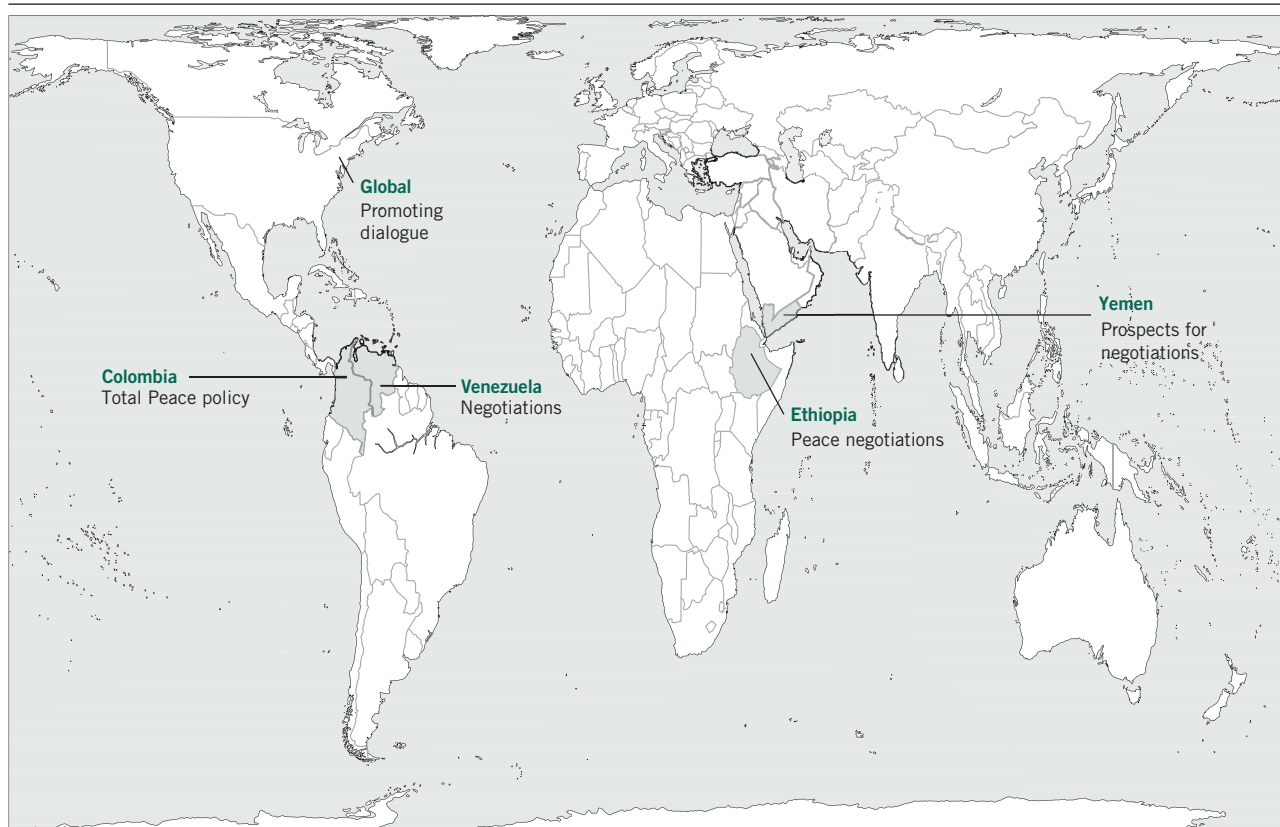


4. Opportunities for peace

After analysing the year 2022 from the perspective of conflicts and peacebuilding,¹ in this chapter the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace highlights five areas that are opportunities for peace in the future. They are contexts where there is, or has been, an armed conflict or socio-political crisis in the past where a series of factors converge that could lead to a positive transformation. The opportunities for peace identified refer to a window for peace in Ethiopia, following the cessation of hostilities in Tigray and the start of talks on the conflict in Oromia; to the possibilities of transforming the armed conflicts in Colombia as part of the Total Peace proposal of President Gustavo Petro; to the establishment of a national and international context more conducive to resolving the crisis in Venezuela through dialogue between the government and the majority opposition faction; to the falling levels of violence and convergence of local and regional factors that could favour a negotiated approach to the armed conflict in Yemen; and to the importance of committing to conflict prevention and negotiated conflict resolution in international contexts of seriously deteriorating human security, where initiatives such as the UN-backed New Agenda for Peace are becoming more important.

All these opportunities for peace will require the effort and real commitment of the parties involved and, where appropriate, the support of international actors so that the synergies and positive factors already present foster peacebuilding. As such, the analysis by the School for a Culture of Peace aims to provide a realistic vision of these scenarios and themes, identifying the positive aspects that encourage expectations of change while also highlighting the existing difficulties and problems that could hinder their crystallisation as opportunities for peace.

Map 4.1. Opportunities for peace



1. The analysis of each context is based on the yearly review of the events that occurred in 2022 and includes some important factors and dynamics of the first four months of 2023.

4.1. Ethiopia, facing a new window of opportunity for peacebuilding

Ethiopia is immersed in a complex range of challenges, profound changes and instability that has gotten worse in recent years. Adding to this instability was the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Tigray region in November 2020 and the serious escalation of violence in the Oromia region during 2022. The permanent cessation of hostilities reached between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayan political and military authorities, as well as the start of peace talks in Oromia with the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), could present a new opportunity for the country to start moving down a new political path, albeit beset with risks and fragility.

