

Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios in 2017



Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios is an annual publication linked to the yearbook *Alert! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding*, which identifies and analyses scenarios and issues on the international agenda that may enable peacebuilding or lead to an increase in violence and instability in the short or medium term.

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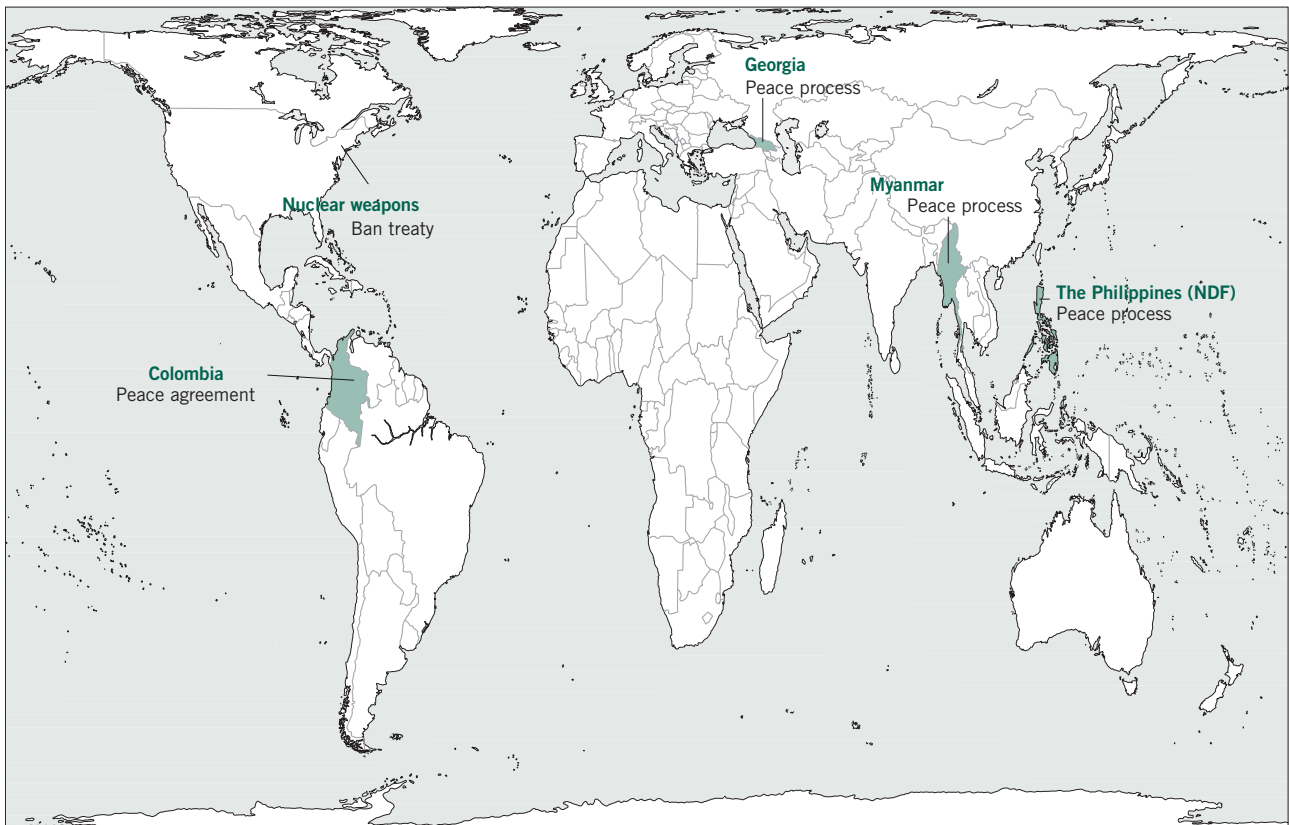
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Executive summary

Opportunities for peace in 2017



■ ■ **Colombia:** The inclusion of a gender perspective in the Colombian peace agreement signed by the government and the FARC militia presents a unique opportunity to move forward in building a sustainable and inclusive peace in Colombia, with the participation of women and the LGBTI population as key players in implementing the agreement.

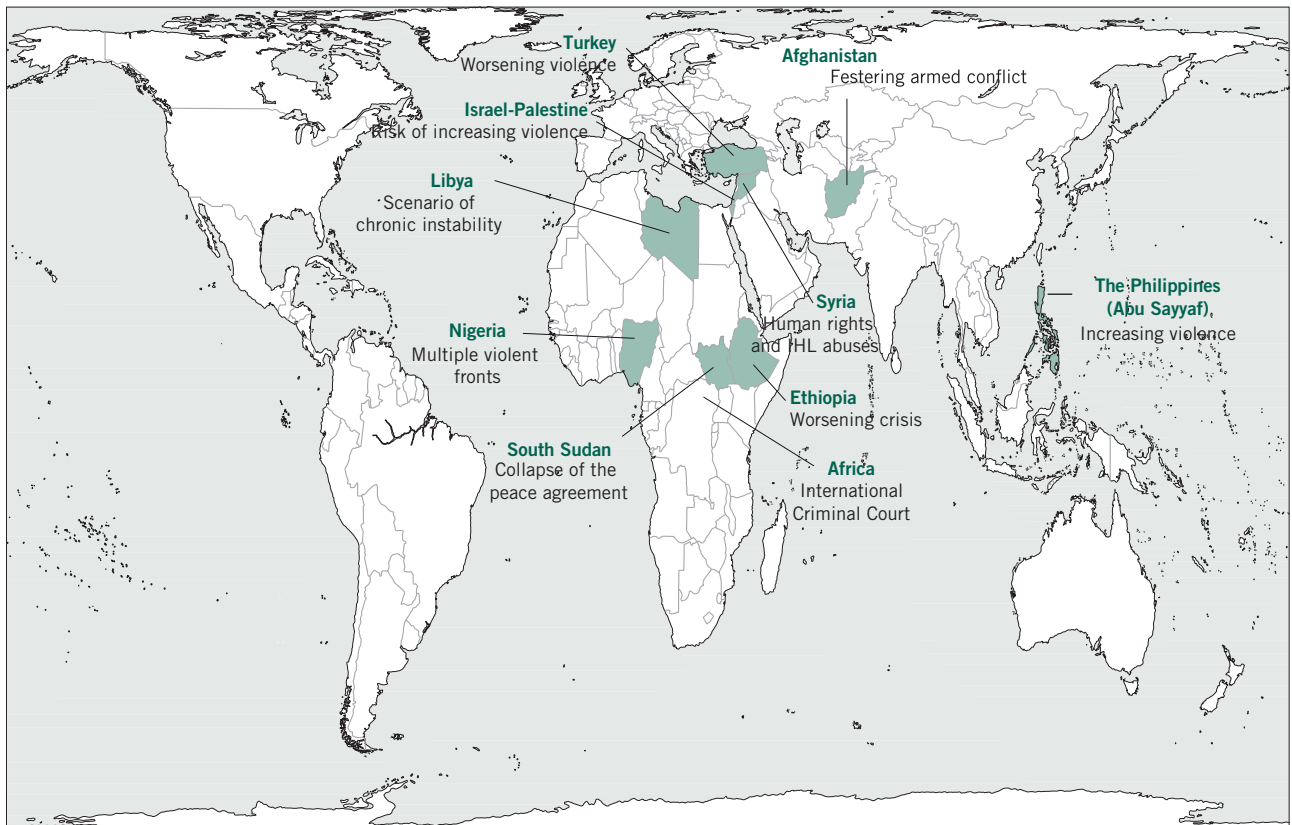
■ ■ **The Philippines (NDF):** The resumption of peace talks in 2016 between the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) –organisation that groups together different Communist-inspired groups and negotiates with Manila on behalf of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)–, as well as the political will expressed by both sides in order to sign a peace agreement by mid-2017, offer a historic opportunity to put an end to one of the long-lived conflicts in the world.

■ ■ **Myanmar:** The government of Myanmar is facing the best chance to negotiate a political accord to end an armed conflict that has lasted 70 years. The political and popular legitimacy of the new Government is the main factor, given its local and international support. However, many challenges must be surmounted to achieve a genuine inclusive process.

■ ■ **Georgia:** In 2016 the resumption of one of the mechanisms of the peace process, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in Abkhazia, and the institutionalisation of talks between Georgian representatives involved in the formal negotiating process and local women's organisations were two events of significant importance for multi-level confidence-building in Georgia, despite the political obstacles in formal negotiations.

■ ■ **Nuclear weapons:** Despite the opposition from the nuclear States and their allies, the commitment to begin negotiations in 2017 on a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons by more than a hundred States, in addition to an increasing humanitarian approach to this issue and the pressure from the international civil society are opening a historic opportunity to stigmatise the use and possession of nuclear weapons and to promote a legally binding instrument.

Risk scenarios in 2017



■ ■ **Ethiopia:** The country is facing the worst political and social crisis in recent years. A wave of anti-government protests have been suppressed in an extremely harsh way by the security forces and may have caused one thousand deaths in the past year. The protests have revealed the fragile social contract between the elites and a population frustrated by years of corruption, the authoritarian political system and the exclusion of large population groups from the alleged Ethiopian economic miracle. In this scenario, the state of emergency decreed at the end of 2016 is a sign of the aggravated situation in the country.

■ ■ **Libya:** During 2016 the countless difficulties to implement the agreement of Skhirat confirmed the pact's fragility and highlighted the complex challenges Libya is facing. Persistent political polarisation, an explosive security situation resulting from an atomised and active range of armed actors, an international approach conditioned by interests and priorities that are often discordant and a situation of economic and humanitarian deterioration with chronic human rights violations are among the factors that could lead to a worsening situation in the country in 2017.

■ ■ **Nigeria:** The proliferation of political tensions, armed movements and intercommunal violence in various regions of the country (north, centre and south) is seriously deteriorating the security situation in Nigeria, threatening its stability. The role of the Nigerian Armed Forces and police in repressing opposition groups and communities and dissidents has contributed significantly to the explosion of violence in various parts of Nigeria, boosting the radicalisation of different movements.

■ ■ **South Sudan:** One year after the peace agreement was signed in South Sudan, the future of the peace process seems more uncertain and precarious than ever. The failure to implement the clauses of the agreement, the systematic ceasefire violations, the increase in violence against the civilian population and the de facto collapse of the transitional government few months after its inception underscore the main challenges the country faces in the immediate future.

■ ■ **Afghanistan:** Fifteen years after the beginning of the current phase of the armed conflict in the country with the invasion by US troops, the situation of armed violence is deeply entrenched and continues generating serious impacts to the civilian population. New conflict dynamics, the emergence of ISIS and an aggravated crisis of forced displacement make more difficult to find a negotiated solution. In addition, the political crisis the government is facing reduces the options to improve the situation in the country.

■ ■ **The Philippines (Abu Sayyaf):** The proliferation and greater coordination of various Islamist groups, the possibility that ISIS may be expanding and consolidating its presence in Mindanao as the epicentre of its activities and project in Southeast Asia and the substantive increase in armed actions conducted by groups declaring their alignment with, and even ISIS membership, like Abu Sayyaf and Islamic State in Lanao, can lead to an increasing insecurity in the region in 2017. These factors can also affect the peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF.

■ ■ **Turkey:** With the recent peace process dead and buried and amidst a violent political, social and regional intensification of the conflict, as well as a much more complex general scenario in Turkey –marked by the challenges and consequences of a failed coup d'état attempt in July 2016, the current dynamics point to the risks of a scenario of worsening violence, greater militarisation and an increasingly insurmountable divide between the contending parties, as well as between the state and the Kurdish movement as a whole.

■ ■ **Israel-Palestine:** The 50th anniversary of the Arab-Israeli war that led to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip may create a scenario with more tensions and violence, considering the convergence of other dynamics such as the Israeli government's dramatic shift to the right, the Palestinian population's signs of growing frustration with the Israeli occupation and with Palestinian political leadership, and low expectations that international initiatives may reactivate the peace process amid increasing scepticism about the viability of the two-states solution.

■ ■ **International Criminal Court:** The International Criminal Court (ICC) faces numerous challenges, pressures, and criticism. In recent years, criticism has increased among those who see it as an institution that has focused on prosecuting crimes in Africa. The ICC is now facing one of the greatest challenges since its inception, as three African countries (South Africa, Burundi, and Gambia) have announced their withdrawal from it. The culmination of these moves and their domino effect may weaken the institution and provoke a regression in terms of protecting human rights in Africa and on the world stage.

■ ■ **Syria:** The war in Syria has been characterized by brutal levels of violence against the civilian population, systematic human rights violations, and continuing infringements of international humanitarian law in a context of total impunity and the indifference of the international community. Although it is not the only case, Syria is setting a dangerous symbolic precedent on the use of violence in current conflicts and has exposed in stark fashion the weaknesses of the international framework to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Opportunities for peace in 2017

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The inclusion of a gender perspective in the Colombian peace agreement

On 12 November 2016, the Colombian government and the FARC militia signed the General agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace in order to end the armed conflict that began in 1964 and that has had a serious impact on the country, causing more than eight million victims according to government figures. This is an agreement of great importance in terms of including a gender perspective and presents a unique opportunity to move forward in building a sustainable and inclusive peace in Colombia, with the participation of women and the LGBTI population as key players in implementing the agreement. The government and the FARC had reached a final agreement in August following a negotiating process in Havana with the facilitation of Cuba and Norway and with the participation of Chile and Venezuela as guarantor countries. However, this agreement was rejected by a tight majority in the referendum arranged by the government in September. After the vote, in which 50.2% rejected the peace agreement compared to 49.8% who accepted it, new negotiations between the parties began, including dialogue with the political and social actors that voted against it. This led to the signing of a new peace agreement. Both legislative chambers of the Congress of Colombia endorsed the new peace agreement, after which it entered into force. The implementation process began in early December 2016.

Both the peace process and the agreement have been described as innovative.¹ The different innovative aspects include the substantive participation of women and representatives of LGBTI organisations in the dialogue process and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the final agreement. Both are particularly significant, since 16 years after the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the beginning of what is known as the women, peace and security agenda, women and gender remain largely absent from peace processes and agreements.² Resolution 1325 "calls for increased participation of women in decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes" and "calls on all those involved in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective." Subsequent Security Council resolutions have gone further in this regard. For example, Resolution 2122 emphasised that both negotiating delegations and facilitating and mediating teams should have technical expertise on the inclusion of a gender perspective and appoint more female mediators. Thus, the international normative framework on women, peace and

security sets clear guidelines on the importance of gender-inclusive processes and peace agreements. However, the case of Colombia is particularly important because it is one of the first to make it explicitly and substantively effective in the text of the signed agreement. Although 27% of the peace accords signed after Resolution 1325 contain some reference to women or gender, not all references included in those peace agreements have the same degree of depth or completeness and there are only a few cases in which these references are truly substantive.³

The final agreement reached contains the gender perspective as one of the general principles for implementation. It is defined as "the recognition of equal rights between men and women in the special circumstances of each, especially women, regardless of their marital status, life cycle and family and community relationship, as a subject of rights and special constitutional protection". The agreement also highlights the importance of adopting affirmative measures to achieve equality and women's participation.⁴ The different points that make up the agreement (comprehensive rural reform, political participation, the end of the conflict, illicit drugs, victims and implementation, endorsement and verification) include specific aspects on how to apply a gender perspective to them. The text also makes several explicit references to the LGBTI population. Whereas the conceptualisation of the gender perspective makes no mention of the LGBTI population, it does so in one of the general principles for implementation: respect for equality and non-discrimination. This principle states that "no contents of the Final Agreement shall be understood and construed as denying, restricting or impairing the rights of individuals irrespective of their sex, age, religious beliefs, opinions, ethnic identity, membership in the LGBTI community, or for any other reason".

Therefore, it is an ambitious agreement concerning the inclusion of a gender perspective, especially on a comparable basis, since no peace agreement reached thus far had achieved gender inclusion in such a thorough and comprehensive manner and because other agreements with references to sexual orientation (Burundi in 2005, DRC in 2003 and Zimbabwe in 2013) have done so in a negative sense.⁵ However, in the first agreement reached by the government of Colombia and the FARC, gender-related language was more robust and more inclusive, linking the gender perspective much more closely not only to the equality of rights between men and women and

The final agreement reached in Colombia adopts a gender perspective and respect for equality and non-discrimination as general principles for implementation

1. Mariano Aguirre, "Un acuerdo de paz innovador", *El País*, 27 September 2016; Kristian Herbolzheimer, *Innovations in the Colombian peace process*, NOREF, 27 June 2016.
2. Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Prevenir los conflictos. Transformar la justicia. Garantizar la paz. Estudio mundial sobre la aplicación de la resolución 1325 del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas*. UN Women, 2015.
3. Christine Bell, *Text and Context. Evaluating Peace Agreements for their "Gender Perspective"*. Report 1. Political Settlements Research Programme, 2015.
4. General agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace, 24 November 2016.
5. Christine Bell, "Lex Pacificatoria Colombiana: Colombia's Peace Accord in Comparative Perspective", 110 *AJIL Unbound* 165, 2016.

to specific recognition of the impact of the conflict on women, but also to the LGBTI population.

The revision of the gender perspective in the new peace agreement bent to pressure from conservative and religious groups that made recurring arguments about the alleged “gender ideology” advocated by the agreement in their campaign against supporting the peace agreement in the referendum.⁶ Coined by religious groups, this term is used internationally to oppose legal progress in recognising the rights of women and people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, especially with regard to sexual and reproductive rights. However, the peace agreement adopted a gender perspective in line with international standards of equality set by international law and jurisprudence, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other normative tools like the aforementioned women, peace and security agenda. The pressure of these religious and conservative groups therefore led to a definition of a gender perspective in the agreement in which gender becomes equivalent to women in line with the more restrictive but at the same time dominant interpretation of the discourse on gender at the international level.⁷ In the text of the agreement, references to the LGBTI population are constantly accompanied by references to the conditions of its historical exclusion, vulnerability and discrimination.

Thus, the agreement reached in Colombia and the complex negotiating process between the parties to the conflict, and subsequently with the social and political groups opposed to the peace agreement, revealed the enormous difficulties that remain before the women, peace and security agenda and gender equality are implemented. While it is true that women’s rights have been given greater recognition in this process, the achievement of gender equality from a broader perspective that embraces different gender and sexual identities and orientations faces formidable obstacles along the way.

