Towards common ground: Strategies for effective collaboration between the humanitarian and peacebuilding communities

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Abstract

In an era marked by growing conflicts, prolonged humanitarian needs and less donor funding, collaboration between the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors is essential for more effective responses. This paper examines the complexities of fostering such collaboration, emphasizing the importance of integrated multisectoral approaches capable of addressing both immediate necessities and long-term peace and development objectives. While recent initiatives such as the humanitarian–development–peace nexus framework and the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity reflect progress toward integrated approaches, substantial collaborative challenges persist. This paper identifies three key entry points for mutual learning between humanitarian and peace actors. Firstly, it discusses a "peace-responsive" approach to humanitarian activities that proactively contributes to "peace-positive" outcomes. Secondly, it emphasizes the need for the peace sector to learn from humanitarian efforts regarding accountability to affected communities. Thirdly, it underscores the need to understand the normative foundations of each sector and their implications for joint action. Drawing on these insights, the paper offers recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners to help them advance joint approaches to humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts.

Keywords: humanitarian–peace collaboration, HDP nexus, peace responsiveness, conflict sensitivity, humanitarian principles, accountability mechanisms, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, peace.

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Introduction

Global crises are lasting longer and are becoming more expensive at a time when the gap between humanitarian needs and funding is larger than ever. The average time that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been present in its ten largest operations, for example, is forty-two years,[1] and the humanitarian funding gap is now at least $41.76 billion.[2] Furthermore, crises are predominantly concentrated in contexts of protracted armed conflict, requiring an estimated 86% of country-allocable humanitarian assistance and with 74% of people in need living in such settings.[3]

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1   Ellen Policinski and Jovana Kuzmanovic, "Protracted Conflicts: The Enduring Legacy of Endless War", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 101, No. 912, 2019, p. 965.

2   UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, February Update (Snapshot as of 29 February 2024)", 11 March 2024, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-february-update-snapshot-29-february-2024 (all internet references were accessed in June 2024).

3   Angus Urquhart *et al.*, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022*, Development Initiatives, Bristol, July 2022.

This new reality requires an urgent shift towards more multidimensional aid responses that are able both to meet short-term needs and to contribute to long-term peace and development outcomes. Because the development cooperation funding gap will only be closed by decreasing needs, humanitarian and development action have roles to play in addressing not just the consequences of violent conflict, but also its root causes. Similarly, peacebuilders must operate in ways that decrease the need for developmental and humanitarian assistance. This is an ambitious agenda for change, but a necessary one that will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of all humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus actions.

There have been some encouraging developments towards such an approach. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has issued policy guidance for an HDP nexus approach, including an issue paper on accentuating the "P" in the HDP nexus.[4] Further, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 urged humanitarian action to move beyond short-term, supply-driven response efforts, to focus on designing "peace-responsive" approaches that address development and humanitarian needs in ways that also support more resilient and peaceful societies.[5]

This task has become more urgent, as 2023 marked the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War, with armed violence contributing to some of today's most pressing humanitarian needs.[6] In such an era, it is incumbent upon peace and humanitarian actors to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and foster cooperation amid limited international consensus. For decades, however, the humanitarian and peace sectors have operated in largely distinct spaces, with differing objectives and methods. Perhaps most importantly, humanitarians have strived to shield the impartial conduct of their operations from political interference while peacebuilders have worked more politically, seeking the kind of political transformations necessary to address the root causes of conflict. Despite these differences, the shared challenges faced by both humanitarians and peacebuilders invite us to re-evaluate the distance between them and identify entry points for more complementary and connected approaches. Indeed, while their methods vary, these two sectors share more than enough common ground – from an imperative to engage power holders with influence over a given problem, to a steadfast commitment to maintaining independence from external agendas.

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4   IASC Results Group 4 on Humanitarian–Development Collaboration (IASC Results Group 4), *Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes: Planning and Implementing the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus in Contexts of Protracted Crisis*, June 2020; IASC Results Group 4, *Exploring Peace within the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus (HDPN)*, October 2020; IASC Results Group 4, *A Mapping and Analysis of Tools and Guidance on the H-P Linkages in the HDP Nexus*, February 2022.
5   UN Secretary-General, *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit*, February 2016.
6   "With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts since Second World War, United Nations Must Rethink Efforts to Achieve, Sustain Peace, Speakers Tell Security Council", *UN News*, 26 January 2023, available at: https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm.

The interplay between the humanitarian and peace sectors presents both obstacles and opportunities. While the development–humanitarian nexus has made significant strides in bridging divides and strengthening cooperation mechanisms, similar progress regarding the humanitarian–peacebuilding nexus has been slower to materialize. There are some fundamental differences in objectives and methods contributing to this divergence. Humanitarian action is typically understood as "an exceptional, temporary emergency measure to save lives and alleviate the suffering of people in armed conflict, disasters, and other crises",[7] while peacebuilding is a longer-term process that aims to strengthen the institutions and relationships necessary for peaceful and sustained conflict resolution.[8] Moreover, the classic paradigm of humanitarianism is based on the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, meant to ensure that aid is solely based on addressing needs, free from political motives or discrimination.[9] This often entails portraying humanitarian actors as being "void of the territorial or political context in which they operate"[10] and instead being guided by a comprehensive legal framework underpinning principled – if perhaps slightly inflexible – efforts to protect and assist populations in need.[11] Peacebuilding actors, on the other hand, have yet to conclusively and precisely define what peacebuilding entails but have reached a consensus that it is best achieved through politically savvy and flexible approaches.[12]

At face value, the concern is that this political and amorphous nature of peacebuilding, which typically involves navigating complex power dynamics in order to address deep-seated societal grievances, is at odds with the political neutrality of humanitarian efforts. This is not to suggest that collaboration is unfeasible or undesirable; indeed, these sectors consistently rub against each other like tectonic plates, affecting, overlapping, complementing and challenging one another. This paper will aim to provide an overview of the current state of collaboration between the humanitarian and peace sectors, propose strategies for improved cooperation, and propose specific policies to address the challenges faced by both sectors.