The regime that has ruled Ethiopia since 1991 has faced a series of opposition movements calling for progress in the country's democracy and governance, as well as a greater degree of self-rule. The government coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), was controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party of the Tigray minority, which ruled the country between 1991 and 2019 with increasing authoritarianism and the blessing of the Amhara elites. The ethnic federal regime entrenched by the EPRDF has not resolved the national issue, prompting stiff political and social opposition. Some political and military groups argue that ethnic federalism cannot meet their national needs, while parts of the ruling classes and across the country as a whole consider ethnic federalism a brake on the establishment of a nation state and demand the democratisation of institutions.

The massive social demonstrations that began in 2014 and were repressed with extreme violence contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in early 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed. The latter undertook a series of reforms² aimed at mitigating ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. However, the changes introduced by Abiy Ahmed's government caused tension, especially between the PP-controlled federal government and the TPLF, which culminated in the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray that has caused thousands of deaths and serious human rights violations. There was an escalation of violence by the armed group OLA in 2022 and a rise in crackdowns by federal security forces and pro-government paramilitary groups in the Oromia region alongside the peace negotiations between the federal government and the military and political

authorities of the Tigray region. These negotiations may have drawn the international community's attention away from the situation in Oromia, according to various analysts.

On 2 November 2022, the government and the political and military authorities of the Tigray region reached a permanent ceasefire agreement in Pretoria (South Africa). It was preceded by the breaking of the humanitarian truce in force between March and August. Various analysts and members of the diaspora cited the humanitarian disaster as the main issue that pushed the Tigrayan authorities to negotiate and accept the agreement, which could be interpreted as a concession made by the TPLF. Details of the agreement demonstrated this, with its effective implementation left in the hands of the

The agreement reached between the federal government and the political and military authorities of Tigray, as well as the start of peace talks with the armed group Oromo Liberation Army, could present a new opportunity for the country to start moving down a new political path

federal government. First, Eritrea was not part of the agreement, so it was not forced to accept any of the provisions established by the Ethiopian federal government. Second, the limited scope of the ceasefire supervision mechanism and the exclusion of the UN, US, EU and IGAD from signing the agreement, as they were merely observers of the process, raised doubts about its actual implementation on the ground and demonstrated the success of Ethiopia's strategy to exclude the international community. Third, the agreement established that the Ethiopian federal government should restore authority in the region until new elections were held and the federal government proposed a global policy of national transitional justice without

mentioning any international investigation mechanism for crimes committed in the region, as highlighted by HRW and Amnesty International. Added to this were the initial ceasefire violations by the Ethiopian and Eritrean security forces and the Amhara militias against the TPLF since the agreement was signed, which stressed the difficulties in implementing it and the fragility of the situation.

However, the implementation of the agreement has so far been positive. In the following weeks, the Tigrayan political and military leadership agreed and began to effectively disarm its fighters and dissolved the regional government that emerged from the 2020 elections (not recognised by the federal government and which led to the war). The UN World Food Programme (WFP) then began to distribute humanitarian aid. On 12 November, the parties signed the Declaration of the Senior Commanders on the Modalities for the Implementation of the Agreement for lasting peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities in Nairobi, which stipulated the delivery of heavy weapons and the demobilisation

2. For instance, Abiy dissolved the EPRDF coalition and refounded it in December 2019 as a new national party that shuns ethnic federalism, the Prosperity Party (PP), which the TPLF did not want to join.

of combatants, the restoration of public services in Tigray, the reactivation of aid and the withdrawal of all armed groups and foreign forces, in reference to Eritrea, which fought alongside the Ethiopian Army. The establishment of the AU monitoring mission was agreed on 22 December, as provided in the agreement, and the mission was launched on 29 December. Eritrea gradually withdrew from most cities in Tigray and by February 2023 its forces had practically left the region and only a few minor units remained in strategic positions in border areas, according to TPLF negotiating leader Getachew Reda,³ while the political and military authorities of Tigray handed over heavy weaponry in the presence of the AU monitoring mission. In December and January, humanitarian access to the region improved substantially, according to United Nations sources,⁴ and communications and commercial flights were restored. On 3 February, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed met with the leaders of the TPLF for the first time since 2020. The following day, the national security advisor and leading negotiator for the federal government, Redwan Hussein, announced the delivery of 90 million dollars to the central bank of Tigray to increase its cash flow. Days later, the TPLF established a committee to form an interim administration. In early March, Tigray's leaders held a conference to agree on the composition of the interim administration, which was boycotted by three opposition Tigrayan parties that accused the TPLF of monopolising power. On 17 March, the TPLF chose Getachew Reda to chair the Interim Regional Administration (IRA) and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ratified his appointment. Days later, Parliament removed the TPLF from the list of terrorist groups and the government dropped the charges against its political and military leaders, an essential requirement to form the IRA. Getachew Reda appointed the members of the IRA on 5 April.