Despite these obstacles and constraints, the women’s and LGBTI organisations that promoted this process since the beginning of the peace negotiations hailed the signing of the new peace agreement. Throughout the peace process, these groups not only demanded the inclusion and significant participation of women and the LGBTI population. Since the beginning of the formal negotiations in Havana, they highlighted that the process was the country’s top priority and demanded that the negotiating parties reach an agreement

and not abandon the negotiating process until it was done. In addition, as part of the National Summit of Women and Peace held in 2013, they presented an extensive list of proposals on all the issues included in the negotiating agenda in order to help to enrich the peace agreement that would result from these talks.⁸ In fact, it was the demands made by women at the summit that led to the inclusion of gender in the process. Following the summit, both the government and the FARC echoed these demands and signed an agreement on political representation that included a point stating that all the contents of the agreement would be implemented with a “gender approach and ensuring the participation of women”.

This agreement was followed by the appointment of two women to the government’s negotiating team, one of whose functions was to establish a channel of communication with women’s

organisations to collect their contributions to the peace process. In 2014, an agreement was reached between the negotiating parties for the establishment of a gender subcommittee mandated to include women’s voices and a gender perspective in all agreements reached at the negotiating table, whether partially or in a final agreement. Made up of five representatives from each of the parties, the subcommittee took advice from national and international experts, including representatives from the guarantor countries, Cuba and Norway. Many

women’s and LGBTI organisations travelled to Havana to participate in different sessions of the gender subcommittee and to contribute their proposals and knowledge on both the specific gender impacts of the armed conflict and on the role of women’s and LGBTI organisations in peacebuilding. Thus, the participation of women and the LGBTI population was a decisive factor in the achievement of a peace agreement that included a gender perspective, since the process had ignored any reference to the importance of gender for peacebuilding in Colombia in the past.

In conclusion, although the final agreement failed to maintain the degree of completeness with which the gender perspective was addressed in the first final agreement, it remains a major step forward in mainstreaming a gender perspective in a peace agreement. The Colombian process shows how the participation of organised civil society and of the women’s movement in synergy with other involved stakeholders, like the formal process facilitators or the process and the UN, represents a successful strategy for implementing the women, peace and security agenda in a peace process.

The participation of women and the LGBTI population was decisive in the achievement of a peace agreement that included a gender perspective

6. Lina M. Céspedes-Báez “Gender Panic and the Failure of a Peace Agreement”, 110 *AJIL Unbound* 183, 2016.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *National Summit of Women and Peace. Bogotá, Colombia. 23 to 25 October 2013. Systematisation.*

Peace talks resume between the Philippine government and the NDF

Shortly after Rodrigo Duterte's victory in the presidential election held in May 2016, peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) resumed. The NDF is an organisation that groups together different Communist-inspired groups and negotiates with Manila on behalf of the Communist Party of the Philippines (PCF) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), a guerrilla organisation that began operating in 1969 and is among the oldest armed insurgencies in Asia. The government, the NDF and some analysts believe that the progress made during 2016 allows for an optimistic view of the peace process, which had been stalled for about four years. In fact, both sides even pledged to sign a peace agreement by mid-2017. By then, the peace talks will have been going on for 30 years, making for one of the longest-running peace processes in the world. This period has witnessed five different administrations (run by Corazón Aquino, Fidel Ramos, José Estrada, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Benigno Aquino), more than 40 rounds of negotiations and over 20 partial agreements different in scale and scope. Therefore, although there are risks, difficulties and uncertainties, both sides have been hopeful about the possibility of achieving a medium-term peace agreement that would be historic, judging by the duration and impact of the conflict.

According to some analysts, the most decisive factor explaining the new scenario of the negotiations between the government and the NDF is the election of Rodrigo Duterte as president for two reasons: the political will he has demonstrated regarding dialogue with the armed groups operating in the country and his personal and ideological proximity to the leadership of the NDF. Duterte, who once declared himself a socialist, studied at the same university as Jose Maria Sison, the founder of the PCF and the NPA, and during his time as mayor of Davao (for about 20 years), he helped to release hostages and prisoners held by the NPA on several occasions. A few hours after his victory in the presidential election, Duterte made public his willingness to initiate a dialogue with Sison, guaranteeing his safety and immunity in a possible return to the Philippines, or even personally travelling to Utrecht, where the leadership of the organisation has been located since the mid-1980s. In addition, as a gesture of goodwill, he offered the NDF four ministries in his government (the environment and natural resources; agricultural reform; social welfare; and labour and employment). The NDF thanked Duterte but declined his proposal, suggesting several names linked to it who were finally appointed to the position. Days later, both the government and the NDF expressed their optimism about the future of the peace process after Duterte personally met in Davao with one of the NDF's top leaders, Fidel Agcaoili, to discuss resuming the peace talks.

Despite the difficulties, the government and the NDF have resumed talks after several years of impasse and have pledged to sign a peace agreement by mid-2017

Another factor reflecting the desire of both parties to begin a new stage in the peace process involves the changes in their respective negotiating teams. Regarding the NDF, which had not made any changes to its negotiating team since it was established in 1992, Fidel Agcaoili was appointed to be the head negotiator to replace Luis Jalandoni. Benito Tiamzon, the chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the NPA, also joined the team. Both Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Austria, the general secretary of the party, were arrested in 2014 and temporarily released to participate in the peace negotiations that resumed in August 2016. In recent times, several media outlets have speculated about a possible growing gap between the NDF leadership, which has been in Utrecht for 30 years, and the top officials of the PCF and NPA in the Philippines. Some analysts argue that Duterte himself would have acknowledged that Sison's influence had diminished recently and that Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Austria were now the key decision makers. Meanwhile, the government appointed a new presidential counsellor, Jesus Dureza, who had held the position under the administration of

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and established a new negotiating team led by Silvestre Bello, who had led it between 2001 and 2014. The team was also joined by figures like Hernani Braganza, who is close to the group and had carried out many negotiations and discreet arrangements with the NDF. These appointments follow tense relations between the NDF and the government negotiating team and especially with Presidential Advisor for the Peace Process, Teresita Quintos-Deles, with several misunderstandings and mutual accusations having taken place. The new members of the government's team were

welcomed by the NDF, which stressed Dureza and Bello's experience and interest in dialogue. The appointment of both men is part of the government's new road map for peace, which among other issues prioritises the re-launch of dialogue with several of the armed groups operating in the country, such as the MILF and the MNLF. On several occasions, the Norwegian government, which facilitates the dialogue through Elisabeth Slattum, has highlighted the good atmosphere between both parties and their willingness to reach agreements during the three rounds of negotiations (one exploratory and other two formal) that were conducted during the second half of 2016 in Oslo. Finally, it should be noted that a delegation of six members of the House of Representatives attended meetings between the government and the NDF as an observer third party.

All the aforementioned confidence-building measures led to several important decisions and agreements, some of which show a greater willingness of both parties to make concessions on aspects that had traditionally blocked the negotiations. The NDF signed an indefinite unilateral truce following the first round of official negotiations held in Oslo at the end of August. Until then, the NDF had always maintained that a

decision of this kind would only be made after the government demonstrated its commitment to the peace process through the implementation of several key reforms in the eyes of the insurgency. Thus, the NDF had only declared partial and limited truces (historically coinciding with Christmas dates). Meanwhile, the government demonstrated greater political will than previous administrations on the very issue that had sunk the negotiations in recent years, especially during the presidency of Benigno Aquino: the release of prisoners linked to the insurgency. Therefore, days before the resumption of official talks in late August, the government and the Supreme Court authorised the temporary release of 20 NDF prisoners to be part of the delegation that travelled to Oslo. Those who obtained this temporary release included Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Austria. The government later said it had a draft amnesty for about 400 people, a figure lower than the over 500 requested by the NDF, and stated that it was working hard on releasing dozens of political prisoners for humanitarian reasons. However, Manila maintains that this does not depend on the government and requires congressional approval, so it asked the NDF for time and patience.

In addition to progress on two politically and symbolically important issues such as the cessation of hostilities and the release of political prisoners, good prospects for the peace process are also underpinned by other major agreements. First is the ratification of over 20 agreements signed between both parties so far, including important documents such as the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG), the scope of which became the main sticking point in the negotiations between the NDF and the government of Benigno Aquino. Second is the approval of the three main items on the substantive agenda of the negotiations: economic and social reforms; political and constitutional reforms; and the end of the conflict. Third, and more importantly, is both parties' commitment to speed up the pace of negotiations in order to have it signed by August 2017, which would give Duterte's government a period of five years to implement it. The government and the NDF also agreed to sign the agreement on economic and social reforms in early 2017, considered by many analysts to be the most important item on the substantive agenda.

Yet despite the positive expectations prompted by events in the second half of 2016, there were also some uncertainties and difficulties, including clashes and mutual accusations between the parties. In Duterte's first speech after being elected president, in July, he decreed a unilateral ceasefire, only to withdraw it a few days later after accusing the NDF of not abiding by the truce and of carrying out several offensive actions. Later, tensions between the parties reached their peak when the signing of a bilateral and permanent ceasefire, scheduled for late October, was delayed for several months on various occasions. This ceasefire would have been the first with these characteristics in the history of the conflict. The NDF was reluctant to sign the agreement, and even once threatened to resume war, on the grounds that Manila had broke its word to push for the release of political prisoners and to move forward in declaring an amnesty. Asserting that it has thus far demonstrated much political will and has made most of the concessions, the government argued that no further releases could be made until the NDF demonstrates its political commitment to the peace process by agreeing to sign the aforementioned ceasefire agreement. Some voices have criticised the overly personal style used by Duterte in these negotiations, alluding both to his interventionism and charisma and to the exploitation of his personal contacts and sympathies. Other critical voices fear that Duterte wants to use certain insurgencies, such as the Communist or Moro insurgencies, to gain further support for his political agenda, especially the transformation of the Philippines into a federal state. Other analysts are more sceptical of the NDF and emphasise the group's history of failing to comply with and disrupting negotiations, even in stages of the peace process in which the NDF and the government seemed to have achieved good levels of empathy and trust, as is presently the case and was previously during the presidencies of Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Benigno Aquino.

In any case, despite these misunderstandings, both parties have always upheld their commitment to continue the negotiations and on several occasions have expressed their conviction that in the current legislature a peace agreement will be reached to an armed conflict that has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and that continues to hamper the human security and development of millions of people in significant parts of the Philippines.

An inclusive peace process in Myanmar

Since Myanmar's democratic transition progress began, significant progress has also been made towards ending an armed conflict that has affected the country since the late 1940s, pitting ethnic armed groups against security forces.¹ The progress that has taken place in terms of democratisation and peacebuilding in 2015 and 2016 points to the possibility of delving deeper into both processes in 2017 and taking significant steps aimed at ending the violence through political dialogue with the armed insurgency. In 2015, the government signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with eight insurgent groups, a significant step towards peace, since it exceeded the logic of bilateral nature ceasefire agreements achieved with the armed groups thus far. However, the process also showed significant limitations, as a dozen groups were left out of the accord. Meanwhile, the general elections of 2015 gave a significant majority to the main opposition party, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi, leading to a change of government and the establishment of the first civilian administration in the country in decades.

Prior to its crushing electoral victory, the NLD had expressed hesitant support for the peace process with the ethnic insurgent groups. The opposition party had consistently pointed to the peace process' lack of inclusiveness, which had left important armed opposition groups outside the negotiations, and subsequently of the agreement. However, after forming a new government following its triumph at the polls, the NLD, and personally Aung San Suu Kyi herself, affirmed their commitment to peacebuilding in the country, taking several steps to do so. The most significant one was the call for the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong, which was held between 31 August and 4 September in Naypitaw, the country's capital. All the country's insurgent groups were present, including those that did not participate in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, as well as other significant players like the UN and China, a country with a great ability to influence various armed groups. In addition to the NCA signatory groups, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a network linking most of the rebel groups that did not sign the agreement, also agreed to participate. Some analysts suggest that the government may be facing the best chance to negotiate a political treaty to end almost 70 years of armed conflict.²

The ceasefire agreement of 2015 envisioned the creation of a political process to discuss a comprehensive peace treaty that would lay the groundwork for constitutional reforms to accommodate the country's legislative and political framework

to its ethnic diversity. The future peace agreement should also guide the processes of disarmament and security sector reform. This agreement, which will be reached in theory after the political dialogue, will start from the framework established in the ceasefire agreement, which is committed to the principles of democracy and federalism, recognising the territorial integrity of the state.

With this framework already agreed, Aung San Suu Kyi's party entered government with the firm commitment made during the election campaign to make the peace process one of its main priorities. In April, Aung San Suu Kyi announced the celebration of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong during a meeting with the Ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). This announcement was of an especially symbolic character, since the original Panglong Conference took place in 1947, under the auspices of the country's independence leader and father of Aung San Suu Kyi, General Aung San, and agreed to establish a federal state with sweeping autonomy for the different ethnic groups. However, the subsequent Constitution largely cut the agreement short. The Panglong conference hosted by Aung San Suu Kyi had succeeded in bringing together virtually the entire armed insurgency of the country. Despite the fact that the initial announcement was received with great caution by the armed insurgent groups, only four (the AA, TNLA, MNDAA and NSCN-K) did not join it.³ The Conference was not entirely free of tensions, including the fact that no agreement was finally reached with the aforementioned groups and that the UWSP abandoned it on the second day. Yet despite this negative outcome, the fact that it was held at all had an important symbolic impact. Aung San Suu Kyi has broad popular support, as the election results demonstrated.⁴ This popularity, which transcends the borders of the country and has significant international support, is one of the main assets of the peace process today and should be exploited, since disenchantment will probably rise among some parts of the population as the government takes action.

Despite significant progress made in the peace process alongside the political transition to democracy, there are still major challenges that could cast a shadow over the achievements. The first involves the armed clashes between the security forces and some insurgent groups. The escalation of violence at different times of the year highlights the enormous difficulties involved in getting certain groups not only to abandon violence, but also to agree to disarm, as well as the still dominant role that the Army continues to play in

1. See Escola de Cultura de Pau, "The transition to democracy and peace in Myanmar", *Alert 2016! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 2016, p. 208.
2. International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue*, Crisis Group Asia Briefing N° 149, Yangon/Bruselas, 19 October 2016.
3. The first three insurgent groups were not invited to attend. The NSCN-K, which is primarily active in the Indian state of Nagaland, decided not to participate since its claim to create "Greater Nagaland" involves territories currently under the control of India and Myanmar, which is incompatible with what is established by the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. International Crisis Group, op. cit.
4. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, won 79% of the elected seats.

Myanmar. Violence continues to have a serious impact on the civilian population in areas affected by the armed conflict and the electoral support that the NLD has had in these areas could fall if the population does not perceive an improvement in security on the ground. Moreover, until the armed conflict ends, the displacement crisis experienced in the conflict zones will not be solved either.⁵

One of the greatest challenges is the fact that the signing of the NCA, which requires the signing of a bilateral ceasefire agreement, is still a requirement to participate in any political dialogue process. Thus, it is necessary for those groups that already maintain ceasefires on a bilateral basis to agree to the conditions laid down in the NCA and groups with which no agreement has been made must initiate a bilateral process. Neither of these two processes will be easy, although the desire of the NLD government to have all armed groups participate in the Panglong Conference shows that it is not impossible.

In addition, many have stressed how important it is that any process of political dialogue not only takes into account the

importance of including all insurgent groups, but also parts of civil society, including women's organisations, that have thus far been excluded. The current alignment of civil society organisations with the new government as a result of the NLD's crucial oppositional role during decades of dictatorship, as well as the symbolic influence of Aung San Suu Kyi, could be weakened if these groups do not perceive that they are considered important partners in the process.

The government of Myanmar could be facing the best chance for negotiating a political agreement that would end almost 70 years of armed conflict

Alongside all these challenges, the government will have to strengthen the institutional structure to accompany the negotiating processes with the different insurgencies, as well as the political process.⁶ Absent any strengthening of peacebuilding capacities, the government may

not be able to cope with obstacles that may arise in the future. However, despite all these challenges and difficulties, Myanmar is at a key moment for the peace process that, if properly exploited, could lead to an inclusive ceasefire agreement with all insurgent groups, as well as a final peace agreement of a political nature in line with the aspirations of the different social and political groups that make up the country.

5. Ashley South and Kim Jolliffe, "Forced Migration and the Myanmar Peace Process" *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Research Paper No. 274, UNHCR, February 2015.

6. International Crisis Group, op. cit.

An opportunity for multi-level confidence-building in Georgia? Incident prevention mechanisms and a gender perspective

Georgia is still affected by unresolved conflicts over the status of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, scenes of war in the 1990s and in the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.¹ In 2016, Georgia witnessed two events that received little media coverage, but were of significant importance for confidence-building and human security in the conflicts affecting the country. First was the resumption of one of the mechanisms of the peace process, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in Abkhazia, after four years of paralysis. Second was the institutionalisation of talks between Georgian representatives involved in the formal negotiating process and local women's organisations. This presents an opportunity to move forward in resolving conflictive issues affecting the security of the people of Abkhazia and Georgia, especially regarding the competence of IPRMs. It also helps to address the gender dimension of the conflict and the peace process, expanding local ownership with a gender perspective. However, these are opportunities that face enormous limitations, given the political and geostrategic obstacles surrounding the conflicts and the gender bias of the peace process.

Amidst the deadlock in negotiations and the fragility on the ground in recent years, the resumption of the so-called IPRM for Abkhazia in May 2016 represents important but small-scale progress in the southern Caucasus. The IPRMs were established in February 2009 by agreement at the Geneva International Discussions (GIDs).² There are two IPRM mechanisms: one in Gali, which brings together representatives of Georgia and Abkhazia, as well as the Russian troops present in Abkhazia; and a second mechanism in Ergneti (South Ossetia), facilitated by the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), the OSCE and the UN. They act as a platform for information exchange, risk prevention, security incident resolution and dialogue on issues affecting the daily lives of the populations' communities (including arrests of civilians crossing the border line and the free movement of people for agricultural, humanitarian, educational or religious purposes, among others). Therefore, they have a direct link to and impact on human security. The IPRM in Gali was suspended in March 2012 after it was rejected by the representatives of Abkhazia.

After years of low-intensity incidents and difficulties, the parties to the conflict finally agreed to resume the IPRM in

Gali in the March 2016 round of GIDs, which took effect in May. This was preceded by a deadly incident around the borderline in which Abkhaz troops killed a Georgian civilian near a border crossing. The resumption of the IPRM entailed the reactivation of associated elements like the direct telephone line, provided by the EUMM, and periodic patrols. The decision to resume it was supported by all parties. It was also demanded by parts of the local population, such as Georgian women's organisations. Facilitated by the UN and in the presence of the EUMM, the rounds took place in a constructive atmosphere in 2016. In addition to the reactivation of the IPRM, other positive developments were also included in 2016, such as the achievement of a trilateral agreement between Georgia, Abkhazia and South

Ossetia to exchange 16 prisoners. Although the pact began to be developed as part of the GIDs, it was notably addressed and agreed in direct meetings between the parties. Also, Abkhazia freed eight people without asking for the release of Abkhaz prisoners in return, which helped the deal to take place.³ The Georgian government also explicitly thanked the Abkhaz regime for its cooperation. Georgia also emphasised its willingness to embark on a new stage in its relations with both regions, giving priority to humanitarian issues.

