displaced from their initial environment live in precarious conditions (without adequate shelter) and are often not welcome in their new environment. In these new areas, either the necessary services (health care or school) are non-existent, or the local resources are so limited that they cannot meet these children's needs. As coping mechanisms, some families resort to child labor or early marriage. Tdh's role is to help prevent such a situation by raising awareness of families and host communities concerning the hosting conditions, providing livelihood support, and increasing access to new income-generating opportunities. In this way, Tdh has helped many children return to school.

Has the Taliban takeover of the Afghan regime had an impact on your work?

The Taliban takeover of the regime, which occurred last year (in August 2021), was a game changer for us but, at the same time, not entirely new. Since some of our colleagues had previously worked in Taliban-ruled areas, we – as an international organization – had already gathered experience in working in a Taliban-ruled environment and coordinating with Taliban officials.

What has been your main concern after this change and how are you dealing with it?

We employ 280 Afghan workers, including three expatriates. Our work is mainly carried out by Afghan female staff. Our mother and child health program is almost exclusively carried out by female midwives, doctors, and social workers with only a few male colleagues. After the Taliban took power, our main concern was to find out their official position on women's employment. We were not sure whether our female colleagues would still be allowed to work. It took several weeks, if not months, before the Taliban's rule was really established, and we could figure out which counterparts to approach in the new administration. At first, this climate of uncertainty led us to stop our activities. Once we identified the right and available counterparts at the national and provincial level, we got the necessary permits fairly quickly (within 3 weeks), allowing our female colleagues to go out and carry on with their work.

How was your (work) environment like during the regime change?

The takeover was mostly peaceful in the big cities, but it brought about numerous changes in the administration. The population was unprepared and shocked, especially by the speed of the changes. Those in charge of the security sector (police, army) disappeared, and unofficial actors initially provided security services. Then, the Taliban gradually took over some of the duties. Ensuring the safety of our staff was our priority. After that, we took the time to discuss internally our next steps, where we would position ourselves under these circumstances, what would still be possible, and what would not. Ultimately, our mother and child healthcare activities were not very affected as we benefitted from community support, and some of the Taliban acknowledge the added value of our presence. Furthermore, our principles of impartiality and neutrality may have been a door opener.

What opportunities and challenges do you see for the future of your work in Afghanistan?

Over the past few decades and before the Taliban took over Kabul, we had witnessed

improvements in school and higher education attendance rates, including in girls' enrolment rates. Since March 2022, the Taliban have prevented girls from attending school after grade 6. For now, we are still able to find qualified female staff. Still, if this situation continues the way it currently is, there will soon be a lack of trained staff in the health sector and other sectors contributing to society's peace and development. If the Afghan education system interrupts the education of female midwives and doctors, we will certainly not be able to pursue our activities, as the recruitment of women for reproductive health is imperative in this country.

[Interview with](#)

Erhard Bauer (Tdh)

Head of delegation Afghanistan, Pakistan & Tajikistan

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- [Terre des hommes \(Tdh\)](#)

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Urgent Appeal for Global Justice



Neuza Yacusa, Mosambik

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- [Urgent Appeal for Global Justice \(German\)](#)

news

PeaceWomen Across the Globe receives Reconciliation Award of the Klaus Jensen Foundation



With the Reconciliation Award 2022, the German Klaus Jensen Foundation for civil conflict transformation honours the commitment of PeaceWomen Across the Globe to women affected by war and conflict.

In her laudation, Malu Dreyer, Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate and member of the Foundation's Board of Directors, recognized the role that PeaceWomen Across the Globe plays in feminist peacebuilding. The participation of women in peace negotiations and peace-related political decisions is more than just a question of political participation or justice, she said. "It is also a central building block for sustainable peace." PeaceWomen Across the Globe, she said, strengthens "the commitment of courageous women to a peaceful world around the globe."

Founder and President of PeaceWomen Across the Globe Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold accepted the 5000 Euro award in Trier on 30 September 2022.

links

- [Read the media release and Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold's acceptance speech here. \(The speech is available in German only.\)](#)

news

Mentors wanted for cfd!



For its job mentoring program, the feminist Peace Organization cfd is looking for mentors with the following professions: biologists, business administrators, nutritionists, lawyers, computer scientists, accountants, and agronomists. Would you like to support our mentees with your knowledge and network? Please contact Theodora Leite Stampfli.

links

- [cfd mentoring programme](#)

news

Apply for the swisspeace Dealing with the Past course



Finding a way to deal with a violent past in the aftermath of civil war, the end of an authoritarian regime or occupation, is argued by some to be the basis for lasting peace, democracy and the rule of law. Learn how societies emerging from violence and conflict deal with the past and prepare for the future.