However, various pending substantive issues reveal the fragility of the agreement, as some analysts point out.⁵ First is the the political debate about the national issue, ethnic federalism and tension between the centre and the periphery, which is still pending to resolve this and other sources of instability in the country. Second is the fight against impunity for serious human rights violations committed in the region. In late February, it was leaked that Addis Ababa had been seeking support to end the UN-ordered investigation into the atrocities in Tigray. More than 60 human rights organisations urged the UN Human Rights Council, which will discuss the complaints in March, to reject the request. US Secretary

of State Antony Blinken visited the country in March and noted that all parties were responsible for crimes against humanity. Third, tensions between the Amhara community and the Oromo community led in April to the Ethiopian federal government's announcement that it would disarm and dissolve the paramilitary militias of the Amhara region and integrate them into the Ethiopian Police and the Ethiopian Army. These militias have been found responsible for crimes against humanity. These actions led to an escalation in fighting between the Fano militia and its sympathisers and activists against the Ethiopian Army and the establishment of a curfew in the region. In mid-April, the fighting began to subside. Fourth is the conflict between the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the Ethiopian federal government, with the support of the Amharic Fano paramilitary militia, which escalated seriously during the second half of 2022, causing hundreds of fatalities. After the agreement was signed between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal government and once its positive implementation had begun, the federal authorities escalated military action against the OLA. Pressure from the local government of the Oromia region as well as the OLA and the federal authorities' shared interest in reaching some kind of truce led to various indirect exploratory meetings in February 2023 between both parties, expressing their interest in a cessation of hostilities. Amid the violence, in March Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said he was committed to exploring a negotiating process with the OLA and peace talks began in Tanzania on 25 April. Peace negotiations began in Zanzibar with the facilitation of Kenya (the OLA had demanded the mediation of a third party)⁶ on behalf of the regional authority IGAD and Norway.⁷ Though the first round ended without progress in early May, both parties expressed their commitment to a seeking a solution to the conflict.⁸

In short, although there is a broad consensus on the positive implementation of the peace agreement between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal government, there are many sources of fragility that could reverse the positive progress made thus far. Continuous attention from the social and political opposition, as well as from the Ethiopian federal government and pressure from the international community is essential to continue advancing in the process to implement the peace agreement, as well as the dialogue between the OLA and the Ethiopian federal government and the fight against impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Tigray.

3. Crisis Watch, *Ethiopia - February 2023*, International Crisis Group, 1 February 2023.

4. Harter, Fred, *Tigray aid access improves as peace deal makes headway*, The New Humanitarian, 31 January 2023.

5. Davison, William, *What now for the Ethiopia-Tigray peace deal?*, International Crisis Group, 30 December 2022.

6. OLA Command, *Regarding Peace Negotiations*, OLF-OLA Press Release, 23 April 2023.

7. Kombe, Charles, *Peace Talks Between Ethiopian Government, OLA Continue in Tanzania*, VOA, 27 April 2023.

8. Paravicini, Giulia, *First round of peace talks between Ethiopia and Oromo rebels ends without deal*, Reuters, 3 May 2023.

4.2. “Total Peace”, an ambitious peace policy for Colombia

The new government of Colombia, led by President Gustavo Petro, is promoting a public peace-building policy known as “Total Peace”, which may present an opportunity to transform the different conflicts affecting the country. Colombia faces many different challenges, given the ongoing political and criminal violence, serious human rights violations and lack of human security, as well as different armed and political actors’ opposition to a negotiated solution to the conflicts. This new policy intends to transcend the limits of the peace negotiations that have taken place with different armed opposition groups active in the country in previous decades, trying to involve all the armed actors operating in the country in different processes, whether they have political agendas or are involved in organised crime activities, such as drug trafficking. Gustavo Petro won the June 2022 election on a platform that included a broad commitment to building peace in the country, both by implementing the peace agreement reached in 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC and in new peace negotiations with the ELN and other armed actors active in the country. During the administration of President Iván Duque and his proposal for “peace with legality”, the implementation of the Havana peace agreement suffered due to Bogotá’s lack of commitment, with significant delays, a lack of resources and even deliberate obstruction. Thus, Petro’s rise to power marks the beginning of a new governmental approach towards the different violent conflicts that have shaken the country for decades and a new impetus for achieving the lasting implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC.

The government of Colombia is promoting a public peacebuilding policy called “Total Peace”, which can be an opportunity to transform the different conflicts affecting the country through dialogue

Legislation for “Total Peace” (Law 2272) was enacted in November by extending and amending Law 418 of 1997. This law, which was passed under the government of Ernesto Samper, has allowed Colombian presidents to conduct peace negotiations with armed groups and design security policies. Under the protection of this law, different governments have conducted negotiations and pursued rapprochement with armed groups. The new law establishes that “peace policy will be a priority and cut across state affairs. It will be participatory, broad, inclusive and comprehensive, both in relation to implementing agreements and to negotiating processes, dialogue and the submission to justice”.⁹ Different facets and processes of peacebuilding are included under this umbrella of “Total Peace”, such as the implementation of the peace agreement reached in 2016 between the FARC and the Colombian government; peace negotiations with illegal armed groups involving

political talks, particularly the negotiations with the ELN currently under way; negotiations with high-impact armed criminal organisations, including drug traffickers and paramilitaries; and dialogue with the local population in different areas of the country to guide public policy based on the needs of civil society.

Several specific initiatives have been launched since the new government was sworn in, some of them enormously significant for ending armed violence in the country. The first is the dialogue with the ELN, which has taken place in several rounds of negotiations between the government and the armed group.¹⁰ The process has stood out for its high degree of internationalisation and support by different actors. It began in November 2022 in Venezuela with a first round of talks, followed by another two in Mexico and Cuba. Norway, Venezuela, Cuba, Brazil, Chile and Mexico participate in the process as guarantor countries, and Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain as supporting countries. The US has also been invited to send a special envoy to it. Despite some snags and disagreements between the parties, the negotiations are moving forward under the leadership of Otty Patiño as chief negotiator for the Colombian government and Pablo Beltrán for the ELN, to the point that in June 2023 a ceasefire agreement was reached.

