

PEACE WORKS

How we can build peace together
in our volatile world



Illustrations in the report are from a collection of comics, drawn from research, sharing the stories of young people in Algeria, Colombia, Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as they live through conflict and imagine and build a better future.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, developed by a coalition of UK-based organisations working to prevent violent conflict around the world, is a rallying cry for collaboration and action.

Peace Works sets out a vision for why and how the UK Government with civil society partners should prioritise conflict prevention as part of an effective and credible foreign policy, in order to shift the global trajectory on conflict.



The moment: why peace matters
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The world is at war. 2025 was the third deadliest year of conflict since the end of the Cold War. With the global economy under strain from rising costs of living, and an underfunded humanitarian system spread thinly across crises, the world simply cannot afford more conflict.

The situation: how conflict is changing
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International law, universal values and agendas – arms regulation, gender equality, climate protection – are under severe strain. Climate change is exacerbating the dynamics of conflicts. Rising global militarisation is increasing the risk of conflict conflagration. New weapons technology makes it harder to end conflicts and AI and social media drive polarisation and disinformation. These trends also present opportunities – for new coalitions, partnerships and solidarity, for innovation in tools and approaches.

The opportunity: why prioritise prevention
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Peace – and peacebuilding – is a public good. Peace creates stability for governments and businesses to invest in people and institutions. Peacebuilding has public support - recent polling shows that the majority of the British

public want to see the UK playing a proactive role in international affairs and conflict prevention. Peacebuilding also pays off – investing in conflict prevention efforts is a small upfront investment in a more stable future.

The impact: how peace works in practice
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Peacebuilders work tirelessly to raise the alarm on emerging crises, to combat division and hate, and to build the foundations of more peaceful societies. They often face considerable personal physical risk but the impact they have within societies is remarkable, even if not always visible to the outside world. Stories of peacebuilding in this report show what it involves and can achieve.

The task ahead: how we can meet the moment together
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We need the UK to prioritise prevention through political support and influence in five areas:

1

Prioritise prevention in policy by publicly committing to a whole-of-government approach to conflict and atrocity prevention and setting out UK policy clearly in order to guide ambitious and timely decisions and actions.

2

Energise coalitions that strengthen peace and uphold international law by backing global and regional institutions that foster cooperation and stability, adhering to international law and bolstering global agendas on Women Peace and Security and climate change.

3

Harness UK peace capabilities by establishing ‘conflict and atrocity prevention taskforces’ that draw on research and practitioner expertise inside and outside government, including in countries affected by conflict – to help Ministers and embassies anticipate and respond to conflict risks.

4

Champion local peacebuilding in word and deed – shifting power in practice – increasing direct funding to local civil society and streamlining administrative burdens to ensure resources reach those best placed to act. Create funding mechanisms specifically to strengthen the leadership and resilience of local organisations and networks and open up decision-making processes to local peacebuilders.

5

Spearhead a step change in PeaceTech by developing the systematic integration of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into conflict prevention approaches and in the peacebuilding sector, and connecting peacebuilders with technology firms and regulators to ensure new technologies and regulations have a more positive impact in conflict situations.

Peace works – this report shows how and sets out what the UK must do to make it happen.

THE MOMENT

Why peace matters



The world is at war

More countries are involved in violent conflicts than at any time since 1945.¹ Where conflict rages it wreaks untold human suffering and environmental devastation. Its consequences reach far beyond conflict zones, increasing hardship and uncertainty in countries around the world, including in the UK, where conflicts are driving up the cost of living and fracturing communities.

The current trajectory is ominous, but not set in stone.

In most cases, there are alternatives to dealing with conflict that cost a fraction of the outlay required for military interventions.² Diplomatic mechanisms can reduce the risk of accidental and intentional escalation between military rivals. New coalitions of states can mediate and avert conflict, as seen by the role of Pakistan and Türkiye at key points in US-Iran talks.

Long-term conflict prevention efforts, led by people in the midst of conflict and supported by international partners, work. They can stop violence and deal with the grievances and injustice that cause conflict. Examples in this report show how. This moment of global fragmentation and instability demands that political and cultural leaders resolve to put peace first and work together to turn the tide on global conflict.

The UK has the responsibility and capability to make this happen – and the opportunity to show consistency and leadership in promoting peace across its foreign policy. It can draw on its diplomatic clout, soft power and world-leading conflict expertise to do so.

This report shows how the UK Government can strengthen and deliver on its commitments to preventing conflict.³



What is conflict prevention and peacebuilding?

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding refer to a range of activities that tackle the factors that cause and drive violent conflict. They both seek non-violent ways to tackle grievances, and to prevent and reduce tensions and insecurity. They aim to give people opportunities to live peaceful lives, free from the threat of violence.

I BELIEVE THAT BUILDING PEACE IS ABOUT QUESTIONING OURSELVES AND OUR BEHAVIOURS, IT IS LEARNING FROM THE MISTAKES WE HAVE MADE. BUILDING PEACE IS ALLOWING US TO LEARN, AND LETTING OURSELVES BE SURPRISED BY THE OTHER.



THE HUMAN COST OF WAR

117.8 million displaced

In 2025, 117.8 million people remained displaced after being forced from their homes.⁴

239 million need humanitarian assistance

Violent conflict is the biggest contributor to humanitarian need, with 239 million people currently in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.⁵

24,174 violations against children

In 2025, 24,174 children experienced grave violations against their rights in situations of armed conflict – 8% more than the year before.⁶

10,000 cases of sexual violence

Nearly 10,000 cases of conflict-related sexual violence were documented by the UN worldwide last year – more than double the previous year's figure. Rape, sexual slavery and abduction were deployed as weapons of war in countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the Caribbean.⁷

11 million in Sudan need urgent health care

Conflict overwhelms and destroys health facilities and increases vulnerability to epidemic diseases, especially amongst the poorest:⁸ intense fighting in Sudan since April 2023 has left 11 million people in need of urgent health care, but insecurity makes delivery of health care extremely difficult.⁹

245,000 KILLED



In 2025 nearly 245,000 people, combatants and civilians, were killed in conflict, making it the third deadliest year since the end of the Cold War – with Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan and Myanmar experiencing the most violence.¹⁰

THE ECONOMIC COST

£22.9 billion

According to the Ministry of Defence, UK operations in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 cost around £22.9 billion – £32.8 billion in today's prices.¹¹

\$2887 billion military expenditure

World military expenditure rose to US\$2887 billion in 2025, an increase of 2.9% in real terms over 2024 and the 11th consecutive annual increase.¹²

\$771 million

The cost of evacuation and damaged property as a result of the five-day border conflict with Cambodia in 2025 cost Thailand an initial \$307 million; the budget to mitigate its effects is \$771 million.¹³

7% of economic output

According to research by the International Monetary Fund, the average national economy in the midst of conflict loses 7% of its economic output over a five-year period.¹⁴ Prices rise steadily, by around 35%, in the five years after conflicts break out.¹⁵

10% of UK GDP

The World Bank estimates that rebuilding infrastructure in Syria following years of brutal conflict may cost \$216 billion;¹⁶ reconstruction in Sudan and Gaza is estimated to cost £130 billion¹⁷ and £70 billion¹⁸ respectively. Together these figures amount to 10% of the UK's nominal GDP at the time of writing.¹⁹



£16.2 TRILLION

In 2025, the global cost of violence was £16.2 trillion, equivalent to 10.5% of global GDP, or nearly £2000 per person – an increase of 3.2% on 2024 and largely due to military expenditure.²⁰

COST TO THE CLIMATE

Polluting our planet

Conflicts disrupt ecosystems, deplete natural resources, pollute the environment, and jeopardise the health of our planet for generations to come.²¹

5.5% of global emissions

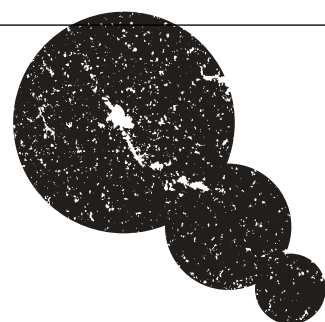
Every fraction of a degree of global warming matters. The total military carbon footprint is approximately 5.5% of global emissions - equivalent to the fourth largest carbon footprint in the world.²² This is contributing to a record high in greenhouse gas emissions.²³

In Ukraine...

