RESPACING GLOBAL COLLABORATION FOR PEACE

Scenarios of the Future
2024–2035

In dedication to **Yves Kayene Kulondwa**, our friend and brother.

Your legacy endures. Rest in power.

"Me, as an artist, I use a pencil and I draw. Use your voice and sing, your body and dance, your emotions and play. We may not all be guilty of these threats to the earth, but we are all responsible for its survival and recovery. If you listen to this message, join the resistance."[7]

Yves Kayene Kulondwa

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Acronyms

BRICS	*Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa*
CSO	*Civil society organisation*
CSP	*Conducive Space for Peace*
EU	*European Union*
G20	*Group of 20*
GCA	*Global Citizens Assembly**
GCG	*Global Climate Governance**
INGO	*International non-governmental organisation*
NATO	*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*
NEAR	*Network for Empowered Aid Response*
PBAR	*Peacebuilding Architecture Review*
RESPACE	*Reimagining Equitable Global Spaces and Infrastructures for Sustainable Peace*
TSP	*Transformative Scenarios Process*
UN	*United Nations*
US	*United States*

** Existing in an imagined future as described in the scenarios.*

Introduction

The RESPACE scenarios are stories of imagined futures in which the potential for and nature of global collaboration for peace is shaped by different forces and dynamics manifesting around the world. They are not forecasts of what will happen nor are they proposals or policy recommendations of what should happen. Rather, they hypothesise possible developments that influence how collaboration for building peace around the world could play out from 2024 to 2035. The four scenarios, or stories, presented in this report have been developed by a group of committed individuals who bring together diverse experiences from across generations, geographies, cultural backgrounds, professions and other dimensions of life. While operating in different capacities and contexts and working in different ways, all hail from various corners of civil society and are fiercely motivated by the courage, ingenuity and resilience of people and movements striving for a more peaceful, just and equitable world.

The purpose of these stories is to stimulate an open and constructive dialogue about the future of global collaboration for peace. Making challenges and opportunities more visible, the stories seek to provoke new thinking, spark imagination, fuel inspiring visions and generate new collaborations among various actors who seek to contribute actively to sustainable peace.

The starting point for these stories is the rapidly changing global context of today. In these uncertain times, there is no existing roadmap to guide the way. The RESPACE scenarios thus serve to provide an initial map of the possible future environment for global collaboration for peace. While created from the vantage point of diverse civic actors from around the world, these stories are an invitation to all actors who have a stake in the future of building peace to engage in a process of reflection, dialogue and strategising about the future and for the future, to reimagine and transform ways of working together for peace across sectors, communities, levels, networks, locations and perspectives.

Why RESPACE now?

The current moment

The landscape for peace, development and systems change[1] has shifted significantly in the past five years, as the world faces interconnected crises. These include a steady increase in armed conflict and violence, accelerating climate change, record levels of displacement and deepening inequality, all with severe humanitarian impacts. Geopolitical tensions have worsened, with the wars in Gaza and Ukraine at risk of further escalation and expansion beyond the respective regions. The term 'polycrisis' is used to refer to synchronised global crises, whereby different crises are mutually entangled in such a way that they can trigger one another, as well as aggravate their underlying structural causes. This global dynamic significantly threatens prospects for the future of humanity and the planet.[2]

Over the last decade, peacebuilding efforts have been deeply influenced by national foreign policy and political shifts such as populism and securitisation, especially in long-standing donor countries. Relationships between high-income countries in North America and Western Europe and low and middle-income countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa continue to be affected by colonial legacies and reflect structural asymmetries, with top–down donor priorities reinforcing these imbalances. There is a gap between what is needed from international institutions to support peace and development, and the current realities of the international frameworks mandated with peacebuilding. There is also a disconnect between what is said and what is done. In policy discourse and formal commitments, local civil society actors are recognised as crucial to peacebuilding, but global governance and aid systems have yet to evolve in ways that give them real power to lead.[3] They and the communities they represent face systemic barriers that hinder their ability to shape policies and interventions meant to address the conflict and violence of which they bear the brunt.

These dynamics complicate transformative peacebuilding outcomes, while stabilisation and military support are increasingly used as the path for achieving security and peace. At the same time, development aid for conflict prevention and peacebuilding is in decline.

Grassroots movements advocating for systems change are gaining momentum, however. These are driven by global protests on issues such as climate justice, democracy and human rights. These movements challenge deep-rooted inequities and call for radical change, rather than incremental reforms, in a world engulfed by crises. To date, many efforts to transform the international system have focused on developing systems innovations, prototypes or pilot projects. Despite the many change-related efforts, support to civil society in low and lower-

[1] The term 'systems change' refers to a deliberate process of altering the underlying structures, relationships and dynamics within a complex system to achieve long-term and sustainable transformation. This can involve shifts in policies, practices, mindsets, power dynamics and resource flows to address the root causes of social, environmental or economic challenges. Rather than focusing on isolated interventions, systems change seeks to influence the entire ecosystem in which problems exist, recognising that lasting solutions require changes at multiple levels.
[2] Lawrence, Michael, Thomas Homer-Dixon, Scott Janzwood, Johan Rockström, Ortwin Renn, and Jonathan F. Donges. (2024). Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement. Global Sustainability, 7, e6, 1–16. Cambridge University Press. Available at https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1.
[3] Roesdahl, Mie, Jasper Peet-Martel and Sweta Velpillay (2021). A Global System in Flux: Pursuing Systems Change for Locally-Led Peacebuilding. Conducive Space for Peace. Available at www.conducivespace.org.

middle income countries outside North America and Western Europe remains overall within the known scope of top–down accountability mechanisms, bureaucratic barriers to access and project-specific funding.

The ongoing challenges and inequities in systems, practices and attitudes raise doubts about whether current reform efforts such as the Grand Bargain and donor-led localisation policies can meaningfully meet their goals and if they are sufficient for shifting power. What is truly needed to transform the systems and address deep-rooted inequities, enabling effective civil society-led peacebuilding locally and globally? And is such transformation even possible in the current global context, where zero-sum geopolitics encourages short-term thinking?

*We propose the verb '**to respace**' (also '**respacing**') as a way to encapsulate how spatial dimensions reflect and reinforce the inequities in global collaboration and relationships, and to highlight the need for transforming these spatial arrangements. For example, respacing calls attention to the power imbalances between actors from different regions, where those from wealthier nations often dominate decision-making. It also refers to the unequal access to spaces—such as how some people enjoy unrestricted mobility, while others face visa restrictions or border controls. Respacing addresses where violence is concentrated, such as in areas prone to conflict or within marginalised communities, and considers the unequal spatial distribution of social groups, such as segregated neighbourhoods or resource-poor regions. Ultimately, to respace means challenging and reconfiguring these spatial inequalities to enable more just and equitable global collaboration.

Opportunity for Change

The rapidly shifting global landscape will inevitably drive changes in international aid and global governance over the next five to ten years. The future is uncertain, but the growing divide between persistent systemic challenges and the push for change will make current systems obsolete or open them to substantial transformation. This moment presents an opportunity to reimagine global and translocal collaboration. The RESPACE initiative is an aspirational, creative and constructive response to the uncertainties we all face and the opportunities for change that are open to us.

What is the RESPACE Initiative?

The RESPACE initiative (in full, Reimagining Equitable Global Spaces and Infrastructures for Sustainable Peace) seeks to provide a collaborative and enabling space for change agents and movement actors to challenge the status quo in international peacebuilding and reimagine transformed, alternative and equitable global spaces and infrastructures for sustainable peace.

RESPACE is informed by the realisation that transformative change often emerges through the ruptures that appear in moments of crises. As an initiative, it recognises that the current instability across the globe brings with it renewed momentum and demand for change. RESPACE is therefore meant as an invitation to lift our gaze from the past and present to instead look to a future that holds many possibilities. It encourages everyone to explore how our future may unfold, so as to arrive at new insights about what a diversity of actors can do together to respace* the future of global collaboration towards equitable spaces and infrastructures that can build and sustain peace globally and locally.

We use the terms 'spaces' and 'infrastructures' as substitutes for the phrase 'ways of collaboration'. By 'spaces', we mean conducive conditions within which people can informally collaborate, and by 'infrastructures' we indicate a need for some degree of governance or structured relations that allows the conducive conditions to be sustained over time. We do not use the terms 'institutions' or 'systems' because these often refer to existing frameworks that are impaired by power inequities and create conditions that are not conducive to meaningful participation by those outside them. We also use the phrase 'global collaboration for peace' as a neutral and inclusive term to encompass the diverse ways in which actors, institutions and systems currently engage—or may engage in the future—to build and sustain peace.

Leveraging the Future

Scenarios—stories of possible futures—play a unique role in strategic planning. Human beings around the world have always used stories to talk about things that are difficult, complex or even taboo, and to encourage a change in thinking, shed light on pathways and inspire relevant action. Because scenarios are fictional and never come alone, but rather always appear in sets of two or more futures, they offer the advantage of supporting informed debate about a range of possibilities without immediately committing anyone to a specific point of view or policy position. This makes scenarios useful in situations when systems are stuck or polarised due to many divergent ideas and interests. Creating and telling stories about possible futures allows us to consider a longer time horizon and wider context. Crucially, they encourage us to ask ourselves: What if…?