Once the talks with the ELN had begun, on 31 December, President Petro announced a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the ELN, the Second Marquetalia, Estado Mayor Central, the AGC and the Conquistador Self-Defence Forces of the Sierra Nevada spanning from 1 January to 30 June 2023, which could be extended depending on the progress made in the negotiations. Two days later, the ELN denied that a bilateral agreement had been reached, but both the Second Marquetalia and Estado Mayor Central responded positively to the ceasefire. After several months of negotiations, the ELN and the government managed to agree to a ceasefire.

In addition to the dialogue with the ELN, the government announced a negotiating process with a group known as Estado Mayor Central, which started out as a FARC dissident group before the 2016 peace agreement was signed and is led by Iván Mordisco. In April, the Colombian government indicated that an Oversight, Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVMV) would be set up for the ceasefire between the national government and Estado Mayor Central. Yet in May, President Petro suspended the ceasefire with this group in several parts of the country as a result

9. Law 2272 of 2022.

10. See the summary on Colombia (ELN) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2022: Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

of the murder of four indigenous minors who had been forcibly recruited, thereby demonstrating the fragility and difficulties of the process. Rapprochement with the Second Marquetalia was also announced, though the very nature of this FARC dissident group, which abandoned the 2016 agreement once it was signed, posed additional problems for new talks. Also in March, the ceasefire with the Gulf Clan had ended. Though some rapprochement had been achieved with this paramilitary organisation, its demands for political recognition and the start of a negotiating process equivalent to the one carried out with the ELN was rejected by the government, which was waiting for talks to agree on ways to submit to justice. Overall, Bogotá indicated in May that it was carrying out different types of negotiations with the ELN, the Gulf Clan, Estado Mayor Central, the Second Marquetalia and the Conquistador Self-Defence Forces of the Sierra Nevada (ACSN).

“Total Peace” is an ambitious project, as it seeks to resolve a multifaceted and entrenched conflict led by many different armed actors. The challenges of

conducting separate peace processes simultaneously are clear and enormous institutional strength is required for multiple negotiating teams to make headway in processes of enormous complexity at the same time. The “Total Peace” proposal has given rise to great expectations that must be handled skilfully to respond to the frustrations that may arise if the main objectives are not achieved. Other main challenges include the possibility of ending drug trafficking and other highly lucrative illicit businesses through dialogue. Organised criminals’ demand for recognition as political actors will also have to be addressed with short-, medium- and long-term strategies embracing the international dimension of drug trafficking and organised crime. Thus, Gustavo Petro’s government must be able to weave a web of interdependent processes, but in which the failure of any one does not necessarily imply the failure of the “Total Peace” policy as a whole. Strengthening what should be the main pillars of this policy, the negotiations with the ELN and the implementation of the 2016 agreement should be a priority to underpin a highly ambitious strategy, but it is also one that is full of risks.

4.3. A more conducive domestic, regional and international context for a negotiated resolution to the crisis in Venezuela

In late April 2023, the Colombian government of Gustavo Petro organised an international conference on Venezuela in Bogotá that enjoyed the participation of representatives from 20 countries and the support of the government of Venezuela, the Venezuelan opposition represented by the Unitary Platform and the US government. The objective of the meeting was mainly to agree on the conditions to resume the talks that Caracas and the opposition began in Mexico in August 2021 with the government of Norway facilitating, which were interrupted in November 2022 shortly after an agreement was reached on social investments with Venezuelan funds frozen abroad. Though the conference did not yield any important breakthrough or resume the talks between the government and the opposition, the fact that it was held and the emergence of some international, regional and internal Venezuelan structural factors in recent times offer some windows of opportunity for negotiations between the Maduro government and the opposition.

The international conference on Venezuela was held on 25 April after many previous meetings between Gustavo Petro and Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan opposition and US President Biden, among other actors, and ended with a statement of conclusions, which mainly pivoted around three commitments: the establishment of an electoral schedule to hold free and transparent elections with full guarantees for all Venezuelan actors; the gradual lifting of sanctions against the Venezuelan government as the agreed promises are fulfilled; and the resumption of the talks in Mexico, accompanied by the implementation of the Social Investment Trust Fund in Venezuela. The fund, which should be filled by Venezuelan monetary assets frozen abroad (around 3.2 billion dollars) and managed by the United Nations, was agreed on in November 2022 during the negotiations in Mexico. Even if most analysts thought that the conference would be unable to resume the talks in Mexico in the short term and that its results had not lived up to expectations, Petro promised to maintain contact with the parties and to convene a new meeting (with a format and date to be determined) to specify and follow up on the commitments made. Though neither Maduro nor US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken ultimately attended the conference, despite initial speculation, it received significant international support for its conflict resolution efforts, with representatives of 20 countries attending, many of them in Latin America, as well as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The fact that Mexico and Norway, which respectively host and facilitate the official negotiations between the two parties, were

present at the Bogotá summit, demonstrates strategic complementarity and diplomatic coordination between the formal negotiations and the Colombian initiative.