The IPRM in Gali and humanitarian developments during 2016 suggest an opportunity for direct confidence building between Georgia and the regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is part of Georgia's dual approach to the conflict. On the one hand, it affirms the general context of the conflict in which Russia is still considered the main aggressor and occupying power of the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the regimes are seen as subject to Russia. On the other hand, it reflects a growing position of soft power that seeks to attract the Abkhaz and Ossetian populations through the provision of services⁴ and that aspires to reunification by prioritising reconciliation through dialogue with Abkhazia and South Ossetia while emphasising the need for the end of the Russian occupation.

Between this duality, and mainly through the emphasis on humanitarian and human security issues, opportunities for confidence-building are perceived, despite the many limits. These include the constraints of the *fait accompli* policy

1. For further information on the origins and development of the conflicts in Georgia, see the Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding maintained by Escola de Cultura de Pau. <http://escolapau.uab.cat/conflictosypaz/index.php>
2. The GIDs are the highest level of the negotiating architecture built for the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, which dismantled previous negotiating architectures. The GIDs include two working groups, one on security issues and the other on humanitarian ones.
3. By means of this deal, Georgia freed four prisoners from South Ossetia, while South Ossetia released four Georgian detainees and Abkhazia freed eight people.
4. Among other services, through its annual budget Georgia provides medical services to the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in medical centres located in territory under Georgian control, with no Georgian identity documents required. Giorgi Menabde, "Why are Ossetians and Abkhazians Coming to Georgia for Medical Treatment", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 12, no. 43, 9 March 2015.

and “rules of the game” imposed by Russia and linked to its strategic interests and of Russia’s national affirmation in its approach to the former Soviet orbit and the West.⁵ In this regard, there has been no substantial progress in the peace process in all these years, but rather a consolidation of the de facto independence of Abkhazia and of the dependence of South Ossetia on Moscow.

From a human security perspective, another positive factor in building trust and ownership is the consultations between the government of Georgia and women’s organisations, as well as women affected by the conflict. In the midst of a gender-biased negotiating process, where a lack of gender inclusion and a lack of women’s participation in GIDs predominate, a process of regular consultation has taken place since 2014 between representatives of the Georgian government participating in the peace process, local women’s organisations organised by the agency UN Women and international stakeholders involved in peacebuilding dynamics, such as the EUMM. The consultation mechanism includes meetings at two levels, with GIDs on the one hand and IPRMs on the other. Two consultations of each type are usually held per year, a good frequency according to the tempo of the formal negotiating process. In 2016, the competences concerning the organisation of these meetings were institutionalised and transferred and the Georgian government took the lead in organising the consultations with the technical and logistical support of the UN agency.

The consultation format creates windows of opportunity for local empowerment, the integration of a gender perspective in the peace process and the participation of women in peacebuilding. Thus, the meetings act as a mechanism for exchanging information on the IPRM and the GID and serve as a forum where they can present demands and programmes for the following rounds. It is a mechanism that has reversed the lack of prior information about the process among local organisations and acts as an engine for empowering and mobilising women, holding its own meetings and interacting among women’s organisations prior to meetings with government representatives. The women’s recent demands included but were not limited to the resumption of the IPRM in Gali, contributing with their approach to the final reactivation of the mechanism. At the same time, obstacles to their participation are identified, including a limited impact on high-level negotiations marked by local, regional

In 2016, consultations were institutionalised between negotiating representatives of Georgia and local women’s organisations

and international political antagonism and the consequent politicisation of the vast majority of issues. The negotiating process still suffers from a high gender bias and the absence of direct gender figures or mechanisms, as well as a very low rate of female participation by most stakeholders, including parties to the conflict and mediators.⁶ Another limitation is the fact that the consultation mechanisms only cover women residing in Georgian-controlled territory, including displaced Georgian women from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but not organisations or figures active in Georgia and South Ossetia, in a context of high politicisation and obstacles to the freedom of movement.

During 2016, Georgia adopted its new action plan (NAP) on resolutions linked to women, peace and security for 2016-2017,⁷ one goal of which is to achieve greater participation for women affected by the conflicts, displaced women and civil society organisations in preventing and resolving the conflicts. The NAP aims to ensure that the needs, priorities and recommendations of displaced women and of those affected by the conflicts are taken into consideration and addressed in the official negotiations. This includes the commitment to implement a mechanism for regular dialogue between government participants in the GIDs and IPRMs and women’s and female IDPs organisations and the organisations of those affected by conflict. In 2016, the Georgian ministry for internally displaced persons also approved a gender equality strategy and a 2016-2017 action plan with an allocated budget. Among other objectives, it includes support for the implementation of resolutions on the women, peace and security agenda. This may all help to give greater emphasis in Georgia regarding the gender dimension in conflict resolution efforts and women’s participation, despite the aforementioned limitations.

In brief, despite the persistent lack of progress in the formal negotiating process and the frequent local, regional and international confrontation and antagonism concerning the underlying issues of the conflict, there are windows of opportunity for building trust and positive impacts on human security on a scale closer to the realities of the populations affected by the conflict, including women. While the politicisation and confrontation often affects human security issues in daily life, the steps taken during 2016 are positive elements to build on in the years to come. None of this detracts from the profound difficulties involved in the global resolution to the conflict in all its dimensions.

5. Vasili Rukhadze, “Is Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian Reconciliation Possible?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 13, n.º 54, 18 March 2016.

6. In contrast with the rest of the negotiating delegations of the GIDs, the Georgian negotiating delegation is made up of 30% women.

7. The previous NAP covered the period 2012-2015. For further information, see: <http://www.peacewomen.org/nap-georgia>

International negotiations to ban nuclear weapons in 2017: a historic opportunity for a treaty

Nuclear weapons are the only type of weapons of mass destruction that are not banned by any international legal agreement (there are only partial prohibitions), despite the devastating effects that they have on human life, the environment and socio-economic development, in addition to other consequences,¹ including those with a gender dimension.² Nine countries possess their own nuclear arsenal, with most of the weapons owned by the US and Russia.³ Although the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT, signed in 1968) requires negotiations for nuclear disarmament (Article VI), progress has been very limited, in contrast to the massive expenditure and current nuclear modernisation programmes. However, a number of significant steps have been taken recently to relaunch the nuclear disarmament agenda, culminating in 2016 in the commitment to begin negotiations in 2017 on a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons. Despite opposition from the nuclear states and dozens of other countries, in addition to pressure from the great powers, a historic opportunity is opening up for a legally binding instrument widely backed by many countries and political and social stakeholders.

Various factors explain this opportunity. These include the recent momentum and expectations about the need to re-energise the nuclear disarmament agenda after three major summits held in 2013 and 2014 (in Norway, Mexico and Austria), focused on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.⁴ Furthermore, many countries and political and social stakeholders are increasingly concerned about slow or inadequate progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament, while the risk posed by nuclear weapons continues. For instance, the 2015 NPT Review Conference ended without agreement on the final document and was considered a significant failure, revealing the depth of division between those who support moving tangibly towards a legal instrument to ban nuclear weapons and those who advocate a “step-by-step” or “gradual” path that is flexible and pays attention to the concerns of different countries, though with no required timetables, which is considered a drawn-out and ineffective approach by pro-treaty groups. In addition to the failed results of pushing the disarmament agenda, the initiative to make progress in declaring the Middle East a

nuclear-weapon-free zone was also overturned at the summit, reflecting the geostrategy and hegemony of power surrounding the discussion.⁵

Given the momentum of the humanitarian approach and the realisation of multilateral failures, tangible progress was made in 2016 by the UN Open-ended Working Group to make progress on multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament, as a result of Resolution 70/33 of the UN General Assembly of December 2015.⁶ After its meetings held in February, May and August, its final report drew support from a “majority of states” to “begin negotiations during the General Assembly in 2017, open to all countries, international and civil society organisations, that lead to their total eradication”. Sixty-eight governments voted in favour, 22 voted against and 13 abstained.⁷ These 25 votes of rejection and abstention came from countries advocating the gradual path that were accused by some non-nuclear countries of hindering the achievement of a balanced report.⁸ Weeks later, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, which is responsible for working on disarmament and international security issues, adopted Resolution L.41 of 14 October, convening a United Nations conference in 2017 to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons with a view to their total elimination. Specifically, the resolution stipulates that the summit will be held from 27 to 31 March and from 15 June to 7 July. The resolution also hails the Working Group’s report and values the contributions made by international and civil society organisations in negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The text calls on the states to finish the legally binding instrument on banning nuclear weapons as soon as possible and adopt the commitment for the conference to present a report on the progress achieved at the 71st session of the General Assembly, which will assess the situation and determine the way forward. One hundred and twenty-three countries voted in favour of Resolution L.41 in the First Committee, while 38 voted against it and 16 abstained. Thus, the resolution was expected to be adopted in a General Assembly plenary session at the end of December 2016, marking a historic milestone.

1. Centre Delàs, “Por un tratado de prohibición de las armas nucleares”, *Centre Delàs*, 20 December 2013.

2. For further information, see the website of the “Reaching Critical Will” project of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

3. The countries with their own nuclear weapons are China, North Korea, the United States, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and Russia. Five other countries host US nuclear weapons and more than 20 are part of alliances with a nuclear component (primarily NATO).

4. Among other results, at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in December 2014, a document entitled “Humanitarian Pledge” was presented by Austria, the host of the conference. By January 2016, it had received support from 127 countries. With experts from various fields, the conference stressed that the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons were much more serious than was assumed at the time.

5. Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZ) are regions in which states commit to banning the research, design, development, testing, acquisition, placement and possession of nuclear weapons on their soil. There are five NWFZs: Latin America (Treaty of Tlatelolco 1967), South Pacific (Treaty of Rarotonga 1985), Southeast Asia (Treaty of Bangkok 1995), Africa (Treaty of Pelindaba 1996) and Central Asia (Nuclear Weapon Free Zone of Central Asia 2006). These are joined by other territories free of nuclear weapons, including Antarctica, the seabed and outer space. Despite the difficulties in approving a NWFZ in the Middle East, several dozen Middle Eastern countries have given support to UN General Assembly Resolution 76/28, which invites the countries of the region to back the creation of an NWFZ.

6. The efforts of the UN Open-ended Working Group to move forward on multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament have also been supported by work performed by previous mechanisms, like the Open-ended Working Group to develop proposals focused on the progress of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament aimed at achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons (2013).

7. UN General Assembly, “Taking Forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations”. Note of the Secretary-General, A/71/371, 1 September 2016.

8. Melissa Hanham, 2016 “Open ended working group: towards 2017 nuclear weapon ban negotiations?”, *Arms Control Work*, 13 September 2016.

The Working Group's report, backed by Resolution L.41, suggests the following possible elements of such a binding instrument: (a) bans on acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, developing, testing and producing nuclear weapons; (b) prohibitions on participating in any use of nuclear weapons, including through involvement in nuclear war planning, participating in the targeting of nuclear weapons and training personnel to take control of nuclear weapons; (c) bans on permitting nuclear weapons in national territory, on allowing vessels with nuclear weapons in ports and territorial seas, on permitting aircraft with nuclear weapons to enter national airspace, on allowing nuclear weapons to be transited through national territory and on permitting nuclear weapons to be stationed or deployed on national territory; (d) prohibitions on financing nuclear weapon activities or on providing special fissionable material to any states that do not apply comprehensive IAEA safeguards; (e) bans on directly or indirectly assisting, encouraging or inducing any activity prohibited by the treaty; and (f) recognition of the rights of victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons and a commitment to provide assistance to victims and to environmental reparation.⁹

The majority proposal for a binding treaty contained in the report of the Working Group and in Resolution L.41 considers the option of a legally binding instrument as a path compatible with the NPT, complementing it in application of NPT Article VI. Thus, it seeks to dismantle the position of the nuclear states and all those in favour of the "step-by-step" route, which reject the option of a treaty claiming that it would be a step backwards, endangering the NPT and other mechanisms. Thus, Resolution L.41 reaffirms the importance of the NPT and the commitments derived thereof.

Another important development in the path towards the possibility of a treaty is the fact that it raises the strategy of moving forward with broad support from countries still without consensus, given the difficulty of initial support from nuclear countries and their allies. It is also acknowledged that a treaty would only be effective with the participation of states with nuclear weapons and it is hoped that the strategy of pointing out and stigmatising the use and possession of nuclear weapons will provide an incentive for nuclear countries to join in later stages. In this respect, the proposals of the Working Group and civil society actors leave the door open for provisions on the verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons to be agreed at

a later stage with nuclear-weapon states, without diminishing the need and opportunity created to promote negotiations for a treaty, including a gradual programme for the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time frame.

One obstacle consists of pressure exerted by the nuclear countries, which see their position threatened in a global order questioned by the non-nuclear powers. For example, the United States' diplomatic pressure on its NATO allies to vote against Resolution L.41 is well known. Moreover, Washington does not merely want its allies to abstain, arguing that negotiations for a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons clash with the military alliances' policies of deterrence.¹⁰ For detractors, nuclear deterrence is itself a risk to the national security of those who practice it because of the devastating risks posed by nuclear weapons. Another obstacle is the wide range of pressures that nuclear and allied countries could deploy against treaty-friendly countries, including economic pressure.

Despite the pressures against a treaty, parliamentary and civic pressures for a favourable or non-obstructive tone have also increased. Such is the case in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, where US nuclear weapons are deployed.¹¹ Also, the prospect of negotiations in 2017 may be amplified by the mobilisation of global civil society organised towards greater local and international pressure, channelled through stakeholders like the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Thus, organisations around the world remain mobilised and social pressure is expected to increase in 2017.

In brief, there is a historic opportunity to move towards a nuclear weapons elimination treaty, with an international conference to be held in 2017, preceded by the support of more than 100 countries for a related resolution issued by the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, as well as global disenchantment with the lack of progress on multilateral disarmament thus far and the mobilisation of political and non-governmental stakeholders. The pressure exerted by the nuclear countries or their refusal to participate in the ongoing process may detract from a legally-binding instrument, but global pressure for the verified elimination of nuclear weapons in favour of a world that is therefore safer for all stakeholders from all points of view, including in terms of national security and human security, may turn the created opportunity into an attainable scenario.

9. UN General Assembly, "Taking Forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations". Note of the Secretary-General, A/71/371, 1 September 2016.

10. ICAN, "US pressured NATO states to vote no to a ban", International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 1 November 2016.

11. Xanthe Hall, "Under Pressure", *IPPNW Peace and Health Blog*, 3 November 2016.

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Rising tension in Ethiopia and its consequences

Ethiopia's economic miracle over the last decade is being overshadowed by the worst political and social crisis in recent years. The country has suffered a wave of anti-government protests that have been suppressed in an extremely harsh way by the security forces and may have caused one thousand deaths in the past year.¹ The six-month state of emergency decreed in October to try to mollify the protests that were initially limited to the Oromia region, but later spread to the rest of the country, demonstrated this extremely critical situation. The government is encouraging the deterioration of the situation by cracking down on the protests, which fuels the outbreak of frustration over accumulated grievances among the different communities in the country. These grievances are rooted in the development of the authoritarian state since 1991 and the pre-eminence of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party.

The regime that has ruled Ethiopia since 1991 is facing a series of opposition movements calling for progress in democracy and the governance of the country, respect for religious minorities, an end to poverty and corruption and a greater degree of self-government. The government coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), is controlled by the Tigray minority's TPLF party, which has been governing the country with increasing authoritarianism, thus far with the approval of the Amhara elites. Therefore, there are important social groups critical of the government's evolution that demand the opening of the political space and progress towards democracy in the country. These groups are also critical of the federal ethnic system implemented by the EPRDF, which has not resolved the national issues. The political map of Ethiopia does not reflect the diversity and importance of the more than 80 ethnic groups that make up the country, since it is divided into nine ethnically based administrative regions and two cities with special status (the capital, Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa). This has all contributed to the consolidation of robust political and social opposition. Moreover, there are political and military groups that question whether ethnic federalism is insufficient for meeting their national demands, like the insurgent movements in the regions of Oromia and Ogaden, while other parts of the ruling classes that are present all over the country see ethnic federalism as a brake on the consolidation of the nation-state, alongside demands for democratisation of the institutions.

The 2005 elections were a challenge for the EPRDF, which was disinclined to allow multi-party competition, as it cracked down harshly on post-election protests against results disputed by the political opposition, whose members were persecuted and gaoled. This virtually closed the doors to any opening of the political system in the country towards a plural democracy. The closing of this window of hope in 2005 was consolidated in the following elections (one seat for the opposition in 2010

and none in 2015, compared to 172 won in 2005), increasing control and pressure on the media and the regime's verticality and use of the 2009 anti-terrorism law to decimate the political opposition. In this regard, the parliamentary elections of May 2015 ratified this development. These were the fifth elections since the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991 and the first since the death of the historical leader and first prime minister of the country Meles Zenawi in 2012, after which questions were raised about the political development of the country. However, the EPRDF and its allies killed all remaining hopes by winning all the seats in Parliament, including the only seat obtained by the opposition in 2010 (specifically by the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UJD) party), which joined the Medrek coalition for the current elections. Fifty-eight parties had registered to participate in the elections, of which only Medrek and Semawayi (Blue Party) represented any real opposition. Although the African Union declared that the elections were credible, the opposition and human rights organisations reported that dozens of politicians and supporters of opposition parties had been threatened, assaulted and detained by the police, which stoked rejection of the government.

Meanwhile, in April 2014 the Ethiopian authorities announced the Addis Ababa and Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan (also known as the Addis Ababa Master Plan), which provided for the territorial expansion of the capital, Addis Ababa, at the expense of several cities in the Oromia region, which would become part of it. Addis Ababa is located in the Oromia region, which also houses the seat of the regional government. The Master Plan aimed to attract new industries, foster demographic and urban growth in the city, consolidate it as an economic and political centre and make it internationally competitive. However, the project prompted much criticism due to its impact on the Oromia region, the way it marginalised the Oromo people from participating in and designing the plan and the fact that many locations around Addis Ababa had been negatively affected but not compensated. Major protests were staged from the beginning, coinciding with the visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry, but were broken up, resulting in the deaths of around dozen people. In November 2015, the protests started by students and farmers resumed and the political crackdown led to the deaths of 75 people. As a result, in January 2016 the regional political branch of the EPRDF coalition announced that it was scrapping the Master Plan² after discussions with the local population, arguing that it felt great respect for the Oromo people opposed to the plan and that there had been a misunderstanding stemming from the lack of transparency, while minimising the reasons for opposition. However, the death toll had already topped 140, according to Human Rights Watch. In June 2016, the organisation raised the number of fatalities during the government crackdown to 400.³

1. See Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED), Ethiopia – November 2016 Update.

2. Endalk Chala, "Ethiopia scraps Addis Ababa 'master plan' after protests kill 140", *The Guardian*, 14 January 2016.

3. Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown:" Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia's Oromo Protests", *Human Rights Watch*, June 2016.