Scenarios thus help us to engage with complexity and uncertainty and learn from the future. They provide a structure and a language to involve diverse actors, including people we may not trust, like or agree with, in strategic conversation. Thinking and talking about the future with others engages the imagination to explore new ways forward. This can also help people work together on creating the future they want.

Creating the Scenarios

The RESPACE initiative was initiated by Conducive Space for Peace (CSP) and then became the basis of a partnership with Reos Partners and the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR). The RESPACE initiative set out to create a global reimagining process involving individuals with very diverse perspectives and experiences of the world and, in particular, peacebuilding.

The RESPACE team created the content of these scenarios. Global in scope, the RESPACE team is composed of 23 civic change agents, thought leaders and movement actors from a wide array of countries across multiple continents. It includes peace practitioners, humanitarian workers, community activists, academics, artists, writers, staff members of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and philanthropic institutions, as well as former (inter)national civil servants in multilateral and national institutions. All team members participate in their personal capacity, engaging in intense conversations in a series of workshops that took place virtually and in-person in April, May, June and August 2024. Many team members also reached out via their professional and personal networks to others outside the RESPACE initiative to obtain additional input, verify ideas and act as a sounding board for aspects of these stories.

Prior to their involvement in the scenario work, all 23 RESPACE team members were interviewed to explore their thinking about the current state and possible future evolution of global collaboration for peace. Seven additional interviews were conducted to draw in other perspectives. From these 30 interviews emerged both a deep concern about the state of the world and dominant approaches to address violence, conflict, instability and inequality, and an assessment that the global systems to advance sustainable peace are broken and not fit for purpose in the world of today.

The RESPACE team collectively created the four scenarios presented in this report based on their diverse experiences and understandings. These scenarios are meant to be relevant, challenging, plausible and clear. They aim to help further conversations among diverse actors about the conditions and paradigms that affect where, when and how global collaboration for peace takes place and by whom. They look at what this all means for those most affected by violence and conflict.

Much initial scenario development happened in a three-day in-person workshop in early June 2024. This was followed up by further virtual engagement and an online process of collective editing. The RESPACE team thought that the most useful period in which to set the scenarios would be the time of writing, 2024, up to 2035, given the crossroads at which the world finds itself. In their view, we face fundamental choices as a global community when it comes to tackling questions of peace and equity. The volatile context and the issues at stake merit close attention to near-time decisions.

To show how the possible futures set out in the four scenarios are anchored in the current context, each scenario is preceded by a snapshot of reality at the time of writing that serves as a launchpad for the future to unfold. By definition, these snapshots do not provide a detailed and comprehensive description of our world at this moment in time. Instead, each offers a distinct picture that foregrounds specific aspects and dynamics, demonstrating how the seeds of that possible future are already present today. Together, the snapshots and scenarios highlight how the future is constructed on a daily basis and results from actions and decisions in the present. What seeds do we want to nurture, and which would we rather not? We have a choice.

Methodology

The core methodology for developing the RESPACE futures scenarios is the Transformative Scenarios Process (TSP). This approach emerged in South Africa during the early 1990s as the country was struggling to resolve its long-standing political crisis and impasse. A few university professors took the initiative to bring together about 30 influential and insightful people from across the entire political, economic and social spectrum to build possible future scenarios for South Africa.[4]

Since its initial use during the transition from apartheid in South Africa, the TSP approach has been applied at national, regional and global levels on a range of topics, including: democracy, drug policy, climate change, peace, justice, education, land reform, food security and more. It has also been applied to envisioning national and regional futures in South Africa, Haiti, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Thailand, the North Netherlands, Cyprus and elsewhere. Across contexts, this method continues to evolve and has consistently generated new insight, enhanced trust, mutual understanding, new partnerships and innovative capacities for strategic foresight and leadership.

[4] Initially codified in the book Transformative Scenarios Planning (Adam Kahane, 2012), TSP is described in many publications; e.g. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation and The Systems Thinker. Conveners, participants and advocates of TSP include: former Colombian president and Nobel peace prize winner, Juan Manuel Santos; former South African minister of finance, Trevor Manuel; and former secretary general of the Organisation of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza.

Reading the Scenarios

As you read, please remember that these four scenarios are not proposals. Do not expect a concrete plan the merits of which are to be debated. Remember, too, that the snapshots of the current reality are inherently limited. We invite you to shift your focus to the future. Imagine these various futures as coming to be.

Immerse yourself in the possibilities that these four scenarios offer. Think of each possible future described in the four scenarios as a situation in which you, your colleagues, your communities and families and friends might find yourself and which you might need to collectively navigate.

As an individual: Reflect on how each scenario could impact your own life, values, and choices. Consider how these possible futures might shape your daily interactions, well-being, and personal responsibility within a changing global landscape for peace.

As a member of your organisation: Think about how each scenario might influence the goals, priorities, and strategies of the organisation you are part of. What opportunities or challenges might arise? How might you and your colleagues need to change to continue contributing to global peace within each potential future?

As part of your networks: Explore the implications of each scenario on your wider network—whether professional, community-based, or international. Reflect on how collective efforts might evolve, how partnerships might be strengthened or redefined, and how new collaborations could emerge in response to these different futures.

The use of terminology in the context of peacebuilding and development can be contentious. This report mostly uses geographical and economic descriptors to refer to different contexts and regions. It uses, for example, the term ‘West Asia’ instead of ‘Middle East’ to avoid the Eurocentric connotation of the latter.

THE RESPACE SCENARIOS

Scenarios Summaries

Walls

In the world of Walls, nation states prioritise narrow domestic interests, retreating from broad international collaboration and increasing polarisation. They invest heavily in security and militarisation, addressing climate change and health crises within their borders rather than seeking global solutions. As resources and political support for multilateralism dwindle, states mostly use the system for power-based negotiations or unilateral actions. Military tensions dominate global headlines and national security strategies, while resource extraction from resource rich countries intensifies. Escalating wars lead to a multipolar and fragmented world, where strong authoritarian states control spheres of influence through military, economic and digital sabotage or warfare, and seek to deter others from interfering. Local civil society groups are subject to strict regulations, struggling to survive in this heavily securitised environment.

Maze

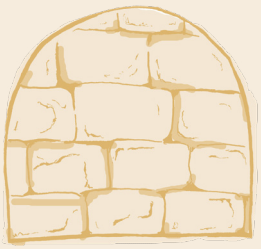
In the world of Maze, states come to once again appreciate international institutions as viable avenues to wield influence and gain access to resources, given multiple interconnected crises and increased public pressure. They start reinvesting in international collaboration as it adapts to diverse interests and contemporary geopolitical realities. Genuine efforts to reform the United Nations (UN) system ensue to enhance democratic governance and regional representation, aided by shifts in international affairs and the domestic politics of prominent member states. Reform efforts are, however, subject to many constraints and inertia in the system. They are also affected by the reluctance of traditionally powerful states to relinquish power. Nonetheless, reforms lead the UN to gain some new momentum, relevance and legitimacy. States and governments remain dominant in global governance, but greater inclusion of civil society and more support for locally led efforts softens hard geopolitics in multilateralism.

Bridges

In the world of Bridges, civic actors and social movements across different causes and localities recognise their interdependence and create stronger, well-resourced networks and infrastructures to shape global and local developments. State power is balanced by bottom–up democratic institutions and an increasingly autonomous civil society. Global collaborative action for sustainable solutions is driven by community-led and publicly owned media platforms, solidarity networks, and consideration of diverse and indigenous knowledges and worldviews. Narratives of change emphasise holistic perspectives, aiming to inform and foster shared identities across differences. The spread of a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness between people, nature and governance systems—including land, sea and the environment—impacts domestic and global politics and leads to a paradigm shift in the global economy. While new collaborations form across sectors and interest groups, recognising a shared humanity, new foundations are added to a global architecture that seeks to create lasting peace.

Towers

In the world of Towers, the decline of liberal internationalism and Western dominance drives governments and civil society to turn to their respective regions in search of identity, partnership and support. This leads to increasingly assertive (sub)regional blocs that gain in strength and relevance. Faced with an intensifying climate emergency, governments, civil society and communities seek to address urgent challenges through effective intra-regional cooperation. This leads to progress on climate change, trade and sometimes conflict management. The extent, nature and manifestation of regionalism varies across regions, including the space afforded to civil society. Powerful regional actors tend to dominate the agenda and inter-regional competition increases, while global governance forums have lost legitimacy in resolving tensions. Robust international civil society networks are also absent, given a changed development landscape



Walls

In **2024**, a year of polls for half the world population, national populism, anti-establishment sentiments and democratic backsliding remain on the rise in many countries around the world. While not winning every election, nationalist parties have made significant gains, shifting the political conversation on migration, gender, women's rights and foreign and economic policy towards right-wing political positions. These positions tend toward authoritarianism and view minority groups with suspicion. The effects of digitalisation and the implications of limited regulation of artificial intelligence are increasingly visible as various interest groups, populist parties and owners of major platforms use social media to spread mis- and disinformation, disrupting the social fabric and fuelling feelings of isolation, mistrust and fear. Meanwhile, international stability and human security have continued to deteriorate in light of a recurrence of interstate warfare and an increase in the number, duration and intractability of armed conflict generally. Violent conflicts such as those in Ukraine and Gaza are exacerbating global divisions and have prompted increased defence and military spending. Combined with accelerating climate change, widespread polarisation, rising inequality and other pressing challenges, the world is facing multiple interlocking crises. Amidst this, the global governance architecture has trouble coming up with viable and lasting solutions.