The conference in Bogotá also reveals a certain depolarisation in Latin America regarding the crisis in Venezuela. The coming to power of some more progressive governments (as in Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Peru and Mexico) has resulted in more conciliatory or pragmatic policies towards the Venezuelan government. The government of Mexico, for example, decided to host the negotiations between Caracas and the Unitary Platform, which formally began in August 2021. Especially significant has been the change in diplomatic relations since Gustavo Petro came to power in August 2022. Petro not only reestablished diplomatic and commercial relations with Caracas (interrupted during Iván Duque's administration), but he met up to five times with Nicolás Maduro in the first stretch of his term to address different issues of mutual concern, such as the negotiations with the ELN and the flow of Venezuelan migrants to Colombia. The organisation of the international conference on Venezuela also illustrates the current Colombian president's desire to play an active role in resolving the political conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Another indicator of a regional context less likely to force alternation in Venezuela through political and economic isolation is the end of the activity of the Lima Group since late 2022, with Bolsonaro leaving power in Brazil. The Lima Group was created in August 2017 by 14 countries with the support of the US, the OAS and the EU primarily to force the end of the Maduro government. It ignored the mandate and legality of the Maduro government and instead recognised Juan Guaidó as president of the country.

Along the same lines, the US government is also showing a more conciliatory position towards the Venezuelan government. Though it is still one of the few countries that still recognises and supports Juan Guaidó, relations between both countries have improved substantially since the end of the Trump administration. Several analysts have said that the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Washington's need to find alternative sources to Moscow for its oil supply contributed decisively to the rapprochement between the two governments. There have been direct meetings between representatives of the US government and Nicolás Maduro since March 2022 and in early October, in what some media outlets considered the most important agreement between the two countries since Biden took office, they agreed to a prisoner exchange in a third country, which included

seven US citizens imprisoned in Venezuela and two nephews of Maduro's wife arrested by the DEA and serving an 18-year sentence in the US. In November, shortly after the signing of the agreement between Caracas and the opposition, Washington announced that it had authorised the oil company Chevron to resume its oil drilling operations in Venezuela to export it to the US. The Venezuelan government announced the signing of several agreements between the national oil company PDVSA and Chevron. Finally, at the end of 2022, Maduro declared that his government was fully prepared to normalise diplomatic relations with the US.

Domestically, there also seems to have been some rapprochement between the government and part of the opposition. In November 2022 in Mexico, the government and the opposition reached an agreement facilitated by Norway in which they both pledged to carry out all national and international efforts aimed at progressively recovering more than 3 billion dollars of frozen state assets abroad to finance social programmes for health, education and food. Even though the agreement has not been fully implemented and the parties have not officially met since then to address issues such as the electoral schedule, conditions and guarantees, the release of detainees or the human rights situation, the mere formal existence of a negotiating process, as well as both parties' willingness to attend the conference in Bogotá, shows their greater pragmatism and confidence in reaching agreements to move the situation forward.

The opposition recently seems to have lost enthusiasm for Juan Guaidó's less conciliatory and more polarising rhetoric. Indeed, in December 2022 the National Assembly, elected in 2015 (which the opposition considers the only legitimate body in the country and was outlawed by the government), decreed an end to Guaidó's interim government and presidency based on the view that it is not an instrument of real change. Guaidó criticised the move, arguing that it strengthens the Maduro government, but there had been previous indicators that international support for Guaidó had waned. In January 2022, for example, the National Assembly had extended Guaidó's interim presidency for one year, but it also shrank the bureaucratic structure that supported him. On 19 October, Latin American countries voted against allowing the Guaidó government to represent Venezuela in the OAS. Some parts of the opposition not necessarily represented in the Unitary Platform, such as former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, welcomed the agreement reached by the government and the opposition in November 2022, saying that it tries to coordinate relief for the population's urgent social needs and deal with the humanitarian crisis gripping the country by improving structural aspects such as the separation of

The conference in Bogotá revealed a certain depolarisation in Latin America regarding the crisis in Venezuela

powers, democratic rules, the rule of law and the re-institutionalisation of the state.

The government has also made moves that seem to show greater internal liberalisation and a propensity for certain concessions. For example, after several months of negotiations with opposition groups not included in the Unitary Platform, and criticised by it for arguing that its political action legitimises the Venezuelan government, Caracas agreed to allow those groups to appoint two of the five members of the National Electoral Council, the highest authority on electoral matters. Along the same lines, several analysts concluded that the 2021 regional and local elections were fairer, freer and more competitive than any previous elections since 2015. In fact, Caracas invited an EU electoral mission to validate the election and make a series of recommendations on electoral matters at the same time. According to the International Crisis Group research centre, two or three things could bring about rapprochement between the government and the opposition, such as improving the electoral census (which currently excludes millions of citizens), appointing independent local election workers and monitoring the next presidential election. Furthermore, the Provea organisation declared that in 2022, arbitrary detentions had fallen by 83% compared to 2021. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict also indicated that the number of protests dropped substantially in 2022 and that the security forces and armed civilian bodies had acted less repressively in containing the demonstrations compared to previous years.

Despite all the above, the negotiating processes are facing major challenges. The conference in Bogotá yielded less ambitious results than expected. It did not substantially change Washington's position that it will not relax sanctions until Caracas takes clear and unequivocal steps towards holding free and competitive elections. Likewise, the Venezuelan government still refuses to resume talks with the Unitary Platform on political issues until its frozen assets abroad are released. Some senior government officials have also demanded other conditions for resuming the talks in Mexico, such as lifting sanctions and involving Alex Saab, a Colombian businessman close to Caracas extradited to the US from Cape Verde in October 2021. The opposition and several NGOs think that the human rights situation in the country remains very insecure. In November 2022, for example, International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan formally asked the Pre-Trial Chamber for authorisation to continue with the investigation opened in November 2021 into the alleged commission of crimes against humanity in Venezuela since April 2017.