Furthermore, movements have recently emerged to forge alliances among some insurgent groups active in their respective regions for several decades (primarily the Ogadeni rebels of the ONLF and the Oromo rebels of the OLF). A movement uniting these forces was created in 2015 with a presence both inside and outside Ethiopia in order to coordinate their political and military activities to put an end to the Ethiopian regime and guarantee the right to self-determination. On 23 October 2015, five political and military movements opposed to the government announced the formation of the People's Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD). This coalition includes the Gambella People Liberation Movement (GPLM), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Benshangul People Liberation Movement (BPLM) and the Sidama National Liberation Front (SNLF). In March 2016, the PAFD held its first congress in Asmara (Eritrea),⁴ although for the time being there are no reports that its members have conducted joint military actions and the real scope of these alignments is unknown. However, as evidence of the increasingly tense atmosphere, a new armed group called Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM) also appeared in 2016, committing its first act of war in the state of Tigray in July, killing 50 people. The government confirmed this figure. The AGUDM is rooted in the political party Ginbot 7, which was declared a terrorist organisation in June 2011 along with the ONLF and OLF, as part of the controversial anti-terrorist law.

During 2016, this tense atmosphere was worsened by the spread of protests to other parts of the country, mainly to the region of Amhara and later to the Afar community. The catalyst took place in the northwestern city of Gondar in July, as a result of the government's decision to try to arrest the leader of the Wolkayit community (Tigray region), who is charged with murder, kidnapping and collaboration with the Eritrean regime. The Wolkayit community wanted the Wolkayit district to join the Amhara region, since it was transferred to the Tigray region in 1994. This government decision triggered large protests in the neighbouring Amhara region that expanded and joined those in other areas, like Oromia and Ogaden. The protests and the outbreak of violence were partially aimed at the Tigray community, which controls the government and the Ethiopian Armed Forces despite being a minority. The TPLF party is the core of the ruling coalition, which has favoured the Tigray community over the others.

Moreover, in an unprecedented decision since 1991 that reveals the seriousness of the situation and the desire to maintain an iron grip on the country, in October the government

decreed a six-month state of emergency to try to mollify the protests. However, far from reducing them, the violence only increased, making October the most violent month since the protests began in Oromia in November 2015. Furthermore, several times throughout the year the government cut off access to the Internet because it was one of the driving forces for social movements to spread news about their anti-government activities and information through social networks. Although most protests during the year were peaceful, the indiscriminate repression, the closing of media outlets and the pressure on and arrest of journalists and political opponents may lead to an increase in violence and an armed response by the civilian population. In addition to all this, the government withdrew part of the Ethiopian troops present in Somalia, a move that several analysts have attributed to an attempt to strengthen actions to quell the internal crisis, though Ethiopia argued that it was due to the lack of international support.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in 2014 and 2015 Ethiopia was ranked as the fourth most repressive country in the world for the media (and the second

African country after Eritrea).⁵ In mid-November, government sources announced that 11,607 people had been arrested since the state of emergency was imposed⁶ and diplomatic delegations in the country were even banned from travelling outside the capital. In early November, the travel ban was lifted on the grounds that the situation had improved.⁷ The concern expressed by non-governmental organisations and international institutions regarding the situation and pressure from the international community and foreign investors have led the government to make some limited concessions to the opposition, like the govern-

ment shakeup that replaced some of the most unpopular ministers and the assignment of some important positions like the ministries of foreign affairs and communication to members of the Oromo community.

However, these limited concessions may not have any effect on the protests, since an atmosphere of rejection and even of anti-Tigray racism has taken root, with the Tigray seen as the main community responsible for the repression due to its links to the TPLF. The serious protests reveal the fragility of the social contract between the elites and the population of the country, which is unhappy with years of corruption, the authoritarian political system and the exclusion of large groups of the population from the alleged Ethiopian economic miracle. As such, the long-awaited political reforms may be too little, too late.

The Ethiopian government decreed a state of emergency in October in an unprecedented decision since 1991 that reveals the seriousness of the situation in the country

4. Oromo Liberation Front, "Resolution of the first Congress of Peoples' Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD)", *Oromo Liberation Front*, 25 March 2016.
5. Committee to Protect Journalists, "Ethiopian newspaper editor, bloggers caught in worsening crackdown", *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 17 November 2016.
6. Al-Jazeera and Agencies, "Ethiopia state of emergency arrests top 11,000", *Al-Jazeera*, 13 November 2016.
7. BBC News, "Ethiopia's diplomatic travel ban ends as 'peace restored'", *BBC*, 8 November 2016

Libya facing a scenario of chronic instability

Libya started 2016 with a new political framework. The agreement signed in Skhirat (Morocco) in December 2015 under the auspices of the UN was aimed at addressing the situation of institutional fragmentation and violence in the North African country, the scene of a bumpy transition since the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi (2011) and of a growing confrontation between poles of power, especially since mid-2014. However, the way that events developed in 2016 has confirmed the concerns expressed by those most sceptical about the fragility of the agreement and has highlighted the complex challenges that Libya must face to move towards a future of peace and stability. These challenges include persistent political polarisation, an explosive security situation resulting from an atomised and active range of armed actors, including ISIS, an international approach conditioned by interests and priorities that are often discordant and a situation of economic and humanitarian deterioration, with chronic human rights violations. This set of factors could lead to a worsening situation in the country in 2017, with serious domestic and regional repercussions, confirming Libya's label in recent years as the epicentre of instability in North Africa.

From the beginning, the Skhirat agreement raised questions about its feasibility and ability to reverse the dynamics of division in the country. Amidst Western concern about the strengthening of ISIS in Libya and the flows of refugees towards Europe, international pressure to reach an agreement intensified in late 2015. However, the resulting agreement was considered rushed and lacking a solid consensus, as key stakeholders did not support the initiative, and some warned of the risk of the establishment of a third pole of power in a context already characterised by a battle for legitimacy among institutions established in Tripoli and in the eastern cities of Tobruk and al-Bayda. The agreement defined the creation of a nine-member Presidential Council, responsible for confirming a Government of National Accord (GNA). The Presidential Council is headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, considered the future prime minister. The agreement and the GNA must be approved by the House of Representatives (HoR) based in Tobruk, which is considered the only valid legislative body. In theory, they must be ratified within one month. Until then, the chamber and its associated government have received international recognition, at least formally, as the legitimate authorities of Libya. In addition, the Skhirat agreement provided for the creation of a High Council of State, an advisory body mostly composed of former members of the General National Congress (GNC), the legislative chamber that preceded the House of Representatives and that remained operational in Tripoli amidst the dispute over legitimacy between both institutions following the elections in June 2014.

In practice, however, the agreement has faced countless difficulties in its implementation, the outcome of deep disagreements, especially on matters of security, institutional

competencies and the appointment of senior officials, as well as on procedural issues, amidst a backdrop of mistrust, power struggles and tribal disputes. Thus, in the early months of 2016, al-Sarraj could not even establish his authority in Libya given the insecurity and threats by different groups. It was not until late March that the leader of the Presidential Council and several of its members arrived in Tripoli by sea and set themselves up in a naval base with the intention of carrying out their functions and consolidating their authority from the capital of the country. However, the Presidential Council had still not achieved this by late 2016, given its limited ability to control territory and the few security forces under its command, which forced it to rely on the collaboration of some militias. Meanwhile, the HoR has refused to approve the cabinet proposed by al-Sarraj and in August it issued a vote of no confidence to the unity government. The eastern part of the country watched the Presidential Council's approach towards some armed groups with distrust, like those of Misrata, and was wary of the establishment of a government that would once again control the country's destiny from Tripoli without taking its aspirations of decentralisation into account.¹ Meanwhile, there is also the Khalifa Haftar factor. The leader of the so-called Libyan National Army and a key player in the eastern province of Cyrenaica, this former general has come out against the Skhirat agreement because he was marginalised in the security accords and has used his influence to bolster the misgivings of the HoR. Thus, in late 2016 the situation in Libya was characterised by the duplication of institutional structures and multiple dysfunctions. Faced with the deadlock caused by the HoR's lack of support, al-Sarraj has proposed that the unity government operate de facto on a temporary basis, while the "interim government" close to the HoR that is set up in al-Bayda has continued to exercise its authority in the eastern part of the country. In Tripoli, parts of the GNC agreed to be transformed into the High Council of State, but other members of the so-called "national salvation government" sought to maintain their influence. The Presidential Council operated during 2016 partially because of the boycott of some of its members. As some analysts point out, the struggle is no longer between two sides or governments, but between dozens of political rivals.²

At the same time, security arrangements were not put in place and the situation remained extremely fragile. In a country where the number of weapons is triple the number of inhabitants (according to estimates, there are at least 20 million weapons in Libya, among a population of 6.5 million), a myriad of armed groups and militias with diverse loyalties and interests continued to engage in battles and disputes throughout the territory, especially in Tripoli, Benghazi and Sirte, intent on securing power by force. Thus, for example, in September General Haftar's forces advanced in the "oil crescent" and took control of various ports that had hitherto been in the hands of a militia (Petroleum Facilities Guard) that had reached an agreement with the Presidential Council

1. International Crisis Group, *The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, Middle East and North Africa Report no.170, 4 November 2016.

2. Arturo Varvelli, "Is International Diplomacy Overcoming the Deadlock in Libya? Future Scenarios", IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2016.

just months before. In this context, new fighting was not ruled out in the area in case Haftar's forces moved westward or southward or in case the armed actors empowered as part of the anti-ISIS campaign in Sirte decide to move eastward.

Indeed, the security situation in 2016 has also been marked by attempts to eradicate ISIS, which has had a greater presence in Libyan territory since mid-2015. A set of armed groups allegedly loyal to the unity government launched Operation Bunyan Marsus with the support of the United States and other Western countries and towards the end of the year the expulsion of ISIS from its main stronghold, Sirte, was announced. This was a clear blow to the armed group and its ambitions to expand the "Caliphate" in North Africa beyond its armed positions in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, experts have agreed to warn that the fall of ISIS in Sirte does not spell its end in Libya, since the group's fighters may continue to take advantage of the political vacuum and the instability to reorganise and return to operating in smaller cells from other points in the country or from neighbouring countries.³ This is even more likely, bearing in mind that in Libya, ISIS has acted as a base of support for ISIS branches in North Africa like the former Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (Egypt) and Jund al-Khilafa (Tunisia). According to estimates in December 2016, hundreds of members of ISIS remained in different points in Libya and could take advantage of the support networks of other jihadist groups like Ansar al-Sharia and AQIM. In addition, according to recent UN reports, AQIM and its affiliated groups have also managed to establish their presence in southern Libya, have continued using the country as a logistical base to procure weapons and ammunition and have taken a more active propagandistic approach to their actions and messages throughout the region, including in Libya.

While the involvement of foreign actors in Libya is not a new phenomenon, the participation of foreign powers became more explicit in 2016. This was obvious in the presence of special forces from countries such as the United Kingdom, France and the United States, which began an air campaign against ISIS with the consent of the acting unity government. This intervention was directly linked to the West's priorities in terms of fighting terrorism and controlling migratory flows and also provided support to the government promoted by al-Sarraj despite its lack of ratification by the HoR, given the need for a local authority to give it a green light. Meanwhile, countries like Egypt, the UAE and Russia have taken a position closer to that of Haftar, who is also supported by France, stressing the need to respect the procedures established in the agreement (like the ratification of the government by the HoR) and expressing concern about the possible influence of Islamist groups in al-Sarraj's circle.⁴ In fact, Haftar has increasingly been depicted as "Moscow's man" in Libya, as part of a possible long-term

alliance that would enable Russia to position itself strategically in the central Mediterranean and ensure it contracts in the oil and weapons sectors.⁵ Russia, Egypt and the UAE have been in favour of allowing the delivery of arms to Haftar's forces through a flexible approach to the weapons embargo (which the UN claims has been violated by various countries, including the UAE, Turkey, Egypt and US companies). In this scenario of various priorities and interests, there is a risk that the Libyan actors become less willing to make concessions because they feel that they have external support and that international geo-strategic tensions are projected onto the country even more. Taking NATO's precedents in Libya into account (its intervention in 2011 exceeded the UN mandate and led to support for the campaign against Gaddafi's regime) and in a context of tensions over Ukraine and Syria, Moscow has already opposed letting the UN Security Council authorise a new intervention by the Atlantic organisation in the North African country.⁶

The dynamics of violence and fragmentation threaten to establish Libya as a source of instability in the central Mediterranean

On top of all this political and security-related complexity is the deterioration in the economic, humanitarian and human rights situation in the country, which could continue to worsen in 2017. According to data from the UN mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the fiscal deficit was expected to reach 69%. The Presidential Council's lack of access to financial resources also limited its ability to provide basic services, generating discomfort and protests. The number of internally displaced people remained high at over 300,000. In addition, various armed actors continued to perpetrate many forms of abuse with total impunity, including murder, indiscriminately attacking civilian areas, kidnapping, torture and arbitrary detention. The victims also included migrants and refugees, arbitrarily detained in centres controlled by the authorities, armed groups or trafficking networks and subjected to many forms of abuse, including sexual violence. Despite the risks and faced with the blockade of the eastern route due to the European Union's border closure policies, thousands of people have continued to choose the central Mediterranean route. In 2016, over 100,000 people had reached the coast of Italy, mostly from the Libyan coast, and by December over 3,000 had lost their lives attempting to cross over this central route (meaning the vast majority of the more than 4,000 people estimated to have died in the Mediterranean in 2016).

Therefore, this set of factors shows how urgent it is for local and international stakeholders to reduce violence in Libya. Along these lines, some analysts have suggested the need to review the Skhirat agreement to guarantee the involvement of key stakeholders and have stressed the need not to underestimate the potential role of tribes to help to solve the political and security crisis. The task is undoubtedly huge, but the alternative is to continue the dynamics of instability and fragmentation that threaten to establish Libya as a source of instability in the central Mediterranean.

3. Eric Schmitt, "ISIS Remains Threat in Libya Despite Defeat in Surt", *The New York Times*, 8 December 2016, Sudarsan Raghavan, "Islamic State loses its stronghold in Libya, but more chaos could soon follow", *The Washington Post*, 7 December 2016.

4. International Crisis Group, op.cit.

5. Tarek Megeresi and Mattia Toaldo, "Russia in Libya, A Driver of Escalation?", *Sada*, 8 December 2016.

6. Moncef Djaziri, "La nueva estrategia de la OTAN en Libia", *Afkar/Ideas*, Autumn 2016.

Multiple violent fronts increase destabilisation in Nigeria

The proliferation of political tensions, armed movements and intercommunal violence in various regions of the country (north, centre and south) is seriously deteriorating the security situation in Nigeria, threatening its stability. According to data collected by the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST)¹, a total of 49,261 violent deaths were reported in the country between May 2011 and November 2016, 5,838 of which took place in 2016 (not counting December). While the violent deaths that took place during 2016 were lower than those reported in each of the previous three years, they occurred in a larger number of conflict situations and were not primarily concentrated in the violence perpetrated by the armed group Boko Haram in the northern part of the country, as in previous years. Nigeria has seen other crises re-emerge over the past year, diversifying the sources of instability. These include the intensification of intercommunal clashes between pastoralist groups and farmers in the central part of the country, the resumption of armed violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, rising political tensions in the historic southern region of Biafra and increasing strain between the Nigerian government and the Shia-oriented Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) in the northern states of Kaduna, Kano and Bauchi.

The arrival of President Muhammadu Buhari following his electoral victory in March 2015 spelled the defeat of the People's Democratic Party, which had been in power for 16 years, and served to focus government efforts on implementing reforms to boost military effectiveness in its counter-insurgency activities against Boko Haram, which pursued intense military activity in 2014 and 2015 that kept the security forces in check. This strategy to contain the insurgency bore fruit during 2016, when the governments of Nigeria and its neighbours (Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon) implemented the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to seize large swathes of territory from the insurgency led by Abubakar Shekau and significantly reduced its abilities and impact on the region. In 2014, according to the report issued by the Institute for Economics and Peace called the *2015 Global Terrorism Index*, Boko Haram appeared as the deadliest armed group, with a death toll of 6,644 (exceeding the 6,073 reportedly killed by ISIS).² In 2015, according to the NST, a total of 4,440 deaths directly caused by Boko Haram were documented, in addition to 3,970 caused in direct clashes between the militia and the Nigerian Armed Forces. These figures dropped even more in 2016, with a death toll of 549 until December, to which 1,004 deaths in direct clashes must be added. The military strategy also managed to sow divisions within the movement, leading to internal struggles for leadership between Shekau and Sheikh Abu Musab al-Barnawi.

However, the success achieved thus far with the deployment of the MNJTF has been overshadowed by data on the humanitarian

situation in the conflict areas, where according to statements made by the UN in September, there is a high risk that the Lake Chad region affected by the violence could become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world if it does not receive aid urgently. There are currently over six million people in serious conditions of food insecurity, 568,000 of which are severely malnourished. Two other factors overshadow the progress made in combating Boko Haram: the different fronts of instability that broke out or intensified in various parts of the country and the constant reports of serious human rights violations committed by the Nigerian security forces. In fact, a large part of the violence currently expanding across the country is a direct response to the violence that the Nigerian government has committed for decades and that continues today.

After more than 33 years of military dictatorships, the return of power to civilian hands in 1999 was unable to contain the security forces' abuses or to improve the social exclusion, marginalisation and grievances generated in various parts of the country, which has led to an increase in tensions and disputes reflected in the current diversification of sources of violence. The role of the Nigerian Armed Forces and police in repressing opposition groups and communities and dissidents through mass killings, indiscriminate detentions, right violations and extrajudicial executions has contributed significantly to the explosion of violence in various parts of the country, boosting the radicalisation of different movements. According to data from the NST, since May 2011, the state security forces have been responsible for the deaths of 6,749 people, most of them civilians, without counting the deaths caused by direct clashes with Boko Haram, which would add another 13,477 fatalities. On more than one occasion, Amnesty International has denounced the human rights violations and crimes committed by the security forces in different parts of the country. In 2015, Amnesty International reported that the Nigerian Armed Forces committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in its struggle with the Boko Haram insurgency from 2011 to 2015, a period when around 7,000 men and children had been killed in military detention.³ In 2016, Amnesty International continued to denounce that the security forces had been responsible for carrying out a chilling campaign of violence and extrajudicial executions against the pro-Biafran movement called the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which claimed the lives of at least 150 peaceful demonstrators in the southeastern part of the country, who proclaimed Biafra Day and called on the federal government to release their leader Nnamdi Kanu, who has been detained since 14 October 2015.⁴ Different local and international human rights groups like Human Rights Watch have also denounced the abuses committed by the Nigerian Army against Shia Muslims linked to the IMN in Zaria,

1. Council on Foreign Relations, "The Nigeria Security Tracker", December 2016.

2. The Institute for Economics and Peace, *2015 Global Terrorism Index*, November 2015.

3. Amnesty International, *Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands. War crimes committed by the Nigerian military*, June 2015.