Soil, waterways and forests have been polluted by shelling, fires and floods. The cost of clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance is expected to be around \$34.6 billion.

In Gaza...

The destruction of buildings, roads and other infrastructure has created over 61 million tonnes of debris, some of which is contaminated with unexploded ordnance, asbestos and other hazardous substances.²⁴ The World Health Organization has reported 179,000 cases of acute respiratory infection and 136,400 cases of diarrhoea among children under five - a clear indication of the impact of the destruction of public works.²⁵



5.5% OF GLOBAL EMISSIONS

The total military carbon footprint is approximately 5.5% of global emissions - equivalent to the fourth largest carbon footprint in the world.

COST TO THE UK

Division

Conflicts abroad and their consequences undermine social cohesion in the UK, providing the backdrop for violence within communities – from the 2022 riots in Leicester to recent attacks on Muslim and Jewish communities linked to wars in the Middle East.

Displacement

Immigration, an increasingly politicised and divisive issue in the UK, is often driven by conflict and persecution – the six top countries of origin of people seeking asylum in the UK are all experiencing conflict or social and political unrest.²⁶

Disruption

Protracted conflict in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 and conflicts in the Middle East and Gulf have disrupted supply chains, affecting the UK's economy and trade.²⁷ The US-Israel-Iran war has hit energy, fuel, mortgage and food bills.²⁸

Distrust

The majority of Britons (55% in one survey) actively distrust the government when it comes to making foreign policy decisions in the public's interests, in part due to widespread dissatisfaction with the government's approach to major conflicts in Europe and the Middle East.²⁹



The world simply cannot afford more conflict.

THE SITUATION

How conflict is changing

The nature of conflict is changing; and efforts to prevent it need to adapt. Peacebuilders are meeting these challenges by harnessing new opportunities in our changing geopolitical, physical and digital landscape.



1

A new world dis-order

Canada's Prime Minister, Mark Carney, has described the current moment as a 'rupture' in the world order, with unbridled geopolitical power leading to a "world of fortresses" which will be "more fragile and less sustainable".³⁰

The new world dis-order plays out in conflicts – regional and international powers asserting themselves over neighbouring states, intervening in conflicts in ways that escalate violence and instability. It is evident too in

conflict prevention – states cooperating less on anticipatory action to prevent atrocities and to hold perpetrators to account, and a proliferation of mediation efforts and of short-term 'deals'. These hamper alignment in support of comprehensive peace agreements that can provide pathways to political transition and institutional and political change. Now, objectives of peace agreements are more modest: ceasefires, security arrangements, and facilitating the flow of natural resources.³¹

Yet, the rupture also brings opportunities to build new, fairer and more effective international systems and coalitions. It opens space for others – such as Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan and Kenya – to play roles in mediating and preventing conflict, and for new 'coalitions of the willing' to form in the prevention of conflict. Regional organisations such as the African Union and Pacific Islands Forum are generating 'homegrown' solutions to conflicts while giving their members a stronger platform to advocate shared positions internationally.³²

2

Down, but not out - international law and values

The integrity of international law is under severe duress.

Civilians are bearing the brunt of violence and states are flouting the protection of civilians enshrined in the Geneva Convention with impunity. In the Middle East, parties to conflicts, wars and atrocities have made open threats to kill civilians and destroy critical civilian infrastructure.³⁴

Children and aid workers are not spared. In June 2026, the annual UN report on Children Affected by Armed Conflict found that – for the first time in its 25 years – states rather than armed groups are the primary perpetrators

of grave violations against children.³⁵ In the same month the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel produced a report highlighting the deliberate targeting of children in the conflict.³⁶ Attacks on aid workers in conflict zones have risen exponentially – from 300 in 2022 to 715 in 2025 – and the numbers of aid workers killed in duty has doubled (141 in 2022 to 387 in 2025).³⁷

Women and girls living in conflict zones face an increasing likelihood of experiencing gender-based violence.³⁸ In 2024, 676 million women



The global movement against gender equality

An increasingly global anti-gender movement is gaining traction. Aiming to restore ‘traditional’ gender roles, the movement is exploiting existing grievances and combining disinformation with political power to undermine progress in women’s and LGBTQ+ rights and civic space, and inciting online and physical violence against women advocates. The backlash has diminished global leadership and financial support for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. A recent UN Women survey warned that almost half of all women’s organisations working in crisis settings were at risk of closure due to funding constraints.⁴¹

and girls lived within 50 kilometres of a deadly conflict event, the highest recorded number since the 1990s. Yet, support for gender equality and for women’s participation in peace and security efforts has regressed (see box).

Treaties and conventions regulating the development, trade and use of weapons are being undermined. In July 2025, five European states withdrew from the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty in response to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. States are increasingly selective in their interpretation of the rules regulating the trade of conventional arms, including the Arms Trade Treaty, undermining international standards and common principles. Exports of arms to the Government of Israel continue – arms used in war and atrocities in Palestine.⁴² Arms transferred to the UAE are deployed in the devastating conflict in Sudan.⁴³

Still, some states are standing by their values and commitments to the rule of law, human rights and justice. And many people globally still believe in the institutions that shape a fairer world and believe that rules rather than power should decide the international order. Research by Lex International shows that most people globally want their governments to do more to ensure that all states comply with international law.⁴⁴

3

Arms race to the bottom

The risk of escalation is higher in a world which is already arming itself for war.

Global military expenditure has grown by 41% in the past decade.⁴⁵ To shore up European security and insure against US retreat, NATO allies have made ambitious commitments to bolster defence spending and invest in nuclear deterrence, sovereign capabilities and new military technologies. Low income and fragile

states are also under pressure to expand military budgets, at the expense of essential services. Beyond the risk of nuclear conflagration, global militarisation creates a vicious cycle: the use of new technologies in warfare makes it harder to end conflicts and saps resources and political attention from tackling the root causes of insecurity, conflict and poverty.

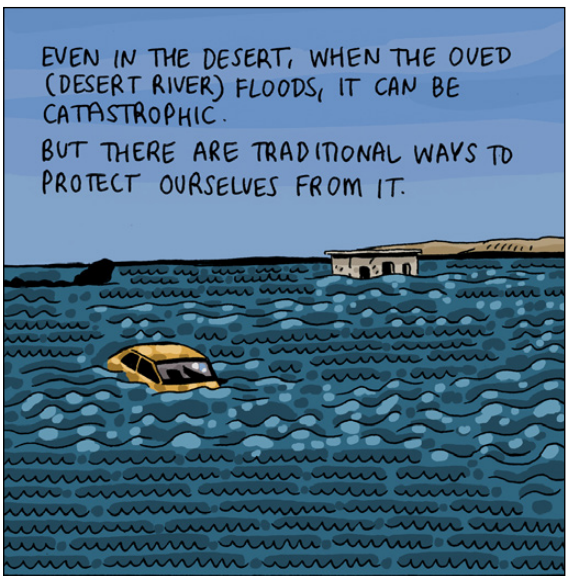
The UN Secretary-General has called for a ‘rebalancing’ of military and development expenditure, warning that military expenditure does not lead to more security and that the trend is undermining progress on nearly all the Sustainable Development Goals, which is facing a \$4 trillion funding gap.⁴⁶

In the UK, the increase in the defence budget has already led to a 40% cut to overseas development assistance.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the UK Defence Investment Plan entails a funding shortfall of roughly £4.7 billion, which may well require cuts to other public services.⁴⁸