By **2026**, the war in Ukraine threatens to move the frontline much further west following further escalations. Tensions are high and governments seek reassurance by further increasing military expenditure and strengthening military alliances, while divesting from diplomacy, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. The Gaza war is not contained and expands into a regional war between Iran, Lebanon and Israel that also draws in other western and Arab powers on the opposing sides. Indeed, many conflict situations remain in a dire and volatile stategy.

Military tensions dominate the global news headlines and national security strategies. Armed criminal violence is a growing or continuing problem in several contexts, such as Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia. In Haiti, such violence repeatedly undermines efforts to restore the collapsed state. European governments heighten their risk assessment and ask their populations to prepare themselves for war. Polarisation between former colonial powers and post-colonial nation states keeps increasing. Many post-colonial governments distance themselves from the global governance architecture and threaten full disengagement, citing 'persistent disillusion'. North American and European states withhold contributions to the multilateral system on the grounds that the security, health and climate threats faced 'do not justify resources going to an ineffective and wasteful system', as Reuters reports. International mediation and peacebuilding efforts barely get off the ground. In the few instances where they do, they generally falter. Analysts attribute this to lack of political will and financial resources, and to regional and global power dynamics, with external actors pursuing their own interests more than supporting genuine resolution. Deepening geopolitical rivalries among the permanent members of the UN Security Council continue to paralyse the body, leaving the reputation of the UN in tatters.

Rising inequality within and between countries—in terms of income, wealth, tax and gender disparities—further fuels tensions and grievances, and leads to growing unrest in countries around the world. Instability on the African continent rapidly increases when persistent

drought coincides with flooding events across much of sub-Saharan Africa, uprooting scores of people. Violent clashes between displaced people and local populations occur. Outbreaks of cholera become common. Several governments declare a state of emergency, deploying security personnel and private military contractors to maintain stability. They also adopt legislation curtailing civic space, claiming the unrest leaves them no other option. Some postpone scheduled elections.

In response to these developments, the European Union (EU) further intensifies its efforts to block migration by strengthening border security, accelerating deportations for rejected applicants for asylum and externalising migration control through expanded agreements with third countries such as Turkey and North African states. Meanwhile, social movements and populist leaders in Africa, Asia and Latin America blame increasing poverty on an un-fair economic world order. They reject the official poverty line as drastically underrepresenting reali-ty and instead present figures that demonstrate a much bleaker picture.

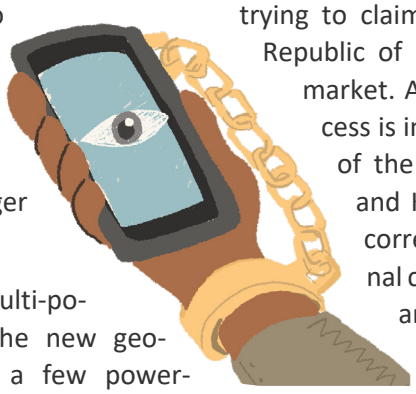
Progress made in the past decades on gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights sees a rapid decline. Abortion rights regress further and further in countries such as the United States and Poland. Violence against women, queer and trans people is on the rise. International institutions that have long worked to protect rights activists find themselves increasingly constrained in their operations due to a combination of factors, including political interference, harassment, fake news and shortage of funds.

In **2030**, a pandemic breaks out as accelerate global warming, deforestation and urbanisation force people and animals in ever closer proximity. Having repatriated the majority of the production of medicines, food staples and basic consumables, industrialised states in North America, Europe and Australasia react by closing down borders and stop contributing to global supply chains. In speeches, political and economic leaders in these states refer to the need to fend for their own populations in these trying times, while opposition figures and social activists lament that leaders fail to heed the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s. Both in industrialised states and elsewhere, the pandemic fuels xenophobia, with specific groups and foreign nations being held responsible for the disease spreading. Borders are increasingly closed, and several states led by nationalist leaders adopt discriminatory policies towards migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities.

In general, the pandemic generates various economic and social impacts in societies, disproportionately affecting groups that already face systemic vulnerabilities. Low and lower-middle income countries bear the brunt of human losses, which creates long-term negative impacts on their economies. Regional powers such as Brazil and South Africa increase their political clout by providing some support to countries in their sphere of influence, while autocratic governments in Asia benefit from assistance by an increasingly assertive China. Multilateral institutions have little space and too few resources to play a significant role.

Instability in many countries is exacerbated by the pandemic. This leads strong states to use technology to address real and perceived opposition inside and outside their borders, using mass surveillance, hacking and sabotage. Authorities see civil society activism and civic protest as a major vulnerability to public order and further clamp down on already weakened civic freedoms. Governments increasingly involve private companies in state security, prompting warnings by some analysts of state capture by private interests. The

struggle of ordinary people for survival leaves little room for community organising, but civil society actors continue their efforts, trying to work around increased regulatory controls and intimidation. In Turkey, Egypt and Myanmar, for example, activists use creative tactics and symbols to challenge authoritarian leaders and convey messages of resistance. But this carries great risk. An ever growing number of people worldwide face hardship and hunger on a daily basis.



The outlines of a cold multi-polar order are becoming clear. The new geopolitical reality revolves around a few powerful nation states that command specific spheres of influence and do not shy away from pursuing their interests at the expense of other countries. Direct military confrontations between NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Russia decisively split the northern hemisphere in two again, although nuclear war is prevented just in time. In addition to the constant threat of military confrontations, economic warfare and protectionism are now the norm. A new hot spot is developing in the East China Sea as Japan and China frequently engage in military attacks against each other. The press secretary of the US president announces that the US military will intervene to protect US interests in the region and assist its long-standing ally Japan, increasing the potential for large-scale military confrontation between major powers.

Increased economic competition also leads to an intensification of resource extraction from resource rich countries in Asia, South and Central America and Africa. This extends poverty and harsh labour conditions. In the absence of strong governments that back a normative global order, international regulatory frameworks have no effect. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, a new African World War breaks out between the neighbouring countries trying to claim the resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo to sell on the international market. An African Union-led mediation process is initiated under the shared leadership of the former presidents of South Africa and Kenya. But they disagree about the correct course of action and multinational companies based in the United States and China act as spoilers against a negotiated resolution.

The demand for military expenses is now up to a level such that the main traditional donors to the UN and broader aid system withdraw more than half of their funding. The UN secretary-general states that more than two-thirds of its missions are to be curtailed.

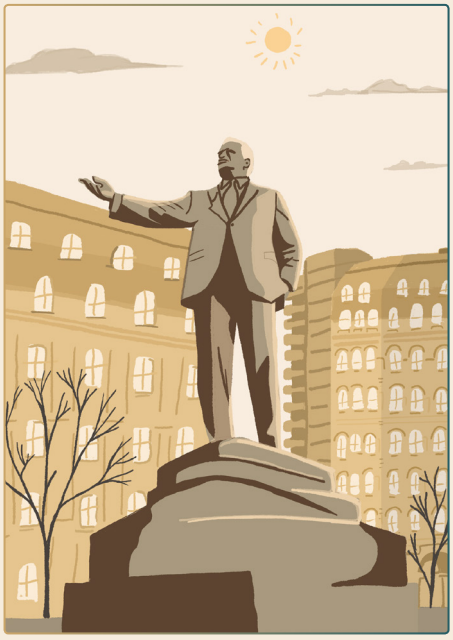
At a national level, high military expenditures mean that many governments divert budget resources away from social services. At the same time, trade disruptions generated by interstate conflict lead to rising costs of essential goods, including fuel. Countries with weak state institutions and little capacity to deliver social services or welfare are now frequently experiencing mass protests driven by citizen grievances about corruption and repression. Often these get captured by elite interests and turn violent, leading to groups fighting one another for political power and access. The larger regional powers dominate stabilisation efforts in their spheres of influence, but the major powers from other regions try to undermine their control when-

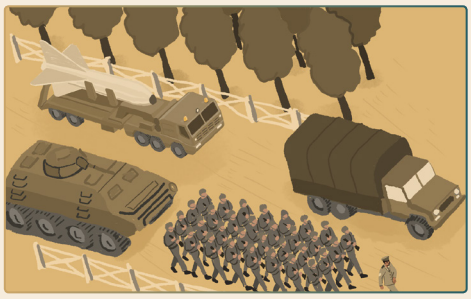
ever and wherever they find an opportunity to do so, in a perceived zero-sum competition for security and global military dominance.

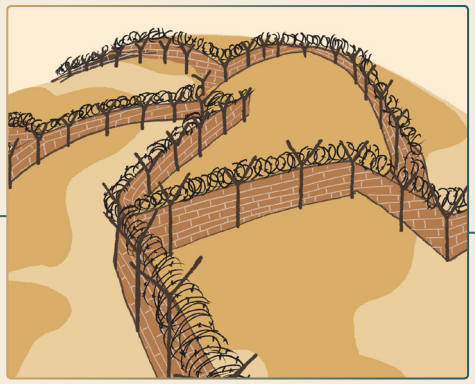
By **2032**, most national economies have negative growth rates in purchasing power parity per capita. In contrast, large multinational corporations make unprecedented profits and use them to intensively influence national and regional politics. The global economy is dominated by rent-seeking from unequal trade and speculation on financial markets rather than by liberal industrial economies. Economic elites prefer strong and authoritarian leadership. They are not alone in this preference: An international study finds that an increasing number of young people in many countries look for strong autocratic leaders who rule with decisiveness and determination amid uncertainty and instability. The richer countries can still guarantee a living wage and some social security for most of their citizens, but depend on the redistribution of rents to achieve that instead of a thriving private sector and middle class economy.