4. Amnesty International, *Nigeria: Bullets were raining everywhere*, November 2016.

Kaduna State, where around 300 people were killed from 12 to 14 December 2015. These deaths were the result of an alleged attempt to assassinate the chief of the Nigerian Army, General Tukur Buratai, and led to the arrest of the leader of the IMN, Shaykh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, who remains in prison.

The current situation of state violence and repression targeting members of the IMN or Biafran movements, as well as the arrest of their leaders, is quite similar to what happened in northern Nigeria in 2009, which resulted in the radicalisation of Boko Haram. Violence in the northern states exploded after the security forces' crackdown on the Boko Haram movement in July 2009, claiming the lives of between 400 and 800 people in a week of fighting in the states of Borno, Yobe and Kano, as well as the arrest and subsequent execution of Mohammed Yussuf, the leader of Boko Haram at the time, while he was in policy custody. In wake of the violence against members of the IMN and Zakzaky's arrest, the Islamic spiritual leader of Nigeria, the Sultan of Sokoto, warned that the Nigerian Army's actions could provoke a new insurgency in the country. In fact, in early December 2016, the governor of the northern state of Kaduna, Nasiru El-Rufa'i, officially declared the IMN to be an insurgent group. This move was condemned by the Nigerian organisation Muslim Rights Concern, which warned that the declaration entered into a dangerous dimension and that criminalising the IMN could set off spiralling radicalisation similar to that of Boko Haram.⁵

At the same time, policies of exclusion, marginalisation and grievances have also aggravated other pre-existing tensions and disputes in the country. The resumption of the armed struggle in the Niger Delta, which had achieved a significant reduction in violence since the amnesty law was promulgated in 2009 and the DDR programmes were implemented, the rise of Buhari to power and the declaration of an end to the programmes have resulted in a return to violence and sabotage

against oil interests. In June, the impact of the actions carried out by the various armed groups active in the area, the most important of which is the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), cut the production of crude oil and electric energy by half, seriously affecting the national economy and demonstrating the rebellion's impact on the country. In addition to the outbreak of violence in the Niger Delta, intercommunal friction in the central parts of the country, fuelled by what is called the right to indigeneity⁶ among ethnic groups considered autochthonous, in opposition to foreign (Hausa-Fula) ethnic groups, has exploded violently since 2014, when attacks by Fula militants killed 1,229 people, compared to the 63 reported the year before. The violence decreased in 2015, but remains present in the so-called "Middle Belt".

The role of the Nigerian Armed Forces and police in repressing opposition groups and communities and dissidents has contributed significantly to the explosion of violence in various parts of Nigeria, boosting the radicalisation of different movements

While Nigeria has made significant strides in its fight against the Boko Haram insurgency in the northern part of the country, other major security challenges have intensified across the entire southeast, the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta. The reasons for the violence include the lack of legitimacy of the state and profound structural problems such as corruption, regional inequalities, dysfunctional federalism, poor governance, poverty and others. Moreover, insecurity has worsened due to the country's poor economic situation, driven by falling oil prices, lower oil production due to instability in the Delta and depreciation of the nation's currency. The Nigerian security forces' systematic human rights violations have increased the violent

response and lowered the people's support and cooperation with the security forces, which turn out to be crucial for addressing future security challenges. In light of this, one of the greatest challenges in the country lies in a comprehensive reform of the security sector that focuses on its professionalisation, effectiveness, accountability and respect for human rights, reducing the risks posed by the malpractice of the security forces today.⁷ Unless the government achieves structural reforms, the country could enter a greater spiral of violence.

5. Muslim Rights Concern, "Press release : INM is not an insurgent group", INM official website, 16 December 2016.

6. For further information, see the section on "Nigeria" in the Database on Conflicts and Peacebuilding, Escola de Cultura de Pau.

7. International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: The challenge of Military Reform*, Africa Report n° 237, June 2016.

De facto collapse of the peace agreement in South Sudan

One year after the peace agreement was signed in South Sudan, the future of the peace process seems more uncertain and precarious than ever. The failure to implement the clauses of the agreement, the systematic ceasefire violations, the increase in violence against the civilian population and the de facto collapse of the transitional government a few months after its inception underscore the main challenges facing the immediate future of the country.

After over 20 months of a brutal civil war, the government of President Salva Kiir and different opposition groups, including primarily the SPLA-IO led by Riek Machar and the group of former SPLM detainees headed by Pagan Amum, signed a peace agreement in August 2015, largely as a result of intense international pressure. Already at that time, the agreement was signed with much uncertainty regarding the real possibilities of success, especially because of the list of 16 reservations that the government attached to it along with its signature, which questioned key aspects of the deal. Just two months after the signature, Kiir's government made it clear that it would not respect the agreed road map, declaring a new federal state formula for the country on 2 October without taking the opposition groups into account. This development, by which South Sudan changed its administrative divisions from the 10 existing states to 28 new ones based on ethnic characteristics, was the first serious violation of the peace agreement and was denounced by the South Sudanese opposition as well as by the international community involved in the peace negotiations. In 2016, the course continued along these lines and practically made no progress in effectively implementing any of the seven chapters of the peace agreement.

With regard to chapter 1, concerning the creation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), the agreement mixed the good with the bad. For one thing, Riek Machar was appointed the first vice president of the country in February and the TGoNU was constituted two months later (28 April), after he returned to the capital, Juba. However, the outbreak of violence in Juba in July, which pitted government forces against those of the opposition and left an official death toll of 270, although non-official sources claimed at least 500, resulted in the flight of Machar and his troops from the capital and his subsequent dismissal by Salva Kiir in July, who replaced him by Mining Minister Taban Deng Gai. Kiir also expelled six of the 10 SPLA-IO ministers loyal to Machar from the TGoNU, replacing them with officials close to Gai. The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), the UN, the IGAD and the African Union Peace and Security

Council (PSC) criticised Machar's dismissal, asserting that it was a violation of the peace agreement. This crisis, which split and fragmented the SPLA-IO into pro-Machar and pro-Gai parties, finally resulted in Machar's announcement in September affirming the collapse of the TGoNU and of the peace agreement and urging his followers to resume their war against the government.

Chapter 2, which deals with the permanent ceasefire and security mechanisms and should have been implemented 72 hours after the peace agreement was signed, was never effective. The armed non-state actors have not been disarmed, demobilised or repatriated and military forces have not withdrawn completely from the capital. Progress has not even been made in the unification of the national Armed Forces. Likewise, no headway was made in terms of a cessation of direct hostilities, with armed clashes and ceasefire violations occurring constantly. The worst episodes of the year included an attack on a UN refugee camp in Malakal in February, the rebels' capture of the city of Wau in June, direct armed clashes between the SPLA and SPLA-IO in Juba in July and the deteriorating security situation in the region of Equatoria. On various occasions, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) accused SPLA forces of refusing to cooperate and of blocking teams in charge of monitoring compliance with the ceasefire and implementing security measures.

Meanwhile, the data referring to the humanitarian crisis in the country in late 2016 highlight the little progress made in chapter 3, alluding to humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. According to statistics reported by OCHA and UNICEF, over 5.1 million people were in need of humanitarian aid in 2016 (representing nearly 40% of the population), around 1.8 million people were internally displaced and more than one million were refugees in neighbouring countries. The UN agency for refugees, UNHCR, denounced that the conflict in South Sudan has become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.¹

Another one of the key chapters of this agreement, the fifth, devoted to transitional justice mechanisms, accountability, reconciliation and restitution, which provides for the creation of three transitional justice institutions (the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing; the Hybrid Court for South Sudan; and the Compensation and Reparation Authority), also has yet to be implemented. In fact, a joint article written by Kiir and Machar that was published in The New York Times in June, although Machar would later distance himself from it, asked the international community to reconsider the

1. Panel of Experts on South Sudan, *Interim report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2206 (2015)*, UN SC, S/2016/963, 15 November 2016.

application of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, arguing that it would be an obstacle to peacebuilding in the country.² In this regard, the African Union Commission chaired by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, created to determine what happened in the South Sudanese Civil War in 2013, found that both troops commanded by both Kiir and Machar had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.³

In addition to this fragile context, growing internal division in the country has given rise to the proliferation of armed actors that have reneged on the peace process. Some, like the Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation (REMNASA) and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM), did not sign the peace agreement in August 2015. Others, like the South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (SSPPF) in the region of Equatoria and the Tiger Faction New Forces (TFNF), composed of Shilluks in the Upper Nile region, took up arms in reaction to the administrative division decreed by the government. In 2016, after Machar's declaration of war on 25 September, Lam Akol, a veteran South Sudanese dissident, also declared war on the government through his National Democratic Movement. The South Sudan Democratic Movement-Cobra Faction (SSDM-CF), originally from the Greater Upper Nile region, which signed a peace agreement with the government in 2015, announced that it was resuming its armed struggle, causing over 5,000 soldiers to desert from the nation's Army (SPLA) and join the insurgency. In late October, a new group from the Equatoria region, called the South Sudan Democratic Front (SSDF), also declared war on the government, stressing the importance of forging a joint alliance with all rebel forces.

The proliferation of armed groups and the deterioration of the peace process have resulted in a rise in ethnic polarisation in the country and an increase in violence perpetrated by all groups against the civilian population. The manipulation of identities and the mobilisation of the members of different ethnic groups that support one faction or another have heightened the ethno-political conflict between the majority Dinka community, allied with Kiir, and the ethnic minorities (the Nuer, Shilluk, Murle and tribes of Equatoria), allied with Machar, raising alarms about the imminent possibility of genocide due to the cycle of generalised and systematic acts

The rise in ethnic polarisation in the country has increased violence against the civilian population, warning of the possibility of a genocide occurring

of revenge and attacks against civilians belonging to different communities. This was acknowledged by Adama Dieng, the UN Secretary-General's special advisor for the prevention of genocide, who warned in November that the atmosphere of violence and intolerance could trigger a genocide after the incidents against civilians reported at the end of the year in the region of Equatoria.

In this environment characterised by serious violent incidents in different regions of the country (Wao, Equatoria), on 12 August the UN Security Council approved sending a 4,000-man regional force to join the UN mission (UNMISS) with the ability to use force to protect the civilian population in Juba. This measure could undoubtedly constitute a breakthrough in protecting civilians in the country after the harsh criticism levelled at the UN mission for failing to protect civilians in the IDP camps under its jurisdiction in the crises in Malakal and Juba. However, the measure is insufficient for ensuring stability. The Security Council, which has been asked to establish a weapons embargo by different international bodies, has still not approved the measure, though it has said that it would consider it if the situation did not stabilise.

In this difficult scenario, after witnessing the failure to implement the peace agreement and the scarce possibilities of an effective transition under the leadership of Kiir, Machar and their closest circles, there are rising calls for the UN or the AU to impose an international guardianship on the country for 10 to 15 years. Under this transition model, Kiir and Machar, indicated as those primarily responsible for the deterioration of governance in the country, would be excluded from any current or future formula of governance. Pagan Amum, the former secretary general of the SPLM, has been one of the people calling for the establishment of this transitional authority as the only viable solution to stop the violence and rebuild the state.⁴ The UN has already applied this extreme solution of an international administration in Timor-Leste, Kosovo and Liberia, with good results.⁵ However, applying this formula in South Sudan does not seem easy, as neither Kiir, Machar, nor their closest allies would allow their exclusion from sharing power. This would lead to its application by force, which the international community has thus far made no attempt to employ to reduce instability and protect the civilian population of the country.

2. Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, "South Sudan Needs Truth, Not Trials", *The New York Times*, 7 June 2016.

3. AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, *Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan*, 15 October 2014, pp. 223–29. Crisis States Research Centre (CSRC), 2010.

4. South Sudan Reborn, "United Nations temporary administration for South Sudan", 1 August 2016.

5. Kate Almquist Knopf, "Ending South Sudan's Civil War", *Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action*, Special Report N° 77, November 2016.

Afghanistan, a festering conflict

Fifteen years after the beginning of the current phase of the armed conflict in Afghanistan with the invasion by US troops and the deployment of the ISAF international military mission, the situation of armed violence is deeply entrenched in the country, with no progress that might offer a glimpse of the end of a war that has ravaged Afghanistan almost uninterruptedly since 1979. Following the withdrawal of a large part of the international troops deployed in combat missions in late 2014, the armed conflict experienced a serious rebound in 2015 that was consolidated in 2016. The country is facing a major political and security crisis. Several factors could cause the armed conflict to go on indefinitely and make the political crisis worse, making it more difficult to find a negotiated solution to the violence and blocking the political reforms necessary for peacebuilding in the country.

Serious clashes were reported throughout 2016 between Afghan security forces and Taliban insurgents, with some episodes of intense violence. The Taliban insurgency made several demonstrations of force at different times of the year, temporarily gaining control of some strategic enclaves, holding the Afghan security forces in check and exposing the government's weakness in expanding its control over all Afghan territory. Thus, parts of the province of Kunduz, including the city of the same name, briefly fell under Taliban control at various times of the year, as did other locations in the provinces of Faryab, Paktia and Helmand, for example. Meanwhile, there were significant attacks on foreign facilities in the country, like embassies, consulates and international NGO offices. Especially notable was an attack in Kabul in July that killed 85 people, all of them civilians and most of them Hazara men. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and the Taliban condemned it. The appearance of ISIS in Afghanistan adds more complexity to the armed conflict. In April, a US drone strike killed the ISIS leader in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the province of Nangarhar, where the organisation may have achieved a foothold in some districts. Some episodes of fighting between the Taliban and groups linked to ISIS were reported in the same province. While the extent of this organisation's establishment in Afghanistan aside from its presence in Nangarhar is unclear and its ability to operate in the conflict remains murky, groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS have taken credit for several attacks in the country, showing a certain degree of penetration into the armed conflict.

With regard to the international presence in the country, and especially to foreign troops, the United States did not reduce its soldiers after the withdrawal of 2014 as planned, and by the end of 2016 the number of international troops in the country as part of NATO's "Decisive Support" mission remained the

same as in 2015. Moreover, the US government changed the rules of engagement for its soldiers in the country, allowing direct fighting with and more air strikes against the Taliban insurgency. Thus, the foreign military presence in the country will not be reduced in the near future and will presumably be extended beyond 2017, since no improvements in the security situation are foreseeable in the short or medium term.

The impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population is particularly acute, as it is increasingly suffering disproportionately from the consequences of the violence and human rights violations. According to figures compiled by the United Nations mission in the country (UNAMA), there is an established upward trend in the number of civilian victims of the armed conflict.¹ During the first six months of 2016, there was a slight rise in the number of civilian casualties compared to the same dates in previous years. The total number of victims was 5,166 (1,601 dead and 3,565 wounded), compared to 4,982 in 2015 (1,615 dead and 3,367 wounded). However, beyond the specific figures on the victims, which are serious enough, some worrying trends are noted in the dynamics of the armed conflict that could have tremendously negative consequences in 2017. Although most civilian casualties were caused by the Taliban rebels, there was an increase in the number of civilian victims caused by the actions of Afghan security forces. Especially important is the spike in victims of government air strikes. The increase in air strikes will have a highly negative impact on human security in Afghanistan, given the indiscriminate effects that this kind of armed action can have. Furthermore, attacks aimed directly at women in public spaces persisted. These attacks that caused civilian casualties, like the specific persecution of women, will undoubtedly create long-term consequences in terms of the destruction of the Afghan social fabric, with serious effects on the democratisation of the country and the human rights situation, lessening the possibilities of the people's participation in the public sphere and putting the political and social future of Afghanistan at risk.

The crisis of forced displacement in the country is yet another factor that could become worse in 2017. This crisis shows both the fragile situation in terms of human rights and security, which continues to force thousands of people to flee their homes, and the government's inability to guarantee the minimum conditions of welfare for the Afghan people. The United Nations noted that during the first six months of 2016, there was a 10% increase in the number of internally displaced people in the country compared to the same dates the year prior. Alongside these new displacements in 2016, a significant process began to forcibly return hundreds

The foreign military presence in the country will presumably extend beyond 2017

1. UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016*, July 2016.

of thousands of refugees in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and EU countries. Over 200,000 people returned to Afghanistan coming from Pakistan and tens of thousands returned from different countries in the EU. Despite the fact that Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR had signed an agreement for the voluntarily repatriation of refugees in 2002, the Pakistani government did not apply any pressure for the return to take place until 2015, and particularly 2016. However, pressure has mounted on the Afghan people residing in Pakistan to return to their country in recent months and this return process could accelerate even more. In the case of the EU, the agreement of late 2016 with the Afghan government to repatriate people whose asylum applications are rejected led to an increase in forced repatriations in the final months of 2016, a phenomenon that will undoubtedly increase in 2017 given the EU's restrictive immigration and refugee policies. While these people are returning, the Afghan government is unable to assist them, leaving them in situations of extreme precariousness and insecurity. The trend towards increasing returns in the second half of 2016 will most likely continue in 2017 without any improvements in receiving them.

In addition to the security situation, the country is facing a serious political crisis radiating from the National Unity Government. Led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, this government was formed in 2014 to overcome the institutional crisis that arose during the presidential election. In his report on Afghanistan released in September 2016, the UN Secretary-General acknowledged that "increased tensions between the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, and the Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, persistent security challenges and rising pressure from political opposition groups contributed to growing volatility".² The agreement that led to the formation of the National Unity Government established that it should be extended until September 2016, but Abdullah announced that the government would complete the

five-year presidential term of office. In the months leading up to this announcement, tensions between Ghani and Abdullah soared as they traded blame for a lack of cooperation and non-compliance with the commitments established in the agreement, especially those related to electoral legislation reform and the establishment of the office of the prime minister. Moreover, discontent also rose markedly among other political leaders and forces, which demanded the holding of a Loya Jirga to settle the future of the country. Those calling for a Loya Jirga included former President Hamid Karzai, whose political position has weakened the current government.³ Various high-level political and administrative appointments made by Ghani prompted Abdullah to accuse him of operating behind his back. In November, the political crisis worsened with the dismissal of several ministers by Parliament. These dismissals fundamentally affected allies of Abdullah, which greatly increased rumours of a political operation orchestrated by Ghani to weaken the chief executive.⁴ Meanwhile, the parliamentary elections that were supposed to be held in October 2016 were postponed due to the government's inability to pass the necessary electoral legislative reforms.