Without balancing its approach to reducing conflict between military, development and diplomatic tools, the UK risks facing global security challenges “with one hand tied behind its back”.⁴⁹

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”⁵⁰

– US President Eisenhower, 1953



4

A changing climate for conflict

Climate change and environmental degradation are changing the conflict landscape – exacerbating the dynamics of violent conflicts and amplifying existing tensions, as well as threatening livelihoods, fuelling economic instability and widening existing gender and social inequalities.⁵¹

Climate change and conflict are closely connected – 17 of the 25 countries deemed most vulnerable to climate-related impacts are experiencing fragility and conflict.⁵²

Rising temperatures and related environmental pressures can weaken the capacity of already fragile institutions to meet the needs of communities. This can be instrumentalised, exacerbating competition and distrust in the state while fuelling ‘resource nationalism’, where states seek to monopolise control of their own natural resources and also those of others.⁵³ This has led to violent confrontations between governments and environmental activists – Global Witness has documented 2250 activists killed or disappeared between 2012 and 2024.⁵⁴ By destabilising

livelihoods, climate change can also increase vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist organisations, armed groups and networks.⁵⁵

How we respond to the climate crisis can either exacerbate conflict or create opportunities for peace. Climate adaptations themselves, such as flood protection infrastructure, agricultural land conservation or managed relocation, can lead to increased social tensions.⁵⁶

Dealing with the effects of the climate crisis also offers opportunities for peacebuilding.

Peacebuilders explore common ground among divided communities affected by environmental degradation. They work with institutions to ensure investments in climate adaptation yield dividends for communities affected by conflict and climate, particularly for those already marginalised.

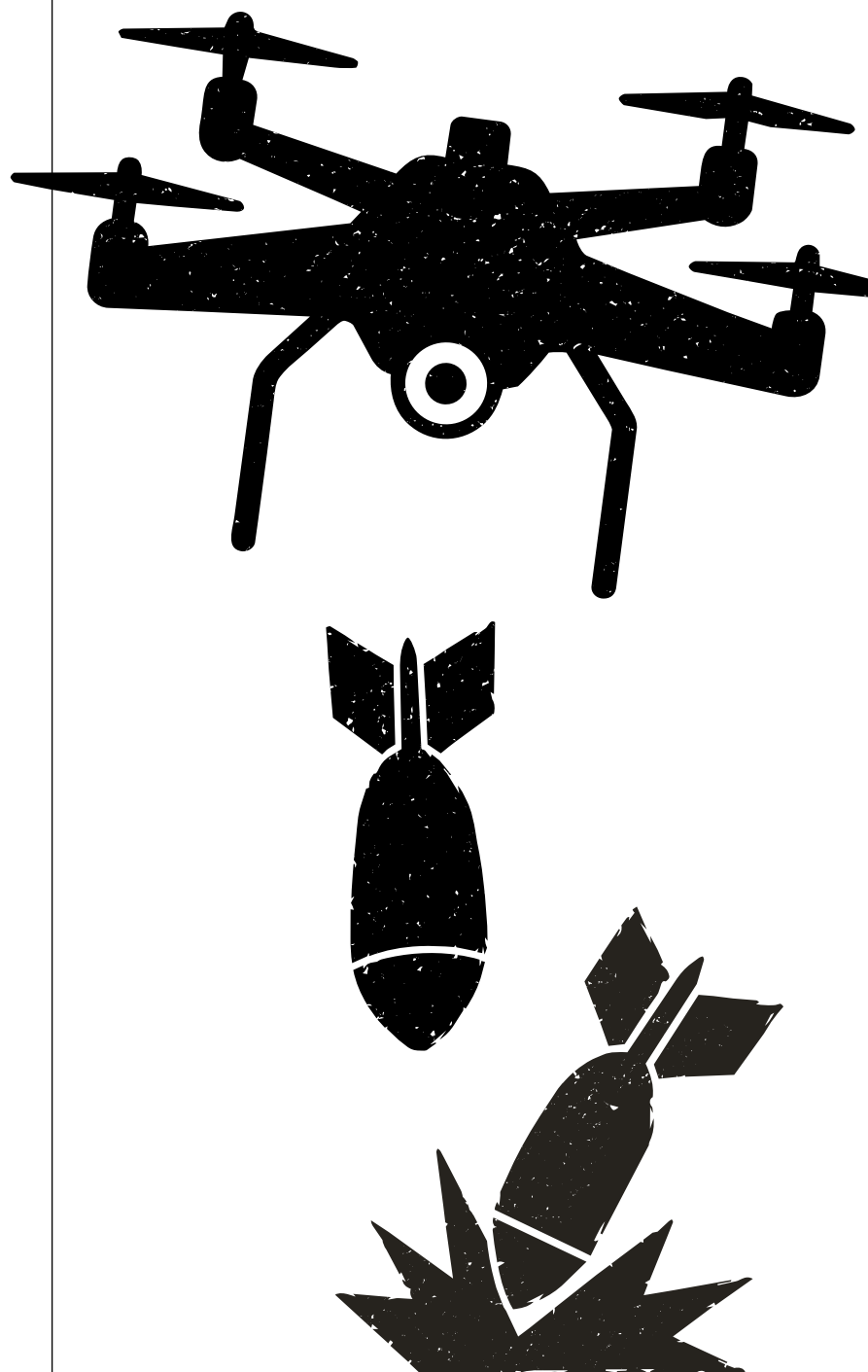
5

Conflict in a digital age

Rapid advances in technology and the increasing prevalence of social media and artificial intelligence (AI) mean that now, more than ever, both war and peace are pursued in the digital realm.

Remote warfare, waged with unmanned weapons aimed at targets identified and ranked using AI, is desensitising the human consequences of violence and creating a profound accountability gap.⁵⁷ Drones are responsible for between 70-80% of those injured or killed in Ukraine and Russia since the war started.⁵⁸ Cyber operations are now part of warfare: the CyberPeace Institute has reported over 2000 cyberattacks connected to the invasion of Ukraine, impacting 25 sectors in over 50 countries.⁵⁹

AI and social media are being weaponised to conduct hybrid warfare, clogging social media platforms with inflammatory, divisive narratives and disinformation that risk societal polarisation,⁶⁰ directly inciting violence and undermining peace processes.⁶¹ Peacebuilders as well as activists, journalists and even health workers are targeted by digital violence.⁶² Digital blackouts have been used in Gaza, Ethiopia and Iran, preventing civilians from accessing information or having their voices heard.



The challenge of building resilience to mis- and dis-information is as relevant in Syria and Sudan as it is in Southport⁶³ and Golders Green.⁶⁴

Peacebuilders are adapting to the digital age – analysing digital harms in conflict, using new ‘PeaceTech’⁶⁵ to analyse, monitor and address conflict dynamics, countering harmful online narratives, and using digital tools for dialogue.⁶⁶

Technology is moving fast – to keep up, conflict prevention efforts must integrate digital communications, new technologies and digital safety measures into policies, strategies, practice and capabilities.

6

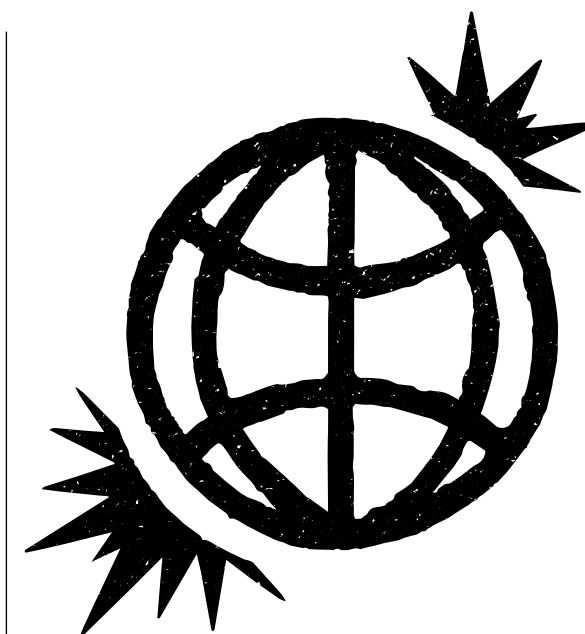
Conflicts without borders

Conflicts are increasingly ‘internationalised’ – involving more external countries in some way. According to the Global Peace Index, the number of these internationalised intra-state conflicts has increased by 175% since 2010.⁶⁷

The number of countries involved in at least one external conflict in the previous five years rose from 59 in 2008 to 103 in 2025.

