5. Opportunities for Peace in 2015

Based on studies of conflicts and peacebuilding in 2014, in this chapter the UAB’s School for a Culture of Peace highlights five opportunities for peace in 2015. These are contexts where an armed conflict or socio-political crisis is present or has occurred in the past in which a series of factors have come together that could help lead to a positive outcome and/or issues on the international agenda that could facilitate peacebuilding in the short or medium term. The opportunities identified in 2015 include the renewed commitment to dialogue to find a solution to the Iranian nuclear dossier; the hope for peace offered by the national dialogue in Sudan; the prospects for making the reduction of armed violence an important subject on the Post-2015 Agenda; the confluence of global efforts against child recruitment; and the possible progress of gender equality on the international agenda due to the coincidence of various international events.

All these opportunities for peace will require real effort and commitment from the parties involved and, if appropriate, the support of international stakeholders so that synergies and positive factors already present may lead to peacebuilding. Thus, the analysis conducted by the School for a Culture of Peace aims to provide a realistic view of these scenarios and topics, identifying positive elements that give hope for change, while also highlighting existing difficulties that could become obstacles to opportunities for peace.

Map 5.1. Opportunities for Peace in 2015

![Map showing opportunities for peace in 2015](image-url)
5.1. Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dossier: a renewed commitment to dialogue

In late 2013, Iran and the group of international powers known as the P5+1 (the USA, China, Russia, the UK, France and Germany) reached an unprecedented agreement to start negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme. The Joint Plan of Action raised expectations about the possibilities of resolving a thorny issue that has been on the international agenda for years through a historic agreement to assist the normalisation of relations between Iran and the West, and especially the United States. The terms of the plan envisaged that the parties reach an agreement within one year maximum, but that did not come to pass. The day that the self-imposed deadline expired, 24 November 2014, Iran and the P5+1 countries had to admit that there were still great disagreements between them. However, the negotiators stressed that significant progress had also been made, making it worthwhile to remain committed to the dialogue. Thus, a seven-month extension to the negotiations was agreed, consisting of two phases. Both parties have until 1 March 2015 to bring their positions closer together and define a political agreement, and until 1 July to achieve a comprehensive agreement, including an implementation plan. This agreement could have important implications not only for the nuclear non-proliferation system, but also for international and regional politics and relations between the United States and Iran. During this time period, however, many more obstacles will likely have to be overcome than were reported in the first year of negotiations.

Talks over the Iranian nuclear issue began in early 2014. In the first stage of the meetings, some of the dynamics of previous negotiations were maintained, characterised by maximalist approaches, mutual accusations and misperceptions regarding the weaknesses of the other party and the weight of domestic narratives and pressures. Nevertheless, the representatives of Iran and the P5+1 managed to advance and reconcile stances on technical issues amidst a succession of multilateral diplomatic meetings and more discreet bilateral negotiations between Iran and the United States (which were also more effective, according to some analysts) in cities such as Vienna, Geneva and Muscat (Oman). As the November deadline approached, it became apparent that the main points of disagreement focused on two issues. The first was the size and scope of Iran’s uranium enrichment programme (the abilities it could keep and those which should be dismantled as part of an agreement) and the second was the sequence for lifting the sanctions imposed on the Tehran regime (in exchange for the agreement and its concessions, Iran wants a complete and rapid removal of the sanctions, while the P5+1 countries propose a suspension and then a phaseout, depending on implementation of the agreement). While the talks, only a few details of which have become public, have centred around various technical aspects, the basis of the discussion (and the solution) is political. For Iran the nuclear issue is a matter of national dignity that implies rejecting the dictates of the West. As a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Tehran insists that it has the right to pursue peaceful atomic activities and provides transparency (inspections, access to facilities) in exchange for keeping aspects of its nuclear plan and research programmes. The P5+1, and particularly the Western countries, want to limit Iran’s abilities as much as possible to prevent any chance that the Iranian nuclear programme may acquire a military dimension.

The failure to reach an agreement within the established timeframe caused some disappointment, but there were also several positive assessments of the progress made, lessons learned after a year of dialogue and prospects for an agreement in the months of negotiations ahead. The parties underscored that progress had been made on subjects that initially seemed intractable and deeper knowledge had been acquired of the other party, its internal constraints and room for manoeuvre. The negotiations over the Iranian nuclear issue also enabled the establishment of an unprecedented channel of communication between senior officials in Washington and Tehran, despite their historical animosity. While this rapprochement was seen publicly in the telephone conversation between US President Barack Obama and the recently elected Iranian leader, Hassan Rouhani in 2013, it took shape over the course of various meetings in 2014 between John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (some alone and others with the chief of European diplomacy at the time, Catherine Ashton) and in smooth telephone conversations between members of the negotiating delegations. Ashton also travelled to Tehran in the first trip to Iran made by a senior EU diplomat in six years.

