

## The Pulse of Peacebuilding

As the world continues to traverse the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, peacebuilders are being offered a unique opportunity to reflect on established international norms and practices for peace. The multiple global crises underway have exposed the fault-lines of a cooperation-based global system designed in the name of peace, yet which is currently ill-adapted to address the contemporary interconnected challenges of the climate crisis, unsustainable growth-based models of consumption, inequality and exclusion, fear-driven politics, social polarization, closing democratic spaces and rising authoritarianism.

This compelling global moment offers peacebuilders a unique opportunity to collectively step forward to address the challenges of a world in great need.

In preparation for Geneva Peace Week 2021, this edition of *The Pulse of Peacebuilding* distills some of the main messages which emerged during Geneva Peace Week in November 2020, when more than 4,000 people and 170 organizations from across the world came together to discuss the theme “**Rebuilding trust after disruption: Pathways to reset international cooperation**”.<sup>1</sup> It includes four key reflections to support peacebuilding efforts in 2021:

1. **Lead pro-actively to mainstream peacebuilding** across sectors, providing alternatives to securitization.
2. **Use the existing evidence base** to achieve broader peacebuilding impact.
3. Start with the peacebuilding sector itself to **realize true inclusion**.
4. Support **peacebuilders to build peace from the inside out**.

The geopolitical power shifts currently underway are contributing to rising international tensions which threaten a multilateral order that has been decades in the making.<sup>2</sup> Responses to crises are increasingly securitized; global military spending continues to rise despite its inability to respond to pressing human security concerns such as bushfires, health crises, and other threats that strain our human and planetary survival. The current visions of security that pervade many sectors and shape respective responses are not aligned with the contemporary threats and challenges that we are collectively facing.

Now more than ever, peacebuilding actors need to step up—in a collective voice and through collaborative actions—to offer alternative narratives for peace and to meaningfully demonstrate what peace leadership entails and how it is done.

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<sup>1</sup> This second edition of the *Pulse of Peacebuilding* has been edited by Claudia Seymour, GPW Focal Point 2018-2020. It draws on multiple qualitative inputs, including: 65 survey responses from GPW20 session organizers and participants, blog and journal entries from more than 90 Graduate Institute MA students, and debriefing meetings with members of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform’s Advisory Board. Analytical reports by Noura Tan on the GPW20 ‘Harnessing the Economy for Peace’ track and by Andreas Hirblinger on the GPW20 ‘CyberPeace’ track have further informed this report.

<sup>2</sup> On the skewed benefits of this previous multilateral order, see e.g.: ‘China is betting that the West is in irreversible decline’, *The Economist*, 3 April 2021. For recent reversals in non-nuclear proliferation norms, see e.g.: ‘The UK’s Nuclear Deterrent: what you need to know’, UK Government Defence and Armed Forces Guidance Note, Updated 16 March 2021.

## **1. Lead pro-actively to mainstream peacebuilding across sectors, providing alternatives to securitization**

- Adapting peacebuilding practice across sectors can be pro-actively led by peacebuilders, who can support the translation of good practices into other sectors. This might include adapting existing conflict analysis tools and conflict sensitive approaches for uptake among private sector actors; integrating principles of peace practice into national school curricula at all levels (from early learning to higher education); and by partnering with media and technology actors to deter and overcome fear-based narratives, hate-speech and disinformation campaigns.
- The digital transformation—propelled forward by the pandemic—is offering new opportunities for peacebuilders to broaden collaboration across geographical boundaries and to engage more consistently across sectors, generations and cultures. All actors—including state administrators, parliamentarians, business leaders, scientists, religious leaders, civil society organizers, teachers, journalists, artists, technology experts, and individual citizens of all ages—have a role to play in peacebuilding.
- Many of the countries facing the biggest climate impacts are also those affected by conflict. As climate change increases uncertainty and compounds risk, environmental issues must be included in peacebuilding and conflict prevention agendas, and vice versa. As decision makers take steps to respond to climate change, they must do so with a conflict-sensitive approach that, at a minimum, avoids exacerbating existing tensions.

## **2. Use the existing evidence base to achieve broader peacebuilding impact**

- There exists a solid foundation of effective peacebuilding tools and approaches from a wide range of geographical contexts. Yet there remain gaps between what we know works and what is actually being implemented in practice.<sup>3</sup> When good practices are working, they should be documented and communicated; when approaches are not working, learning should also be transparently shared among peacebuilding actors committed to improved outcomes for peace.
- More concerted efforts are required to assess the relevance and impact of peacebuilding initiatives through rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, undertaken in equal partnership with local actors and national governments. Ensuring accountability to the people programs are intended to serve should be encouraged by donor funding mechanisms that support learning and transparency, and which allow for flexibility and responsiveness when adjustments are needed.
- There is great potential to leverage technology for peacebuilding, including in applications using satellite imagery for tracking human rights violations, machine learning to analyze large amounts of data, blockchain for guaranteeing cease fire arrangements, or mapping applications to monitor conflict events. It would be beneficial to integrate and mainstream technical expertise into peacebuilding

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<sup>3</sup> See the [What Works in Peacebuilding](#) resources in the Geneva Peace Week Digital Series.

programme design while also remaining in control of the uniquely human capacities for nuance, discernment and care.

### **3. Start with the peacebuilding sector itself to realize true inclusivity**

- Much has been said about 'inclusion' in the peacebuilding sector, but meaningful actions are still needed to address persisting systemic exclusion based on race, ethnicity, gender, or other identities. As public pressure builds to end structural exclusions such as racism and gender-based discrimination, peacebuilding actors should lead the way in examining how inequality may be perpetuated within their own organizations and programs. Recognition about structural privileges and efforts to redress these will serve as models on how systems more generally might be adapted to realize peace-promoting values such as inclusivity.
- Within organizations, hiring practices, pay scales and management styles might be helpfully reviewed to ensure that they are truly inclusive. Redressing pay gaps or security-related logistical considerations between national and international staff, for example, will send a strong message about authentic commitment to equality and shared dignity, and thus contribute to generating trust within and beyond peacebuilding organizations.
- Within programs, peacebuilders might systematically review when exclusion occurs in their organizations, then make the necessary administrative and management adjustments. Inclusion of local actors in all programs needs to be meaningful and consistent, which requires full organizational commitment, sufficient time and resources for follow-through. Donors can help ensure that inclusivity is not a 'check-the-box' formality but that a commitment to inclusion is fully integrated into program design, implementation and evaluation.

### **4. Support peacebuilders to build peace from the inside out**

- The spaces created by the pandemic have opened up possibilities for peacebuilders to reflect on how we ourselves integrate the values of peace work within our own lives. Aware that peace is the cumulation of the small actions of every day, professional peacebuilders should be encouraged to double down on our own personal commitments to deep listening, empathy, mutual respect and non-violent communication.
- If peacebuilders intend to have a meaningful impact for peace in the world, peace needs to start from within. Inner peace work can be supported by well-designed management processes that are committed to staff well-being and that reward integrity and authentic leadership.