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Values for Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding grows out of a set of values. Values guide all decision-making. Ideally, people begin building peace by reflecting on how their lives and choices impact others. When people work with others to build peace, their values are often hidden or unstated. But values can be revealed by a key question about goals: What will peacebuilding accomplish? In general, peacebuilding values meeting human needs and protecting human rights.

Human Needs and Human Rights

Peacebuilding values the quality and sustainability of life. Peacebuilding aims to create societies that affirm human dignity through meeting human needs and protecting human rights. Peacebuilders also have a responsibility to protect the environment.

From the time of the earliest civilizations until today, most religious traditions have promoted relationships that meet human needs. The introduction of human rights charters after World War II increased the expecta-

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tion that governments should address human needs by protecting and promoting human rights laws.

Humans have material, social, and cultural needs and rights.¹ Human rights serve as a moral guide for people at every level of society. They give direction for making all types of decisions about how people can live with the least amount of violence and the greatest amount of common good.

- **Material needs and rights** include food, shelter, water, healthcare, and resources to meet physical needs. They require societies to protect economic rights through distributive justice or a fair distribution of wealth, education, and employment opportunities for all people.
- **Social needs and rights** include a sense of human dignity, belonging and predictability in relationships, security from attack, participation and influence in making decisions that affect one's life, and an ability to earn respect and recognition from others. They require societies to protect social, civil, and political rights through procedural justice. This includes democratic structures, the enforcement of the rule of law, and social justice programs of empowerment and education that foster cross-cultural understanding.
- **Cultural needs and rights** include the ability to give life meaning through personal, cultural, and religious identities without persecution, threats, or intimidation. Cultures and religions give people a sense of meaning, purpose, and identity. These

needs and rights require societies to protect religious freedoms, minority rights, and other social and civil rights through laws and education programs that foster understanding and tolerance.

People have choices about how to satisfy their needs. Everyone needs food, but not everyone needs to eat the same foods. Everyone needs respect, but people earn and give respect in different ways. Humans often want to satisfy their needs in the same ways other people do. They imitate the desires of others, particularly of those deemed to be powerful, in an effort to belong to their group.²

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish need from greed. Some people perceive that they have the right to meet their own needs at the expense of others. Greed is the desire to accumulate excessive amounts of material resources, decision-making power, and respect. An internalized sense of superiority and greed create an excessive sense of need.

Peacebuilding requires an ethic of *interdependence*, *partnership*, and *limiting violence* when making choices about how to satisfy needs and protect rights.

Interdependence

Humans are interdependent; the unmet human needs or rights of any individual or group ripple outward and affect the whole of humanity. When people are aware of and value interdependence with others, they coordinate efforts to meet human needs and rights so that they do not harm others. The world's wealthy people, for example, cannot meet all of their needs, particularly for security, in a world where others' basic human needs go unmet.

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Partnership

A dominate-or-be-dominated worldview creates a foundation for violence. The value of partnership is an alternative to domination. It encourages people to use power *with* others to satisfy mutual needs and rights. When relationships are egalitarian and based on the values of partnership rather than domination, people cooperate with and empower each other to meet their needs and rights.

Limiting Violence

Humans hurt each other in many ways through choices they make about what or what not to consume, how to interact with others, and when to use force against others to meet needs. Conflicts will occur as people pursue both liberty and security, both private property and distributive justice. Any use of violence to pursue the human needs and rights of one person or group harms and obstructs the rights of others. A cycle of violence results when individuals and groups use violence against each other.

Levels of violence or harm fall along a continuum. Peacebuilding is about increasing the number of non-violent options people believe they have to satisfy their needs and helping them choose the least violent options.

The concepts of *justice*, *justpeace*, and *human security* express peacebuilding values. *Justice* exists when people are able to participate in shaping their environment so that they can meet their needs. *Justice* exists when people respect the human rights of others, and when there are processes in place for holding people who violate the rights of others accountable to their victims and to the wider community.

The concept of *justpeace* recognizes that justice pursued violently only contributes to further injus-

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tice, and that peace without justice is unlikely to be sustainable.

Human security exists when people are safe from direct and structural forms of violence and are able to meet their basic needs and rights. Human security advocates seek to replace or broaden traditional state-based definitions of security that focus on protecting territory or national interests. Human security aims to reduce the threats of disease, poverty, crime, and other factors that lessen the quality of life.

While the language here is secular to reflect the broad readership of this book, religious groups have their own ways of communicating these concepts. People of many faiths understand the pursuit of peace, justice, and reconciliation between people as God's will for humanity. Peacebuilding is also a religious task and includes an important spiritual dimension.

The values described here guide peacebuilding. Individuals and organizations can make decisions and assess their work with the help of these values. Chapter 11 describes how these values can help shape the practice of peacebuilding. Yet values alone are not enough. Relational skills help people behave in ways that reflect these values.