– Global Peace Index, 2026

This trend generates significant risks in a world of interconnected economies and societies. Conflict parties can capture and disrupt vital supply chains to exert leverage – whether it be Ukrainian wheat, shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, gold in Sudan, or critical minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Conflicts are more likely to spill over as conflict parties attract direct support or intervention from external allies, as has occurred to devastating effect in Israel and Palestine.



Conflict parties are also increasingly fragmented. Multiple armed groups with varied and variable agendas and alliances often operate in conflict contexts, creating a complex and shifting conflict system for peacebuilders to navigate.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Why prioritise prevention



Conflict lies at the heart of many challenges facing the world today, and conflict prevention should be at the heart of all strategies and solutions to address them.

1

Peace (building) is a public good

Peace provides the foundation for the world to thrive. Efforts to advance global health, grow economies, address inequality and poverty, tackle the climate crisis, and expand access to justice, education and nutrition are all made more possible by peace. This is because peace creates the stability needed for governments to invest in people and institutions.⁶⁸

Peace brings opportunities for economic development. Between the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and 2019, Northern Ireland's GDP per capita increased by 27%.⁶⁹ In Rwanda following the Genocide, under-five mortality fell from 184 to 38 deaths per 1000 live births between 2000 and 2024, and economic growth averaged 7.4% annually between 2000 and 2023.⁷⁰ In Colombia, peace-related rural development programmes helped reduce structural poverty in conflict-affected municipalities from 39.8% to 24.4% between 2018 and 2024.⁷¹

Peacebuilding offers opportunities for grievance and dispute to be dealt with through non-violent or political means. It offers a tool for societies to confront and cope with social upheavals brought about by climate change or the AI revolution.

2

Peacebuilding has public support

It is the primary role of a government to keep its citizens safe. Yet, the rise of conflicts overseas are causing genuine harm and worry amongst the British public. Ahead of the 2024 UK General Election, one poll found that 'war/conflict around the world' was the third most commonly cited reason why people feel unsafe in their everyday life – ahead of migration, climate change and even physical health problems.⁷²

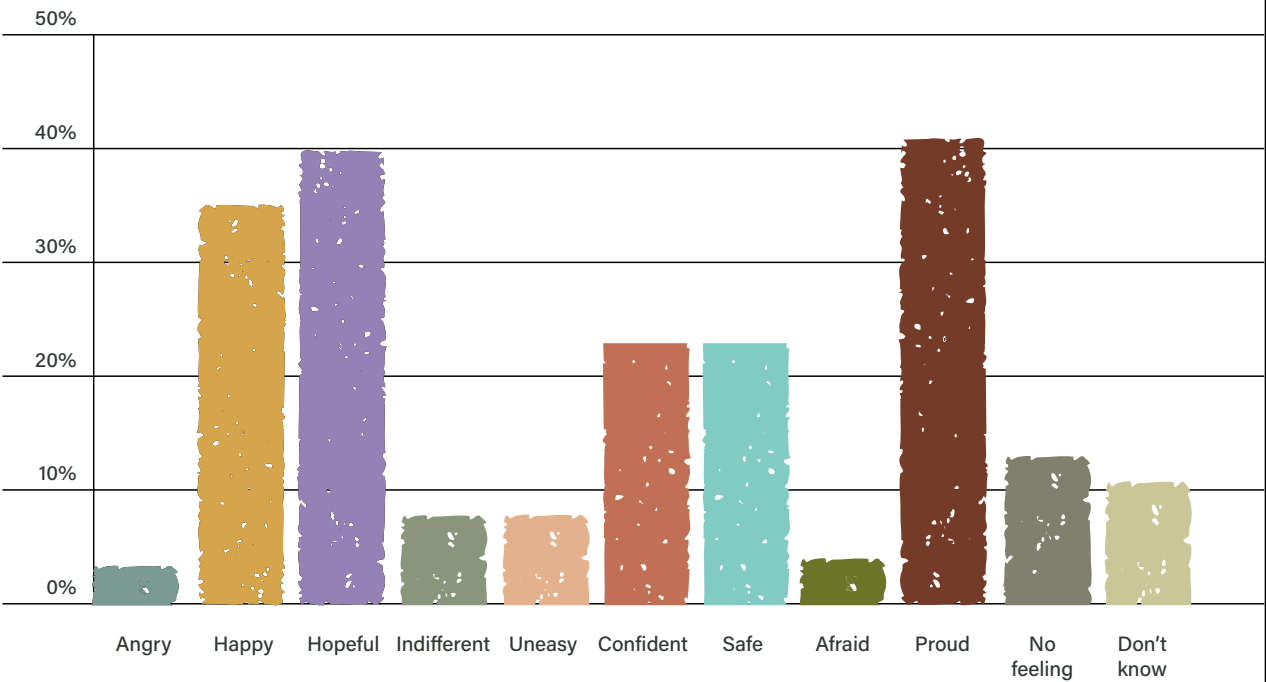
The British public want to see the UK playing a proactive role in international affairs, with 61% of those surveyed by More in Common in 2025 agreeing that the UK should play a leading (20%) or large but supportive (41%) role.⁷³

Evidence also suggests that many Britons support UK investment in peacebuilding around the world: a UK poll conducted in July 2026 showed that 65% agree that it is very or fairly important that the UK invests more resources into peacebuilding. Asked why, people supported on moral grounds – the most popular responses being because:

- **'human beings have the right to live in peace, free from the threat of conflict'**
- **'conflict creates so much suffering in the world, but when peace is achieved people's lives can flourish'**

The same survey showed that most Britons understand what peacebuilding involves – addressing the underlying causes of conflict, not its symptoms – and that it is a long-term and inclusive process, involving everyone from communities to governments working to end fighting and the recurrence of violence. When asked how they would feel if they knew the UK Government played a key role in stopping conflict somewhere in the world, people chose overwhelmingly positive emotions: 'proud', 'hopeful', 'safe' and 'confident'.⁷⁴

How would you feel if you knew that the UK had played a key role in stopping conflict somewhere else in the world?



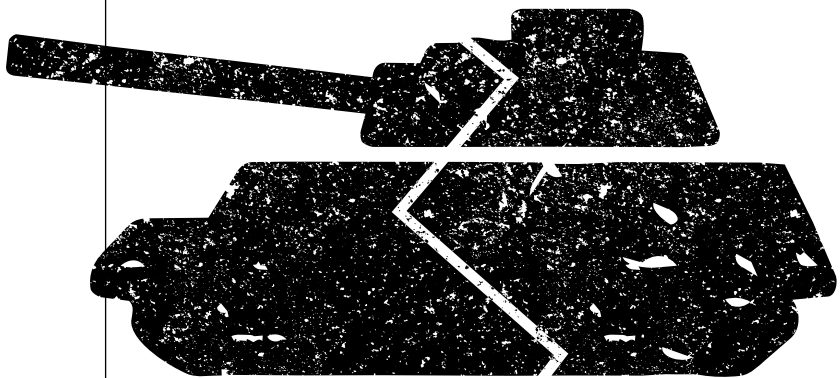
3

Peacebuilding pays off

Peacebuilding prevents the escalation of conflict and crises. It reduces the cost of humanitarian assistance, mine clearance and reconstruction, and builds the conditions for economies to flourish.