To do so, this paper focuses on three key areas of collaboration between the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. Firstly, organizations from both sectors are actively and jointly exploring what a "peace-responsive" approach to humanitarian activities might entail, and in particular how they can contribute to "peace-positive"

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7   ICRC, "Q&A: The ICRC and the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus Discussion", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 101, No. 912, 2019, p. 1053.

8   Molly M. Melin, "Peacebuilding: Definition, Actors, Framework, and Measurement", in Molly M. Melin, *The Building and Breaking of Peace*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2021; Vincent Chetail and Oliver Jütersonke, *Peacebuilding: A Review of the Academic Literature*, White Paper Series No. 13, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, 2015, available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2684002.

9   Dorothea Hilhorst, "Classical Humanitarianism and Resilience Humanitarianism: Making Sense of Two Brands of Humanitarian Action", *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, Vol. 3, No. 15, 2018.

10   *Ibid.*, p. 4.

11   Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, *International Legal Frameworks for Humanitarian Action: Topic Guide*, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, April 2013.

12   V. Chetail and O. Jütersonke, above note 8.

outcomes such as social cohesion and trust-building without compromising the humanitarian principles.[13] Secondly, peace actors recognize that they must strengthen their accountability to local communities, drawing lessons from humanitarian efforts and standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability.[14] Thirdly, the paper examines and compares the normative foundations of each sector, highlighting opportunities for mutual learning and alignment around shared principles.

"Peace responsiveness" as an approach to humanitarian programming?

Global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 dual resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly and Security Council (Resolutions 70/262 and 2282) on sustaining peace, and the subsequent 2019 Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus (DAC Recommendation) have emphasized the need for improved coherence and cooperation among development, humanitarian and peace efforts in conflict-affected settings. For example, the DAC Recommendation calls for a more "coherent and coordinated effort that strengthens complementarity across the 'nexus' … through a common set of principles".[15] It also emphasizes a gradual shift from the traditional "do no harm" approach to one more focused on peace positivity, to be integrated into development and humanitarian aid mechanisms.[16] Furthermore, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit invited humanitarian actors to reflect on their contributions to improving conditions for peace in the communities they serve, resulting in the New Way of Working initiative.[17] Because humanitarian actors are part of the conflict economy, their work can have both a "peace-positive" and a "peace-negative" impact.[18] Merely minimizing harm and conducting short-term needs assessments are insufficient for achieving sustained peace;[19] instead, humanitarians are being challenged to consider the long-term, structural impacts of their work in societies on the brink of, emerging from, or currently undergoing conflict. Situating this in existing international frameworks, an increasing number of voices argue that if the international community hopes to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development

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13 Interpeace, *Peace Responsiveness: Delivering on the Promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus*, Geneva, September 2021.

14 *Ibid.*

15 OECD, *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus*, OECD/LEGAL/5019, 2024, p. 3.

16 Sarah Spencer Bernard, Gregory De Paepe and Cyprien Fabre, *Report on the Implementation, Dissemination and Continued Relevance of the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus*, OECD, March 2024.

17 Cyprien Fabre, *Humanitarian Development Coherence*, OECD, Paris, 2017.

18 S. S. Bernard, G. De Paepe and C. Fabre, above note 16.

19 *Ibid.*

Goals, it is essential to work in a more coordinated, cross-sectoral way on the drivers of conflict in order to help alleviate humanitarian need and build peace in tandem.[20]

However, while this shared vision of *what* should be achieved has developed, there is less consensus on *how* to achieve it. For peacebuilders, it has become evident that despite two decades of efforts to teach and train actors in other sectors to be more conflict-sensitive,[21] conflict insensitivity or "peace blindness" remains pervasive. What was once thought to be merely a matter of insufficient knowledge or training now appears to be a far more complex, systemic challenge that cannot be "addressed by applying tools or ticking boxes".[22] Hence, treating conflict sensitivity as a technical concern has not consistently been translated into increased sensitivity in practice. This more comprehensive systemic approach has come to be known as "peace responsiveness".[23]

An introduction to peace responsiveness

Peace responsiveness refers to the ability of actors operating in contexts and areas affected by conflict and violence to be conflict-sensitive and to deliberately contribute to peace within the scope of their mandates, in a manner that enhances their collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive and locally led change, and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.[24] It is an evolution of, and builds on, conflict sensitivity and the principle of "do no harm", moving beyond minimizing unintended harm and towards a more intentional and forward-leaning focus on deliberately contributing to peace. Peace responsiveness is grounded in the understanding that peace cannot be solved by one set of actors alone, necessitating a paradigm shift in how various actors operate in conflict-affected or transitional contexts.[25] It recognizes the need for "non-peacebuilders", including development and humanitarian actors, to incorporate into their technical programming peace-positive contributions, even

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20 "With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts", above note 6; UN Secretary-General, *Chair's Summary: Standing up for Humanity: Committing to Action*, Istanbul, May 2016.

21 Conflict sensitivity extends beyond "do no harm" and the minimum standard of practice to avoid causing inadvertent harm. While there is not a universally agreed-upon definition of conflict sensitivity, it generally involves integrating an awareness of conflict dynamics into the approaches of actors operating in conflict settings. The goal is to minimize the risk that their activities will exacerbate conflict dynamics by equipping actors with the necessary frameworks and tools to comprehend the context in which they operate. For more information, see Mary Rose O'Brien, Hkinjawng Naw (Laser) and Khin Zar Mon, "Building a Culture of Conflict Sensitivity within a Consortium", *Development in Practice*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2023; Susanne Schmeidl, Anthony Ware and Claudio Alberti, "Conflict Sensitivity/Do No Harm (DNH) in Development, Humanitarian, and Peacebuilding Practice – Reflections and Emerging Trends", *Development in Practice*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2023; Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1999.