The forced displacement crisis in the country could worsen during 2017

Therefore, Afghanistan is facing 2017 in the midst of a tremendously unstable security situation and a political situation of great fragility. The serious impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population, the appearance of ISIS in the Afghan theatre, the enormous obstacles to political activity in the country and the serious government crisis predict a year plagued by difficulties. While the peace process between Kabul and the Taliban may have resumed in the closing months of 2016, with the direct involvement of US diplomacy, the negotiations are not official and have a long history of failure in the recent past. Neither side has expressed a sufficiently clear and forceful commitment to a negotiating process that justifies the notion that it could have continuity and be able to achieve results in the near future.

2. UNSG, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, Report of the Secretary-General. A/71/616–S/2016/768, 7 September 2016.
3. Ali Yawar Adili, *Post-Presidential Karzai: Still a challenge to the NUG?*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 November 2016.
4. Thomas Ruttig, *Parliament Kicks Out Ministers Again: A multi-dimensional power struggle*. Afghanistan Analysts Network, 19 November 2016.

The rise in violence and growing presence of ISIS in Mindanao

After several years in which levels of violence had fallen in Mindanao, mainly due to the progress made in the peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF, the largest armed group operating in the southern part of the country, in 2016 various analysts warned of the proliferation and greater coordination of various Islamist groups, the possibility that ISIS may be expanding and consolidating its presence in Mindanao as the epicentre of its activities and project in Southeast Asia and the substantive increase in armed actions conducted by groups declaring their alignment with and even membership in ISIS, like Abu Sayyaf and Islamic State in Lanao. Despite the fact that some experts question the solidity of the ties between ISIS and various local groups and that Manila continued to minimise and ignore the collaboration between Philippine armed groups and regional or transnational organisations and networks, by late 2016 Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte acknowledged the presence of ISIS and foreign groups and combatants on the country's soil. The international community's concern about the possible increase of jihadist organisations in Mindanao includes possible participation in the peace process with the MILF, the rise of insecurity in the region, the increase of risks in navigating in the area between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia due to the activity of armed groups like Abu Sayyaf and the possibility of attacks occurring in some cities in the Philippines.

Although intelligence reports have long warned of greater cooperation between jihadist groups in Mindanao and the intentions of ISIS to maintain a stable presence in the region, in 2016 ISIS claimed responsibility for a large-scale attack for the first time; warned of its intention to grow and increase its attacks in the Philippines; officially recognised its loyalty and obedience, made public by many groups in the Philippines; appointed a leader in the region; and announced its intention to create a province (wilayah) of the Caliphate in the region, although it is not clear if this would only include the Philippines or other regions and countries of Southeast Asia. Indeed, in mid-April ISIS claimed responsibility for its first armed action in the Philippines, killing 18 soldiers and wounding over 50 in the Basilan region, making it the deadliest armed incident for the Philippine Army since 2011. Later, ISIS said that it had 10 battalions of fighters in five different locations in the country and ensured that it had killed 289 people since April 2015. A few months before, ISIS had appointed Isnilon Hapilon to be the top leader in the region or the emir of the soldiers of the Caliphate in the Philippines. A historical leader of Abu Sayyaf, Hapilon led the group's faction in Basilan, but swore allegiance to ISIS in 2014 and split from Abu Sayyaf to create or strengthen the structure of ISIS in the Philippines. ISIS also announced that four armed organisations in Mindanao (Ansar al Shariah, Marakah al Ansar, Ansar al Khilafah and Al Harakatul al Islamiyah) had converged under the authority

of Hapilon, also known as Sheikh Mujahid Abu Abdullah al-Filipini, leading some analysts to fear not only that ISIS could soon declare a new province of the Caliphate in the region, but also that in the near future it could seek the membership of or collaborate with many groups (up to 16, according to some) that have sworn loyalty and obedience to it in recent years, like the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Abu Sayyaf, Jamaal al Tawhid Wal Jihad, Khilafah Islamiyah Mindanao and Dawlah Islamiyah.

Alongside the growing presence of ISIS in Mindanao, some of these groups close to or belonging to the organisation increased their armed activity substantively to the extent that the government recognised that it had deployed thousands of additional troops and police officers and declared that approximately half of its military air and naval capacities were devoted to counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism in Mindanao. In the case of the BIFF, a MILF splinter group opposed to the peace process that swore allegiance to ISIS in 2014, at least 70 combatants died during the year. The government indicated that this organisation continued to harbour a number of foreign combatants and warned of the possibility of ever-increasing attacks considered acts of terrorism. In February, for example, the government declared that according to its intelligence sources, around 100 BIFF members had participated in a course to manufacture and handle explosive devices for one month and a half. Furthermore, in late July, a BIFF faction declared that it had taken over control of the group at the expense of its current leader, Ismael Abubakar (also known as Imam Bongos) because it thought that the current leadership was getting too close to the positions of ISIS. However, the BIFF's official spokesman denied that the faction had seized control of the group, which is estimated to have around 500 combatants, significant military equipment and even some territorial control in historical MILF strongholds.

The armed group that certainly caused the most surprise and concern during 2016 was the self-styled Islamic State in Lanao or Dawlah Islamiyah, which the government calls the Maute group since it is led by the brothers Abdullah and Omar Maute. Despite the fact that this group was created a few years before and had even pledged allegiance to ISIS, in 2016 it gained some notoriety for its major armed activity (at the year's end, the government declared that around 160 combatants had been killed in 2016), for its assiduous use of ISIS symbolism and terminology, for having temporarily occupied the city of Butig (Lanao del Sur) and having hung the ISIS banner from various buildings, including the old city hall, and for Duterte's statements openly acknowledging the links between Islamic State in Lanao and ISIS. In addition to the many clashes between the armed group and the Philippine Armed Forces in the Butig region (Lanao del Sur, in Mindanao) that caused the death of a significant number of soldiers, the government

warned of the risk that Islamic State in Lanao might conduct a campaign of attacks in various parts of Mindanao and even attempt a large-scale attack in the Manila metropolitan region, as occurred in May. In this regard, in December the government blamed the group for having placed an explosive device (which did not blow up in the end) in the vicinity of the US embassy in Manila. Earlier, three people linked to Islamic State in Lanao had been arrested for participating in an attack on a market in the city of Davao (Mindanao) in December that killed 15 people and wounded 70.

On various occasions, the Philippine government expressed enormous concern about the increase in Abu Sayyaf's armed activity and its growing ability to acquire funding through kidnapping and to endanger security and navigation in Southeast Asia. The government acknowledged that the armed activity of Abu Sayyaf had risen dramatically in the last two years, especially in 2016. By way of example, in mid-November, the government stated that nearly 130 Abu Sayyaf fighters had been killed and more than 100 had been arrested since early July. Manila recognised that in the first 100 days of Duterte's administration alone, 579 military operations had been carried out in Sulu and 54 direct clashes had taken place with Abu Sayyaf. Undoubtedly, one of the factors explaining the notable increase in the government's counter-insurgency efforts is the rise in the number of abductions carried out by the group. According to the government, in the first six months of the year alone, Abu Sayyaf obtained 7.3 million dollars in ransom for releasing people it had abducted. Despite all the people released during the year, by late 2016 Abu Sayyaf held 23 people, 18 of them foreigners. Moreover, Abu Sayyaf demonstrated a growing ability to seize people and ships further from its historical area of operations, and at the end of the year the governments of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia signed an agreement to prevent piracy and to guarantee security in the region, especially in the seas of Sulu and Celebes.

In addition to all these events that were reported over the course of 2016, some think that the situation of insecurity could worsen for several reasons, and not only due to the possibility that counter-insurgency efforts in the Philippines could be seriously undermined by a theoretical substantial reduction in the military and intelligence-related support that the United States has given to Manila in recent years following its criticism of the so-called war on drugs undertaken by the new Philippine government, which by the year's end had caused the deaths of over 6,000 people. First, the deadlock in the peace process between the government and the MILF could cause part of the group's sympathisers or even its combatants (which some sources estimate at 12,000) to join one of the many armed groups currently active in Mindanao. In fact, it is certainly

plausible to consider that many of these groups have become stronger in recent years precisely due to the disappointment and indignation felt by a large part of the Moro population following the annulment of the 2008 peace agreement by the Supreme Court (which led to the split between the MILF and the BIFF) and the lack of implementation of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2012) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014). It must be borne in mind that after noting the government's unwillingness to implement the 1996 peace agreement, the MNLF has staged many episodes of violence in the last 20 years and is still not a fully demobilised group. It is also worth recalling that armed groups fully engaged in peace negotiations with the government have historically tended to splinter with breakaway factions, as witnessed with the emergence of the MILF, Abu Sayyaf and the BIFF.

Second, the proclamation of the Philippines as a new province or epicentre of the activities of ISIS in Southeast Asia could lead to closer ties between the groups currently operating in Mindanao and some of the main jihadist organisations in Southeast Asia that have also pledged allegiance to ISIS, like Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, Jemaah Ansharaut Tauhid and Darul Islam Sabah. In this regard, it should be noted that at the end of the year, the government recognised the existence of many foreign combatants in the ranks of some groups from Mindanao. Thus, some think that in the near future, Mindanao could become a training centre for Asian combatants ultimately bound for countries in Iraq and Syria. In the same way, the insecurity and violence in Mindanao could rise notably with the return of approximately 1,200 combatants from the region who are estimated to have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. In fact, there is a faction within ISIS called Katibah Nasuntara that is composed entirely of fighters from Southeast Asia and is linked to the attack in Jakarta in January 2016. Furthermore, there are currently around 2.5 million Filipinos residing in countries in the Middle East.

Despite all these factors, some argue that so far the operational and financial links between ISIS and various groups active in Mindanao have not been verified. According to these arguments, the groups are allegedly trying to use their supposed links with ISIS to gain visibility or raise the political profile of their demands and even the amounts of the ransoms for people they have kidnapped. In turn, ISIS would be interested in capitalising on and promoting violent incidents and instability in various parts of the world, including in Southeast Asia, to divert attention from its recent military setbacks in Syria and Iraq. Thus far, the MILF has been flatly opposed to ISIS and has shown its willingness to help to fight against jihadist groups, several of which operate in its traditional strongholds.

The Kurdish issue in Turkey and the multiplication of war fronts

The Kurdish issue in Turkey, one of whose manifestations is the armed conflict that has pitted the Turkish government against the PKK since the 1980s, is witnessing one of the most delicate moments in its history. With the recent peace process dead and buried (2012-2015) and amidst a violent political, social and regional intensification of the conflict, as well as a much more complex general scenario in Turkey, marked by the challenges and consequences of a failed coup d'état attempt in July 2016, the outlook does not bode well for optimists. On the contrary, the current dynamics point to the risks of a scenario of total antagonism, with worsening violence, greater militarisation and an increasingly insurmountable divide between the contending parties, as well as between the state and the Kurdish movement as a whole.

The serious deterioration of the conflict takes place in a historical context marked by the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, led by part of the Turkish Army allegedly infiltrated by the religious movement of Gülen, a former ally of the ruling AKP party and fervent opponent of any dialogue with the PKK who has been described as a terrorist organisation by the government under the acronym FETÖ. With at least 265 people killed and over 1,400 wounded, the coup attempt caused deep shock in a country marked by the role of the Army and was unanimously condemned by the entire political class, including the pro-Kurdish HDP party, creating what was identified as an opportunity for political unity and parliamentary democracy to meet the various challenges in the country. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the PKK mostly ceased its armed activities in the days that followed. According to the pro-Kurdish HDP party, the move to stop its activities was intentional.

However, this was followed by a time of great complexity, with various worrying trends that were also important for the Kurdish issue. Among them was the configuration of a political framework of new fronts, led by the so-called national front between the ruling AKP party and the opposition nationalist MHP party, which interacts to a greater or lesser extent with the CHP, but excludes the pro-Kurdish HDP (the third-largest party in Turkey) from the high-level negotiations since 15 July. This factor is highly relevant in the context after the failed coup, in which constitutional reform and a future change to a presidential system are being addressed, in addition to other subjects with repercussions for the Kurdish issue. In this regard, the umbrella of democratic constitutional reform resulting from an inclusive process had historically been seen as an opportunity (though not one free of difficulties) to address the Kurdish issue, at least in part. The new scenario of the HDP's exclusion pushes that option away.

Furthermore, in the context after 15 July, massive purges were carried out of people accused of supporting FETÖ, the PKK and ISIS under often vague and problematic definitions of "terrorism", including in sectors with no links to the violence or the attempted coup. This is establishing the paradigm of being "with us or with the terrorists", reducing the political and social space for democratic

criticism and dissent, political independence (or the independence of professional guilds) and the construction of bridges in search of negotiated solutions. At the same time, under the protection of previous anti-terrorism laws and emergency legislation, progress is being made towards beginning legal processes on the political and social dimensions of ongoing conflicts, such as the Kurdish issue, at least in part. Another worrying trend in the wake of 15 July has been the marked increase in attacks by the PKK, a pattern attributed to its perception of weakness in the security forces after the failed coup.¹ Indeed, massive purges were conducted in the Turkish Army, including at least half the generals and admirals, as well as staff with central roles in operations against the PKK.²

In addition to this general framework of political exclusion and the "with us or against us" paradigm, there has more specifically been an intensification of the various fronts in the conflict over the Kurdish issue. Thus, in line with the HDP's exclusion from the major political issues of the state, the political, social and legal space of the Kurdish nationalist movement, the main stakeholder in the Kurdish issue, is seriously shrinking. Based on the premise that they were accused of supporting the PKK, the arrest of Kurdish political representatives increased during 2016, including of co-leaders of the party, MPs and other elected representatives and highly symbolic political figures for the Kurdish population, like the co-mayors of Diyarbakir and the historical Kurdish leader Ahmet Turk, accused of having links with terrorism), elected mayors were replaced by government officials, media outlets and nearly 200 associations were closed and 11,000 teachers were temporarily dismissed, among other measures. This has led to a scenario of serious polarisation and political and social gaps between the state and the Kurdish movement, in which Ankara has returned to its pre-2005 position of denying the Kurdish issue, refusing any rapprochement with the Kurdish movement, pursuing total war with the PKK and taking an economic approach and seeking out alternative voices in the southeast.

Meanwhile, the situation of the Kurdish movement remains extremely delicate. It is marked by its limited ability to influence the new national front between the AKP and MHP, as well as the PKK, to move towards silencing their weapons, despite the appeals made during 2016; the still uncertain consequences of intensified persecution against its political cadres; the further alienation of parts of the southeastern population from the state, although some local groups have also criticised the PKK's urban warfare strategies in 2015-2016; and the complicated balance struck by the Kurdish movement in a scenario marked by the importance of the armed group and the violence.

The factors of concern include the serious deterioration in the war front since the resumption of open war in mid-2015, with various elements to pay attention to, including the impacts of the violence, strategies, stakeholders, resources and positions. It is not the first time that a serious resurgence of violence occurs after a

1. Berkay Mandiraci, "Turkey's PKK Conflict Veers onto a More Violent Path", ICG, 10 November 2016.

2. Lars Haugom, "The Turkish Armed Forces Restructured", *The Turkey Analyst*, 30 September 2016.

failed attempt at dialogue, as the same happened in 2011 and 2012 after the Oslo talks failed in 2011. However, with regard to previous crises, this new situation has seen a significant increase in the impact on mortality and on human security for the civilian population, largely due to the urban war from mid-2015 to mid-2016, involving forced displacement, the total destruction of civilian urban areas, attacks on civilian targets by part of the security forces during their siege and curfew operations and the militarisation of many Kurdish youths through the Civil Protection Units (YPS) and of civilian areas under their control.

Although operations have partially continued in urban centres, the shift to a war primarily fought in rural areas in mid-2016 has reduced the number of civilian deaths, but has been accompanied by risk factors like the many attacks and clashes between the security forces and the guerrillas, growing intervention by the armed group TAK³ through suicide attacks in urban and/or crowded spaces with a serious risk for civilians and with high counts of people killed and wounded, including civilians, and an increase in the PKK's attacks on political targets, among other incidents. Despite the mass purges in the Turkish Army after the failed coup, Ankara began a deep restructuring of the military, which some analysts say runs the risk of politicisation, in addition to reforms aimed at strengthening the immunity of the security forces regarding accusations of abuse and a reorganisation of the police aimed at intensifying the fight against the PKK.

Furthermore, in the context of the war, there is greater pressure on resources. The state may be trying to deal a strategic blow to the PKK, focusing militarily on two provinces important for the group in terms of moving military and human resources: Hakkari and Sirnak.⁴ The government's strategy of intervening in dozens of Kurdish city councils that it accuses of funding the PKK also falls within this logic of war.

A bellicose escalation has also been identified in their positions and rhetoric, reaffirming the choice of war and its intensification. Both sides have blamed each other for the failure of the Imrali peace process (late 2012-2015). Moreover, Ankara has threatened the PKK with total destruction, ruling out any chance of dialogue with the group and with the Kurdish nationalist movement (including the HDP), demanding that the PKK disarm and disappear (threatening it with destruction) and requiring the HDP to condemn the group and cut all ties with it. Meanwhile, throughout 2016 the PKK threatened to expand the war to cover all of Turkey and urban areas and called for "resistance". And while in 2016 it once again indicated its preference for a negotiated solution, it denied that the conditions for dialogue were being met, stating that negotiations must depend on a change in state policy towards the Kurds. In this respect, early in the year the HDP had affirmed that it has persuaded the PKK of the need to resume negotiations, with the knowledge of the government, but the party pointed out that Ankara flatly rejected returning to the talks. Thus, under current circumstances both sides seem willing to push the military struggle between them to the maximum. The

government feels that it enjoys popular support in its large-scale military response after its electoral victory in November 2015 and the polls in its favour throughout 2016, including in the wake of the attempted coup. Meanwhile, the PKK seems determined to flex its military muscles and defend its local and regional agenda.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has always had a regional component, although the current war in Syria adds enormous pressure and challenges. In 2016, a red line for Turkey was put to the test: Kurdish armed actors (YPG/YPJ/YPS guerrillas and SDF forces, with ties to the PKK) gained significant amounts of territory, crossing the Euphrates and opening the door to the possibility of a continuous strip of territory under Kurdish control and linked to the PKK on the Syrian side of the Syrian-Turkish border. Thus, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in August, sending its own troops to Syria with support from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in order to combat ISIS, but also and primarily to prevent a continuous strip of territory under YPG control. In this highly tense context, the United States maintained a fragile balance between continuing to support the Kurds, who have become crucial allies on the ground, and demanding that they return to the east bank of the Euphrates. The positions of Russia and of the Syrian regime have also been ambivalent regarding the Kurds, marked as they are by their respective strategic agendas.

