

8. Reducing Direct Violence

The second category of strategic peacebuilding processes includes state-based legal and judicial systems, the military, and civilian peacekeeping efforts and programs such as refugee camps and shelters to give people a safe place to live. These programs interrupt the cycle of violence and lay the foundation for further peacebuilding in three ways: preventing victimization, restraining offenders, and creating safe space.

These strategies aim to prevent victimization, restrain offenders, and make a safe space for other peacebuilding processes.

Preventing Victimization

In many civil wars, civilians are targeted as a strategy of war. Civilian massacres plant the seeds for future wars and revenge killings. In Rwanda and Burundi, the international community failed to act when warned of impending genocide. Once the killings

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started, the cycle of violence became a raging flood that affected every street in every village. If international peacekeepers had been there to prevent the victimization of civilians, far fewer people would have died, and far fewer people would have taken up arms to conduct revenge killings on civilians of the opposing ethnic group. The more peacebuilders can protect civilians from becoming victims, the more likely they are to prevent an expansion of war and direct violence.

Restraining Offenders

People who commit crimes or attack civilians need to be stopped. The Western legal framework uses state-based law enforcement and justice processes to protect citizens from individuals who are not able or willing to follow laws. While this approach is not always successful—and indeed can be counterproductive—a system of law and order is important. As noted in Chapter 6, a variety of efforts are underway to reform and improve the methods of responding to wrongdoing.

Creating Safe Space

During war and violence, it is hard to gain perspective and make decisions objectively. People tend to go into survival mode and make reactionary decisions that may hurt their long-term interests. Fragile peace negotiations lose momentum with every suicide bombing on an Israeli bus and with every Palestinian house bulldozed to make way for Israeli settlements. Efforts to reduce violence create a space for cooling down and preparing for other approaches to peacebuilding.

The concept of safe space has three different dimensions. It is a physical place where people can meet

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across the lines of conflict. It's an emotional space where people have the time and focus to thoughtfully reflect on the choices they make about how to respond to conflict. And, it's a relational space that nurtures constructive interaction between people and conflict.

A variety of programs can help to achieve the immediate goal of reducing violence, thus making space for other peacebuilding approaches. These include legal and judicial systems intended to protect order and human rights, humanitarian relief aid, cease-fire agreements, peacekeeping, peace zones, and early warning programs to detect escalating conflict.

Systems and Approaches for Reducing Violence

Legal and Judicial Systems

Legal and judicial systems help to create order. When they are oriented toward justice, human security, and protecting human rights, they can help people to meet their own needs without interference from others. Legal and judicial systems should gain legitimacy through serving communities rather than through coercive violence. When they do not gain legitimacy in appropriate ways, however, they can contribute to the problem. Legal and judicial systems are often the enforcers of structural violence that discriminate against and harm people based on their race, religion, class, or other identity. If legal and judicial systems are based on revenge, they can fuel and even increase the cycle of violence and crime within a society.

Laws and justice systems can help maintain order, which is essential for a sustainable peace.

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State-Based Law and Justice

The state system includes law enforcement, courts and some form of sanctioning or corrections. Ideally, these systems prevent individuals from hurting themselves and others, provide an opportunity for offenders to reflect on and change their behaviors, and encourage offenders to develop skills and ways of dealing with conflict so that they can make better choices. Such state-based legal systems are important for order and social control. However, in societies where these systems are ineffective or unjust, and where many citizens are not able to meet their basic needs, or where primary reliance is upon a "get-tough" approach, the task of maintaining order may become difficult. The only sure way to reduce crime is to increase the ability of people to meet their needs in ways that do not hurt others.

The concepts of community policing and restorative justice are growing in popularity and have a proven record of reducing crime. Community policing uses police partnerships that consult with and are accountable to the communities they serve. Restorative justice processes, described in more detail in the next chapter, are also increasingly used to address the problem of criminal and other offending behaviors in ways that promote community ownership and responsibility.

International Law and Justice

The founders of the United Nations responded to the horrors of World War II by establishing international laws and human rights to deter violent conflict and set standards for countries. These include international humanitarian laws establishing rules of war that seek to protect and limit harms to civilians during armed conflict.

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In 2002, the United Nations established an international criminal court to hold people responsible for human rights crimes in countries that are unable or unwilling to do so. Earlier, two ad-hoc criminal courts were set up to judge war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. While their effectiveness is controversial, these courts aim to affirm human rights, restrain offenders, and deter future people from participating in gross human-rights violations.

Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian aid seeks to relieve human suffering. It is important to peacebuilding because it can interrupt the cycle of violence that leads victims to commit revenge violence. Food, shelter, and medical aid offered by local religious and non-profit organizations assist victims of violence. In addition to providing important support for people in crisis, these organizations may also advocate for government and community responses to violence.

While international humanitarian aid is traditionally guided by principles of political neutrality and impartiality, recent research shows that this approach can exacerbate conflict if it turns a blind eye to politics. Aid is sometimes hijacked by warring sides, and profits are used to buy more weapons. Nevertheless, international humanitarian aid is important in meeting need and reducing violence. In fact, there is growing awareness that humanitarian aid processes, such as delivering food, organizing water and health programs in refugee camps, and building new housing provide an important opportunity to collaborate across the lines of conflict.