22 Anita Ernstorfer, Anne-Sofie Stockman and Frauke de Weijer, "Peace Responsiveness: A Paradigm Shift to Deliver on Conflict Sensitivity and Sustaining Peace", *Development in Practice*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2023, p. 3.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Interpeace, *Peace Responsiveness: Delivering on the Promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus – Briefing Note*, Geneva, January 2022.

25 A. Ernstorfer, A. Stockman and F. de Weijer, above note 22.

when peacebuilding is not necessarily at the core of their mandates. For example, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has integrated peace-responsive strategies, including conflict-sensitive analysis, into the design and implementation of its programmes in an effort not only to minimize the risk of any negative impacts but also to maximize peace-positive contributions.[26] In South Sudan, for instance, the FAO led an initiative to improve the livelihoods of two communities in order to mitigate the risk of natural resource-based conflict, thereby proactively addressing one of the root causes of conflict between those communities.[27] Such peace-positive contributions may take many forms, contingent upon the actor involved and the specific context in which they operate, but what all these interventions have in common is that their impact serves as a force multiplier for strengthening and consolidating the conditions for sustainable peace. In other words, "peace responsiveness offers an operational paradigm that can embody the normative commitments set out in the Sustaining Peace Agenda".[28] To operationalize this approach, peace responsiveness therefore adopts a four-pronged approach, encompassing individual change-makers, technical programmes, specific organizations and the sector or system as a whole.[29] Broadly, it involves working across these four domains following a recognition that a holistic approach is required to address such deeply rooted and complex incentive and cultural structures obstructing efforts to working more deliberately on peace.

While collaboration with development actors or the development sections of multi-mandate organizations on peace responsiveness has been fairly seamless, efforts to establish similar partnership arrangements with humanitarian organizations have encountered several challenges. The following section aims to better understand the challenges that humanitarian actors have faced in implementing the peace aspects of the HDP nexus.

Challenges to humanitarian–peacebuilding integration

There is a sense of urgency driving the humanitarian sector which often obscures the long-term consequences of aid and can also burden humanitarians trying to address immediate needs for which quick solutions may not exist. This "urgency trap" is centred around the short-term, needs-based perspective commonly associated with the humanitarian sector.[30] Humanitarian action is still perceived as a short-term endeavour requiring short-term planning even though the average humanitarian intervention now extends to nine years.[31] Although the short-term

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26   FAO and Interpeace, *Pathways to Sustaining Peace at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, Rome, 2020.
27   A. Ernstorfer, A. Stockman and F. de Weijer, above note 22.
28   *Ibid.*, p. 4.
29   *Ibid.*
30   Interpeace, *Integrating a Peace-Responsive Approach in Humanitarian Action*, Geneva, December 2022.
31   Studies show that the average humanitarian intervention/mission now extends to more than nine years and that 80% of humanitarian action occurs in protracted crises. See, for example, "Humanitarian Crises around the World Are Becoming Longer and More Complex", EU Science Hub, 20 November

lens is understandable in terms of humanitarianism's primary objectives, including addressing immediate needs, it can be a barrier to recognizing and understanding the longer-term impacts of humanitarian actions. However, this tension may also offer an entry point for dialogue with peacebuilders, who are used to planning years of long engagement, as humanitarians themselves adapt to ensure that their current planning frameworks are fit for purpose.[32]

Another challenge is that the definition and scope of "peace" within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus are unclear to many humanitarians, further complicating integration efforts. There is also widespread confusion regarding the implications of integrating a peace component into humanitarian engagement, and what outcomes are expected as a result.[33] This confusion stems partly from "peace" remaining the least conceptualized component within the nexus, leading to fundamental questions of what peace actually is and what it looks like.[34] As a way to address this confusion, the IASC introduced a distinction, commonly known as "little p" and "big P" engagements, to conceptualize the "peace" component. "Big P" includes peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, formal Track 1 processes, political solutions, and securitized responses to violent conflict, viewed as inherently political.[35] In contrast, "little p" engagements focus on building trust and social cohesions and building capacities for peace within institutions and society.[36] Another broad understanding also includes both "negative peace", commonly understood as the cessation of hostilities, and "positive peace",[37] entailing the creation of the optimal environment for human potential to flourish. Humanitarian practice arguably sits more comfortably with some parts of peace definitions than others, particularly some of the activities referred to as "little p" and positive peace engagements, which are often understood as less political and more focused on productive relationships and societal transformation.[38]

While the IASC's framework has provided a helpful policy guideline, it arguably simplifies the complex concept of peace into binary terms, thereby oversimplifying its understanding. Moving forward, there is a need for more nuanced discussions on what this framework means in practical terms. While the framework has set a valuable precedent, the challenge now is to move beyond

2020, available at: https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/humanitarian-crises-around-world-are-becoming-longer-and-more-complex-2020-11-20_en.

32 Hugo Slim and Ariana Lopes Morey, *Protracted Conflict and Humanitarian Action: Some Recent ICRC Experiences*, ICRC, Geneva, 2016.

33 Summer Brown, Rodrigo Mena and Sylvia Brown, "The Peace Dilemma in the Triple Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Approach", *Development in Practice*, April 2024.

34 Marie Müller *et al.*, *How Can the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus Work from the Bottom Up?*, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, 2024.