It remains to be seen how the various dynamics with influence over the Syrian and regional chessboard (including the partial resumption of relations between Russia and Turkey, though still marked by mistrust, the policies of new US President-elect Donald Trump towards the Kurds and developments in the situation in Iraq) will affect the Kurdish conflict between Turkey and the PKK. At the same time, for the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Syria, the consolidation of Kurdish self-government in Syria has become a crucial regional factor, relying on ad hoc alliances and accompanied by future uncertainties, given its external dependence. Moreover, there is the violence perpetrated by ISIS in Turkey. In 2016, various large-scale attacks were blamed on ISIS, like those committed at the Istanbul Airport and the attack on a Kurdish wedding in southeastern Turkey, each of which killed 50 people and left hundreds wounded. The assassination of the Russian ambassador to Turkey in Ankara could also have serious consequences. For the time being, the fronts of violence in Turkey have only continued to increase.

In summary, there are serious difficulties to overcome to break the vicious cycle of violence and zero-sum logics and to move towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In the background, some space and opportunities to redress the situation continue to exist, which would require dialogue with the Kurdish actors of Turkey and the region and a mutual commitment for both sides to silence their weapons and to build confidence in order to address the substantive issues of the conflict. However, the short- and medium-term scenario seems to point to dynamics of violence and political exclusion, with uncertainty about whether this is a transitory phase of flexing military muscle or the foreword to a more virulent and unsolvable conflict.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has experienced a violent political, social and regional intensification

3. Some analysts consider the TAK to be an autonomous PKK splinter group, while others see it as an instrumental group linked to the PKK, allowing it to claim responsibility for attacks not as the PKK, but as the TAK, among other interpretations.
4. Berkay Mandiraci, "Turkey Conflict Veers onto a More Violent Path", ICG, 10 November 2016.

Israel-Palestine: the death throes of the two-state solution and the risk of further violence 50 years after the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank

June 2017 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Arab-Israeli war that was a turning point in the history of the Middle East and led to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (as well as Sinai and the Golan Heights). Five decades after the Six Day War, as the Israelis call it, or the Naksa (“setback”) as it is known to the Palestinians, and 24 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993), the prospects for a solution to the conflict are mired and scepticism is growing about the viability of the two-state solution, an option that many consider impossible. After several failures in previous years, the negotiations between the parties have been deadlocked since April 2014. Israel maintains its policy of *fait accompli* in the occupied territories and its tight blockade on Gaza, Palestinian political forces remain divided, the many sources of violence that characterise the conflict persist and escalate periodically and international efforts to revive the peace process generate low expectations. Against this background, the Palestinian population’s signs of growing frustration with the Israeli occupation and with Palestinian political leadership, the Israeli government’s shift to the right and the low expectations that international initiatives may reactivate the peace process lead to the conclusion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will surely be in the spotlight in 2017 not only because a historical milestone will be reached, but also because of the possibility of new outbreaks of tension and violence.

After the Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip in summer 2014, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict experienced a new escalation of violence starting in the last quarter of 2015, primarily in the West Bank. The series of Palestinian knife attacks and instances of deliberately hitting Israeli pedestrians with cars that continued throughout 2016 was described as a new Intifada, though of a different nature than the two previous ones. The so-called “Knife Intifada” has been characterised by individual acts of violence mostly carried out by young people, including legal minors, with unsophisticated weapons and in “lone wolf” type actions without ties to armed groups. These attacks have been linked to the Palestinian population’s frustration with the occupation and the lack of prospects for peace. In practice, they are considered acts of suicide since Israeli forces have a *de facto* license to kill the alleged perpetrators and have acted accordingly, though many were neutralised and did not pose a threat.¹ Thus, between October 2015 and March 2016, around 30 Israelis, two foreigners and over 200 Palestinians lost their lives in more than 300 incidents of this kind. There were less episodes in the following months of 2016, due in part to the greater involvement of the Palestinian security forces.

These types of actions have been supported by a significant proportion of the Palestinian public opinion: 58% in March 2016, according to a study conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research. This research centre identified a rise in support for the use of violence in Palestinian public opinion,

leaping from 40% in 2010 to 57% in September 2015 and 67% in December 2015, and drew attention to the phenomenon of the so-called “Oslo generation”, a young cohort that was born around the time that the peace process was signed and is disenchanting with the political process, opposed to a two-state solution and, in the case of many young men, supportive of armed activity.² The Palestinians’ frustration is attributed to many factors, including, as pointed out by Palestinian analyst Khalil Shikaki, the conviction that Israel has no intention to put an end to the occupation (in part because the status quo involves no costs), the belief that the international community is unwilling to exert effective pressure on Israel to comply with international law and the negative assessment of the Palestinian leadership and its strategies. With regard to the last point, according to surveys from September 2015, and for the first time since the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created in 1994, 51% of the Palestinians consulted supported its dissolution and two thirds agreed that Mahmoud Abbas should resign from the presidency.

In this regard, some have drawn attention to the institutional and economic weaknesses of the PA and the crisis of legitimacy in its leadership. Abbas, who has never had the charisma of his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, has been criticised for his policies towards Israel, including cooperation on security. Although his initial term of office was to last four years, he has been in power for 12 and despite his age (82) and the recurrent speculations about his successor, he is still the president of the Palestinian Authority, the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the head of Fatah. His administration is perceived as increasingly intolerant of dissent and is criticised for corruption and a lack of accountability.³ In fact, the Palestinian population has not voted since the 2006 election, won by the Islamist group Hamas, and the municipal elections that may have reversed this trend in October 2016 were postponed *sine die* at the last minute by the PA. Other issues include the lack of a unified Palestinian leadership due to the chronic division between Fatah and Hamas, which has not achieved a rapprochement despite the many reconciliation agreements announced over the last 10 years. Meanwhile, Hamas has also been criticised, has little room to cope with the blockade and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and finds itself in a more vulnerable position after two countries in the region that have supported it, Egypt and Turkey, adopted policies of rapprochement and understanding with Israel in recent years.

Added to this scenario is the Israeli government’s gradual shift to the right, which under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasised policies that have only undermined the possible emergence of a Palestinian state since the signing of the Oslo Accords. In mid-2016, a report by the Quartet on the Middle East (the United States, Russia, the UN and the European Union) warned that one of the main threats to the two-state solution was the

1. Lev Luis Gringberg, “Political Crisis in Israel: a Military Regime within a Democratic State?”, *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2016.

2. Khalil Shikaki, *Changing the Status Quo: What Directions for Palestinians?*, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, May 2016.

3. Khaled Elgindy, *The Palestinian leadership crisis*, Brookings, 5 January 2016.

relentless settlement-building policy. Since 1993, Israeli settlers in the occupied territories have more than doubled, reaching a total of 570,000 people in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This is in addition to the unilateral appropriation of the territory of the West Bank (70% of Area C has been designated for Israel's exclusive use) and other policies like the wall, the checkpoints and the segregation of the Palestinian population that worsens the fragmentation of the territory and makes a Palestinian state practically unfeasible. During the election campaign that ended in his re-election in 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he would not allow a Palestinian state to emerge while he was in office. Although he was forced to retract his statement, in practice his administration has stuck to this line of action and has shown greater radicalisation. In fact, since the change in the composition of the ruling coalition in May 2016 and the appointment of the ultra-rightwing politician Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the party Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Is Our Home) and past supporter of re-occupying Gaza, to be the country's defence minister, Netanyahu's government has been described as the most rightwing in Israeli history. Its discourses and policies confirm this depiction. In late 2016, the demolition of Palestinian homes was estimated to have doubled compared to the year prior and the decision to push for a law to retroactively legalise⁴ 4,000 homes built on private Palestinian territory in the West Bank aroused new controversy and criticism from the UN. Encouraged by the victory of Donald Trump in the United States, Minister Naftali Bennet, the leader of the ultra-rightwing party Jewish Home and a supporter of annexing most of the West Bank to Israel, declared in late 2016 that the era of the Palestinian state was ending and that the new scenario provided a unique opportunity for Israel to rethink everything.

The international context also fails to provide encouraging prospects for the possibility of reactivating a discredited peace process, despite the fact that different initiatives were launched or instigated during 2016. France promoted a process with EU support based on the creation of an international support group and the promotion of an international conference to revive the talks and prevent the demise of the two-state formula. The initiative was welcomed by the Palestinian leadership, which in recent years has become committed to an internationalisation strategy in an attempt to reduce the asymmetry between the parties to the conflict, and was repeatedly rejected by the Israeli government, which supports limiting the talks to the bilateral level. Given the reluctance of Israel and the United States, France lowered its ambitions to define parameters, mechanisms, a timetable and the reflection of everything in a UN Security Council resolution. Therefore, while an international meeting was held in Paris in June, involving 29 countries and international organisations, the joint statement reflected the lowest common denominator and the second edition of the summit, which should convene in late 2016,

The Palestinian population's growing frustration with the occupation and the Palestinian political leadership, the Israeli government's shift to the far right and the low expectations for peace may lead to a deterioration of the situation in 2017

may be postponed until 2017. Even France's warning that it would recognise a Palestinian state if the negotiations failed seemed to have lost steam.⁵

Meanwhile, the Quartet on the Middle East warned that the status quo is not sustainable and presented its first diagnostic report on the threats to the two-state solution and a dozen recommendations in July. The Israeli government pressed for changes to the drafted text and despite its criticism, it agreed with the result since the text does not contain a mandate and is not perceived as a binding document.⁶ However, the Palestinian authorities expressed their disappointment and showed more support for the French initiative. At the same time, during 2016 Egypt's intention to advance its own proposal was announced after rapprochement between the regime

of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and Israel, which has also led to cooperation in the fight against ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula and caused Hamas special concern.⁷ The plan, which would involve the adoption of confidence-building measures, has been described as a backroom Israeli initiative to counter international initiatives.⁸ Until late 2016, there was speculation about the possibility that the government of Barack Obama would present its own parameters to resolve the conflict before the end of his term in January 2017. Nevertheless, attention focused on the effects of Trump's victory, which was celebrated effusively by the Israeli right. During the campaign, the tycoon issued contradictory messages about his future policy towards the Middle East, but made statements supportive of the Israeli government by announcing that he would recognise Jerusalem as its capital and that he would take a different and less critical approach to the construction of settlements on occupied territory. Trump has also suggested that his son-in-law Jared Kushner, a pro-Israeli orthodox Jew, could play a key role in efforts to bring peace to the Middle East and appointed David Friedman, a lawyer aligned with the Israeli ultra-right, to be the new US ambassador to Israel.

Opinion polls indicate that in mid-2016, a slight majority of the Palestinian and Israeli population (51% and 59%, respectively) continued to support an agreement conducive to the establishment of two states. However, some consider reorienting the strategy towards a single bi-national state, with equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians alike, given the signs that Israeli policies are making the establishment of a Palestinian state impossible. In any case, the evidence indicates that the trends in the Palestinian and Israeli sides, along with the chronic lack of political will to promote substantive peace initiatives, is setting up an increasingly worrying scenario. In this context, the 50th anniversary of the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank may strain the atmosphere even more. The commemoration will undoubtedly heighten sensitivities, generate duelling narratives and return a key conflict for the region to the forefront, after enjoying less media interest in recent years in part because of the revolts and the emergence of other crises.

4. All the settlements are illegal under international law, but Israel distinguishes between authorised ones and unauthorised ones, according to its own legislation.

5. International Crisis Group, *Israel/Palestine: Parameters for a Two State Settlement*, Middle East Report no.172, ICG, 28 November 2016.

6. Uri Savir, "EU to push Israel-Palestine peace process as Quartet report flops", *Al-Monitor*, 17 July 2016.

7. Shlomi Eldar, "What do Palestinians think about Egypt's Peace initiative?", *Al Monitor*, 12 July 2016.

8. International Crisis Group, op.cit.

The withdrawal of African countries from the ICC: regression in terms of protecting human rights

The International Criminal Court (ICC), the permanent international court of justice independent of the UN whose mission is to try people accused of committing crimes of genocide, war, aggression and crimes of humanity that escape local legal systems, has been subjected to significant pressure even before its inception in 2002. In recent years, criticism has increased in Africa among those who see it as an institution that has focused on prosecuting crimes in Africa at the expense of other criminals and conflicts in other parts of the world. Despite the increase in trials and the geographic and thematic expansion towards new types of crimes conducted by the ICC in recent years, it is now facing one of the greatest challenges since its inception, as three African countries (South Africa, Burundi and the Gambia) have announced their withdrawal from it.¹ Furthermore, Kenya, Namibia and Uganda, among others, are weighing the same decision.² The culmination of these moves and their domino effect may weaken the institution and provoke a regression in terms of protecting human rights in Africa and on the world stage.

There are many criticisms and challenges facing the ICC, which are grouped into three main themes, as noted by various authors and institutions. First is the issue of the institution's credibility and efficiency, evidenced in 2012 after the culmination of the first ICC trial against Thomas Lubanga, the leader of a Congolese armed group found guilty of war crimes. In the first 10 years of its existence, the ICC spent nearly one billion dollars and only issued one verdict, although the work required to put the court in motion was arduous and barely visible. However, in the years since (2012-2016), the ICC has been in full swing. At the end of 2016, a total of 13 cases were in different stages of development. In addition, 10 situations were under investigation and 10 more were under preliminary examination.

There are three guilty verdicts awaiting reparations for the victims (the case of Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, the leader of the Malian group Ansar Dine, for destroying world heritage in the conflict in northern Mali; the case of Congolese insurgent leader Germain Katanga for committing war crimes in the eastern DRC; and the case of Thomas Lubanga); a trial pending appeal (the case of Congolese politician and rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba); five trials closed (charges dropped for Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta; charges dismissed for Kenyan Vice President cargos William Ruto and journalist Joshua Arap Sang; charges not confirmed for JEM leader Bahar Idriss Abu Garda of the Sudanese region of Darfur; the acquittal of Congolese insurgent leader Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui; and finally the non-confirmation of charges

against Rwandan national Callixte Mbarushimana, accused of involvement in the genocide in Rwanda); five other trials under way (the case of the leader of the guerrilla group JEM, Abdallah Banda; the trial of one of the commanders of the Ugandan LRA, Dominic Ongwen; the cases of Côte d'Ivoire related to former President Laurent Gbagbo and the leader of the Jeunes Patriotes militia, Ble Goudé; the leader of the Congolese M23, Bosco Ntaganda; and the aforementioned trial of Congolese national Jean-Pierre Bemba). However, as ICC President Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi has indicated, there is a need to accelerate the trials, to get states to become new members of the ICC (at present, 124 states are signatories to the Rome Statute) and to guarantee the budget (which currently amounts to 150 million dollars), among other pending issues.

Furthermore, the issue of the expectations generated by the ICC in terms of monitoring the human rights situation in the world should be stressed. The ICC is subjected to permanent scrutiny that can be frustrating, since the expectations placed on it are high and inevitably affected by various issues, such as the role played by the UN Security Council, the obstacles and agreements that some countries like the United States have established to prevent their citizens from being tried in other member states, budget constraints and delays in the contributions of states, the pressure applied to the court by states and regional and international bodies based on their interests and many aspects that are difficult to cope with in the arena of international relations.

The third major challenge is related to legitimacy. The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) has been heavily criticised regarding its selection of cases as it is accused of being biased against Africa. Despite the fact that the OTP has currently initiated preliminary investigations ("examinations" in ICC jargon) to determine the existence of evidence in a dozen countries, including cases in Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Palestine and Ukraine,³ for the time being only one of the 10 cases currently under investigation corresponds to a non-African country. This involves the investigation into war crimes in Georgia, which began in 2016.⁴ The rest correspond to African countries: the DRC, Uganda, two cases affecting the CAR, Sudan (Darfur), Kenya, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. On the contrary, the cases that were rejected after preliminary examinations had been conducted were not African countries, such as Venezuela, South Korea and Honduras.

Although the figures seem to show a clear bias, defenders of the ICC's impartiality argue that most of these investigations have emerged from the African states themselves, through

The Office of the Prosecutor has repeatedly been accused of being biased against Africa

1. Isabel Ferrer, "África rompe con La Haya", *El País*, 26 October 2016.

2. Kevin Sief, "Gambia is the latest African country deciding to pull out of International Criminal Court", *The Washington Post*, 26 October 2016.

3. ICC, Preliminary Examinations.

4. Fatou Bensouda, "The Russia-Georgia war: why the ICC is launching war crimes probe", *The Guardian*, 24 March 2016.

explicit requests or assignments of jurisdiction, seeing the ICC as an opportunity to prosecute war criminals and seek a source of internal and international legitimacy through respect for human rights. Others have tried to use it to persecute political opponents. In other cases, non-member states like Côte d'Ivoire (when requesting intervention by the ICC) and Ukraine have accepted the ICC's ad hoc jurisdiction. Finally, only two situations were referred to the OTP by the UN Security Council (Libya and Sudan). Only the case of Kenya was proactively started by the OTP, and also only after the ICC ruled that the internal action of the country's authorities was insufficient.⁵ At the same time, the role of the states is key to overcoming issues related to the legitimacy of the ICC, since its role has been weakened by the fact that only two of the permanent members of the UN Security Council are members of the ICC (France and the United Kingdom).

The bylaws of the ICC determine that it may only investigate and try the citizens of a member state or crimes committed in the member states, in addition to those designated by the UN Security Council. Even in those cases, the ICC may not exercise its jurisdiction if the national justice system is conducting credible investigations. As a result, the fact that the United States, Russia and China are not member states means that their citizens are not subject to the jurisdiction of the court without the approval of the Security Council, a circumstance that severely restricts the ICC's actions towards those countries and their allies. An example of this situation would be Syria, as some members of the Security Council have vetoed its referral to the ICC when flagrant war crimes and crimes against humanity are being committed.⁶ Most of the 124 members of the ICC are European and Latin American countries and 34 are African (of 54), while most Arab and Middle Eastern countries are not members (except for Jordan and Tunisia) and only 18 of 50 Asian countries are. Non-members include China, Iraq, Israel, Libya, India, Iran, the United States, Pakistan, Russia,⁷ Turkey and others. As a sign of the notable influence of the ICC, on 30 November 2016, Russia also withdrew its signature from the Rome Statute one day after the ICC published a report describing the Russian annexation of Crimea as an occupation.