Notably, the path of diplomatic dialogue about the Iranian nuclear dossier was maintained, despite the many contingencies that could have hindered its development, such as tensions between Russia and the West stemming from the crisis in Ukraine, for example, or the legislative elections in the United States in November, which was a significant setback for Obama’s Democratic Party (and which led to some scepticism among the Iranian delegation about any deals that Washington could propose). Specialised analysts pointed out that negotiations to regulate such complex issues usually last more than a year.\(^1\) Thus, the extension of the talks has been seen as a sign of trust that it is still a credible pathway. Meanwhile, the deal is still alive that allowed the talks to begin, bringing benefits to both parties. For the P5+1, this means that Tehran has put a freeze on its atomic activities (the IAEA has certified that Iran has fulfilled its promises in this regard), while

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1. Consisting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, this group of countries is also known as the EU3+3.
Iran enjoys a partial lifting of the sanctions, giving it a little room to breathe economically.

In the current scenario, various factors could help the parties to achieve an agreement and act as an incentive. For the time being, the leadership of both Iran and the USA are committed to the search for a negotiated solution. Obama has invested significant political capital in rapprochement with Washington’s traditional enemy. After his party’s defeat in the elections in November, Obama wrote his fourth letter to the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urging him not to miss the opportunity to make a deal. Obama only has so much time (his term ends in 2016) to try to reach an agreement that would become the distinctive seal of his foreign policy legacy, a sphere in which he has not had much success. Rouhani, the former Iranian nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005, has focused his efforts on the nuclear dossier, aware that any economic recovery, one of the main issues facing Iran, would require an agreement resulting in lifting the sanctions. Various public opinion studies reveal that Rouhani’s commitment to negotiations has the backing of most of the Iranian populace, which is open to making some concessions and adopting measures that enable it to normalise relations with the USA.3 Thus, some analysts have said that the hope for change represented by Rouhani and his focus on a nuclear deal goes hand in hand with the need for change in the regime, as more than two-thirds of the population was born after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In addition, the evolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, and particularly the rise of the radical Sunni Islamic State (ISIS), has shown an unusual confluence of interests between the United States and Iran. Despite their differences in other areas, like the war in Syria (Iran remains steadfast in its support for Bashar Assad’s government), in practice Tehran and Washington have become allies in the fight against ISIS, identified as a common enemy. Senior leaders from both countries have addressed the issue, and Obama insinuated as much in his letter to Khamenei. A possible agreement that resolves the atomic dispute could promote or open avenues of understanding between Tehran and the West in other areas, based on the understanding that Iran is an inevitable regional power in the current context, with a special ability to influence developments in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. One of the most stable countries in the region, it has the resources and willingness to intervene in the region to stop the rise of radical Sunni armed groups. Europe is not only interested in promoting pathways to stabilise the Middle East, but could also be interested in lifting sanctions on Iran for the purpose of diversifying its sources of energy supply given its tensions with Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow could leverage its relations through agreements with Iran as an asset in its dispute with the West, aware that it could defy the sanctions and that it has great influence in areas that could be of assistance in resolving the nuclear issue. Although some observers viewed the recent agreement between Russia and Iran to provide reactors to the Bushehr plant as evidence of this, others stressed that the deal fits the argument promoted by the P5+1 in the negotiations to reduce Tehran’s needs to produce atomic energy within its borders.4

Despite some encouraging signs, it is clear that the negotiations and possibilities of an agreement over Iran’s nuclear programme are also threatened by several factors. The extension of the dialogue exposes it to the influence of hardliners on both sides, which have expressed their scepticism from the start, if not open rejection, and are willing to boycott it. On the Iranian side, powerful sectors, such as the top brass of the Republic Guard, have openly questioned it, although they lowered the tone of their criticism after an appeal from Ayatollah Khamenei. The supreme Iranian Leader, who has the final say on nuclear policy, has asked to give the negotiations a chance, but has also adopted a cautious and suspicious attitude towards the intentions of the United States and its Western allies.

In the United States, the victory of the opposition Republican Party in the recent elections, which furthered its majority in the House of Representatives and will control the Senate in January for the first time since 2007, will not only reduce Obama’s room for manoeuvre, but will also increase the odds that unilateral sanctions will be promoted against Iran. This would contravene the agreements necessary for the negotiations to begin, weaken the Iranian leadership that promoted the talks, lead to a resumption of Iran’s nuclear activities that have been frozen so far and create divisions within the P5+1. For this reason, various analysts have warned of the strategic cost of a measure of this kind, since the United States could be held accountable, even by some of its partners, for setting off an escalation and increasing the possibilities of violent confrontation.5 Polls also indicate that the US population supports diplomatic negotiation to address the nuclear issue over any alternatives.

However, the Israeli government has been fiercely opposed to the negotiations from the start. At any time, the Israeli government could choose to attack Iran’s nuclear

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facilities directly (in August Tehran claimed that it had shot down an Israeli drone flying over the Natanz nuclear complex). Israel has adopted this policy in the past, when it attacked the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, and when it conducted another strike in Syria in 2007, in order to guarantee its position as the sole nuclear power in the region. Israel, which unlike Iran has not signed the NPT, pursues a policy of nuclear “ambiguity”, neither confirming nor denying whether it possesses nuclear arsenals. The Israeli government’s position could be influenced by the upcoming Knesset elections in March, but overall the policies promoted by Netanyahu have isolated Israel internationally, thus limiting its ability to mobilise against Iran. Meanwhile, it must be borne in mind that developments in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria may have implications for the nuclear negotiations, although for the first year the negotiating parties managed to hold the talks in safety, despite the regional turmoil.