Investment in preventative peacebuilding represents a small upfront investment in a more stable future. The IMF estimates that for every dollar spent on conflict prevention, between \$26 and \$103 can be saved in other costs.⁷⁵

Nor is conflict prevention hugely expensive. The role played by local and international



peacebuilders in the six years of peace negotiations leading to the 2018 comprehensive peace agreement between the Ethiopian Government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, cost far less than one Challenger tank.⁷⁶

The peace agreement ended a 30-year conflict, with the Somali Regional State becoming one of the most stable in the country.⁷⁷



The UK's role in the Colombia peace process

The conflict between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which began in 1964, was the longest-running domestic conflict in the western hemisphere. The conflict killed 200,000 people and displaced a further 7 million. It undermined development of large parts of the country where the state had little access, creating a safe haven for drug traffickers and illegal deforestation.

A peace agreement signed in 2016 brought the conflict to an end. The UK made a significant contribution to Colombian peace efforts, through diplomatic and technical assistance to the peace negotiations and by supporting strategic civil society initiatives.

The UK is the penholder for the peace process at the UN Security Council and has committed £80 million to support agreement implementation. This funds initiatives that strengthen government engagement with citizens, stimulate rural socio-economic development to strengthen security of communities in conflict-affected areas, and enhance women's inclusion in decision-making, security and peacebuilding.

As the 10th anniversary of the peace agreement approaches, sustained UK engagement will be critical to help consolidate gains and address implementation gaps.

Yet, the UK is seriously underinvesting in its preventative capacities. Even when UK Official Development Assistance stood at 0.7% of GDP, only around 1% of this was spent on civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation – that envelope has now reduced to 0.3%.⁷⁸ Cuts to the FCDO and to the UK Integrated Security Fund, which funded the majority of UK-supported peacebuilding and conflict prevention initiatives, has left it unclear how much funding will remain for this work.

At a time of rising instability, can the UK afford NOT to spend more on upstream conflict prevention?

THE IMPACT

How peace works in practice

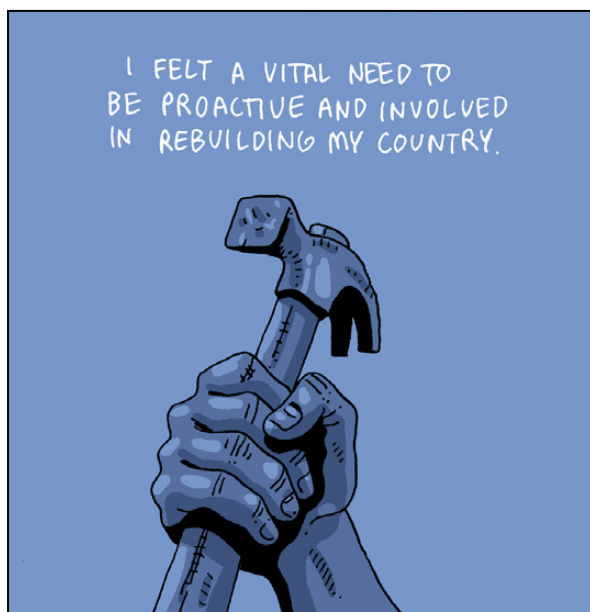
Around the world, peacebuilders work tirelessly to raise the alarm about emerging crises, to combat division and hate, and to build the foundations of more peaceful societies.

Peacebuilders are often the first responders when conflicts break out. Their work continues long after peace agreements are signed. They often face considerable personal physical risk – but the impact they have within societies is remarkable.

The results of conflict prevention can at times be tangible: an agreement signed, weapons destroyed, the return of displaced families. They can also be less visible: keeping peace talks going amid political turmoil and distrust, averting atrocities, reducing hostile narratives in the media.

Bad things not happening might not make the news, but for those intent on preventing conflict, it is the ultimate sign of success.

Here we share stories of what peacebuilding and conflict prevention looks like and what it can achieve. This work may often



be invisible, but its impact is not – and it is central to the stability, security and prosperity this report has set out to protect.

Mediation to end long-term conflict and prevent violence

Mediation and dialogue are tools for the peaceful resolution and prevention of conflict. They can be used at official levels between governments, as well as within societies.

In the **Philippines**, the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014 ended four decades of conflict between the national Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This agreement transformed the MILF into a peaceful political party and established the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 2019. Since the agreement, acts of violence have fallen dramatically and mass displacement has ended. Economic growth and investment has surged into the region, helping to reduce poverty rates and improve school enrolment and health indicators.

Peace mediation at multiple levels and over many years contributed to the peace agreement. The International Contact Group,⁷⁹ comprising international NGOs and external government partners, including the UK, supported the negotiations directly. Peacebuilders set up early warning and monitoring systems, connected communities and local civil society with the negotiations, and supported women leaders to play an instrumental role in the peace process and politics.

Local mediation is the frontline response to the kinds of conflict and insecurity most people experience. In **Malawi**, a woman mediator, Mable Chawinga, helped prevent instances of mob violence and community conflict.⁸⁰ Communities felt let down by the police forces and the courts' slowness to act, but by building cooperation between them, Mable helped communities to get involved on security questions and engage in dialogue with police when security issues emerged.

Clearing land mines to create fertile ground for economic growth and resilience

Mine clearance restores safe access to land, infrastructure and essential services. Clearance helps communities recover economically, rebuild social cohesion and strengthen resilience to future conflict.

In **Mozambique**, declared landmine-free in 2015, mine clearance has contributed to a 3.5-5% increase in GDP by restoring access to agricultural land and transport networks, enabling communities and markets to reconnect and thrive.

In **Angola**, a major battleground during the civil war, Huambo, was heavily contaminated by landmines, with 460 minefields across the province. Since then, every minefield has been cleared, and more than 16,000 landmines removed. The area where Princess Diana famously walked through a minefield in 1997, now Avenida 28 de Maio, has become a thriving community with schools, healthcare facilities and businesses. Across Huambo, households have reported average income increases of 270% following clearance, highlighting the transformative long-term economic and social benefits of making land safe.

Dealing with the past for a brighter future

Violent conflicts leave physical, social and psychological wounds, which can leave a lasting sense of grievance and cause conflicts to reoccur if allowed to fester.

In **Colombia**, peacebuilders supported Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women as well as LGBTQ+ people to ensure their distinct experiences of violence during the conflict were recognised, to pursue justice for crimes committed against them, and to combat the deeply embedded discrimination they face. They set up safe spaces for dialogue and collective healing, helped reconcile survivors and their communities, amplified their stories

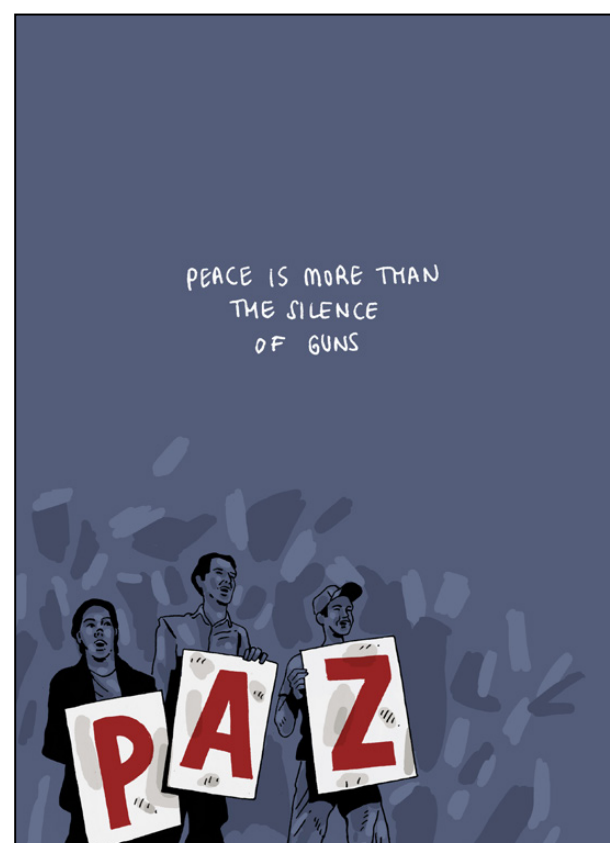
through online repositories, and supported joint advocacy and strategic litigation.