The fact that a significant number of conflicts are taking place in Africa and in ICC member countries (which are therefore subject to investigation), together with the increase in conflicts outside Africa and especially in the Middle East, with the significant involvement of Western powers and where people may be committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, has made this bias even more visible.⁸ However, as the authors indicate,⁹ the African countries themselves are the ones that have promoted and facilitated these investigations on the continent, which are some of the most serious in the world today. The most disagreeable issue for African leaders has been the attempt to

try two active heads of state, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. The pressure exerted by the ICC for the states to fulfil their obligations and capture al-Bashir, who has travelled to several African and Middle Eastern countries with total impunity, is a matter that has pitted the AU against the ICC because the AU has repeatedly expressed opposition to the trial of active African heads of state by the court.¹⁰ A tense atmosphere also descended upon the continent between the supporters of the ICC, including countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and others, and its detractors. Several countries among the detractors have indicated that the creation of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights would make the ICC unnecessary, although these countries have determined that the court could not try any active president.

Nevertheless, despite South Africa, the Gambia and Burundi's announcement related to their withdrawal from the ICC in October 2016, which set off all alarms, it may turn out that none will leave, which would provide some breathing room for the criticised ICC. The president-elect of the Gambia, Adama Barrow, who defeated authoritarian leader Yahya Jammeh in the election on 1 December, said that he would remain committed to the ICC, unlike his predecessor, who had denounced the bias against Africa. Burundi announced its withdrawal from the ICC when it was revealed that the ICC had begun investigations into crimes committed in the country, just like was the case with Russia. Meanwhile, there was uproar in South Africa regarding the possible withdrawal and the main South African opposition party filed a lawsuit to block the government's plans, arguing that it would be unconstitutional. Furthermore, many African activists, including South Africans, have stressed that their withdrawal could result in a rise in impunity and The Elders,¹¹ an organisation headed by leaders like Desmond Tutu, have said that South Africa's decision would be a betrayal of the struggle to promote peace and human rights that Nelson Mandela embodied.¹² One of South Africa's arguments has been its commitment to peacebuilding on the continent and the dilemma and even the incompatibility of defending human rights in some contexts versus the facilitation of negotiating processes with parties responsible for human rights violations.

Whether the countries remain or withdraw involves political decisions that must be settled politically and the withdrawal of a country as important as South Africa would certainly set a poor regional example and lead to backsliding in protecting human rights, while other countries may act in the opposite fashion, as El Salvador did when it joined the ICC in 2016. The fact that these and other countries attach so much importance to the decisions of the ICC is what ends up giving more meaning to its existence. The ICC represents the last hope for the victims of atrocities and sends an unequivocal message that nobody is above the law.

5. Charles C. Jalloh, "Kenya's Dangerous Dance with Impunity", *Jurist*, 18 August 2009.

6. UN News, "Russia, China block Security Council referral of Syria to International Criminal Court", *UN*, 27 May 2014.

7. Shaun Walker y Owen Bowcott, "Russia withdraws signature from international criminal court statute", *The Guardian*, 30 November 2016.

8. Somini Sengupta, "As 3 African Nations Vow to Exit, International Court Faces Its Own Trial", *The New York Times*, 26 October 2016.

9. Office of the Prosecutor, "Is the International Criminal Court (ICC) targeting Africa inappropriately?"

10. BBC News, "Omar al-Bashir: ICC urges S Africa to arrest Sudan leader", *BBC*, 14 June 2015.

11. The Elders, "The Elders urge all states to commit to universal, impartial International Criminal Court", 26 October 2016.

12. Somini Sengupta, Op. Cit.

Syria and the failure to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict

Coinciding with the campaign launched by the Syrian government and its allies in eastern Aleppo, a survivor of the Srebrenica massacre of 1995, in which over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed, called on international public opinion to remember the promises made at the time to “never again” permit the repetition of these kinds of atrocities.¹ However, two decades later, Aleppo and Syria have become a scenario of armed conflict characterised by brutal levels of violence against the civilian population, systematic human rights violations and continuing infringements of international humanitarian law in a context of total impunity and the indifference, if not complicity, of the international community. With over half a million fatalities since the conflict began in 2011 and more than half the population displaced inside and outside the country because of the hostilities, the war in Syria has become the worst humanitarian crisis today. Although it is not the only case, Syria is also setting a dangerous symbolic precedent on the use of violence in current conflicts and has exposed in stark fashion the weaknesses of the international framework to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict.

In Syria, the norms and principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) have been defied again and again. Designed to limit the effects of conflicts, the so-called “laws of war” aim to regulate the methods and practices used in armed conflicts and to ensure the protection of those who do not participate in the hostilities. The necessary distinction between civilians and combatants when carrying out war operations is one of the most basic rules of IHL, which has been flagrantly transgressed in Syria. In recent years, the government of Bashar Assad and its allies, responsible for most of the abuses committed as part of the war, have been continuously denounced for perpetrating indiscriminate and deliberate attacks against the civilian population through air strikes, the use of barrel bombs and even chemical weapons and offensives in densely populated areas, schools and markets. Pro-government militias have murdered unarmed civilians, like recently in Aleppo and in the emblematic Houla massacre (2012), where entire families were executed for their link with one of the armed opposition groups. Armed opposition groups have also been blamed for civilian deaths, either through indiscriminate attacks and actions that have targeted civilians in retaliation for their alleged religious affiliation or political allegiance, like campaigns against Alawite communities in Latakia.

Many reports issued by the UN and international human rights NGOs have reported many other large-scale abuses in Syria that constitute war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. Syrian government forces have been involved in killing wounded combatants and civilians and there is evidence of the systematic use of torture and abuse against thousands of people detained in government prisons in deplorable conditions. According to

an investigation led by Amnesty International published in 2016, nearly 18,000 people may have died in custody in government detention centres since 2011, an average of 300 people per month.² Thousands of other people (over 65,000, according to estimates made by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) disappeared, including opposition figures, activists, journalists, officials and soldiers suspected of deserting and people perceived as insufficiently loyal to the government. Armed opposition groups have also been accused of committing summary executions, kidnapping and torture, including ISIS, which has carried out public executions and mutilations in areas under their control in Syria. Sexual violence has also been identified as a characteristic feature of the conflict, which is sometimes used as a form of torture against men and women and in the form of sexual slavery, like in the case of ISIS. At the same time, the blockades of humanitarian aid convoys have continued, despite the adoption of UN Resolution 2258 in 2015, which sought to overcome these obstacles.

Along these lines, throughout 2016 two other practices of war intensified that were particularly damaging to the civilian population. The first of these are the sieges. According to UN estimates, in late 2016 the number of people living in besieged settlements in Syria had more than doubled, as part of a strategy used mainly, though not exclusively, by Bashar Assad’s forces. Over one million people were living under siege, in isolation, with a lack of food and health care, of which about 250,000 were in the eastern part of Aleppo controlled by rebel forces until the city fell at the end of the year. The hunger and the blockade of basic supplies, like drinking water and electricity, have been used as tactics of war in Syria in violation of international law. The effects on the civilian population have been dramatic, as also illustrated in the case of Madaya, a town besieged by pro-government forces where severe cases of malnutrition and the killing of inhabitants that tried to flee or access nearby areas in search of food were reported.

A second strategy that became more recurrent in the past year was the deliberate attack on health infrastructure and medical staff, mostly by the regime. In 2014, a report issued by Physicians for Human Rights warned that the Syrian government was responsible for 90% of the 150 attacks against health facilities in which over 460 health professionals lost their lives and in 2016, Amnesty International reported that Russia and Damascus was using the destruction of hospitals as part of a strategy of war in its Aleppo campaign. According to data collected by the UN, between January and August 2016, around 20 hospitals and clinics were destroyed in Aleppo and the surrounding area. None of them were near any military targets.³ In this context, in May 2016 the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2286, which forcefully condemns the attacks on medical staff and facilities in situations of armed conflict

1. Nedžad Avdić, “Aleppo’s people are being slaughtered. Did we learn nothing from Srebrenica?”, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2016.

2. Amnesty International, *‘It breaks the human’: Torture, disease and death in Syria’s prisons*, Amnesty International, 18 August 2016.

3. Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/33/55, 11 August 2016.

and reminds the parties to the conflict that they are obliged to respect IHL and to guarantee security and access for medical and humanitarian staff because as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, “even wars have laws”.⁴ The allusion was not only valid for Syria. The Red Cross has counted 2,400 attacks in the last three years in 11 countries. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has denounced continuous attacks on hospitals in Afghanistan, the CAR, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen, and has warned that four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are involved in military coalitions that have been responsible for these kinds of attacks. In Syria, in any case, the resolution did not discourage the use of this strategy. The offensives continued, including one that destroyed a convoy and killed 18 Red Crescent officials in October 2016.

Syria has been the scene of massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, setting a dangerous precedent

In this scenario, the war in Syria and the dynamics of violence in other contexts have warned of the risk that after 150 years of the development of IHL, the system for protecting civilians in conflict zones is collapsing.⁵ The UN has warned of the dangers of “contagion” in not respecting or undermining IHL and human rights, in encouraging other states and/or armed actors to follow this path. The key issue remains how to get the parties to stick to the IHL and human rights framework, whether from conviction or from fear of the consequences. In statements on Syria that are also applicable to other contexts, Carla del Ponte, a member of the International Commission of Inquiry into the war in the country, insisted on the obligation of foreign powers with influence over the parties to the conflict to wield it and on the responsibility they have when continuing to provide weapons that have fuelled the cycle of violence due to the obvious risk that they may be used to commit abuses.⁶ In practice, however, approaches to the Syrian crisis have been shaped by the disparate interests of the regional and international powers involved in it. Amidst division and deadlock in the UN Security Council, this has led, for example, to Russia and China’s persistent veto to reject condemnation of the Syrian government for the atrocities perpetrated and the investigation of Syria by the International Criminal Court.

The situation in Syria has also called into question the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. Adopted by the UN in 2005 with the intention of preventing episodes like the Rwandan genocide and the massacre in Srebrenica, R2P proposed that states are the primary bodies in charge of protecting their citizens in the case of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing, but when states fail

or are unwilling to do so (in part due to the possibility that they are the perpetrators of the violence), R2P is transferred to the international community. Of limited use, this doctrine is not considered to have been applied to Syria, in part as a consequence of the experience in Libya. In the North African country, a UN resolution that alluded (though only partially) to R2P principles and authorised the use of force ended up

being used by a Western military coalition in favour of regime change. However, R2P advocates remind that the possibility of intervention is the most extreme choice for implementing the doctrine, which also asserts that the international community must exercise its duty to protect civilians through diplomatic and humanitarian means. In this context, it should be noted that one of the few points of agreement in the UN Security Council occurred after the chemical weapon attack that killed over 1,400 people in 2013, an eminently indiscriminate and brutal

attack that was blamed on the regime and that led to a plan to destroy its chemical arsenals. While unanimous agreement was reached on this issue, no measures were taken to avoid the impact of the other conventional weapons responsible for most of the fatalities of the conflict. Despite the measures taken, chemical weapon attacks were reported again. In this regard, experts have stressed that the lack of accountability is encouraging more extreme forms of violence and destruction.⁷ Faced with the realisation that the UN Security Council is failing not only in applying R2P, but also in its more basic duty to promote peace and security, some analysts warn of deepening criticism of the dynamics of the Security Council and its architecture of asymmetrical power and stress that initiatives have been activated that seek to establish a code of conduct so that vetoes can not be used in cases of mass crime.

Finally, Syria, which in recent years has become the primary source of refugees, has also highlighted the erosion of the human rights framework and the lack of respect for conventions on refugees shown by many countries that signed the treaty. The example of Europe, which has opted for security responses, border outsourcing and return policies, is illustrative of the extremely vulnerable situation faced by the civilian population fleeing conflicts like the one in Syria and so many others. Faced with this set of trends, efforts should be redoubled to ensure civilian protection in accordance with the principles of IHL and international human rights law, insist on seeking ways to stop violence and activate mechanisms of accountability to ensure that the crimes and atrocities committed as part of the armed conflict in Syria and other places do not go unpunished.

4. United Nations, *Security Council Adopts Resolution 2286 (2016) Strongly Condemning Attack against Medical Facilities, Personnel in Conflict Situations*, Meetings Coverage, SC/12347, 3 May 2016.
5. Jan Egeland and Stephen Obrian, “International humanitarian law is unravelling before our eyes”, *The Guardian*, 25 March 2016.
6. Carla Del Ponte, “The Case of Syria”, *Respecting IHL: Challenges and responses*, IIHL, 2015.
7. Simon Adams, *Failure to Protect: Syria and the UN Security Council*, *Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect*, Ocasional Paper Series no.5, March 2015.

ANNEX: Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios in previous years

Opportunities for peace

2016

- ■ The resumption of negotiations in Cyprus: the definitive peace process?
- ■ New political era in Burkina Faso after the transitional stage ends
- ■ Exploration of scenarios of peace in southern Thailand
- ■ The transition to democracy and peace in Myanmar
- ■ The gender perspective in peace processes: inclusiveness and sustainability

2015

- ■ Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dossier: a renewed commitment to dialogue
- ■ Sudan's National Dialogue, one of the last hopes for peace in the country
- ■ The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda
- ■ The confluence of global efforts against child recruitment
- ■ Integrating peace and development: progress on the international agenda for gender equality

2014

- ■ Iran and nuclear talks: an opportunity beyond the atomic dispute
- ■ The Colombian Women's Truth and Memory Commission, a feminist approach to peacebuilding and recovering memory
- ■ The peace process in Mindanao: inclusivity and a gender perspective
- ■ West Papua: the diplomatic internationalisation of a forgotten conflict
- ■ Serbia and Kosovo, from antagonism to the pragmatic normalisation of relations
- ■ The European Court of Human Rights and Chechnya: though limited, the only recourse to justice
- ■ The defeat of the armed group M23, a new opportunity for peace in the Great Lakes region

2013

- ■ Georgia: a new post-election boost for relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia?
- ■ A peace agreement for Nagaland
- ■ The signing of a peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF in Mindanao
- ■ Senegal: prospects of a negotiated outcome to the conflict in Casamance
- ■ Colombia: towards a peace agreement with the guerrillas
- ■ A strong treaty to control the arms trade: a second attempt?
- ■ Young people: an engine for change and dialogue in contexts of conflict?

2012

- ■ The Arab Spring and the Tunisian way
- ■ Myanmar: an opportunity for democratic reforms and a transformation of the conflict
- ■ Serbia, Kosovo and Northern Kosovo: the challenge of cooperation
- ■ The cessation of hostilities in the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia
- ■ New agreements for the consolidation of peace in Nepal
- ■ The dialogue on Transdniestria
- ■ The Arms Trade Treaty and the new challenges of disarmament

2011

- ■ UN Women, the New Body for the Defence of Gender Equity
- ■ The United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons
- ■ Self-Determination Referendum in Southern Sudan
- ■ An Opportunity for Dialogue in Colombia
- ■ Peace Processes in the State of Assam (India)
- ■ The Resumption of Peace Talks in the Philippines
- ■ The Achievement of Lasting Peace in the Basque Country

2010

- ■ Ten years of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
- ■ The International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- ■ The African Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons
- ■ Initiative to resolve the Kurdish question in Turkey
- ■ Peace negotiations in the Niger Delta (Nigeria)

2009

- ■ The Geneva Declaration: a reduction in armed violence for 2015
- ■ The peace agreement in Burundi
- ■ The Inclusive Political Dialogue in Central African Republic
- ■ Openness for peace in Colombia
- ■ The consolidation of peace in Nepal
- ■ The negotiations for reunifying Cyprus
- ■ The inclusion of Syria into the regional peace picture
- ■ The application of the EU's Common Position on arms trade
- ■ The closure of Guantanamo as a turning point on the present human rights crisis
- ■ Resolution 1820 on sexual violence as a weapon of war

2008

- ■ The peace process in northern Uganda
- ■ The implementation of the peace agreement in Côte d'Ivoire
- ■ The signing of the peace agreement in the southern Philippines
- ■ The consolidation of the transition process in Haiti
- ■ The creation of a Truth Commission and International Criminal Court in Burundi
- ■ The process of dialogue and transition for Myanmar
- ■ The signing of an international treaty for the banning of cluster bombs
- ■ The impact of the United Nations Declaration on indigenous peoples in the resolution of conflicts

Risk scenarios

2016

- ■ On the brink of civil war in Burundi
- ■ Mali: jihadist group activities threaten stability
- ■ DRC faced with the risk of an escalation of political instability and armed conflict in 2016
- ■ South Sudan: a very fragile peace agreement
- ■ Venezuela, a new political scenario marked by polarised branches of government
- ■ Afghanistan: the lack of legitimacy of the new Taliban leadership and its impact on the peace process
- ■ Philippines: The peace process in Mindanao, at the crossroads
- ■ The conflict between Turkey and the PKK: the risks of further deterioration
- ■ Armed violence in Yemen: a new and invisible Syria?
- ■ The jihadist threat and its destabilising effects worldwide

2015

- ■ The threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria: risks for human security and impacts on the region
- ■ Libya: a land of fragmentation, institutional fragility, regional disputes and mounting violence
- ■ The escalation of violence in the Chinese region of Xinjiang
- ■ Urban violence in Pakistan: Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, scenarios of conflict and tension
- ■ The war in Ukraine: few prospects of a solution
- ■ Haiti: the risk of a power vacuum and a worsening political and social crisis
- ■ The expansion of al-Shabaab into Kenya: at the doors of a new armed conflict

2014

- ■ Global challenge: forced displacement of population at the worst level since the 1990s
- ■ Iraq: Devastating toll of a decade of war amidst growing turmoil
- ■ Internationalisation and radicalisation of the conflict in Syria and its destabilising regional impact
- ■ Eritrea facing a possible implosion of the state with unforeseeable consequences

- Thailand: a decade of protests and an uncertain future
- Increasing violence in the Chinese province of Xinjiang
- The dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the struggle for power in East Asia
- Turkey-PKK talks: internal Turkish crisis and regional instability

2013

- Dagestan, between militarisation and an acute human rights crisis
- An uncertain future in Myanmar?
- Complex challenges 15 years on from the Tajikistan peace agreement
- The possible resumption of the armed conflict between the government and the MNLF in the south of the Philippines
- Self-immolations in Tibet, a symptom of desperation
- The possible reconstitution of the army in Haiti
- Unmanned aerial vehicles: the challenges of remote-controlled warfare
- The pending closure of Guantanamo
- Kenya, faced with growing instability in 2013
- Rwanda and the FDLR, cause and consequence of the instability in the Great Lakes
- Violence and the Syrian forced displacement crisis
- The crisis in Mali and security challenges in the Sahel

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It was created in 1999 with the aim of promoting the culture of peace through research, parallel diplomacy, training and awareness generating activities. Its main scope of action includes analysing conflicts, peace processes, gender, human rights and transnational justice, and education for peace.

The fields of action of the Escola de Cultura de Pau are:

- **Research.** Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.
- **Second track diplomacy.** The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through second track initiatives, including facilitation tasks with armed actors.
- **Consultancy services.** The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.
- **Teaching and training.** ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.
- **Advocacy and awareness-raising.** Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.



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