



“The Future of Human Rights and Peace and Security”

**Roundtable 1, Human Rights 75 High-Level Event
Tuesday, 12 December 2023, 10.00am to 12.45pm CET**

Think Piece

Context and background

One quarter of humanity is living today in places affected by conflict. At the end of last year, the [Peace Institute in Oslo](#) found that the intensity, length and number of conflicts worldwide are at their highest levels since the Cold War: 55 conflicts, lasting on average between 8 and 11 years. In the last months of 2023, the gravity of this situation and the suffering and toll on civilians have only become more acute. And these numbers do not include situations of widespread violence that may not amount to conflicts, but nonetheless inflict immense harm on people, including violence from criminal or armed groups or gangs.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, it built on the underlying rationale of the United Nations Charter, which speaks of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, with prevention of conflict and the promotion of peace as central goals. The mutually reinforcing relationship between human rights and peace and security has repeatedly been recognized since by States, including in resolutions of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

Widespread and systematic human rights violations often proceed and can be an early warning sign for the outbreak of active conflict. Injustice, discrimination, oppression, extreme inequalities, and a lack of accountability are among the factors that can make violence more likely. Addressing these root causes early can prevent escalation into open armed conflict.

Once conflict breaks out, respect for international human rights and humanitarian law can diminish the horror and massively damaging impact of conflict and foster trust between belligerents – whether State or non-State actors.

Upholding human rights can also facilitate ceasefire and peace agreement negotiations. An important component of such negotiations is securing accountability for serious crimes under international law – essential to human rights protection, and a cornerstone of the rule of law.

Similarly, transitional justice – with its interrelated pillars of truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence – fosters trust, empowers victims and communities, promotes gender equality, inclusion and participation, and helps identify root causes of conflict and violations. This helps to prevent recurrence, while pursuing justice, reconciliation and social integration and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Objectives

The purpose of this roundtable is to consider concrete recommendations for promoting peace and security through the lens of human rights, including steps to uphold human rights as a pathway to preventing conflicts, reducing the severity of their impact, and building and sustaining peace.

The discussion will provide an opportunity to explore innovative approaches as well as creative avenues for new partnerships between States, international and regional organizations, civil society and other actors.

Looking ahead to the next 25 years, participants are invited to consider a number of guiding questions, along with recommendations for discussion, with a view to identifying priorities for action by governments and other stakeholders, including within the United Nations.

Guiding questions and possible recommendations

1. What can we learn from past situations of conflict and violence on the linkages between human rights and peace?

Possible recommendation: Commit to the transformative role of human rights, even in the midst of geopolitical tensions, in addressing root causes of conflicts, promoting peaceful, inclusive and just societies, and fostering international cooperation.

2. How can early warning signals of human rights violations and emerging social unrest be better taken into account to prevent violence and conflict?

Possible recommendation: Ensure recommendations from the human rights ecosystem – including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council and its bodies and mechanisms, the treaty bodies, regional human rights mechanisms, as well as civil society – are actioned and built into early warning and prevention systems.

3. How can human rights engagement address grievances, exclusion and inequalities and support conflict prevention strategies at the national and regional levels?

Possible recommendation: As recommended by the Secretary-General in his Policy Brief on a New Agenda for Peace, develop national prevention strategies, that are inclusive and participatory, with human rights at their heart. These could seek to address the root causes of violence and conflict and improve enjoyment of all rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, to reduce social tensions. Consider the role of national human rights institutions in facilitating national dialogues on prevention.



4. How can ensuring justice and accountability for violations contribute to ending cycles of violence and conflict?

Possible recommendation: Support accountability mechanisms and transitional justice initiatives, including grassroots initiatives, building on good models and lessons learned from past experiences. Consider good models of transitional justice also in response to violence by non-State actors and criminal and other armed groups.

For more information about this round table, contact Mr. James Turpin (turpin@un.org) and Ms. Murielle Tchouwo (tchouwo@un.org).

Additional resources:

- Human Rights 75 Discussion Paper: The Future of Human Rights in Peace and Security (Adam Day/Pablo de Greiff) – *paper prepared in support of this round table.*
- Summary of New York Round Table on human rights, prevention and peace (20 November 2023) – *a summary note prepared by OHCHR in support of this round table.*
- [Our Common Agenda Policy Brief No. 9: A New Agenda for Peace](#) – *a policy brief by the Secretary-General.*
- [Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict](#) – *a joint study by the United Nations and the World Bank Group.*