As a result, the experiences of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women and LGBTQ+ survivors have been acknowledged by communities, and transitional justice mechanisms set up after the conflict have officially recognised the harms done to them and investigated the crimes committed against them.

Working with business to generate peace dividends for communities

Large-scale investments can create jobs and economic growth, yet when communities are excluded from decisions that affect them, they can also lead to land disputes, environmental harm, human rights abuses and conflict.

Across the **Horn of Africa**, peacebuilders have worked with communities, governments and the private sector to ensure that development is more inclusive, accountable and contributes to peace. Across the region, communities and companies involved are now increasingly



resolving disputes through dialogue before they escalate. Meanwhile, trust and accountability between communities and business have improved, with communities reporting better access to information, increased responsiveness from companies to complaints, and greater confidence to demand their rights.

In **Uganda**, community monitors documented human rights violations linked to the oil and gas sector, and then secured remedies such as compensation, relocation of oil rigs, and improvements in labour practices.

“Instead of protesting, now we sit with companies and the government in meetings. We present evidence from our monitoring, and they must respond.”

– Community Representative, Uganda, 2024

Supporting women to prevent conflict and build peace

Women are integral to peace and security but are too often sidelined from both peace processes and political decision-making. Research shows that the inclusion of women makes peace processes more sustainable and more likely to address the priorities of women and girls.⁸² The UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework recognises the importance of women's role in preventing conflict, and the different impacts of conflict on women and girls.⁸³ Yet in 2024, women made up only 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators in formal peace processes. Many peace processes include no women at all.⁸⁴

Women peacebuilders have found a variety of ways to influence peace processes at the negotiating table and among communities.

In **Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia** and **Yemen**, a UK-funded project, 'Resourcing Change', provided flexible, core funding and support to women's organisations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, enabling them to respond to local peace priorities.⁸⁵ In **Yemen**, women have taken action to tackle online abuse and promote women's cyber security, particularly of women in public life, including by advocating for a Cyber Extortion Division within the Yemeni judicial system.⁸⁶ In **South Sudan**, women have prevented conflict between bordering communities in Eastern Equatoria state by fostering community peace dialogues to address tensions.

In the **Somali Region of Ethiopia**, women working in politics and civil society have established a cross-party platform to transform women's political influence in the region.⁸⁷ A rare demonstration of political collaboration in the region, they are advancing women's political participation and influence in politics. Members have persuaded religious and clan leaders to make public statements supporting women's inclusion, secured commitments from the authorities to appoint more women to positions in local government, and convinced conflict parties to engage in dialogue mediated by them. Women have now been asked to participate in local government as well as the Somali Regional State's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



Opening safe space for humanitarian access

Peacebuilders are an essential part of the humanitarian system, using relationships with conflict parties and local leaders to find entry points to open safe humanitarian access.

In South Kordofan, **Sudan**, women peacebuilders were able to broker agreements with the SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to reopen humanitarian supply routes to six communities that had been cut off from food and medicine for weeks.

Navigating security risks from armed groups and sometimes resistance from within their own communities, the women negotiated directly with the conflict parties, leading some to be involved in the formal Geneva peace talks in August 2024. This was the first time women had been included at this level of the talks, which helped broker a wider agreement to open the Adré border crossing for aid, and to guarantee humanitarian access along the Dabbah Road from Port Sudan.

“No one thought we could sit with those holding the guns... Now, they see we can make a difference.”

– Woman participant in Geneva peace talks, 2024

Preventing local conflicts and atrocities in real time

With a nuanced understanding of local conflict drivers and influential local networks, peacebuilders are uniquely well placed to act quickly to stop conflicts from escalating and spreading.

After the outbreak of war in April 2023, peacebuilders in **Sudan** were able to broker an agreement among several tribes in the west of the country to stay out of the country's

civil war – the agreement still holds today. With support from diaspora communities, signatories agreed that no tribe will formally take sides and that any individual participation would be seen as a personal decision rather than a reflection of tribal allegiance. This concord proved critical in preventing cycles of retaliation and mistrust between the tribes – no violent conflicts between them have since been reported. Direct, flexible funding support to informal and unregistered peacebuilders was critical in enabling this outcome.

In **Chad's** Batha Province, training provided to local peacebuilders in conflict resolution techniques is being used to prevent conflicts between herders and farmers. In the absence of a fair local court system, disputes over crop damage by grazing animals frequently turned violent. Since receiving his training, Younous Dout, a community leader in Batha leads a conflict management committee that includes herders, farmers and representatives from government and community groups. The committee brings parties to the conflict together when crops are damaged and works with them to agree fair compensation.

“The conflicts that led to the loss of human life are beginning to find peaceful solutions and this gives us joy in our hearts.”

– Younous Dout, Community leader, Chad, 2023

Creating opportunities to prevent recruitment into armed groups

Armed groups thrive in societies where people lack opportunities and harbour major grievances against the state or a specific group.⁸⁹ Peacebuilders combat

recruitment into these groups and help disaffected and excluded people find exit pathways by offering them alternatives to violence and by building relationships and accountability between the state and society.

In **Mali**, peacebuilders have supported young people with technical assistance and seed funding to start businesses that provide economic opportunities to young people and reduce the appeal of joining armed groups or migrating overseas. One young man, Djibril, previously lacked a stable source of income and the capital, training and market access to start his poultry business. With support and guidance, he quickly became a reliable supplier in his local market and his business has grown. He has since hired one full-time employee, is able to support his household, and says the work gives him direction and dignity.

“This project gave me hope and independence. I no longer have to think about leaving or joining risky networks. I'm building something real.”⁹⁰

– Djibril, Mali, 2025

Supporting the next generation of peacebuilders

While young people are often portrayed as a 'conflict problem', peacebuilders see their potential to contribute to peace in their communities and wider society.

In **Lebanon**, the conflict has caused major upheavals for public schools, many of which have been turned into shelters. Peacebuilders have worked with teachers, families and civil servants to develop practical tools for use in schools and the wider school community across Lebanon to address and reduce tension and to build understanding and trust. The tools help students explore their identities, celebrate diversity and find common ground with their peers. Parents and caregivers have

got involved in facilitated discussions to find solutions to shared problems. Hundreds of educators have now been trained in using the tools, which are influencing broader education policies and helping communities become more resilient, inclusive and peaceful.



Working to combat online hate speech and division

In **Myanmar**, peacebuilders have worked closely with religious leaders, students and digital technologies to promote peace and tackle hate speech in religious schools and online. Divisive narratives and misinformation shared on social media were driving suspicion and tension among young people from different faith groups. Religious leaders and peacebuilders brought young Muslims and Buddhists in their communities together to see beyond the divisive narratives they grew up with and build new friendships. Having resolved their own differences, the young people set out to promote religious tolerance and counter hate speech among their communities.

“I used to be so narrow-minded and sensitive when it came to religion. I think it was because of extreme messages about other faiths. [...] I now have lots of friends from other communities.”

To tackle hate speech at its source, peacebuilders developed a natural language processing (NLP) tool that detected and removed 17,000 pieces of hate speech online in the local language. Alongside this, digital literacy training helped young people identify and challenge hate speech online.