35 See the references cited in above note 4.

36 See the references cited in above note 4.

37 Positive peace has been defined in many ways. To take just one example, the Institute for Economics and Peace defines it as creating "an optimal environment for human potential to flourish" as well as "the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies". Institute for Economics and Peace, *Positive Peace Report 2022*, Sydney, January 2022, pp. 2, 4.

38 See the references cited in above note 4.

this binary understanding and to foster deeper, more practical discussions on how peacebuilders and humanitarians can collaborate more interactively without these rigid distinctions.

A third challenge is the perception that aid contributes to positive, and peaceful, social outcomes.[39] However, foreign aid is not a good in itself; it is merely an input. All aid, including humanitarian assistance, can inadvertently exacerbate conflict drivers.[40] This is not to argue that humanitarian aid is categorically bad, but rather to highlight a core paradox of humanitarian engagement and to stress that the potential negative effects of aid are neither unavoidable nor random. In response, humanitarian actions may benefit from incorporating key peacebuilding tools into their work, such as stakeholder mapping, and context and conflict analyses that can help them to understand and investigate conflict risks. Yet, at present, an HDP nexus interim review conducted by the OECD in 2022 found that conflict analysis is the second-least-used input to inform planning and programming.[41] Moreover, there is a growing realization that the current international aid system is largely part of a colonial construct that continues to perpetuate power imbalances and is thus in need of a fundamental shift in power and resources.[42] This growing emphasis, albeit more evident in policy than in practice, underscores the perception that international response should be directly shaped by affected communities according to their needs. Inherently linked to this is the growing understanding that international aid response should support, rather than substitute, other local actors as "the frontline responders in a crisis".[43] For instance, at the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, a principles of partnership commitment was endorsed, emphasizing that "local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build".[44]

Another challenge pertains to the overarching critique of "the role of assumptions in shaping peacebuilding initiatives" and their impact on the sector's effectiveness.[45] Despite the growing recognition among policy-makers and practitioners of the limitations of many conventional peacebuilding strategies and methods, many feel compelled to keep on using these approaches, primarily because of the lack of compelling alternatives.[46] As previously mentioned, 2023 marked the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War, with armed violence contributing to some of today's most pressing humanitarian

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39   Interpeace, above note 30.
40   Interpeace, above note 13. See also Christoph Zürcher, "What Do We (not) Know about Development Aid and Violence? A Systematic Review", *World Development*, Vol. 98, October 2017, for one of the original studies on this topic.
41   OECD, *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review*, Paris, 2022.
42   Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, *Transformation in the Aid and Development Sector? Decolonising Aid*, Melbourne, December 2021.
43   Interpeace, above note 30.
44   Global Humanitarian Platform, "Principles of Partnership: A Statement of Commitment", 12 July 2007, available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/principles-partnership-global-humanitarian-platform-17-july-2007.
45   Severine Autesserre, "International Peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2017, p. 114.
46   *Ibid.*

needs.[47] Against this backdrop, it is becoming increasingly evident that while numerous peacebuilding efforts are being implemented, a significant number of these efforts are falling short of their intended impact. Repeated cycles of violence and recurrent civil wars present significant challenges for humanitarian actors working on the front lines, and these realities lead them to witness first-hand the lack of successful and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes. This might lead them to question the effectiveness of peacebuilding approaches, and to realize that "being part of the ostensibly moral plan to bring peace and prosperity to war-torn societies has proved to be more complicated for humanitarian agencies than many of them thought".[48] Many humanitarian actors are questioning whether "the conceptual baggage of peacebuilding" can bring about sustainable peace,[49] and as a result, they may be hesitant to compromise their current approaches or take further risks by incorporating peace-responsive methods. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that the humanitarian sector, despite its crucial role in providing immediate relief in times of crisis, cannot meet the escalating needs and challenges alone.[50] Being peace-responsive does not mean that humanitarians are expected to become peacebuilders, but as the realities on the ground are changing, it is also becoming increasingly evident that no section alone will be able to meet the growing needs and challenges faced by communities affected by conflict and crisis. This underscores the importance of collaboration and synergy between humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts.

Lastly, a prominent challenge lies in the ambiguity that humanitarians face regarding the role of the State in peacebuilding work. The varying degrees of State involvement in peace activities present a complex landscape for humanitarians who are striving to uphold the principle of neutrality.[51] For instance, humanitarians have voiced concerns that needs-based priorities, which should be the guiding principle of their work, could be compromised and manipulated into serving political or military agendas.[52] This risk is particularly heightened when States are given a more influential role in humanitarian activities. Such involvement could potentially undermine the very essence of the "humanitarian imperative": the commitment to creating a "humanitarian space" where assistance can be provided to populations that are vulnerable to risks from all sides of a conflict, without any discrimination or bias.[53] This situation presents a paradox for humanitarians. On the one hand, they recognize the need to engage with States and other political actors in order to ensure access to those in need.[54] On the

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47   "With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts", above note 6.
48   Beat Schweizer, "Moral Dilemmas for Humanitarianism in the Era of 'Humanitarian' Military Interventions", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 86, No. 855, 2004, p. 555.
49   Michael Pugh, "Introduction: The Ownership of Regeneration and Peacebuilding", in Michael Pugh (ed.), *Regeneration of War-Torn Societies*, St Martin's Press, New York, 2000.
50   *Ibid.*
51   B. Schweizer, above note 48.
52   Masayo Kondo Rossier, *Linking Humanitarian Action and Peacebuilding*, Graduate Institute Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, Geneva, 2011.
53   *Ibid.*
54   B. Schweizer, above note 48.

other hand, they are wary of the potential for their engagements to be co-opted or misused for political ends.[55] The challenge, therefore, lies in finding ways to work with political nous and sensitivity without serving a particular political agenda.[56]

These challenges complicate efforts to integrate humanitarian action into broader peacebuilding efforts. Many of them require action from peace actors, who must first clarify their own approaches before striving to foster collaboration with other sectors – otherwise, the absence of common operating principles within the peacebuilding sector, in addition to the myriad nature of definitions, understandings and practices, can pose significant barriers for humanitarians seeking to engage. These complexities will be explored later in this paper; however, the next section seeks to delineate several potential entry points for more cooperative work.