However, both sides still have incentives to resume dialogue and reach a political agreement. After several years of mass demonstrations and the remarkable international recognition of an alternative president, Juan Guaidó, the opposition seems convinced that the only option to achieve a change of government is through elections. Give the Venezuelan government's resilience to international pressure and popular protests, any improvement in electoral conditions seems to inevitably require a deal with the government. From Caracas' point of view, the country's insecure economic situation makes it urgent to relax international sanctions. As of December 2022, there were more than seven

million Venezuelan migrants or refugees worldwide and, according to the IOM, 7.7 million people in the country in need of humanitarian aid. According to some analysts, both international sanctions and the lack of foreign investment are hindering the production and sale of Venezuelan crude oil, one of the main assets of the country's economy. A regional and international context more conducive to a negotiated solution to the crisis in Venezuela would undoubtedly maximise the incentives for both parties to negotiate and make it easier to explore options to overcome the institutional deadlock and the political and social tension in the country since Maduro came to power a decade ago.

4.4. Decisive opportunity? Challenges for a sustainable and inclusive peace in Yemen

Yemen is at a critical juncture. After eight years of a high-intensity armed conflict that has claimed many thousands of lives, the country has an unprecedented and decisive opportunity to try to put an end to hostilities. This expectation has been built on the basis of a series of recent local and regional events that point to the shaping of a context apparently more conducive for addressing the conflict through negotiated and political means, including a truce that has significantly reduced the violence and that has generally been upheld, despite not being formally renewed; the establishment of a negotiating channel between Riyadh and the Houthis under the mediation of Oman; the rapprochement and restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran with the possibility of repercussions in Yemen, given their role in the conflict there; and the commitment of Yemeni actors to make progress in implementing some agreements. However, a careful analysis of these and other dynamics leads to conclude that there are still important challenges ahead of any prospects for a sustainable and inclusive peace in Yemen.

One unquestionable factor is the drop in levels of direct violence in the country as a result of the truce agreement signed in April 2022 between the main contending parties: the internationally recognised government, deposed in 2014 and supported by Saudi Arabia; and the Houthi forces. After a period of intensified hostilities, this UN-backed ceasefire, the first nationwide ceasefire since 2016, has significantly reduced the number of deaths in the conflict, decreased levels of forced displacement and relatively improved the very serious food insecurity situation affecting the population. Despite the formal collapse of the truce, which was renewed twice, but not the third time, in October 2022, important stipulations have remained in force that are significant for the humanitarian situation in the country. There have also been no large-scale armed operations and the lines of the main battlefronts have remained stable, despite an increase in acts of violence in 2023. The effects of the truce have been held up as tangible proof of the positive possibilities of approaching the conflict through negotiations. Hostilities are at their lowest levels in recent years, but the situation is fragile. The UN special envoy for Yemen has tried to get the parties to formally renew the ceasefire for a longer period and move forward on other issues that have been agenda items in the negotiations sponsored by the UN in recent years. As a result of these efforts, a massive prisoner exchange took place in April 2023, resulting in the release of almost 900 people. This prisoner swap, which implemented

part of the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, shows the possibilities of understanding and compromise between the Houthis and the Riyadh-backed Yemeni government, though they have not made headway on other issues of disagreement.

Since the last quarter of 2022, the most substantive dialogue has been in the direct negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis mediated by Oman. This channel was begun in October after the ceasefire could not be formally renewed, a failure attributed to the Houthis for including additional demands in the UN-sponsored process. This format suits the interests of the Houthis, who prefer to deal with Riyadh as an interlocutor. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's decision to get involved in this way has been interpreted as further evidence of its interest in withdrawing from a costly armed conflict that has spread beyond what it had envisaged and in which none of its objectives have been achieved: restoring the deposed government; defeating the Houthis, who have tightened their hold on an important part of the country; or keeping away an armed actor with alleged ties with Iran. Indeed, Tehran has strengthened ties with and provided political and military support to the Houthis throughout the conflict.

In this context, the announcement of rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran in March 2023 after years of diplomatic rift (the result of contacts initially facilitated by Iraq and Oman, but which took form under mediation by China) encouraged expectations regarding the possibilities that it could have an impact on various regional conflicts and particularly in Yemen, given the role of both actors over the course of the conflict. According to reports, one of Saudi Arabia's demands to re-establish relations with Iran, broken off since 2016, is that Tehran must stop supporting the Houthis and influencing their positions in the negotiating process. Though this "détente" between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been viewed as gathering momentum for dialogue and an understanding that can accelerate negotiations over Yemen, others have expressed doubt about the process. The rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran has projected and aggravated the Yemeni conflict, but it has not caused it, since the dispute has its roots in internal fractures and involves different political and armed actors. Therefore, this new regional dynamic, while positive, is not by itself sufficient to bring about peace in Yemen. There have also been questions about Iran's effective ability to influence the Houthis or force them to accept a political agreement, as its sway is more limited compared to other groups in

Despite the formal collapse of the truce in October 2022, important aspects of the agreement have remained in force and several factors indicate that the parties may continue to address the conflict through negotiations

the region and Tehran cannot wield total control over the Houthis' actions and about the risks that regional players may seek to control the negotiations and shape an outcome based on their priorities, bypassing Yemeni players and the UN. This is what has been identified as a danger of "Astanisation", in reference to the Astana negotiating process on Syria promoted by Russia, Turkey and Iran, established alongside the negotiations promoted by the UN.