The coming months will show whether cooperation and the search for consensus will prevail over confrontation. What is certain is that any achievement would require both parties to be flexible and to make difficult concessions, with political costs among their respective domestic audiences. Any agreement would therefore require education about its advantages, stressing the risks involved in scenarios other than a negotiated solution. A positive outcome could strengthen the nuclear weapon non-proliferation system in an especially tumultuous zone, help to bury a dispute that has affected Iran’s international relations for decades, facilitate some normalisation between Washington and Tehran and create a scenario that could aid collaboration between regional and international powers in efforts to stabilise the Middle East. The timeframe is limited. Iran and the P5+1 have the first quarter of 2015 to grasp this opportunity for peace—or to let it slip away.
5.2. Sudan’s National Dialogue, one of the last hopes for peace in the country

The history of Sudan has been marked by a nearly constant atmosphere of violence and instability. Over the course of the last 50 years, the marginalised peripheries of the country have confronted a predatory client state in an attempt to halt the inequality and exclusion that has characterised the country since its independence. The construction of this state, based on the Arabic cultural assimilation of the non-Arab periphery through repression and violence to ensure its dominance by extracting resources from the marginal areas, provided structural conditions and provided political and economic reasons for various insurgencies to appear. Three years after losing one-fourth of its population and territory as a result of the secession of South Sudan in 2011 after more than 20 years of war, Sudan remains immersed in violence because it has not dealt with the deep causes of this instability. According to some analysts, for several years there has been growing agreement that resolving the different domestic conflicts facing the country (from Darfur, which goes back more than a decade, to South Kordofan and Blue Nile, in addition to pressure from the political opposition and various attempted coups d’état carried out by parts of the Sudanese Army) would require a global approach, instead of the failed individualised treatment of the government of Omar al-Bashir in an attempt to remain in power. Whether due to internal influence, international pressure (especially from the United States and the European Union), political calculations or the conviction that it is the only way out of the Sudanese labyrinth, on 27 January 2014 President Omar al-Bashir called on the political parties and the insurgencies to commit to the National Dialogue process to build peace in the country and discuss possible constitutional reform, which some analysts believe could be one of the best opportunities for peacebuilding in the country in recent years. The international community and internal political opposition hailed the proposal, though the insurgents regarded it with scepticism. The main points of his appeal were national unity and peace, the economy, basic freedoms and rights, national identity and governance and constitutional reform.

The National Dialogue is an initiative coordinated on the technical level by a committee in charge of organising the process, known as the 7+7 Committee, which takes its name from the number of members composing it: seven from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and seven from opposition parties. Nevertheless, the initiative displayed great fragility from the beginning. First, the process was delayed many times and events on the ground are not consistent with the good intentions and declarations of the president of the country.6 The pressure on the media, the restrictions of political parties’ freedoms and the ongoing wars in Darfur and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile are a sign of this. At mid-year, a political advisor and member of the NCP’s inner circle, Qutbi al-Mahdi, announced that the National Dialogue would include civil society organisations, women’s groups, students, workers and national figures, but no concrete initiative for inclusive participation in it has been made public thus far.

However, from the start the coalition National Consensus Forces (NCF), which unites the main opposition parties, stated that it would not participate in the National Dialogue unless the government puts an end to the various wars affecting the country and creates an environment favourable to holding talks after two of its main parties said they were willing to participate, the Popular Congress Party (PCP) and the National Umma Party (NUP). The PCP, headed by its historical leader Hassan al-Turabi, expressed its readiness to participate in the initiative, dividing the opposition bloc. The initiative was stalled for various months, especially after the arrest on 17 May of another opposition leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi of the NUP, also a member of the NCF. His arrest prompted his party to announce it was suspending meetings to participate in the National Dialogue. Al-Mahdi was arrested because of his harsh criticism of the government’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for crimes and atrocities committed in the conflict zones. However, one month later he was released due to the negative impact surrounding the arrest of an opposition leader and because the central committee of the NUP, hoping to regain lost confidence, expressed its support for the Sudanese Armed Forces and said that al-Mahdi’s statements regarding the RSF could come from information that “may not be entirely true”7. Despite the setbacks and following months of deadlock, the 7+7 Committee unveiled the road map of the National Dialogue on 8 August, establishing that it would begin in September and last three months. This timeframe was not respected, however, as the National Dialogue has yet to start.

Nevertheless, the insurgency and political opposition have expressed their willingness to move forward with the process. The National Dialogue was given significant impetus in August, when the NUP and armed opposition coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)8 signed the Paris Declaration,9 by which the SRF pledged to observe a unilateral two-month ceasefire,
make the effort necessary to end the war and start talks with all political forces leading to the formation of a transition government and more democracy. SRF leader Malik Agar said that both groups had agreed to join political forces and work for a broad dialogue to preserve the unity of the country (in reference to South Sudan). They also agreed to boycott the general elections in April 2015 unless they are organised by an inclusive transition government. The remaining parties welcomed the declaration. Al-Bashir said that the National Dialogue only required three months, which is why he had announced that the 2015 elections would not be postponed, since according to him that would create a constitutional vacuum. He also said that a transition government would not be established and that the National Dialogue would start on 25 November. 