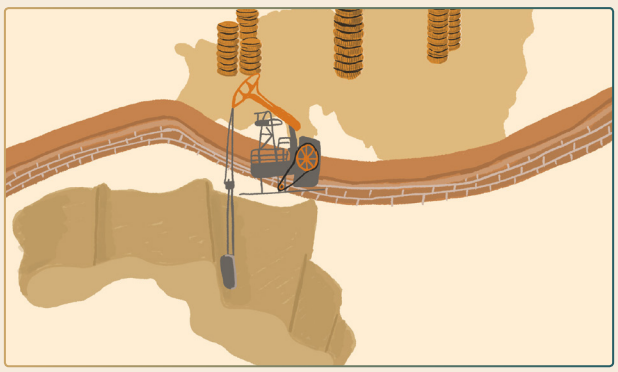
By **2035**, civil society activity is subject to very stringent regulations in many countries across the globe. Isolated and under resourced, civil society actors struggle for survival rather than to work to influence politics. Many become part of clientelistic networks. Some analysts hint at underground activities by civic actors in various countries to build new solidarity networks, but little is known. The world has become multi-polar and fragmented, with strong authoritarian states that seek to deter one another from interfering in their affairs. A limited group of government and corporate leaders control economic and political affairs. The threat of war between major nuclear powers is all over the news. It is also the key item on national security agendas. Some former political leaders come forward in the press and speak out for a return to a norm-based international order with a strong global governance architecture. But their voices are also doubtful: Is a return even at all possible at this stage?

Walls

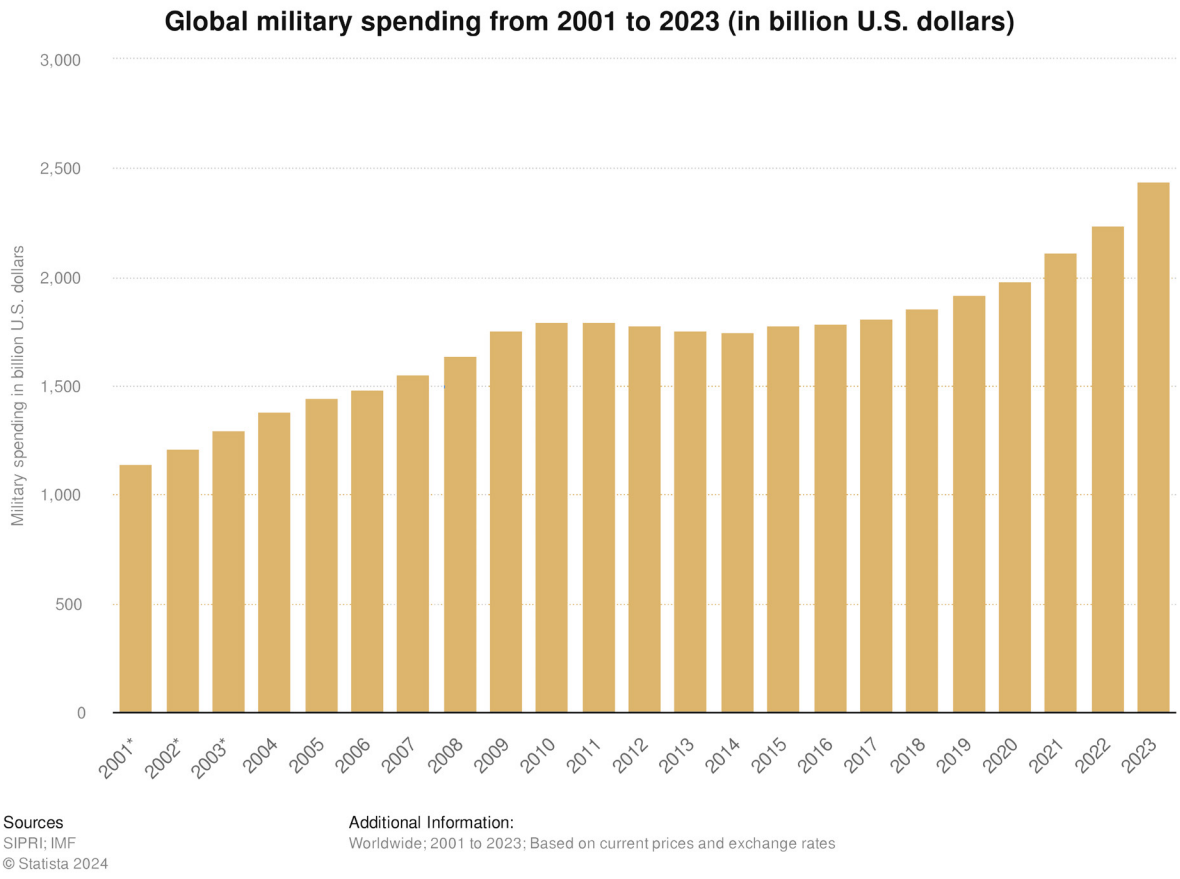








Box 1
Global military spending

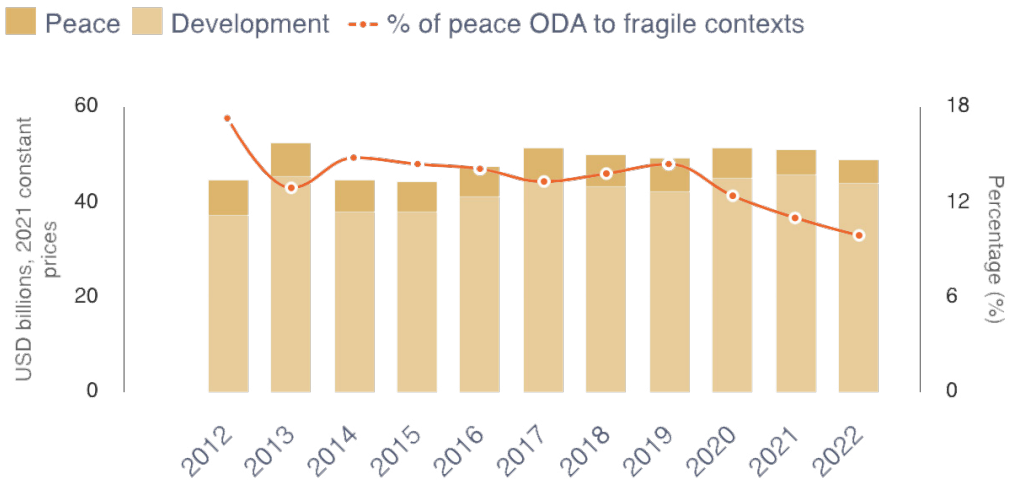


Sources
SIPRI; IMF
© Statista 2024

Additional Information:
Worldwide; 2001 to 2023; Based on current prices and exchange rates

In 2023, the military spending worldwide amounted to 2.44 trillion U.S. dollars, wich was the highest during the period under consideration. Comparatively, global military spending was at 1.1 trillion U.S. dollars in 2001, and at 1.7 trillion U.S. dollars in 2010, past the peak of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Box 2
Funding for Peacebuilding



DAC members' peace ODA to fragile contexts
Peace ODA from DAC members' to 60 fragile contexts on the OECD's multidimentional framework has decreased in terms of volume and percentage from 2019 onwards.

Box 3

Peacefulness, Armed Conflicts, and Political Violence

The Global Peace Index (GPI) has consistently reported deteriorations in global peace over the past 16 years, with the average level of peacefulness falling by 4.5% since 2008. Factors contributing to this include rising geopolitical tensions, increasing military expenditures, and prolonged conflicts, such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The number of active conflicts involving states is at its highest since World War II, and the likelihood of resolving these conflicts has dramatically decreased.

In 2022, there were 55 active state-based armed conflicts across 38 countries, marking a slight increase from the 54 recorded in 2021. Of these, eight conflicts escalated to the level of war, each causing over 1,000 battle-related deaths. This represents the highest number of conflicts sice the end of the Cold War. Notably, the Russia-Ukraine war and the conflict in Ethiopia were the deadliest, contributing significantly to the global death toll. Interstate conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, have re-emerged as a major trend, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine being the first large-scale interstate conflict in over 20 years. Additionally, 92 countries were involved in conflicts beyond their borders, the highest number since the Global Peace Index began tracking in 2008.

The year 2022 saw a staggering 97% increase in fatalities from organised violence compared to the previous year, with over 237,000 deaths, marking it as the deadliest year since the Rwandan genocide. The conflicts in Ukraine and Ethiopia were responsible for 89% of these fatalities.

A significant trend is the growing internationalisation of conflicts, where third-party states or non-state actors like the Wagner Group and transnational jihadist groups increasingly influence conflict dynamics. This has led to a rise in interstate conflicts, reversing the post-Cold War decline in such wars.