In this context, the possibility of an agreement being forged only between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis that excludes other Yemeni actors produces particular concern and misgivings. Analysts have pointed out the risks that any deal could be limited to guaranteeing these actors' interests (Saudi border security to facilitate their withdrawal and formalisation of the Houthis' territorial control of a good part of the country) at the expense of the interests and participation of other actors in Yemeni society. The secrecy and dynamics of these negotiations have fuelled various Yemeni actors' fears that they are addressing and resolving substantive issues without the possibility of receiving influence and that this approach may lead to future instability and violence. For example, some actors, such as representatives of separatist groups in southern Yemen, have said that they will not recognise any agreement that compromises issues related to the distribution of resources, administration or security of the country. Yemeni actors have expressed frustration over what they perceive to be Saudi Arabia's attempt to seek a quick solution, the lack of prior consultation with Yemeni government representatives and reports that Riyadh may be willing to accept many of the Houthis' demands.

At least formally, the Omani-facilitated process seems committed to restarting UN-facilitated intra-Yemeni talks. If this takes place, it will pose another challenge of internal conflict among the bloc of actors of the "anti-Houthi" front. The configuration of a collegiate Presidential Leadership Council in April 2022, under the directives of Riyadh and the UAE (another regional actor directly involved in the Yemeni conflict), was presented as a new attempt to overcome these divisions. However, one year after its creation, this

Presidential Leadership Council appears as a weak and fragmented interlocutor, hobbled from the beginning by disagreements and political and military competition among its members, dynamics encouraged by Saudi Arabia and the UAE's policies to try to strengthen actors aligned with their interests. Thus, beyond their anti-Houthi stance, the forces represented in the Presidential Leadership Council do not have a shared vision of the political future of Yemen. They lack a common strategy for UN-mediated negotiations and have been excluded from the talks facilitated by Oman.

Added to all this is another fundamental challenge to peace in Yemen: the effective inclusion of civilians who have suffered the most from the conflict and who have been persistently marginalised from formal negotiations, especially women. Women have been excluded despite their public demands to be involved and despite the formal commitments made in the past about representation quotas in decision-making about the future of Yemen. Women's actions have been very important in local peacebuilding and mediation initiatives and their contributions have been and will be decisive in efforts towards building a sustainable peace in Yemen. This peace is understood not only as the end of armed hostilities, but as a process that addresses all the many different causes of the conflict and the violence, considers the demands for accountability for the abuses committed by all parties to the conflict and focuses on the urgent humanitarian needs of the civilian population.

This opportunity for peace in Yemen must therefore be seen as the start of a long-term process. Meanwhile, the contending parties and international actors that can support the negotiations should promote upholding the ceasefire, an environment conducive to dialogue and negotiation, and a truly inclusive process that recognises the contributions of women and civil society. The talks should address the complexity and the different factors of the conflict and not be limited to the interests of regional powers or armed actors. Despite all its imperfections, previous experiences such as the National Dialogue Conference (2013-14) indicate that it is possible to establish formats to address the future of Yemen from a multidimensional perspective that puts understanding and reconciliation efforts front and centre.

4.5. Promoting dialogue in a time of multipolar international order

There is a serious deterioration in the human security of many populations around the world due to conflicts, crises and intertwined processes such as climate change. The complex international scenario of armed conflict is characterised by increasing intensity of violence and a proliferating number of actors. Often prolonged over time, these are mostly internationalised internal conflicts in which foreign geopolitical disputes are projected, with growing dimensions of intercommunal violence and criminal violence. This is happening in a multipolar international context that is experiencing intensified tensions between great powers and a trend towards greater militarisation. However, at the same time, dialogue and diplomacy are still important and necessary for dealing with this context, including to prevent conflict and support mediation. The UN-backed process under way for the development of a New Agenda for Peace offers a framework of opportunity to strengthen international, regional and local efforts in conflict prevention and in promoting dialogue and peacebuilding.

There were ongoing negotiations in 19 of the 33 active armed conflicts in 2022 (58%)

39 peace processes and negotiations were identified in 2022. A large majority were in Africa (15), followed by Asia (10), Europe (six), the Middle East (four) and the Americas (four).¹¹ Compared to the previous year, a slight increase was identified in the number of peace processes and negotiations analysed worldwide (there had been 37 in 2021). Though not as high as in previous years (40 processes in 2020, 50 in 2019 and 49 in 2018), it was still significant in terms of the number of conflicts in which opposed actors agreed to settle some or all their differences through dialogue, despite the many problems entailed. Some of those 39 processes involved actors in armed conflict, while others dealt with non-armed disputes. There were ongoing negotiations in 19 of the 33 active armed conflicts during 2022 (58%), while 14 did not have any dialogue between the parties. Moreover, 11 of the 17 most intense armed conflicts had dialogue or negotiating processes (65%) in 2022. Even in a year of global setbacks in terms of peace and security like 2022, there were partial achievements such as an agreement to end the hostilities in the Tigray region, in Ethiopia; a nationwide truce in Yemen, which expired in the final months of the year, though some aspects of the agreement were upheld in practice; an agreement between the government of South Sudan and an armed faction to sign the 2018 peace agreement; and a tripartite peace agreement between the central government of India, the state government of Assam and eight Adivasi insurgent groups, among others.