The Paris Declaration, which was sponsored by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on 4 September, helped the SRF, NUP and 7+7 Committee to sign a participation in Addis Ababa about their participation in the National Dialogue with the facilitation of the AUHIP, ending months of stalemate in the process. Although al-Bashir rejected the Paris Declaration, he welcomed the signing of the agreement in Addis Ababa by the same groups that participated in Paris and the 7+7 Committee. The members of the Troika (the United States, United Kingdom and Norway) hailed these efforts and backed the AU in its initiatives and positioning.

The first meeting of the general assembly to prepare for the National Dialogue was held on 2 November and presided over by Omar al-Bashir. Around 100 political players and members of political parties participated in the assembly, which approved the report of the 7+7 Committee (the road map for the National Dialogue) and the Addis Ababa agreement signed on 4 September, as well as plans to agree on a timetable for the National Dialogue. Other important parties like the Reform Now Movement (RNM), led by Ghazi Salah al-Din Attabani, also participated in the meeting. Various subcommittees for preparing the National Dialogue started to hold meetings and gather ideas.

Meanwhile, even though a significant push was given to the peace processes in Darfur and South Kordofan and Blue Nile in November, with parallel meetings held in Addis Ababa, no agreement was reached due to al-Bashir's refusal to take a sweeping approach to resolve the conflicts in the country, as requested by the armed groups. Nevertheless, al-Bashir repeated his call for the armed groups to join the dialogue process. Thus far, the Sudanese government had kept its negotiations with the Two Areas (as the peace process in South Kordofan and Blue Nile is known) and Darfur separate from the National Dialogue, while the SPLM-N wanted to include aspects of the National Dialogue (the Paris Declaration) in it and bring the Darfur peace process under a single peace process coordinating both lines of negotiation and leading to the National Dialogue.

Even though the National Dialogue is proceeding slowly and no agreement has been achieved in Darfur or the Two Areas enabling the involvement of armed groups in it, the fact that the AUHIP is bringing these processes together and coordinating them so they may be united with the National Dialogue means that the African Union understands a comprehensive approach is essential and wants to move the negotiations in that direction. However, al-Bashir refuses to accept the convergence of the National Dialogue with efforts to resolve the armed conflicts in Sudan. Led by Thabo Mbeki, the AUHIP has urged the 7+7 Committee to persuade the armed groups to join the National Dialogue and supports all mediation efforts moving in the same direction. Chadian President Idriss Déby also encouraged former allies of his, armed groups from Darfur, to participate in the process. The German government and Berghoff Foundation did the same, holding a seminar in Berlin in October after the SRF announced plans to form a strategic alliance with the opposition bloc NCF and other opposition parties. Internationally, there is a clear desire to support the process, as the European Union has demonstrated on many occasions, such as when it announced its promise to forgive Sudan’s foreign debt if the process reached its stated objectives. Even if the initiative fails, meaning that a negotiating process takes place that is not inclusive and does not resolve the conflicts in the country due to the slow progress of the National Dialogue, the complexity and number of groups involved, the accumulation of mistrust between the parties and the persisting violence on the ground, it can be said that the beginning of a process of change is now under way.

The National Dialogue could be one of the best opportunities for peacebuilding in the country in recent years

11. The United States, the United Kingdom and Norway form what is known as the Sudan Troika, a group whose governments backed the peace negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 2005.
13. On 3 December, the “Sudan Call” was signed in Addis Ababa between the leader of the NCF coalition, Farouk Abu Issa, the vice president of the armed SRF coalition, Minni Minawi, the head of the NUP, al-Sadiq al Mahdi, and the chief of the Alliance of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations, Amin Maki Madani. This agreement is a call to end the war, dismantle the single-party state, sign a comprehensive agreement and undertake a democratic transition in the country. Al-Bashir has condemned alliances between the political opposition and the insurgency, reasserting that the two conflicts will not be negotiated in the same forum, as the insurgencies would like. See Sudan Tribune, “Sudan’s Bashir vows to quash rebellion by the end of the year”, Sudan Tribune, 13 December 2014.
5.3. The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda

Throughout 2015, states will formally start negotiations to define the new development agenda, known as the Post-2015 Agenda, which will replace the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed in the year 2000. Although the Millennium Declaration in 2000 addressed issues of peace, security and disarmament, they were not subsequently included directly or specifically in the MDGs. In recent years, various initiatives and reports produced by international organisations, governments and NGOs have been fuelling a growing consensus about the need to explicitly include the prevention and reduction of armed violence and the promotion of security in the Post-2015 Agenda. Despite all the political and methodological criticism that accompanied the design and follow-up of the MDGs, most agree on the point that the explicit inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda would be a historic opportunity by situating such a sensitive issue at the centre of the debate and of the international community’s efforts while forcing states to mobilise resources and make agreements to adopt concrete and quantifiable strategies and measures to achieve the goals finally agreed.