Entry points for enhancing humanitarian–peacebuilding integration

In response to the challenges discussed above, consultations between the humanitarian and peace sectors have revealed some common entry points for advancing work in partnership. The first builds on the growing appreciation of context as part of their efforts to minimize harm, maximize benefit and optimize the use of resources by humanitarians. For instance, efforts to improve mental health care and psychosocial support in humanitarian emergencies benefit from understanding the socio-cultural context in which such services operate.[57] In 1999, in Tirana, Albania, a foreign psychologist provided gender-based violence counselling to Kosovar survivors, which led to the public identification of sexual violence survivors. This revelation was seen as an affront to familial honour that was to be "rectified by killing the survivor".[58] Thus, failure to appreciate the operational context can and does lead to unintended consequences, both positive and negative.[59] However, much of this harm can be mitigated through appropriate preparation. Humanitarian action would arguably be more effective and contribute more directly to peace dividends if it were also based on a corresponding conflict analysis of conflict drivers and root causes, conducted in an ongoing and iterative manner, cognisant of cross-border and regional dynamics, and drawing on intentionally established and long-cultivated local relationships and knowledge.[60] This is precisely where integrating a peace-responsive approach, such as through joint programming or change process approaches, would be beneficial. Some multi-mandate organizations have already adopted a shift away from "needs" assessment to one focused both on "risks and vulnerabilities" as well as "opportunities and

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55 *Ibid.*
56 Torunn Wimpelmann, "State-building", in Antonio De Lauri (ed.), *Humanitarianism: Keywords*, Vol. 1, Brill, Leiden, 2020.
57 Brandon A. Kohrt and Bonnie N. Kaiser, "Measuring Mental Health in Humanitarian Crises: A Practitioner's Guide to Validity", *Conflict and Health*, Vol. 15, No. 72, 2021.
58 Michael G. Wessels, "Do No Harm: Toward Contextually Appropriate Psychosocial Support in International Emergencies", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 64, No. 8, 2009, p. 843.
59 *Ibid.*
60 Interpeace, above note 30.

strengths", and in so doing have provided a common framing across the humanitarian, peace and development sectors.[61] For example, rising tensions between conflict-displaced people and host communities in Niger were unintentionally fuelled by government aid responses solely focused on refugees. In response, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shifted its approach to support joint initiatives between host and refugee communities in order to foster mutual assistance and understanding while also establishing reliable communications channels to address misinformation about aid distribution.[62] In this example, peace responsiveness hinged on two important factors: (1) UNHCR engaging directly with local communities to better understand their perceived risks and vulnerabilities, and (2) UNHCR adapting its engagement to the reality on the ground in order to deliberately prevent escalating tensions.

A second entry point is to collaborate on clarifying what aspects of "peace" are compatible for integration with the humanitarian sector. This collaboration is particularly evident when highlighting the work of humanitarian actors who are already acting in peace-responsive ways, whether intentionally or not. The fact that humanitarians are increasingly willing to consider the longer-term needs of conflict-affected populations provides an entry point to introduce "peace" as a fundamental outcome to which all actors can contribute.[63] This can be partly explained by the fact that the bulk of humanitarian efforts in the last decade have primarily focused on long-standing armed conflicts, addressing recurring outbreaks of violence and the increasingly complex array of needs and vulnerabilities arising from conflict.[64] As emphasized in the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, this reality has intensified the need to shift humanitarian action away from only "short-term, supply-driven response efforts" and towards developing responses that not only meet humanitarian needs but also contribute to building more resilient and peaceful societies.[65]

A third area for exploring a deeper understanding between the sectors could be to redefine the humanitarian sector's emphasis on "impartiality" as not only a commitment to prioritization based on needs but also as a call to better understand the surrounding context. For example, meeting one group's needs might adversely or positively affect another group's needs and create inequality – a common driver of conflict and insecurity. Thus, to be impartial may require a deeper understanding of the local dynamics and relationships between different groups, and the potential impacts of humanitarian assistance on these dynamics, in order to ensure that humanitarian actors are not blind to how their assistance can inflame inequalities and fuel conflict.[66]

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61 See, for example, the work of the international Peace Responsiveness Facility launched by Interpeace in 2020.
62 Search for Common Ground, *Rapport Etude Baseline: Project – "Mu Gina Gobe! Construisons Demain!"*, 2015.
63 ICRC, *ICRC Strategy 2019–2024*, Geneva, June 2020.
64 A. Urquhart *et al.*, above note 3.
65 Interpeace, above note 30.
66 Joshua Craze, "Why Humanitarians Should Stop Hiding Behind Impartiality", *The New Humanitarian*, 22 August 2022, available at: www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2022/08/22/impartiality-humanitarian-aid-South-Sudan-conflict.