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Cease-Fire Agreements

The first step in formal negotiations is to gain agreement between fighting groups to stop the violence. While cease-fire agreements do not address the roots of the conflict, they aim to create a safe space to allow further negotiations.

Groups engaged in warfare are willing to stop fighting when they experience a "hurting stalemate." This occurs when all groups are not able to gain more territory, when they are sufficiently tired of war, or when each group feels it has enough bargaining power at the negotiating table.

Without a cease-fire agreement, it is difficult if not impossible to negotiate about more difficult issues such as governance. If groups continue to fight during peace talks, people traumatized by new rounds of violence are unlikely to support the peace talks.

Military Intervention

Militaries everywhere claim to promote peace by reducing other people's violence. In the United States, arms manufacturers advertise warships as tools for diplomacy and nuclear weapons as "peacemakers." As an institution, the military is designed to be a last resort when diplomacy fails. The United States justified war on Iraq as necessary to protect human rights and security. But many peacebuilding actors debate the rules for and effectiveness of humanitarian military interventions. Using military force to reduce other people's violence inevitably harms civilians and often fails to protect human rights or security.

Still, others argue that militaries can contribute toward peacebuilding if they orient themselves toward peace

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enforcement missions and operations that respect local populations and humanitarian law. They point to examples such as the 2004 U.S. military presence in Haiti when internal conflict threatened to break into mass murder, and also to the 2003 U.S. military presence in Liberia that aimed to reduce levels of direct violence while relating respectfully to local populations. These uses of the military more closely resemble peacekeeping rather than traditional military strategies designed to defeat opponents.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping aims to stop the cycle of violence between armed groups using a variety of means. Peacekeepers may not only physically position themselves between armed groups, but they may also observe, document, and monitor violence. They may alert a network of supporters to exert diplomatic pressure on armed groups and their funders, facilitate communication between warring groups, monitor elections, and show solidarity with local people to demonstrate international support.⁹ Each of these tasks is important to other peacebuilding activities. Military and civilian peacekeeping efforts share these goals and tasks but use different means to coerce groups to stop fighting.

At the international level, the United Nations and regional organizations use *military peacekeepers*. They often act as international police to maintain cease-fires, limit violence, and assist in withdrawing troops and demobilizing armed groups. Peacekeepers also may protect civilian workers and accompany relief aid workers and resources to ensure their safe transportation.

While military peacekeeping is important, it also receives wide criticism. In the former Yugoslavia, there

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were too few peacekeepers to prevent massacres. In places like Sierra Leone and Cambodia, peacekeepers routinely raped local women or forced them into prostitution in exchange for food. In Cyprus, peacekeepers separating the two sides may have removed the urgency for a political solution.

Civilian peacekeeping—also called unarmed peacekeeping, peace teams, or third-party nonviolent intervention—performs many of the same tasks as military peacekeeping. Civilian peacekeepers position themselves between opposing groups in an effort to reduce or stop the fighting, creating both a moral and physical barrier between the groups. When Muslims and Hindus began fighting in the streets after India gained independence from Britain, Gandhi's *Shanti Sena* or "peace army" walked into the violence, encouraged rioters to disperse, and created opportunities for constructive communication between groups.

Intercessionary peacekeeping uses individual peacekeepers to accompany endangered people or groups to prevent violence against them. Some international human rights organizations provide accompaniment for local human rights workers who might be threatened or killed for their work. In Sri Lanka, Peace Brigades International provides 24-hour accompaniment for civilians who are afraid they may be killed for their work as labor activists, human rights lawyers, or political candidates or officials.

During a South African election, peace monitors from around the world stood with local people, documented violations, facilitated communication between conflicting groups, and provided a calming presence in a potentially volatile situation.

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Peace Zones

In the midst of war, civilian safety is difficult to secure. Peace zones aim to create safe spaces for civilians during war. Villages, cities, or regions negotiate with armed groups to become peace zones and make it illegal for anyone to carry a weapon within the boundaries. Of course, if civilians are strategic targets in the eyes of military or rebel groups, peace zones are unlikely to be effective. If successful, peace zones can help de-escalate violence by affirming that all groups can work together to reach even a small agreement about where not to fight.

Early Warning and Response Programs

Identifying the patterns that lead to violence helps communities create the political will to address conflicts before they become violent. Early warning programs systematically gather information on specific indicators such as an increase in ethnic or religious polarization, political exclusion, political prisoners, arms trade, media propaganda, or the movement of soldiers. Early response programs aim to bring international attention and resources to a conflict before it erupts into mass violence. It is much less expensive and far more effective to address conflicts before people are traumatized, maimed, or killed, and before a country's infrastructure is destroyed by war.

The programs detailed in this chapter are essential to interrupting escalating cycles of direct violence. However, there are concerns that these programs often

An ounce of
violence prevention
is worth a pound
of post-violence
peacebuilding.

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are not adequately linked to other peacebuilding programs. In some places, they may even work against other peacebuilding approaches. In many countries, nonviolent activists experience severe repression from legal and judicial systems. Peacekeepers and relief-aid workers are accused of putting Band-Aid solutions on problems whose underlying causes of conflict need to be addressed. Alone, efforts to reduce violence in the short term do not stop violence from recurring.

Programs aimed at reducing direct violence must be based on the values of human security and justice. They also must be located within a much larger peacebuilding framework that can address root causes. The next chapter looks at how processes that aim to transform the very nature of relationships contribute to addressing those root causes.