In any case, most of the negotiating processes faced serious obstacles and many dragged on over time, like the conflicts they addressed. However, despite the enormous difficulties, the widespread existence of negotiating processes highlights that they are valid and relevant.

On the other hand, an analysis of the active peace processes in 2022 reveals many different actors involved in promoting dialogue. Although the UN continues to be the leading mediator and co-mediator, the scenario is characterised by a growing number of diverse actors, though it still faces challenges of coordination and of the actors projecting their own interests while assuming mediation roles, especially state actors. In 2022, the EU carried out third-party functions in 16 negotiating processes, the AU in 11 processes, the IGAD in five and the OSCE in four. Many states also carried out functions as third parties in negotiating processes.

In an international order marked by dynamics of rivalry between international and regional powers and internationalised internal armed conflicts with layers of geostrategic disputes, the involvement of a greater number or diversity of actors supporting dialogue and mediation may contribute to approaches that eventually could lead to agreements of various kinds, including humanitarian ones. One such agreement, though considered exceptional,¹² is the 2022 deal between Ukraine and Russia to export grain amid the invasion and a serious crisis of rising prices and global food insecurity, reached with the participation of Turkey, two UN agencies and advisory services from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

However, among other challenges, there are risks of support for mediation approaches that disregard even more (or even confront) the framework of mediation support principles developed by the United Nations thus far, with features like inclusive mediation and integration of the gender perspective. Faced with this challenge, it is essential to ensure international support for the many different local actors from different spheres involved in inclusive peacebuilding, their local agendas and priorities, and in protecting human rights activists. For example, in his 2022 annual report on the implementation of the international women, peace and security agenda, which covered the year 2021, the UN Secretary-General highlighted examples of the inclusion of detailed provisions related to gender in local agreements, including a peace action agreement between the Lou Nuer, Dinka Bor and Murle ethnic

11. Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2022. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

12. Vatikiotis, Michael, "Humanitarian crises in a multipolar world: How mediation and reforms can get aid moving", *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*, 14 September 2022.

groups in Yonglei state, South Sudan. The UN Secretary-General noted that the provisions appeared to be rooted in community mediation processes that preceded the agreements.¹³

In recent decades, international mechanisms and agendas have expanded that at least formally complement and enhance peacebuilding, conflict prevention and the promotion of negotiated solutions to armed conflicts. The multiplication of preventive warning systems, the efforts of regional and state actors to support dialogue and mediation by adopting institutional infrastructure and practical tools and the importance of promoting dialogue in the women, peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas, among other factors, indicate a high degree of sophistication, acquired learning and interconnection. In practice, however, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and support for dialogue are still underfunded and underused, hand-in-hand with short-sighted and reactive political positions. For example, Muggah and Whitlock identified factors explaining the poor operationalisation of preventive warning systems and cited a lack of political will as the central aspect of the “warning-response gap”.¹⁴ More broadly, the lack of political will to focus more on preventing armed violence and on supporting mediation and dialogue as a whole is a chronic obstacle that diminishes enormous potentiality. More efforts are needed, including political leadership that promotes its implementation.

Finally, the process promoted by the United Nations around *Our Common Agenda* with which to face current and future challenges and accelerate the implementation of the Millenium Development Goals is an opportunity for a renewed drive for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This international process includes framework documents such as the

The United Nations-supported process “Our Common Agenda” is an opportunity to promote armed conflict prevention and peacebuilding

report *Our Common Agenda*, released by the UN Secretary-General in September 2021, as a road map and in response to the member states’ request as part of the UN’s 75th anniversary to move towards an agenda to face global challenges and produce recommendations. The UN Secretary-General’s report indicates the need for a New Agenda for Peace and identifies six potential areas for developing it: a) by reducing strategic risks, b) by strengthening international foresight and capacities to identify and adapt to new peace and security risks, c) by reshaping our responses to all forms of violence, d) by investing in Investing in prevention and peacebuilding., e) by supporting regional prevention and f) by putting women and girls at the centre of security policy.¹⁵ This entire process, including the development of the “New Agenda for Peace”, is expected to be carried out in consultation with and the participation of many different actors, including members of civil society, and will lead to the Summit of the Future and the adoption of the Pact for the Future in 2024, with multilateral commitments for action.

Overall, the landscape of armed conflict and intertwined processes does not invite optimism. At the same time, armed conflict prevention and the promotion of negotiated conflict resolution remain relevant and necessary and have been fields in recent decades (and especially in recent years) of actors’ increasing involvement and the expansion of mechanisms, architectures and integration in interconnected agendas. The New Agenda for Peace and the greater geostrategic rivalry and protracted conflicts in the world increase the opportunity and the urgent need to reinvigorate prevention and support for dialogue and mediation, with innovation, human and economic resources, multilateralism, support for local agendas and priorities and the protection of human rights activists.

13. UN Secretary-General, *Women, peace and security*, S/2022/740, 5 October 2022.

14. Muggah, Robert and Mark Whitlock, “Reflections on the Evolution of Conflict Early Warning”, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 10(1): 2, pp. 1–16.

15. Un Secretary-General, *Our Shared Agenda - report of the Secretary-General*, United Nations, 2021.