A final entry point involves finding mutually sensitive but also intelligible language to describe peace-responsive humanitarian work. It is important to tailor the framing of peace responsiveness in such a way as to consider various dynamics and to find a language that resonates with humanitarian actors and the context in which they work. Mutual intelligibility through a concrete new lexicon could help bridge the conceptual and operational divides between humanitarians and peacebuilders, leading to integrated practices. As previously outlined, peace-related engagements encompass a variety of approaches and methodologies. Additionally, the language used by peacebuilders often involves terms and concepts that are deeply rooted in the political context of conflict resolution, including "political reconciliation", "justice" and "conflict analysis".[67] These terms, while integral to peacebuilding, may imply taking sides in a conflict, thereby potentially posing a challenge to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. This is where the distinction between "big P" and "little p" peace work might be beneficial. While "big P" is more high-profile and political in nature (and likely to brush against the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality), "little p" leaves a more inclusive space for both actors to work together, especially at the local level, in order to tackle key short- to intermediate-term drivers, including resilience and dispute resolution mechanisms, that are critical to both peace and humanitarian efforts.[68] Importantly, these "little p" initiatives can still be politically transformative, and can even help enhance the inclusiveness and sustainability of outcomes resulting from peace processes at the "big P" level by:

1. reducing conflict between communities or other social groups;
2. reducing structural (economic, political, social) inequalities and power asymmetries;
3. strengthening the conflict management capacities of communities and/or authorities;
4. enhancing inclusiveness and the participatory nature of decision-making;
5. enhancing trust and positively transforming relations between social groups (i.e., horizontal social cohesion);
6. strengthening the social contract between citizen and State (enhancing trust between citizens and authorities and the trustworthiness of authorities, empowering citizens and enhancing the accountability of authorities (duty bearers) – i.e., vertical social cohesion); and
7. enhancing tolerance and influencing social norms around the use of violence.

In conclusion, these entry points provide a potential road map for strengthening collaboration between the humanitarian and peace sectors. By leveraging a deeper understanding of the context, redefining the concept of impartiality and finding common ground, these two sectors can work towards more integrated and effective

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67 International Alert, *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Peacebuilding: A Resource Pack*, London, January 2004.
68 See the references cited in above note 4.

peace-responsive responses to complex crises. This not only requires a shift in mindset and approach but also a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation.

Accountability to affected communities

Integrating peace aspects into humanitarian work, and vice versa, depends upon a process of diligent learning and exchange. It is not something that can be imposed on humanitarians from the outside, and peace actors must be equally open to examining their own practices. One area for improvement includes a better understanding of what "downward" accountability would look like in practice across the peacebuilding sector (rather than merely at the project/programme level). Amongst a small but vocal group of peace actors, there is a strong recognition of a need to strengthen the sector's approach to accountability to people affected by their actions, "particularly those whose peace they seek to help build".[69]

Whilst the humanitarian sector has a well-established, system-wide, "professionalized" approach to accountability vis-à-vis affected communities, this approach is not explicitly laid out in most peacebuilders' operating guidelines, ethical frameworks or sector-wide professional commitments.[70] Broadly, the humanitarian standards on accountability are understood to have emerged from two overlapping, catalytic events in the sector. In the 1990s, leaders of humanitarian organizations grasped that they needed to be more accountable "upwards", to their donors, regarding the tracking of resource usage and distribution.[71] In parallel, however, related questions were being raised about "downward" accountability towards affected communities. This reflexive turn was largely driven by the sectoral failure to sufficiently predict, prevent and respond to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.[72] This prompted the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Oxfam and others to convene humanitarian leaders and revisit their operational practices. What emerged in the 1990s and 2000s was the creation of several standards and accountability initiatives, including the Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability (CHS), the Sphere Project, the Consolidated Appeals Process, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action and the IASC commitments to affected people.[73] These have evolved over time but continue to offer the normative and policy frameworks through which humanitarian actors attempt to be accountable to affected populations in all their diversity. It has become increasingly evident that humanitarian actors cannot claim to uphold the principle of humanity, alongside its related principles of

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69 Phil Vernon, *Background Paper: Peacebuilding and Accountability*, Interpeace, Geneva, May 2023, p. 1.
70 *Ibid.*
71 Dorothea Hilhorst *et al.*, "Accountability in Humanitarian Action", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2021.
72 Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict", *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2003.
73 D. Hilhorst *et al.*, above note 71.

neutrality, independence and impartiality, without striving to maintain a certain level of accountability for their engagements.[74] An integrated perspective on accountability standards includes mechanisms which ensure that external actors and standards can hold humanitarian actors accountable as well as internal processes for humanitarians themselves to take responsibility for their actions.[75] Updating the various standards offers an important moment for the sector to challenge itself to be better and more accountable to the communities it serves.

Herein lies an opportunity for the peacebuilding sector to learn from the humanitarians, integrating appropriate lessons of what has worked and, just as importantly, avoiding what has not. For too long, the peacebuilding sector has intentionally kept many of its effective practices at an informal, *ad hoc* level, with minimal documentation.[76] While this approach preserves adaptability and flexibility, it also poses challenges in terms of accountability. Moving forward, therefore, peacebuilders should arguably consider finding a balance between maintaining their flexible, context-specific approaches and adopting some level of standardization to ensure accountability to the communities they serve. Indeed, humanitarians are arguably the first to point out that the progress of their accountability agenda has been "uneven and slow", with CHS compliance being both "patchy and inadequate",[77] but despite these shortcomings, humanitarians set a commendable example of how to "fail forward". They continuously learn, correct, and improve based on past mistakes, setting a precedent for those outside the sector. This could be a valuable approach to follow for peacebuilders as they strive to ensure that accountability does not remain a mere buzzword in their own sector.

Exploring normative foundations for the peace sector

A third entry point relates to the normative foundations, principles and standards guiding each sector. This exploration can be subdivided into two topics. The first analyzes the peace sector's search for a more codified and principled approach to peacebuilding, and the extent to which it could draw on the humanitarian principles. The second looks at whether some common cross-sectoral core principles can be gleaned to reinforce the normative connections between peace and humanitarianism.

Entrenched norms and the emergence of codified principles for the peace sector?