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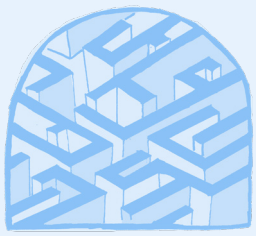


Maze

In **2024**, the risks posed by nuclear arms are rising rapidly. Several situations have a risk of nuclear escalation; notably, the ongoing war in Ukraine (showing signs of growing international involvement) and the situation in Gaza (given increasing skirmishes between Israel and Iran). The multilateral system, with the UN at its core, faces significant challenges as it struggles to address the various complex interconnected and protracted issues facing the world. Deep divisions in the UN Security Council prevent the body from acting towards the peaceful resolution of violent conflicts from Ukraine to DR Congo and from Myanmar to West Asia. While analysts acknowledge the positive impact of the UN in refugee protection and humanitarian assistance, they criticise its ongoing emphasis on emergency response and use of militarised approaches in violent conflict. Other key concerns are the failure to tackle corruption and insufficient engagement with and empowerment of local actors. Representatives of countries from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands Countries, Asia and West Asia argue that the composition of the UN Security Council does not reflect the global geopolitical realities of the 21st century. The UN secretary-general is on record as stating that multilateral institutions are weak and outdated, reflecting the reality of 80 years ago, which makes them potentially part of the problem rather than the solution, and that there is no alternative to reform: "It is reform or rupture." [5]

In **2025**, several global civil society coalitions publish a joint statement urging UN member states to follow up on commitments made at the UN Summit of the Future, held in September 2024 and captured in the Pact for the Future. They call upon UN member states to intensify collaboration with civil society, and for the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) to address issues not included in the Pact. Later that year, the president of the UN General Assembly declares in a speech for the 80th anniversary of the UN that the international community has not been able to stem human hardship resulting from conflict, violence and natural disasters worldwide and failed in upholding our common humanity when 2 million civilian lives in Gaza were in need of protection. The president of the UN General Assembly passionately urges all member states to reimagine a UN that is fit for the 21st century and can deliver on its promises.

The speech causes much contro-versy, but is also met with appreciation. Pundits refer to it as a 'final wake-up call'. They also highlight speeches by various member states that manifest strong support for a wide UN reform process to ensure its institutions gain renewed relevance in a context of ongoing geopolitical tensions, the threat of nuclear use, violent conflict, ecological disruption and economic decline. Some analysts note that the remarks of the non-permanent members of the Security Council for 2025 and 2026—Somalia, Pakistan, Panama, Greece and Denmark—are remarkably aligned in how they emphasise the need for greater regional representation, a more democratic UN and a strengthened multilateralism. International civil society organisations (CSOs) reiterate the need to elaborate the reforms envisaged in the Pact for the Future, in detailed plans of action with firm

[5] https://www.un.org/en/desa/reform-or-rupture, last accessed 25.10.2024.

time frames. Renewed diplomatic engagement between Russia, Europe and the United States following the end of the war in Ukraine starts to create a more constructive environment in the UN Security Council.

In **2027**, a UN reform coalition consisting of civil society, academic and philanthropic organisations, and supported by some governments, launches a global communication drive to raise awareness and mobilise public pressure for reform of the multilateral system. The coalition cites concern about an apparent lack of follow-up action on the Pact for the Future. Leveraging the use of social media platforms and the involvement of prominent artists who speak to different audiences across the globe, two campaigns go viral. The first details the money spent on arms and the impact these resources could have if directed towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention broadly conceived, with examples of how this would affect the lives of people in both conflict-affected contexts and elsewhere. The second focuses on the triple planetary crisis of ongoing climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, and highlights its consequences in terms of increased natural disasters, reduced food supplies and access to clean water, economic and financial losses, and how these interact with conflict, displacement and migration and health.

A growing number of states become vocal about the need for structural and procedural UN reform. They speak out against policies that 'pit people and states against one another, increase the risk of military confrontation, and impede efforts to effectively address shared critical challenges related to global ecology and stability', as a special report in The Economist puts it. It suggests that states increasingly see international institutions as viable avenues to wield influence and gain access to resources, and that they could decide to reinvest in international collaboration, provided it changes sufficiently to accommodate their interests. The report also notes that more and more General Assembly members express strong support for reform of the UN Charter and points to a lobby to invoke Article 109 to effect change in the Charter.

The ten non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (referred to as 'the Elected Ten') increasingly work together to exert influence as a group.[6] This enables them to impact UN Security Council resolutions, as well as action and challenge the domination of council procedures by the five permanent members. Groups such as the Singapore-led Forum of Small States and other coalitions of states supportive of democratic governance and accountability use their influence to press for greater civil society participation. They also push back on states limiting civic space, accountability and transparency in the international, regional and national sphere. Other groups that involve governments pursuing more conservative and nationalist policies act to hinder progress in various ways, keeping civil society at bay.

Political shifts in a few permanent member states of the UN Security Council provide promising entry points for change. Leaders in the United Kingdom, United States and France are pushed towards a new internationalism by their constituencies. This creates synergies with the push from member states such as India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, and the African Union to reform the UN Security Council to be more inclusive and equalise distribution of power.

[6] The UN Security Council has ten non-permanent members. Each year, the UN General Assembly elects five member states to serve a two-year term in this capacity. This ensures a rotation of members, with five new countries joining the UN Security Council on 1 January each year, while the other five finish their term on 31 December of that same year.

In **2029**, the new secretary-general convenes a Review Conference of the UN Charter based on Article 109 (invoked in 2028 after lengthy negotiations). Internal reform groups of UN personnel join forces to be more effective in bridging the gap between external pressure and internal action through facilitating coordination and leveraging their internal networks to help reform agendas gain traction. They also support efforts by INGOs and civil society actors from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania that work with member states seeking to open space in international and national settings for civil society consultations and campaigns to influence negotiations and decision makers in the reform process. National consultations reveal that some civil society actors are sceptical of what they call 'all the reform talk'. They speak of established power structures paying lip service to equality and solidarity, and question why or how institutions and individuals outside the UN would be affected by these processes. In a blog post, a prominent activist warns of a top–down technocratic approach to managing complex systemic challenges that is unlikely to improve conditions on the ground for those who are most vulnerable. The post is widely circulated.

China extends its leadership role further into peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It increases personnel contributions and financial support and seeks integration of its global Belt and Road Initiative with UN peacebuilding efforts. It also increasingly leverages its relationships with both major powers and low-income countries in relation to conflicts. Its greater role in the multilateral system boosts efforts to reform international financial institutions.

In **2030**, the failure to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals adds fuel to reform efforts. A rise in the number of refugees (from 120 million in 2024 to 160 million in 2030) creates a serious setback, however, as this puts even more pressure on UN operational and financial capacities. The costs of humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance mushroom exponentially, straining the UN bureaucratic machinery and the member states that fund these initiatives. Still, a first draft of a revised UN Charter is released for consultation to maintain momentum in these trying times. Envisaged changes include expansion of UN Security Council permanent membership, enhanced representation and democratisation, and provisions relating to environmental and digital governance.

The approach adopted for the 2030 PBAR differs from previous iterations, including civil society and local actors much more in consultations. This does not happen without a fight, however. The original plans for the review once again only allowed for limited civil society consultations, which caused an outcry. In response, a civil society infrastructure develops around the UN reform process that is well established to provide insight and advice on the various policy processes. It is also able to mobilise constituencies globally to hold governments accountable to their pledges. The infrastructure is partly funded by aligned governments and private foundations with an interest in creating a more equal global community.

In **2033**, the first steps are taken to operationalise the revised UN Charter. Civil society actors express optimism about the commitment to establish a Global Citizens Assembly (GCA), noting that this can finally turn the rhetoric about inclusive multilateralism into reality. But bureaucratic procedures, siloed approaches, risk aversion and other factors slow down and sometimes outright hinder efforts to promote change. Moreover, several powerful member states and power holders in the multilateral system push back on these developments, despite formally endorsing many commitments in policy documents.

By **2035**, following long and arduous negotiations, the UN Security Council increases membership and permanent members are constrained in the use of veto powers. The UN General Assembly has more binding authority in international decisions, particularly in matters where the UN Security Council fails to act due to a veto or deadlock. A revised process for selecting a new secretary-general is in place, including a more transparent and consultative selection process. The UN adopts some measures to further antiracism and decolonisation in its internal processes. On paper, the participation of civil society actors in UN deliberations and decision-making has grown, but some question whether this translates into increased influence and better performance downstream.

Nevertheless, partially due to effective collaboration between some member states and civil society networks, the global peacebuilding infrastructure has improved its procedures for providing direct support for local peacebuilders and creating space for local leadership. It receives much more reliable and significantly increased funding commitments from multilateral sources such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the World Bank, as well as through catalytic private sector sources; notably, major foundations that are coordinated through networks such as the Peace and Security Funders Group and worldwide initiatives for grantmaker support.

The jury is out on the GCA. Some hail its first session, which focused on the state of democracy and political participation, as a big step towards enhancing citizen engagement and accountability in the multilateral system. Others are less sure if decision makers will pay attention to recommendations. They express doubt whether the GCA is tokenism, point to limitations of representation, and note the lack of clarity about the follow-up given to recommendations. On social media, the hashtag #GCAPaperTiger? emerges. A network of critical think tanks, based in Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, New Delhi, Manila, Bangkok and Sarajevo, releases a discussion paper on whether the normative UN agenda on gender equality, human rights, democracy and civic space benefits or suffers from the institutional changes and the trade-offs involved.