In **Syria**, a UK-funded ‘Trusted Voices’ project has built Syria’s first early warning and response system that can track and counter divisive narratives and hate speech. The system combines AI-supported monitoring with local validation to analyse over 21,000 social media posts and track 390 influential accounts to identify narratives that could deepen polarisation.

The project has trained Digital Community Stewards, journalists and civil society activists to identify harmful content and initiate local responses promoting peace. Since then, it



has built a national coordination platform to develop shared approaches to hate speech and information integrity. A linked media campaign, working with 18 Syrian outlets and other journalists and digital influencers to promote responsible online engagement, reached nearly 15 million people.

Building cooperation in the face of climate change

Climate change is adding new pressures to conflicts over natural resources. Peacebuilders find areas of resource collaboration between divided communities and ensure climate adaptation efforts are shaped by and benefit the affected communities.

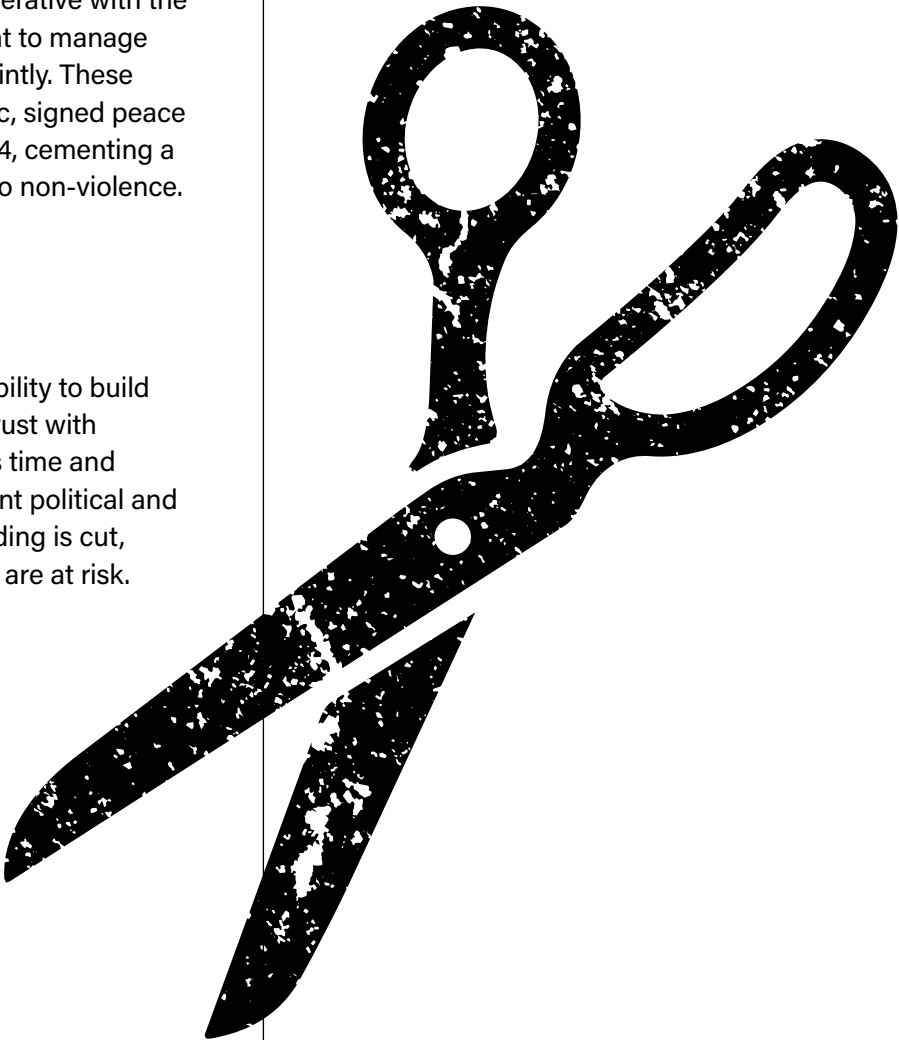
In Benue State, **Nigeria**, the Jukun and Tiv communities faced long-standing, violent conflicts over dwindling land and water

resources. Deforestation to fuel wood-powered fish smoking ovens rapidly depleted the local ecosystem. Peacebuilders facilitated dialogue between the Jukun and Tiv communities, which generated shared, community-led peace and climate adaptation plans, and then provided technical expertise and resources for communities to put climate adaptation projects into action. As a result, the communities built a cooperative factory that converts agricultural waste into eco-friendly charcoal briquettes. This replaced the need for wood, halted deforestation and boosted sales to nearby regions. The communities then registered a formal cooperative with the Ministry of Rural Development to manage income and market access jointly. These efforts culminated in a historic, signed peace agreement in September 2024, cementing a mutual, lasting commitment to non-violence.

When peacebuilding funding is cut

Peacebuilding relies on the ability to build and sustain relationships of trust with people at all levels. This takes time and relies on consistent and patient political and financial support.⁹¹ When funding is cut, future gains are lost and lives are at risk.

In Benue State, **Nigeria**, a community-led early warning system helped reduce violent incidents in the state by 40% between 2022 and 2024.⁹² Only five months later – after funding to the system was cut and the platform shut down – the town of Yelwata was attacked: around 200 people were killed and nearly 4,000 displaced. Community members had reported warning signs in the days before the violence – but with the platform gone, the alerts were never escalated or acted on.



THE TASK AHEAD

How we can
meet the moment
together

The UK must meet the challenge of global conflict head on – because, rather than in spite of, the threats we face.

The UK has expertise and influence to make a difference. We must be a reliable partner to people and countries seeking lasting solutions to conflict.

We need a new approach, one that is fit for the volatile, fragmented world we live in and the limited resources available.

Peace works when the UK backs it.

Here's how.

1

Prioritise prevention policy

Warning signs of violence manifest long before it breaks out. Yet, alarms raised by local civil society organisations are too often missed and action taken too late.

Together, we can and must do better to prevent future crises, protect civilians and back frontline responders. We need to listen to people on the ground who see the early signs of conflict and know how to respond.

Ministers need to show ambitious and imaginative leadership, and a willingness to take risks. Closer coordination on conflict prevention and resolution with coalitions of willing states is vital to ensure aligned action in a fragmented world. Timely and ambitious responses must be a priority – without these, warnings are futile.

Within government and embassies, officials need an informed understanding of how conflicts emerge, and the green light to explore bolder policy and programme responses.

Recommendations:

- Ministers should publicly affirm a whole-of-government commitment to preventing conflicts and mass atrocities and the importance of local civil society peacebuilding. They should report regularly to parliament on how all areas of foreign and security policy and state alliances are meeting that commitment.
- Articulate a clear conflict and atrocity prevention policy, in the form of a strategy or White Paper developed in consultation with relevant government departments, international and local peacebuilders, that will guide departmental decisions and actions.
- Equip officials in London and in relevant posts with dedicated and up-to-date guidance and training on how to prevent and resolve violent conflict, and with flexible, agile funding instruments to react to emerging conflict risks.

2

Energise coalitions that strengthen peace and uphold international law

We need the UK to back multilateralism – to support the global and regional institutions that foster cooperation and stability, to adhere to international law, and to bolster global agendas on Women, Peace and Security and climate change.

The UK is well placed to reinvigorate and reinforce global and regional architectures for conflict prevention, justice and accountability, and the protection of civilians, and the values that underpin them. The UK has convening power and global networks – as the 2025 Global Partnerships Conference

demonstrated – and is committed to being a reliable international partner. The government has a stated interest in exploring how wider coalitions working together can better respond to today's global challenges.⁹³

The UK has spearheaded and remains the penholder for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) at the UN, but its interest in WPS has waxed and waned. To date, delivery against the ambitious WPS National Action Plan of 2023 – which expires in 2027 – has been disappointing.⁹⁴ To guard against the growing anti-gender movement, the UK needs to show renewed leadership and imagination on WPS.