The challenges facing the peace sector are numerous. The increasing number of both intra- and inter-State conflicts, coupled with a significant shortage of

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74 CHS Alliance, *On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective?*, Geneva, 2 September 2015.
75 Alnoor Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice: Mechanisms for NGOs", *World Development*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2003.
76 P. Vernon, above note 69.
77 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

durable peace agreements, necessitates a moment of reckoning. The key challenges are as follows.

Time frame: Peace processes often prioritize conflict resolution over the broader objective of sustaining peace. This is a misplaced emphasis given that, on average, post-conflict peace lasts only seven years, and around 60% of all conflicts recur.[78] Moreover, repeated cycles of violence and recurrent civil wars are the prevailing types of armed conflict.[79] We also know that even after conflicts end, post-war societies frequently experience ongoing insecurity, violence, political instability and continued divisions among previously conflicting groups.[80] Consequently, it is imperative to look beyond simple conflict resolution efforts in order to ensure sustainable peace. Although peace agreements may lay the groundwork for stable peace, there still needs to be a concerted effort to build structures and strengthen systems that prevent the recurrence of conflict. For instance, research shows that "agreements that are carefully designed to deal with all obstacles to cooperation have the strongest pacifying effect among armed conflict outcomes".[81] Hence, how long peace will last is determined by how well it is made, and peace agreements must thus be complemented by long-term peacebuilding efforts that address these issues.

Parallel tracks: The peacebuilding sector tends to focus excessively on negotiations "at the table", resulting in peace agreements that lack multi-track planning and complementary interventions. However, one could argue that "the quality of a peace agreement is only equal to the quality of its implementation".[82] While the handshake might represent the end of the negotiations, it does not ensure that what has been agreed upon is effectively put into practice. Simultaneously, peacebuilding actors must consistently strive to work across various levels of society to link different peacebuilding initiatives as part of the larger peacebuilding processes to ensure their sustainability.[83]

External actors: The pursuit of peace, especially at Track 1 level (government and political elites), tends to be disproportionately driven by external actors, raising the question of representation, prioritization and whose voices are heard, and thus ownership of peacebuilding processes.[84]

78 Scott Gates, Haavard Mokleiv Nygaard and Esther Trappeniers, *Conflict Recurrence*, Conflict Trends, Peace Research Institute Oslo, Oslo, February 2016, p. 1.

79 Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, *Why Peace Processes Fail: Negotiating Insecurity after Civil War*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2015.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Ramzi Badran, "Intrastate Peace Agreements and the Durability of Peace", *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2014, p. 193.

82 Humanity United, "After the Handshake: Forging Quality Implementation of Peace Agreements", 2 September 2016, available at: https://humanityunited.org/perspectives/after-the-handshake/#allow.

83 Julia Palmiano Federer *et al.*, *Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes*, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich, Folke Bernadotte Academy and Swisspeace, January 2020.

84 Jannie Lilja and Kristine Höglund, "The Role of the External in Local Peacebuilding: Enabling Action – Managing Risk", *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2018.

Inclusion: Despite some progress, the inclusivity of women, youth and marginalized groups in peacebuilding work remains insufficient. This is especially prevalent when it comes to their participation in peace agreements. For instance, between 1992 and 2019, women served as only 6% of mediators and 13% of negotiators globally.[85] Moreover, of the eighteen peace agreements concluded in 2022, only one had a woman signatory.[86] However, we know that "inclusion at the table is an exercise in inclusion in the post-conflict context".[87] This exclusive tendency results in damaging outcomes that reinforce the very patterns of behaviour and governance that exacerbated conflict dynamics in the first place.[88]

Sustainability: As 50% of peace agreements fail within the first five years, sustainable peace demands more than just agreements negotiated among elites.[89] Hence, peacebuilding actors typically attempt to address the structural weaknesses, violence, insecurity, instability and political conflict that commonly characterize many conflict-affected societies.[90]

These are norms for the peace sector but are not codified. In response, a recent initiative incubated by Interpeace,[91] called Principles for Peace,[92] has sought to establish a practical framework rooted in eight core peace principles. These respond to the reality that we have the Geneva Conventions to guide conduct in war but no principles on the process of building and sustaining peace. The eight peace principles are dignity, solidarity, humility, enhancing legitimacy, accountable security, promoting pluralism, adopting subsidiarity, and integrated and hybrid solutions.[93] Dignity, solidarity and humility each focus on grounding peacemaking in a moral and ethical foundation that promotes trust and engenders respect amongst all parties. Enhancing legitimacy and accountable security both serve as a foundation for sustaining peace. Promoting pluralism, adopting subsidiarity, and pursuing integrated and hybrid solutions each help highlight the practical commitments needed for strengthening peacemaking efforts. Implementing these principles, however, has not been universal across the peace sector and will take time and significant political effort. As the process advances and if the principles are to take root, it will be tactically necessary to clarify which of them can be operationalized, in what order, and how. Here, the

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85 UN, "Prospects for Women Peacebuilders Vastly Worse than Before Pandemic as Spoilers Ramp Up Action Aimed at Silencing Their Voices, Human Rights Chief Warns Security Council", 18 January 2022, available at: https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14768.doc.htm.

86 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes", available at: www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/.

87 International Civil Society Action Network, *The Better Peace Tool*, Washington, DC, 2014, p. 4.

88 J.-K. Westendorf, above note 79.

89 Veronique Dudouet and Andreas Schädel, "New Evidence: To Build Peace, Include Women from the Start", United States Institute of Peace, 11 March 2021, available at: www.usip.org/publications/2021/03/new-evidence-build-peace-include-women-start.