Despite these tensions, some changes are visible. Improved regional representation creates renewed interest among formerly colonised countries to work with and through the UN. This also applies to members of the Group of 20 (G20), with several noting that the UN has regained relevance as the global forum to discuss and coordinate international affairs. Agreements and resolutions are more actively implemented than before. As regards international peace mediation and taming state aggression, the UN has recovered some legitimacy and leverage through a reformed UN Security Council. Many see the changes as an important step towards a more equal international system. States and governments still dominate global governance, but increased inclusion of civil society in peacebuilding and a refocusing of funds to locally led efforts help soften a hard geopolitical lens in multilateralism and allude to a sense of shared humanity.

Maze

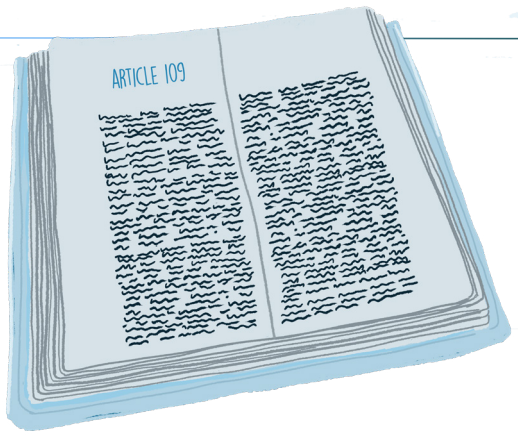
Box 4
Article 109 of the UN Charter

Purpose:
Establishes a formal process for reviewing and amending the UN Charter, allowing for necessary adjustments to the organisation's structure and function.

Key Provisions:
Article 109 provides a framework for amending the United Nations Charter. It allows the General Assembly, with two-thirds of its members and a majority of the Security Council (any seven votes), to call a General Conference aimed at Charter review and reform. If convened, this conference gives each UN member a single vote, emphasising the principle of equal representation among member states.

To make amendments from such a conference binding, a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly is required, as well as ratification from all five permanent Security Council members.

Potential Impact:
- Institutional Reform: Can address longstanding issues such as Security Council reform, including altering the permanent membership or veto powers.
- Adaptation to Global Challenges: Provides a legal pathway to reshape the UN in response to emerging global issues, ensuring the organisation remains effective and relevant in a changing world.
- Diplomatic Leverage: The ability to amend the Charter may serve as a powerful tool for member states seeking to advocate for modernisation and reform within the UN system.

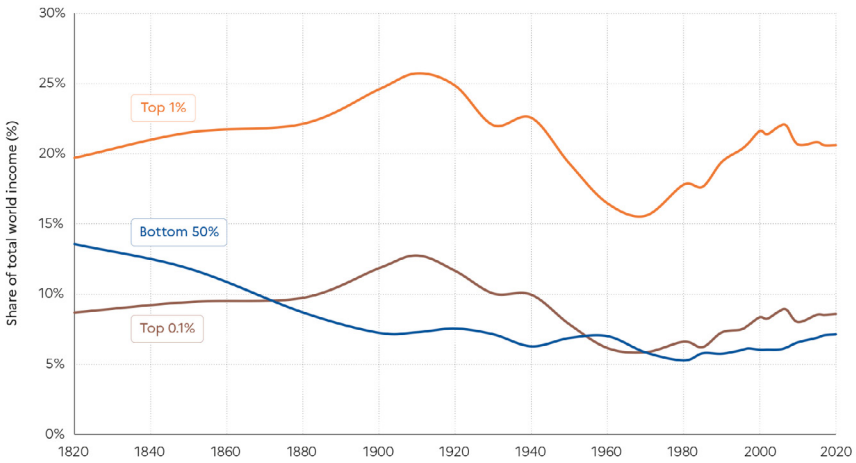


Box 5
Global Inequality

Historical evidence suggests that extreme levels of global inequality can be highly persistent. The continuation of a trend towards more global equality depends on various political, social, and economic factors. Between 1910 and 1980, the movement towards greater within-country equality was largely driven by socialist political movements, which also advocated for international equality, particularly through their support for independence and the end of colonialism. Emerging forms of internationalist egalitarian political mobilisation, as well as grassroots movements like Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future, and MeToo, might play a similar role in the future.

In contemporary capitalism, an individual's income group (i.e. whether they belong to the bottom 50%, top 1%, etc. in their own country) is now more significant than their nationality (where they live) in determining levels of global inequality. This finding implies that the predistribution and redistribution of incomes and capital within countries, both rich and emerging, are essential for reducing global inequality. However, it is important to note that inequality between countries remains very high in absolute terms as of 2020, roughly at the same level as in 1900. Reducing the differences in average income (or capital endowment) between countries is still significantly important. In other words, while within-country inequalities dominate in relative terms, disparities between countries remain substantial, which explains why overall inequalities are so pronounced, akin to the situation in 1900-1910. Additionally, although between-country inequality has been declining since 2008, there is no guarantee that this trend will continue in the future.

Global income inequality: top 1% and top 0.1% vs bottom 50% income shares, 1820-2020



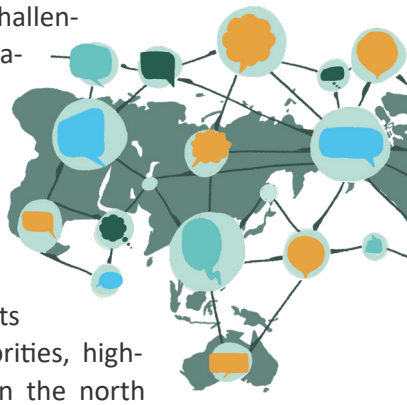
Source: World Inequality Report 2022. Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G., et al. (2022). World Inequality Lab. Pp. 68-69. https://www.un.org/en/desa/reform-or-rupture

Bridges

As of **2024**, the world faces multiple crises, including climate change, violent conflict, rising authoritarianism, economic inequality and record levels of displacement. Many believe governments and global institutions are either unable or unwilling to address this condition of polycrisis, leaving communities to fend for themselves, often without adequate resources. Local and international civil society organisations (CSOs) have stepped in to respond to challenges and provide relief, but their efforts are also under resourced. In the past 15 years, there has been a notable rise in political protests and grassroots mobilisations across the world, at local, national and global levels. Communities, civic actors, and social and political movements increasingly organise to demand substantial and radical changes from governments and the international community at large. They seek to reclaim power from what is more and more seen as elite capture and oligarchic global politics. While collaboration across issues and movements remains limited, there is growing recognition of the connections between local challenges and global dynamics. Many people and civic groups are exploring alternative worldviews, ideas and practices, drawing from indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies from the formerly colonised world to challenge modernist models and dominant paradigms. These efforts face opposition from powerful interests and nationalistic movements, and risk being co-opted into a multicultural neoliberalism.

In **2026,** following a series of summits, forums and reports calling to shift power back to communities, the #InvestInEquitableNarratives movement emerges. Led by youth and supported across generations, it rapidly grows worldwide. The campaign targets dominant media (print, television, radio) to feature more diverse perspectives and voices to tell a wider range of stories about contemporary realities. Many see it as a response to conflicts in Gaza, Sudan and elsewhere, where social media was seen as a more accurate source of information than traditional outlets. To provide balance in global narratives, communities draw on their traditions, knowledge systems and relational philosophies such as Ubuntu, using symbolism and actions that foster mutual recognition and understanding. These efforts foster collaborations grounded in shared humanity, creating connections beyond social media. Key networks unite to amplify overlooked voices and share new stories.

In South Africa, the campaign sparks #IAmHere, linked to the Zulu greeting 'Sawubona' ('I see you'), encouraging people to relate their experiences in their own words, creating space for neglected narratives and challenging dominant frames in leading media. In Cyprus, a bicommunal media platform partners with outlets from both sides of the divided island to report on the daily lives of ordinary Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots and members of ethnic minorities, highlighting different conditions in the north and south. While initially focusing on food, which resonates across divides, the articles also explore deeper issues of identity and belonging. These content-specific campaigns spread through global social media platforms and civil society networks, inspiring similar efforts worldwide.



Yet many civic actors are also wary of the potential for bias and manipulation in social media. In response, cross-sectoral networks—including businesses, tech organisations, academics, activists, community groups and artists—collaborate to write algorithms for inclusivity, promote respectful online interactions and reduce digital harm.

Fact-checking initiatives and research collectives, inspired by groups such as Team Watchdog in Sri Lanka, BOOM Live in India and Correctiv in Germany, form in various countries to counter misinformation and hold institutions accountable. Formal networks linking these initiatives strengthen worldwide.

Public scrutiny leads some governments to make changes, but these are mostly cosmetic, fuelling demands for meaningful reform. The profile of such coalitions, networks and movements grows as they gain public trust and are increasingly sought out for their expert opinions on social, political and economic issues. This filters through in global reporting.

The Global Protest Tracker shows that uprisings against autocratic rule and exploitative economic policies are increasing worldwide. Shared grievances across countries foster collaboration among civil society actors rooted in local experiences. In Pakistan, for instance, a popular protest movement results in the resignation of the government and the creation of a transitional process to ensure a democratic and inclusive government. In Nigeria, nationwide protests draw inspiration from earlier youth-led movements that challenged the Kenyan government and others across the continent. Worker activism rises in response to economic crises and labour rights issues, but the global influence of labour unions remains mixed: In some areas, they see a revival in collective bargaining power, while in others they are kept away from the negotiating table.