The UK has the tools and opportunity to energise new coalitions of states, conflict specialists and civil society organisations to galvanise efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, and to address emerging conflict drivers.

Recommendations:

- Ministers should focus efforts on strengthening the collaboration and leverage of international coalitions of states, international organisations and civil society organisations willing to prevent conflict, protect civilians and uphold international law at the multilateral level and in specific contexts.
- Reaffirm the UK's commitment to the WPS agenda within international fora and through a new National Action Plan that builds on previous commitments and is developed in collaboration with WPS advocates within the UK, and with partners in conflict situations.
- Reignite collaborative efforts to harness climate adaptation to prevent conflicts by developing joint strategies among multilateral climate institutions, climate finance bodies, and local and international peacebuilders.

3

Harness UK peace capabilities

To be more effective, UK responses to conflicts must protect, bolster and harness the full range of capabilities available for the prevention and resolution of conflict.

The UK is home to thought-leading research institutions and think tanks with world-leading conflict expertise and analysis. Several international peacebuilding NGOs are based in the UK and have decades of experience partnering with local staff and networks to address root causes and drivers of conflict. Their unique access, insights and trusted partnerships are core assets for a more effective UK response.

Despite recent cuts and restructures, the government employs staff with a wealth of diverse expertise and experience in conflict prevention. And in Parliament, many MPs and peers have direct experience of conflict situations, whether as diplomats, military personnel, diaspora or peacebuilders. Vibrant All Party Parliamentary Groups on Conflict Prevention and Women, Peace and Security, and relevant Select Committees connect insights and expertise to improve policy.

The government should commit to structured engagement with these UK-based peace capabilities as well as with peacebuilders in conflict settings, and strengthen links between them to generate shared analysis, strategies and policy options.

Recommendations:

- FCDO should set up responsive 'conflict and atrocity prevention taskforces' that engage with UK peace capabilities to develop analysis and strategies for ministers at the global level, and with British embassies at the national level, to anticipate and respond to conflict risks. In line with commitments on locally led development, taskforces should reflect analysis by people working for peace in their own contexts.
- Strengthen conflict and atrocity prevention expertise in government, including through advisers on conflict, gender and children affected by conflict.
- Establish a global 'conflict and atrocity challenge board' to work with taskforces, monitor impact and offer both ideas and accountability, including through regular meetings with FCDO ministers.

4

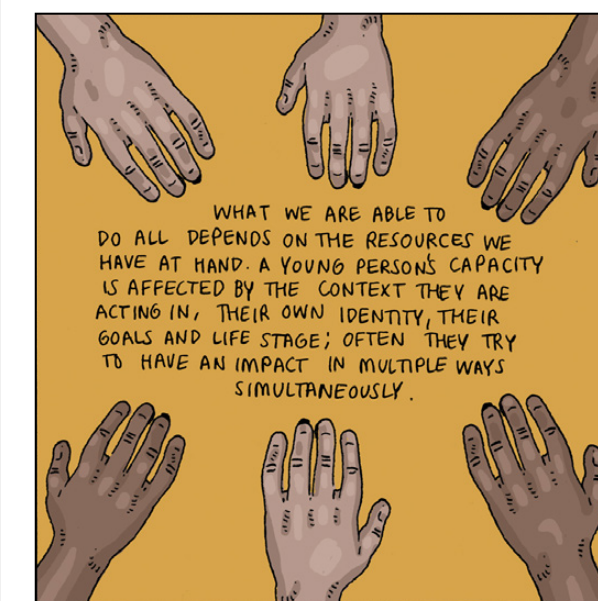
Champion local peacebuilding in word and deed

A step change from both government and international peacebuilding organisations is needed to shift power by localising and decolonising peacebuilding approaches.⁹⁵ In 2023, less than 10% of peacebuilding funding from OECD Development Assistance Committee member countries went to local civil society.⁹⁶

We remain a long way from realising the ambition of the 2025 Global Partnerships Conference to "shift power so countries, communities and local actors lead, with partnerships supporting, not substituting for, local systems and leadership, and decision-making and resources closer to those best placed to deliver."⁹⁷ Local peacebuilders are frequently excluded from

debates that determine UK policy due to financial constraints or visa regulations.

The analysis, relationships and leadership shown of peacebuilders living and working in countries affected by conflict are the cornerstone of any effective peace initiative and must be central to the UK's approach. They need long-term funding and flexibility to adapt quickly to developing crises and opportunities, to build their organisational resilience and staff skills, and to raise funds.



Recommendations:

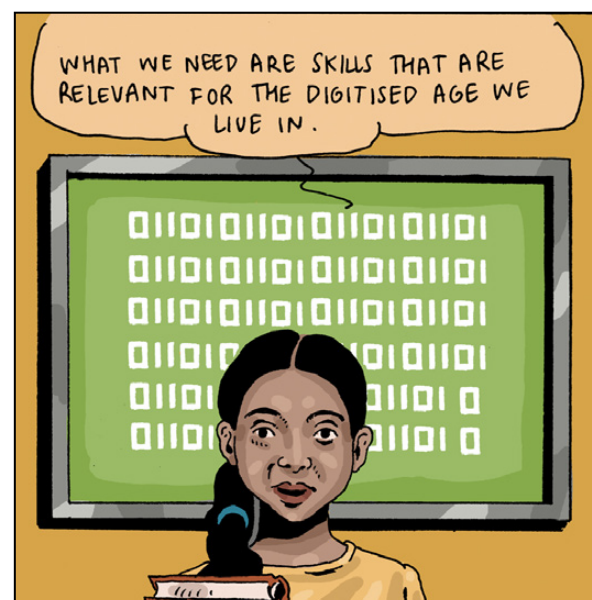
- Make direct UK conflict prevention funding more accessible to local peacebuilders by streamlining the administrative burden for applying and managing funds, and by setting a minimum level of investment in local civil society peacebuilding initiatives.
- Establish a Civil Society Support Hub to provide specific financial and technical support to strengthen the resilience of local organisations and networks, including women's rights organisations and peacebuilding initiatives.

→ Government and international peacebuilding organisations should fund and support local peacebuilders to attend and participate meaningfully in processes shaping UK approaches to conflict prevention in Whitehall and embassies. They should also advocate and make space for their inclusion in global peace and security processes.

5

Spearhead a step change in PeaceTech

The UK is well-placed to spearhead a systematic integration of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into peacemaking and peacebuilding policies, strategies and capabilities. The UK has made important contributions in supporting PeaceTech research and data innovation, AI-driven conflict early warning, digital inclusion and public consultation, and tackling information warfare.



Tech and AI offer new tools to prevent and resolve violent conflict – helping to anticipate and analyse violence, increase participation in peace processes by women, young people and marginalised groups, or counter misinformation and hate speech. But PeaceTech is still niche and limited to isolated pilots, and has not kept pace with military digital applications. Any systematic tech integration approach needs to ensure ownership and leadership by people who are *affected by* and will *use* and *experience* its effects, and that it *supports* rather than *supplants* human interaction in peace talks and dialogue.

Recommendations:

- Work with peacebuilders to tackle the negative impact of technology on conflict, to negotiate ceasefires and peace deals on the use of AI-enabled drones, and to counter polarised online narratives that fuel battlefield violence.
- Enable a 'digital uplift' in the peacebuilding sector, providing resources and opportunities to explore how evolving technologies can enhance impact, reach and inclusion.
- Connect peacebuilders with technology firms and regulators to shape new technologies and regulations that have a more positive impact in conflict situations.

TIME TO ACT

Peace works.

The UK has the tools, the expertise and the public support to make it work at scale. What's needed now is the political will to act on these five areas.

It's time for a more ambitious approach, fit for the volatile, fragmented and digital world in which we now live. The UK Government needs to show political leadership, imagination and resolve to make this vision a reality.



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Coalition organisations



Endorsing organisations