90 J.-K. Westendorf, above note 79.

91 Interpeace is an international peacebuilding organization with thirty years of experience working in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

92 For further information, see the Principles for Peace website, available at: https://principlesforpeace.org.

93 See the Principles for Peace website, above note 92.

experience of the humanitarian sector offers a valuable source of guidance for the peace sector as it attempts to turn the principles into a framework for action.

It is notable that the values of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence imagined at the core of the principles for humanitarian engagement are enshrined in international texts and have been guiding the actions of humanitarians for decades.[94] These principles are both ethically and operationally grounded, serving as a tool to help navigate complex crises. That said, principles can also be restrictive, even if they can encourage sectoral congruence. Rigid deontological norms can elide more contextual and critical reflections on how to operate, and risk narrowing the available options for a sector to respond to complex humanitarian and conflict needs. Norms and principles can also be hidden behind; for example, claims of principled neutrality can be difficult to uphold when it is inescapable that any actor in a conflict area will be rendered political in one way or another. Here, a principle is perhaps more useful as an aspiration or operational measure of quality than a rule. Otherwise, the risk is that principles become a straitjacket that inhibits the ability to think and work with political agility when peace outcomes would benefit from it.

There are also divergent views regarding the existence of a hierarchy among these principles, with some viewing the principle of humanity as the North Star, embodying the ultimate goal of humanitarian action.[95] However, any North Star must surely be one in a constellation of important waypoints if joined-up peace and humanitarian work is to remain relevant and agile in the face of complex problems. Principles must improve effectiveness, not become a substitute for necessary action.[96]

In looking for congruence between the humanitarian and peace principles, there are of course dilemmas to contend with, including the different ways in which humanitarians and peace actors ground their actions in their respective principles. Current conflicts in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza, for example, have revealed the challenges of pursuing neutrality during intense and asymmetric urban warfare, where needs fall disproportionately on one side and humanitarian access becomes construed as partial. The repercussions are serious, with aid deliberately restricted, humanitarian workers targeted and killed, and selective narratives subsequently deployed within the media to justify these actions. Biased reporting, fake news and misinformation significantly distort how humanitarian actors are perceived, and thus their ability to act effectively in accordance with their principles. In Ukraine, for example, the "unwavering commitment to neutrality of the ICRC and the Ukrainian Red Cross has put them increasingly under pressure

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94 UNGA Res. 46/182 and 58/114, "Strengthening the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations", 19 December 1991 and 5 February 2004; Proclamation of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, Vienna, 1965; Jean Pictet, "The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 19, No. 210, 1979.

95 J. Pictet, above note 94.

96 Andreas T. Hirblinger and Dana M. Landau, "Daring to Differ? Strategies of Inclusion in Peace Making", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2020.

from authorities in Kyiv",[97] where they have been accused of "not doing enough to help Ukrainians".[98]

Peacebuilders too, with their principles of reconciliation, political inclusion and societal transformation, have increasingly found scant room to work. Some organizations have found that the operational space is limited to working only with certain groups and on certain issues – even when these are not the most pressing for a particular community or related to the most severe conflict. Consequently, these organizations are faced with a choice: cease operations in such a polarized environment or continue working within the given constraints, even if this means compromising their own understanding of independence and thus their ability to talk to all parties and build networks across political divides with those committed to finding non-violent solutions to conflict. Hence, the lesson appears to be that modern conflicts are leaving both humanitarian and peace actors in a quandary between upholding their principles and continuing their vital needs-based work. Therefore, while the two sectors may have different objectives and principles, these differences do not detract from the common and urgent need to ensure operational space, access to communities and stakeholders, the safety of practitioners and the integrity of the work, regardless of the context. It is this shared challenge that has led organizations from both sectors to seek stronger collaboration.

Conclusion

The complex landscape of global crises and growing needs demands approaches that bridge the gap between immediate humanitarian responses and longer-term peace and development objectives. With crises increasingly concentrated in protracted armed conflict contexts, humanitarian responses would be improved by also seeking to address the root causes of conflict. While the development–humanitarian nexus has made significant strides in bridging divides and strengthening cooperation mechanisms, similar progress regarding the humanitarian–peacebuilding nexus has been slower to materialize. This paper has aimed to provide an overview of the current state of collaboration between the humanitarian and peace sectors and has proposed strategies for improved cooperation and specific policies to address the challenges faced by both sectors, including exploring peace-responsive approaches to humanitarian activities and strengthening accountability to local communities. Moreover, the development of overarching principles for the peace sector, drawing lessons from the humanitarian sector's long-standing principles, represents a significant

97 Gabriela Galindo, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Crisis-Hit ICRC at Pains to Deliver in Ukraine", Geneva Solutions, June 2022, available at: https://genevasolutions.news/peace-humanitarian/between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-crisis-hit-icrc-at-pains-to-deliver-in-ukraine.

98 Lily Hyde, "Evacuation Challenges and Bad Optics", The New Humanitarian, 3 May 2022, available at: www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/05/03/the-icrc-and-the-pitfalls-of-neutrality-in-ukraine.

step towards a more codified approach to peacebuilding that may help lay common foundations for more integrated peacebuilding and humanitarian actions.

While the humanitarian and peace sectors have historically operated in distinct spheres, the current fraught geopolitical environment, with increasing needs, escalating conflicts, and decreasing political and financial support, provides a necessary and timely nudge for both sectors to recognize that they have more to gain through mutual explorations than they have to lose, in their joint effort to meaningfully support and improve the lives of people affected by violent conflict. Even if navigating complex geopolitical dynamics and fostering cooperation amid limited international consensus remains a formidable challenge, humanitarians and peacebuilders must recognize the shared challenges they face and identify opportunities for collaboration. It now remains for practitioners, policy-makers, politicians and researchers to take up the torch and continue the exchange and exploration.