In this course, you will:

- Understand different approaches to dealing with the past.
- Get familiar with the most important notions, concepts and mechanisms relevant to transitional justice and dealing with the past (truth commissions, archives, reparation programs, guarantees of non-recurrence, etc.).
- Learn how dealing with the past processes have been designed and implemented in different contexts.
- Learn about the complexities, challenges and politics inherent in dealing with the past processes and the design of mechanisms and interventions.
- Exchange experience and become part of a community of practice.

swisspeace

links

- [Apply now!](#)

calendar

Events

KOFF MEMBER NEWS SITE

Upcoming events organized by KOFF member organizations can be found on our [KOFF MEMBER NEWS SITE](#).

GENEVA PEACE WEEK – “DIGITAL SPACES : RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE”

Principles for Peace, Fondation Hirondelle and ICT4Peace Foundation

2.11.2022

Digital spaces bring both risks and opportunities to peace. We can see it from Zimbabwe to Venezuela from Ukraine to the US, from Sri Lanka to Syria, and in many other places around the world. The objective of this workshop is to demonstrate the extent to which digital spaces can both contribute to and undermine the peace process. We will build on a research conducted in May 2022, based on a series of interviews and a consultation organized by Principles for Peace, Fondation Hirondelle and ICT4Peace Foundation.

Join our workshop and engage with our panellists: researchers, tech and media experts from around the world!

[More information](#)

KITCHEN BATTLE

Cuisine sans frontières

Kitchen Battle Lucerne: 3-6.11.2022

Kitchen Battle Bern: 17-19.11.2022

The Kitchen Battle is a unique gastro-cultural event. Different teams, from haute cuisine to trendy pubs, cook live on stage, in front of and for the audience against each other.

And all this for a good cause:

To finance the projects of Cuisine sans frontières.

[More information](#)

AUTUMN MEETING OF WOMEN FOR PEACE

16.11.2022

Feminist foreign policy increasingly refers to women’s and human rights. It strives to offer a policy for all. Is this more than wishful thinking, especially in today’s tumultuous times? Officially, it already exists in several countries. How can its impact be measured?

Leandra Bias (former swisspeace member, now employed by the University of Bern) knows about the strengths and weaknesses and does research on authoritarianism. The Autumn meeting of Women for Peace Switzerland offers a good occasion for an in-depth discussion.

INFORMATION EVENT

artasfoundation foundation

19.11.2022 at 2.30pm at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur

The Kunstmuseum Winterthur is currently hosting the exhibition “Art and War”. After a

guided tour by the exhibition curator, we invite you to an aperitif in the foyer of the Kunstmuseum as well as to an informal conversation about our own work, where we approach the issue of art in conflict regions (less through artworks than through participatory artistic processes).

PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT – FROM ASPIRATIONS TO REALITY

Helvetas Symposium (hybrid event)

23.11.2022, 2:30-8pm at Kursaal in Berne and online

Through partnerships with large companies, development organizations and donors hope to achieve impact and reach with their operations, as well as sustainability and innovation. This will be key for achieving the SDGs. At the same time, such collaborations carry risks, since goals and values of the unlike partners differ. What does it take to reach benefits for the poor and the companies, based on a sustainable use of natural resources? And how can mutual understanding be fostered and pitfalls be avoided?

[More information](#)

FILMFESTIVAL FRAUENSTARK!

25.11 – 4.12.2022 in kult.kino, Theaterstrasse 7, Basel

The film festival takes place within the framework of the 16 Days Campaign on Violence against Women. A selection of events will be organized to complement some of the film screenings. The Ukrainian writer Eugenia Selik, the filmmaker Celina Escher as well as the film producer Sonja Kilbertus are some of the exciting guests who will give an in-depth insight into the topics of the respective film screenings.

Four screenings are reserved exclusively for school classes.

Films: The Letter, Clara Sola, La Mif, 107 Mothers, Stand Up My Beauty, Fly So Far, Among Us Women (premiere), Quo Vadis, Aida?

[More information](#)

WORKSHOP ON PBI MISSIONS ABROAD

26.11.2022

Are you interested in working for human rights in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala or Colombia? Then register now for the workshop day and learn more about non-violent conflict resolution. The workshop is especially aimed at people who are interested in working abroad. But it is also open to those who are generally interested in PBI's peace work. The workshop day will be bilingual, in French and German, depending on the composition of the group.

[More information](#)

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KOFF

Die Schweizer Plattform für Friedensförderung
La plateforme suisse de promotion de la paix
La piattaforma svizzera per la promozione della pace
The Swiss platform for peacebuilding

KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

ae-Centre	HEKS	Stiftung für Integrale
Alliance Sud	HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation	Friedensförderung
APRED	IAMANEH Schweiz	Swiss Academy for Development
artasfoundation	Interpeace	Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund
Baha'i	Lucerne Initiative for Peace and	Swiss Peace Council
Brücke · Le pont	Security (LIPS)	Swiss Red Cross
Caritas Switzerland	medico international schweiz	Swiss Refugee Council
Caux – Initiatives of Change	MIR Switzerland	SWISSAID
Coexistences	mission 21	Terre des Femmes Switzerland
Foundation	miva – transporte l'aide	terre des hommes schweiz
cfd	Peace Brigades International	Women for Peace Switzerland
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