Social and political movements advocating for more equitable global systems, including fair resource distribution, land rights and access to knowledge also gain momentum. This growth is fuelled by community philanthropy, mutual aid initiatives (especially in low- and lower middle-income countries) and stronger partnerships between civic organisations across regions. These movements promote inclusive development, emphasise indigenous knowledge and work to eliminate colonial practices and language. Efforts focus on finding new ways to collaborate across different movements to drive meaningful change. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, for example, actors from the social justice, climate justice and peace movements join forces to address the intertwined challenges of inequality, environmental degradation and conflict. Among other interests, they focus on demilitarising peace, recognising that militarisation drives environmental destruction through exploitative practices such as mining and deepens social and economic inequality.

By **2030**, community-owned social media platforms become more popular in many countries, driven by an open-source movement offering alternatives to tech monopolies. Fact-checking and cross-referencing tools become commonplace integrations into these platforms, which are designed as public commons rather than private enterprises. Their algorithms promote diverse content and stories from across the world, attracting creators who find broader reach; notably, for minority voices. As a result, people-centred journalism focusing on community and human needs flourishes. Platforms that have gradually fragmented into echo chambers as a result of their prioritising sensational or fake news decline in popularity. A special edition of Time and other major news outlets highlight the surge in alternative media, including talk shows and podcasts that address global peace and solidarity. Landmark EU legislation further supports this shift by regulating social media as public spaces to ensure fair treatment of all users and content. Some activists question whether this is sufficiently transformative, as increased state regulations inherently risk promoting powerful interests.

The gradual transformation of virtual public spaces, combined with increased community activism across issues, reshapes domestic politics in

many countries. The conservative and authoritarian wave of the early 2020s is reversing as voters, led by civic groups and younger political leaders, demand more inclusive, just, participatory and egalitarian governance. New political parties emerge as multi-constituency forces, winning elections and pressuring established liberal parties to adopt more progressive policies. In the United States, a third party won seats in the Senate and House of Representatives for the first time in history during the mid-term elections, granting it the power to break tight votes on new legislation. Ruling parties are increasingly held accountable by a translocal civil society infrastructure that provides mutual support. This grassroots political shift is already starting to yield positive effects, such as higher wages for low and middle-income workers. Populism and extreme nationalism lose appeal as people feel more accepted and represented.

As self-organisation and translocal networks grow bottom–up and participatory democratic practices gain popularity. Citizens in many countries start forming local and national citizen assemblies. Some regional assemblies are also created through direct consultation with these groups. A Global Citizens Assembly (GCA) is in development. Although these assemblies operate outside state governments and multilateral frameworks, their influence grows, revealing significant democratic deficits in global governance. They demonstrate that meaningful international collaboration can occur beyond the traditional nation-state system.

More funding is directed towards local and translocal civic eco-systems. It is considered best practice for global public investments to allocate 5 percent of grants to innovation and experimentation based on recognition that new approaches are needed in this interconnected world. These developments enable established translocal networks to leverage their collective power more effectively and coordinate efforts to influence governments and multilateral institutions, promoting progressive collaboration. Many local economies become more sustainable and less reliant on global supply chains, supporting community initiatives and strengthening civic responsibility and values.

Many countries learn from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. They also continue to face challenges from the increasingly volatile climate crisis and its effects on supply chains, economic growth and social cohesion. With an electorate demanding more action to ensure life on the planet is viable for future generations, governments in Europe and North America focus more and more on sustainable technologies and infrastructure. Those in low and lower-income countries reinvigorate local, national and regional markets to build climate resilience. This shift toward green regional economic integration reduces pressure on resource-rich countries, allowing them to re-invest in more diversified economies, while still supplying raw materials to transitioning economies.

In **2035**, amid intensifying climate and migration crises, the Global Climate Governance (GCG) framework is launched after the failure of previous carbon trading systems. Driven by a coalition of civic actors, citizen assemblies and social movements, the GCG secures national government commitments to global climate policies. The GCG is based on the principles of mutual benefit, collective responsibility and positive reinforcement, avoiding punitive measures. Central to the system are Global Climate Credits tied to the performance of each country and managed through the GCG Climate Fund, which receives a portion of GDP from all participants. The GCG Climate Council monitors compliance and progress. Analysts note that a crucial

ingredient is the active participation of citizens worldwide, who vote on climate initiatives via a digital platform. In their view, this approach fosters global citizenship and responsibility.

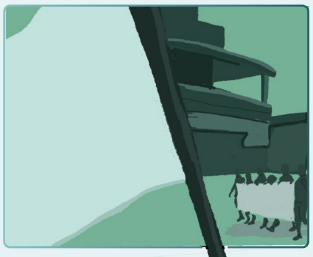
The co-speakers of the GCA give a speech for the signing ceremony in which they reflect on the historic developments of the previous decade. They remark on how many things had to go just right and how many people had to succeed in working together to reach this day, saying: 'The world synchronised around a shared vision of humanity not by one powerful voice directing all others, but by people in all corners of the world speaking up and building up one another.' In social media, the hashtag #BuildingTogether goes viral, with people sharing stories about how they contributed to this moment in their own communities.

Civil society increasingly relies on community philanthropy, self-sustaining business models, translocal solidarity networks and support from small and medium businesses embedded in local communities. Many CSOs reject traditional donor funding with conditions, instead demanding solidaric contributions to rectify historical injustices and equitably shift resources. A large coalition of funder networks notes that they see themselves as contributing to a global solidarity fund. One of its leaders is quoted as saying, 'The global funding system of the early 21st century feels largely irrelevant these days.'

The rise of egalitarian, diverse and participatory decision-making spaces sparks global excitement, especially as they shape equitable organising principles for a new global governance system that is grounded by the voices of communities and civic groups. A consensus on shared values and a new epistemology of peace lay the foundation for an alternative norm-based order. This goes beyond formal commitments in paper agreements and is practised across emerging institutions, networks and assemblies worldwide.

After reaching historic levels a decade ago, violence and conflicts have been declining for six consecutive years. Civic groups and local assemblies have the power to lead peace efforts, with support from a diversified global resourcing infrastructure. The easing of global economic pressures through green transitions and socio-economic resilience, along with reduced geopolitical conflicts over raw materials, allows civil society to play a larger role in diplomacy and fostering relationships between potential rivals.

Bridges



Box 6
World Protests

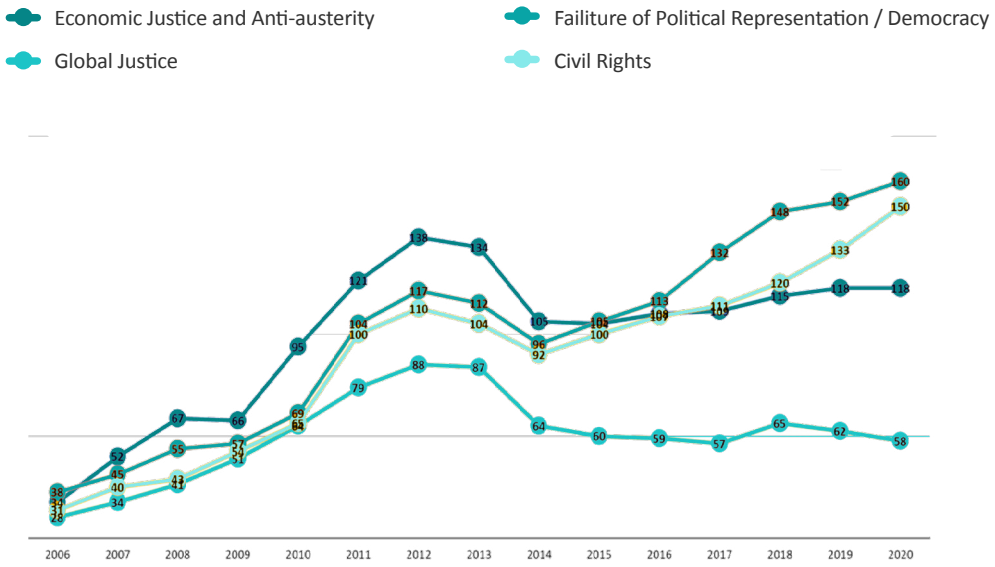
"There have been periods in history when large numbers of people rebelled against the way things were, demanding change, such as in 1848, 1917, and 1968; today we are experiencing another period of rising outrage and discontent, and some of the largest protests in world history." (Executive Summary)

Global protests from 2006 to 2020 have surged (2,809 in 101 countries covering over 93 percent of the world population), driven by increasing economic inequality, political discontent, and unmet social demands. These protests reflect widespread dissatisfaction with democracy, corruption, economic injustice, and failures in governance. Key grievances include political representation, economic justice, civil rights, and global justice issues like environmental concerns and opposition to global financial institutions

Protesters are not limited to traditional activists but increasingly include middle-class citizens, women, youth, and ethnic groups who feel marginalised by the political and economic systems. The protests have also seen the rise of radical right movements alongside progressive causes, highlighting polarisation. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing frustrations.

While many protests have succeeded in achieving some reforms, particularly in areas like wages and public services, broader systemic changes remain elusive. Governments are frequently the primary target, with repression common, as seen through arrests, injuries, and deaths.