Armed violence is currently estimated to kill around 740,000 people each year,\(^{15}\) of which only around one-third may be attributed to armed conflicts and preventable diseases affecting vulnerable people in war zones. Furthermore, each year 500,000 to 750,000 people are injured in contexts other than armed conflicts\(^ {16}\) and 51.2 million people had been forcibly displaced at the end of 2013 (16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million displaced persons and 1.2 million asylum seekers). Other reports calculate that around 1.5 billion people live in contexts of fragility, armed conflict or large-scale organised crime.\(^ {17}\)

Beyond the direct impact of armed conflict, several reports have established a clear connection between violence and development, as well as between violence and many variables (rates of poverty, income inequality, unemployment, illiteracy, infant mortality, lack of access to healthcare and education, etc.). According to the World Bank’s World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Violence and Development (p. 5),\(^ {18}\) “People in fragile and conflict-affected states are more than twice as likely to be undernourished as those in other developing countries, more than three times as likely to be unable to send their children to school, twice as likely to see their children die before age five and more than twice as likely to lack clean water. On average, a country that experienced major violence over the period from 1981 to 2005 has a poverty rate 21 percentage points higher than a country that saw no violence” (WDR 2011, p. 5). Both the UNPD and the Geneva Declaration, for example, have indicated that no country affected by high levels of violence has managed to achieve even one MDG while various reports by the Geneva Declaration and other centres show a clear correlation between levels of violence and seven of the eight MDGs.\(^ {19}\) According to the World Bank, the average cost of a war is equivalent to 30 years of growth of the GDP of a medium-sized developing country.\(^ {20}\) Violence has an obvious effect on the macroeconomic level (lower levels of investment and savings, brain drain and capital flight, migration and forced displacement, interrupted economic activity, damaged infrastructure, rise in the prices of staple products, etc.), but also on the microeconomic one (less productivity and less participation in the labour market, for example), which directly affects the state’s ability to fulfil some of its main obligations, such as the guarantee of security and basic services and the redistribution of wealth. In addition, high levels of violence often lead to significant expenditure of public funds on issues that do not directly affect the population’s welfare.

Given this situation, in the last 10 years a series of initiatives and efforts have been undertaken to create consensus on including the reduction and prevention of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda. Notable among them has been the consensus approval of the UN General Assembly’s resolution on “Promoting development through the reduction and prevention of armed violence” in 2008, which urged the Secretary-General to explore the views of member states regarding the interrelations between armed violence and development, as well as the Secretary-General’s subsequent report bearing the

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\(^{20}\) World Bank, op. cit.
same title, which was published in November 2009. This report acknowledged that armed violence is a clear obstacle to development and to attaining the MDGs and also made a series of recommendations, including the design of goals, targets and indicators for measuring the reduction of armed violence. Both the UN General Assembly’s resolution and the Secretary-General’s report, as well as many of the initiatives developed afterwards, originally emerged through the impetus of the Geneva Declaration, a document initially adopted by 42 states at a ministerial summit organised by the UNDP and the Swiss government in June 2006 that has currently been signed by more than 100. The initiative achieved an important consensus between states, NGOs and the donor community to significantly reduce levels of armed violence in 2015 and beyond. Another significant initiative was the Conference on Armed Violence held in Geneva under the auspices of the Norwegian government, where more than 60 countries signed the “Oslo Commitments”, pledging to include measures to prevent and reduce armed violence in their strategies to achieve the MDGs. Also in 2010, representatives of many different governments met in Timor-Leste and approved the Dili Declaration, which identifies seven targets for peacebuilding and statebuilding and outlines specific commitments for governments and the donor community. Later, in November 2010, many countries and the donor community approved the document New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, in which the signatories pledged to work to include five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals in the Post-2015 Agenda. 

More specifically with regard to the process of reflection on the definition of a global development agenda after 2015, the UN Secretary-General promoted various initiatives to achieve the greatest possible consensus between member states and civil society. The subjects of peace, security and armed violence are explicitly addressed in some of these preparatory efforts and the documents to be used as a basis for negotiations between states, which will be developed in 2015. First is the report created in 2012 by the United Nations System Task Team, Realising the future we want for all, which identified “peace and security” as one of the four interdependent dimensions upon which the entire development agenda should be articulated beyond 2015. Second, the report issued in 2013 by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons and entitled A New Global Partnership to Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development indicated that the new universal development agenda should drive five major changes, one of which was to “build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all”, stating that “freedom from fear, conflict and violence is the most fundamental human right and the essential foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies”. This report also proposed targets and goals that, according to some analysts, might be adopted in the end in the Post-2015 Agenda. Third, one of the 11 global thematic consultations led by the United Nations was on “Conflict, Violence and Disaster, and the 2015 Development Agenda” and considered the reduction of violence a priority for the international community beyond 2015.

Despite the consensus on the need to include issues related to peace, insecurity, conflict and violence in the Post-2015 Agenda, some political and methodological challenges and dilemmas regarding operationalisation and precision remain. Prominent in the political arena is the eminently political nature of many phenomena that give rise to armed violence and insecurity, the management of which many states view as one of their core areas of sovereignty. Therefore, they are reluctant to agree on strategies involving the observational capacities of the international community. Historically, states have been opposed to third-party intervention in managing and resolving armed conflicts, which is viewed as tacit political acknowledgement of the groups conducting the armed struggle and especially acceptance that the state (with its legal and economic instruments and means of enforcement) is unable to resolve a conflict. In fact, the staunch opposition of many states to any form of foreign interference in what they consider to be domestic affairs was notable in the long discussion that led to the birth of the “Right to Protect” concept. Thus, some experts have opined that the inclusion of politically sensitive issues (such as armed conflict or state fragility) in the Post-2015 Agenda could undermine the consensus that could help to reduce violence or struggle against insecurity.

21. These targets include: a) strengthening agreements, processes and inclusive political dialogue; b) establishing and strengthening basic security; c) achieving the peacef ul resolution of conflicts and access to justice; d) developing effective and accountable government institutions to facilitate the provision of services; e) creating the foundation for inclusive economic development, including sustainable livelihoods, employment and the effective management of natural resources; f) developing social skills for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence; and g) strengthening regional stability and cooperation.

22. The five goals are: a) legitimate politics – foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution; b) security – establish and strengthen people’s security; c) justice – address injustices and increase people’s access to justice; d) economic foundations – generate employment and improve livelihoods; and e) revenues and services – manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

23. See the United Nations System Task Team on the UN Post-2015 Agenda (created in January 2012 in order to bring analysis and technical and analytical knowledge to the discussion about the Post-2015 Agenda, it brings together over 60 UN organisations and agencies and other international organisations); the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons; the Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning; the national consultations that have been held in 88 countries; and the 11 global thematic consultations, as well as a participatory process in which anyone can share their views on the priorities for development in the Post-2015 Agenda.


25. The goal would be to “ensure stable and peaceful societies” and the targets would be to: a) reduce by x the violent deaths per 10,000 people and eliminate all forms of violence against children; b) ensure that institutions of justice are accessible, independent, equipped with sufficient resources and respectful of the rights of due process; c) curb factors of external tension that lead to conflicts, including those related to organised crime; and d) improve the capacity, professionalism and accountability of security forces, the police and the judiciary.

26. This global consultation was led by UNDP, UNICEF, UNISDIR and UNPBSO with the support of the governments of Finland, Indonesia, Liberia and Panama. For more information see the final report by the Government of Finland: “The Global Thematic Consultation on Conflict, Violence and Disaster, and the Post-2015 Development Agenda” at http://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/library/post2015/synthesis_report/.

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In recent years, a consensus has been growing about the need to include the prevention and reduction of armed violence in the new development agenda that states will begin to discuss in 2015.
5.4. The confluence of global efforts against child recruitment

The recruitment of children continues to be a serious problem around the world and a prevalent practice among armed groups, governments and opposition forces in conflict. In 2013, the United Nations documented over 4,000 cases of recruitment and use of children and estimated that the real number was much higher, and in 2014 at least 57 armed groups in 15 countries in conflict recruited or used children, according to the latest report by the UN Secretary-General on childhood and armed conflicts. Boy and girl recruits perform many functions, including combat, message delivery, logistics, cooking, transport and sexual slavery. Whether forced or voluntary, their participation in armed groups has a serious impact on their physical and emotional wellbeing, including abuse, sexual violence and long-term psychosocial damage. There are also specific impacts on gender. International human rights law sets the minimum age for recruitment and participation in combat at 18 and international humanitarian law bans the recruitment and use of children under the age of 15, which is stipulated as a war crime by the International Criminal Court. Given this extremely serious situation, various players aimed at fighting and preventing the use of boys and girls by armed groups have increased their efforts on different levels in recent years, making the problem more visible and putting practical measures in motion. Thus, in 2014 a host of initiatives came together to give fresh impetus to the issue. Prominent among these initiatives was the United Nations campaign backed by the UN Security Council addressed to governments that recruit children; agreement on new UN action plans with parties in conflict; other ad hoc mechanisms aimed at armed opposition groups; and initiatives from regional stakeholders. These efforts could pay dividends in 2015 and for years to come in terms of new releases of minors, a greater commitment from armed actors to obey the child recruitment ban, the empowerment of civil society groups in this field and greater awareness of the problem in the international peace and security agenda. However, to the extent that child soldiers are used in armed actors’ strategies, the obstacles only grow.

Standing out in this tide of local and international efforts is the United Nations global campaign “Children, not soldiers” (a title using more inclusive language from a gender perspective), launched in March 2014, which aspires to end the recruitment and use of minors by the security forces of governments involved in armed conflict. The UN Security Council’s adoption of its objectives (Resolution 2134 (2014)) broadens its scope. In practical terms, the campaign plans to create road maps with eight governments that have already signed action plans with the UN (Afghanistan, Chad, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia and DR Congo) or that have shown a willingness to do so (Yemen, which finally signed an action plan in May 2014, and Sudan). In consultation with the governments, the road maps will indicate priorities, challenges, benchmarks and timelines. While there is a clear risk of default, it will come at the cost of breaching an explicit and voluntary commitment. And at the additional risk of countries whitewashing their image and continuing with policies that seriously violate human rights in many areas, the campaign and mechanisms provided are themselves a practical and pragmatic tool for making concrete progress in an area that affects a vulnerable group, that of children and child recruits, which is already a significant improvement over previous periods.

Another arena of international effort has been the action plans between the UN and parties in conflict, whether governments or armed opposition groups, that appear in the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General as actors that seriously violate children’s rights. In late 2014, there were 23 action plans signed between the UN and parties in conflict (11 state forces and 12 non-state forces, covering 14 countries), of which nine had already been implemented and completed, with the actors implicated being removed from the lists of the annual report. The oldest action plan dates to 2005 (with Forces Nouvelles, of Côte d’Ivoire, which has already been implemented, removing its leaders from the list like other players with actions plans in the country). The action plans have been adopted at a slow but steady rate, with four new signatories in 2011, three in 2012, the renewal of a previous one in 2013 and a new plan for Yemen in 2014. As such, it is slow and long-term work that has achieved some positive results (new signatories and cases of complete implementation and removal from the lists). The action plans cover matters such as the issuance of orders to ban child recruitment, the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for child recruitment, the release of children identified in armed groups, authorised and unobstructed access to military camps and bases to verify that there are no minors among the groups and many other measures that vary depending on each case. The action plans include concrete steps and specific timelines.

The instruments led by the UN, whether addressed to governments or to both governmental and non-governmental forces, are accompanied by other complementary initiatives promoted by civil society and regional stakeholders aimed at achieving commitments and concrete measures and at enhancing awareness and visibility of the issue of child soldiers. The main example from civil society is the Deed of Commitment mechanism from the NGO Geneva Call, which promotes the observation of humanitarian norms

28. For more detailed information about the campaign, see https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers/.
by non-governmental armed groups through verifiable public commitments. This tool takes shape when a Deed of Commitment is signed by the armed opposition group, Geneva Call and the government of the Republic and Canton of Geneva.29 In addition to the Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action and the Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination, Geneva Call promotes a third mechanism, the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict. Among other aspects, their adoption by armed groups includes the promise to ban the use of minors in hostilities, guarantees that they will not recruit minors, whether voluntarily or by force, and pledges to release minors. During 2014, Deeds of Commitment to protect children were signed with the CNA of Myanmar, the YPG and YPJ of the Kurdish parts of Syria and the GPRN/NSCN of northeastern India. Furthermore, two Palestinian factions, the PLO and the Palestinian National Coalition (“Tahaluf”), an umbrella organisation, adopted a declaration committed to the highest standards of child protection, including measures to prevent 18-year-olds from participating in hostilities. Geneva Call plans to continue the dialogue to make progress in implementation. In relation to the armed groups’ positions on child recruitment, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the rise in the number of public statements and orders issued by armed groups banning the recruitment and use of minors.30

Efforts from regional organisations also increased, boosting operational efforts against child recruitment and giving the subject more visibility. The African Union’s Peace and Security Department is working together with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, UNICEF and experts to create guidance and bring a child protection perspective to AU policies and activities. Likewise, in March 2012 the European Parliament ratified a statement urging non-state armed groups to commit to ending child recruitment. This statement was adopted after discussions initiated by Geneva Call. The text recommends that the bodies of the European Commission engage with armed opposition groups directly or indirectly (through specialised NGOs or humanitarian organisations) to address the issue of child protection and to urge those groups to sign Geneva Call’s Deeds of Commitment. It also endorses supporting humanitarian organisations that engage with armed groups to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

Despite the coming together of effort on many levels, the many hurdles ahead should temper our optimism. For instance, there are still only a few armed groups involved in active conflicts accused of serious violations of the rights of children that are participating in mechanisms to end child recruitment (of the 57 armed groups accused of recruiting or using minors in 15 countries in conflict, including conflicts not dealt with by the UN Security Council, only five parties had agreed on action plans, according to estimates in May 2014). In other words, armed groups that continue to recruit or use minors for economic, strategic, logistic or military reasons are still in the majority, regardless of whether they are aware of international humanitarian law against doing so. In contexts where armed groups and especially opposition groups try to maximise armed struggle, they may see little incentive to stop recruiting or using children. Added to this are troubling patterns of violence against children in 2014 in places such as Syria, the Central African Republic and Nigeria, among many others, where rather than seek external legitimacy through greater respect for international humanitarian law, armed groups step up their violations of the rights of minors, apparently as a strategy of terror and to maximise human and material resources. Despite the enormous difficulties and challenges, we are witnessing an obvious swell of effort on multiple fronts, including the immense labour of many civil society stakeholders, which boosts the struggle against child recruitment and strives to prevent the recruitment and use of minors and could result in positive new outcomes in 2015 and beyond. This enhanced visibility could also lead to greater importance of the subject of child recruits in the agenda of DDR programmes and peace processes. The obstacles are many, yet the coming together of efforts and initiatives invites the consideration that some clearly necessary progress has been made.

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29. For more detailed information on Geneva Call’s Deeds of Commitment, see http://www.genevacall.org/how-we-work/deed-of-commitment/
5.5. Integrating peace and development: progress on the international agenda for gender equality

The year 2015 may be decisive for progress in gender equality internationally, due to the coincidence of different events and the possible approval of new instruments that may advance the equity agenda worldwide and represent an endorsement for the women, peace and security agenda that began in 2000. The year 2015 is the deadline set by the United Nations to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and marks the 20th anniversary since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, when the Beijing Platform for Action was signed. Third, it will be the 15th anniversary since the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. All three of these tools will be subject to review in 2015. The timing may be important in giving new impetus to the gender agenda in an international context in which women’s rights are seriously threatened by different factors such as the international financial crisis and the growing conservatism of many governments intending to regressively reform international commitments acquired previously, to the detriment of women.31

With a strong push from women’s organisations, the international gender equity agenda has made significant progress since 1995, when the conference in Beijing marked a turning point with the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. It was certainly the most important moment since 1979, when the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was approved. The platform made a number of strategic objectives to achieve the empowerment of women and improve their living conditions worldwide by achieving gender equality in 12 areas. This conference, which brought together tens of thousands of women worldwide, created unprecedented momentum for the women’s movement and served as a springboard for working towards gender equity in the international arena. In 2000, as part of the Millennium Summit, the United Nations adopted the MDGs, which included two explicit gender goals: 1) to promote equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women32 and 2) to improve maternal health. Other objectives were also included that addressed gender issues in their development, such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Thus, the impetus given by the conference in Beijing also affected the agenda for international development, albeit timidly. Meanwhile, in 2000 the agenda for peace and international security also began the process to integrate a gender perspective by approving UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which later became what is called the women, peace and security agenda. For the first time, the UN Security Council was the arena for discussion on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the role that women play in peacebuilding locally and internationally. After the approval of Resolution 1325, six other resolutions have been passed to develop and complete this first one.33

A process to review these three processes will take place during 2015, first to evaluate the application of the MDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action and Resolution 1325, and second to improve their implementation and in some cases to ratify new instruments, like the new goals that will replace the MDGs. Women’s organisations have called for this new development agenda to include gender equity to a larger extent (whose integration into the MDGs was very weak) and for greater integration of the women, peace and security agenda, arguing that peace and security are necessary and essential conditions for development, which cannot be achieved without gender equality. Two parallel processes have been undertaken in preparation for the Post-2015 Agenda: the UN Secretary-General called a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons to conduct a report with recommendations to create a new agenda34 and agreement was reached on the creation of an open working group to define a set of objectives for sustainable development during the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development.35 As a result of both processes, two proposals have been presented for objectives to continue the process begun in 2000. Meanwhile, civil society has monitored these processes exhaustively and contributed many proposals.

On the positive side, both official proposals envisage the creation of gender equality as an objective unto itself, the empowerment of women and human rights for women and girls much more ambitiously than in the MDGs, which only focused on the subject of education. The new proposals, which are different but share some points in common, believe that gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights for women and girls may only be achieved by eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence against them, in addition to eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage, recognising the right of women to own land and guaranteeing equal and effective participation in political, economic and public life. This includes universal access to healthcare, respect for sexual and reproductive rights and lower child mortality. The Rio+20 proposal also explicitly refers to unpaid work and domestic work. Thus, the dimension of gender has become much more relevant

32. This objective resulted in the following goal: “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”.
than before, showing that it is a central and crucial aspect of sustainable development that cannot truly be achieved while exclusion and discrimination against women and girls continue. Despite the reluctance of many states, some proposals by women’s organisations have finally penetrated official documents, in line with all the international commitments that have arisen so far to promote gender equity. Meanwhile, it may also be considered progress that both documents set out the objective of promoting or guaranteeing peaceful, inclusive and stable societies.\textsuperscript{36}

However, civil society organisations and particularly women’s organisations have also discussed the shortcomings of both proposals and the need for them to be much more ambitious to genuinely attain global sustainable development, full gender equity and international peace. Specifically, while these proposals are considered a step forward regarding the MDG agenda, it is also clear that once again, structural issues are excluded that substantively question the current neoliberal economic model and the macroeconomic policies behind many of the deepest economic inequalities, such as poverty, including its increasingly female face and intergenerational transfer, and the perpetuation of some armed conflicts. In other words, they do not address the serious impact of the global financial crisis or the dire consequences that austerity policies are having on the welfare of the world’s population, and particularly on women. Furthermore, great emphasis is placed on the role of private individuals in promoting development without showing its direct responsibility for the difficult and unfair living conditions of a very important part of the world population. Another major point of criticism is the lack of a focus on human rights, which has been replaced by one of an instrumentalist nature indicating the economic value of equality and equal rights more than their intrinsic value. With regard to the inclusion of peace and security in the development agenda, there are some significant gaps from a gender perspective, since crucial aspects have been left out such as disarmament, demilitarisation and indicators to gauge the impact of violence that are more sensitive to gender. For example, the High-Level Panel’s report proposes that peaceful societies measure their achievements in the target of violent deaths, leaving out other impacts that particularly affect women, such as sexual violence and forced mass displacement, since the chances of dying violently are much higher for men than for women, while sexual violence has a much more pronounced impact on women. An additional risk lies in the fact that ambitious documents with comprehensive goals may be welcomed by civil society, but not implemented by governments later.

A comprehensive review of the implementation of Resolution 1325 is expected to be coordinated by former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Radhika Coomaraswamy in consultation with a group of experts from civil society, the United Nations and other spheres. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will be reviewed during the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Although the possibility of organising another world conference on women was debated, the idea seems to have been discarded due to various issues like the disapproval of documents that would be a step backwards from previous progress, given the position of some states in this regard.

Despite the major criticism that can be made and the caution that must be taken, the coming together of these three processes should be recognised as an important opportunity to move towards a much firmer and more substantial commitment to real sustainable development in which gender equality and the empowerment of women and children are also a cornerstone for peacebuilding. The United Nations and various states have the chance to demonstrate that international instruments are not worthless, but true platforms for promoting real change. The year 2015 will be one of review and could also become a year of significant progress if civil society can forcefully articulate its demands and states can keep their promises to avoid backsliding, which would have dire consequences for the lives of women and girls.

\textbf{The new proposed development goals for 2015 include gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls more substantively than the MDGs}

\textsuperscript{36} For more information, see “The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda” in this chapter.