Increasing Number of World Protest by Grievance/Demand, 2006-2020



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Box 7
Technology and Peacebuilding

We are at a critical juncture where technology's role in global peacebuilding could either deepen divisions or bridge them. As technology increasingly permeates every aspect of life, its dual nature becomes evident. On one hand, digital tools have been weaponised, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and undermining social cohesion. A 2023 UNESCO global survey on the impact of online disinformation and hate speech indicates that 67% of internet users have encountered hate speech online, while 85% of respondents report concern about the impact of disinformation in their country, including the possible impact on upcoming elections.

Conversely, the potential for technology to foster peace is equally significant. Digital platforms can facilitate dialogue, build bridges between divided communities, and mobilise global support for peace initiatives. Studies reveal that social media platforms have the potential to promote social cohesion and connectedness. Additionally, the effective use of technology in cross-border collaborations has been instrumental in addressing global challenges, from climate change to humanitarian crises. Coordinated efforts utilising digital tools during the COVID-19 pandemic helped sustain essential services across borders, demonstrating the power of technology in uniting nations for a common cause.

It is, however, important to recognise that technology is more than a 'double-edged sword' with the potential to divide communities or bring people together. Technology has fundamentally changed how we experience life and, as such, influences the very context in which conflict and collaboration occur.

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https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14607.doc.htm

Towers

In **2024**, populism, societal polarisation and rising authoritarianism are testing liberal democratic institutions in Europe and North America. At the same time, the growing influence of rising powers such as the BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and other strong emerging economies) heightens diplomatic, economic and military tensions, putting global governance arrangements—already strained by the fall out of war, economic uncertainty and climate change—under duress. These pressures reveal deep ideological divisions, with some analysts noting a widening gap between the West and the rest. This includes growing resistance to former colonial powers. In response, many in Africa, Asia, the Arab world and Latin America challenge the commitment of the West to international norms. They cite selective responses to atrocities and arms supplies into conflict zones in support of western interests. Low and middle-income countries face debt traps and austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund that reinforce their structural vulnerabilities, keeping them stuck at the bottom of the global value chain and prone to exploitation. Critics argue that colonial and hierarchical mindsets are deeply embedded in the multilateral system and question the supposed stability and superiority of the Western democratic model. Shrinking resources for development cooperation due to donor budget cuts limit the abilities of civil society actors to address key issues. New donors are emerging, primarily among the large rising economies in the Gulf, Asia and Latin America.

In **2026,** the United States and European countries are pushed further into a crisis of liberal democracy. As populist and authoritarian-leaning parties and interest groups become dominant forces, divides within populations deepen. Riots in the United States for and against elected leaders cause right-wing militias to mobilise in many states. The federal government deploys the national guard to quell the clashes, but these nonetheless cause widespread destruction and disrupt upcoming election cycles. Given its national crisis, the United States diverts its attention and funding away from international affairs to address domestic issues. In Europe, most governments are dominated by right-wing or EU-sceptical political parties. In the face of the global climate emergency and migration, these governments opt to intensify the fortification of Europe. The EU further transforms into a narrow project of regional economic protectionism and preventing immigration.

The climate emergency manifests in unprecedented and simultaneous ways. According to climate and meteorological organisations, every year between 2026 and 2029 becomes the hottest on record. In West Asia, Africa and Australia, widespread and lasting droughts cause massive loss of life of humans and livestock, as well as wildfires, severe food shortages and millions of displaced people. Extreme rainfall and floods cause mass fatalities and immense destruction of infrastructure in Latin America and Southern China, while islands in the Caribbean and Pacific experience coastal flooding. Outbreaks of disease in many affected areas leave the world afraid of a new pandemic and global health emergency. Already overwhelmed by internal crises, the United States and the EU isolate themselves even more, upsetting other regions, which are left with little support and limited supplies to address the disasters they face. Attempts to negotiate access to emergency supplies through the multilateral system are largely unsuccessful, although some bilateral deals can be achieved.

Many governments and civil society actors in low- and middle income countries say they have lost all faith in an international system that clearly does not exist to serve their needs. Heads of states denounce Europe and the United States for their unwillingness to rectify historical injustices and move from words to action when engaging with other parts of the world. They cite the failure of these actors to take responsibility for their disproportionate contribution to global warming as one more example of this pattern and refer to politicised responses to global conflicts in Yemen, South Sudan, Gaza and Myanmar to name but a few.

#AfricaFirstHypocrisyLast becomes a popular slogan in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, and soon informs the views of policymakers across sub-Saharan Africa. Variations rapidly spread to other regions; notably, West Asia and Latin America. These slogans become a rallying point in resistance to the existing climate finance system that sees the most vulnerable areas of the planet receive the least support for climate change adaptation, despite contributing little to global greenhouse gas emissions.

Identity politics becomes a powerful framework for regional leaders to present regionalism as an alternative to a failing global governance architecture, arguing that their shared regional history, values and culture bind its people together and is a foundation for a strong political unit. Civil society actors in Africa, Asia and Latin America increasingly work together within their respective (sub)regions to support one another. The growing gulf between the United States and the EU, and countries in the formerly colonised world affects the relationship between INGOs from high-income countries and civil society elsewhere. Dwindling funding from traditional development donors accompanies growing disillusionment outside North America and Europe about the sincerity of these INGOs to engage in equal partnerships and value non-western norms, knowledge and practices.

Growing contributions from donors such as Brazil, Mexico, India and the United Arab Emirates, which focus mostly on infrastructure, health, agriculture, migration and humanitarian aid, add to a reshaping of the global aid system. Their direct grants to groups and organisations in their own regions reduces local civil society dependency on INGOs and their intermediary role. Global civil society networks, however, face increasing challenges as they contend with reduced resources and relevance.

By **2030**, politics in many regions are reconfiguring. The significant withdrawal of the United States and the EU from global commitments accelerates (sub)regional collaboration to address the aftermath of the historic global climate emergency and the associated humanitarian crises. Governments enhance regional mechanisms and up efforts to address climate change, with priorities and focus areas varying across regions. Civil society actors, alongside local communities, play a key role in influencing regional policies, managing much of the disaster and humanitarian relief after the 2026 emergency. Their leadership strengthens their position in regional governance and gives them leverage in political matters. There is, however, regional divergence in the extent of civil society influence. These developments deepen regional consciousness and collective identities.

Trade and climate negotiations now take place between regional blocks since multilateral arrangements are more or less obsolete. Latin American and Caribbean countries at the forefront of the Latin oil rush are the first to negotiate as a regional block on their own terms, but Asian and African countries follow with actions for bypassing tradi-tional financial institutions. Countries increasingly

trade in their own currencies (swapping) or adopt digital currencies and blockchain, while expanding new financial institutions such as the New Development Bank.

Even so, challenges remain. Violence persists. In some contexts, for example, armed groups, criminal networks and cartels assume control over parts of territory and carry out governance functions. Efforts by regional leaders and bodies to settle these conflicts by pursuing power-sharing arrangements between opposing forces are controversial and not necessarily effective. Civil society groups argue that this approach disempowers citizens and establishes authoritarian elites prone to use violence to pursue their goals. They also point out that war and violence transcend political or territorial boundaries, advocating instead for enhancing cross-border community engagement and trade networks.

With the United States neglecting NATO and the EU having turned inward and grappling with its decline, Russia manages to establish a care-taker government in Ukraine, given waning support for the country. Despite ongoing resistance from guerrilla warfare and insurgency movements, Russia is emboldened to exert greater influence in countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus through military, political and economic means. The role of Russia as regional power broker is solidified, increasing regional tensions between Russia and Turkey

While regionalisms manifest differently around the world, it is especially at the (sub)regional level where collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors intensifies. In Africa, (sub)regional organisations effectively address cross-national issues, drawing in civil society networks to varying degrees. The African Union serves as a diplomatic forum with limited leverage and enforcement power. Larger-scale regional politics is often dominated by major regional powers. West Asia is divided between two alliances—one led by Iran and the other by Saudi Arabia—leaving little room for civil society actors due to their authoritarian nature. Tensions also continue around Israel and the newly independent Palestinian state. In Latin America, (sub)regional integration serves as a stepping stone for more regional collaboration, which also involves the Caribbean region. This is led by Brazil and Mexico, the leadership of which was boosted when they provided economic assistance and humanitarian relief in the 2026 disasters. There are challenges to overcome, notably political differences, economic disparities and geographical distance, but significant progress is made on trade integration and cooperation on environmental issues. Civil society coordination forums are recognised for their valuable contribution to regional collaboration.

In the Asia-Pacific region, relationships are fraught with ongoing rivalry between India, China and Japan. They manage to reach some agreement for the joint mitigation of and response to natural disasters following the 2026 emergency, but competition for influence and hegemony in the region and its markets is fierce. When China invades Taiwan, however, this fundamentally changes political dynamics in Asia. The absence of active US and EU engagement and the military might of China mean a swift occupation, although resistance groups form that carry out attacks against Chinese forces. Regional actors such as Japan, India and South Korea bolster their defences in response. Smaller countries in Southeast Asia try to enhance (sub)regional coperation to gain autonomy, but their heavy dependence on Chinese development assistance is a limiting factor. The global economy faces serious disruptions as global supply chains are significantly affected.

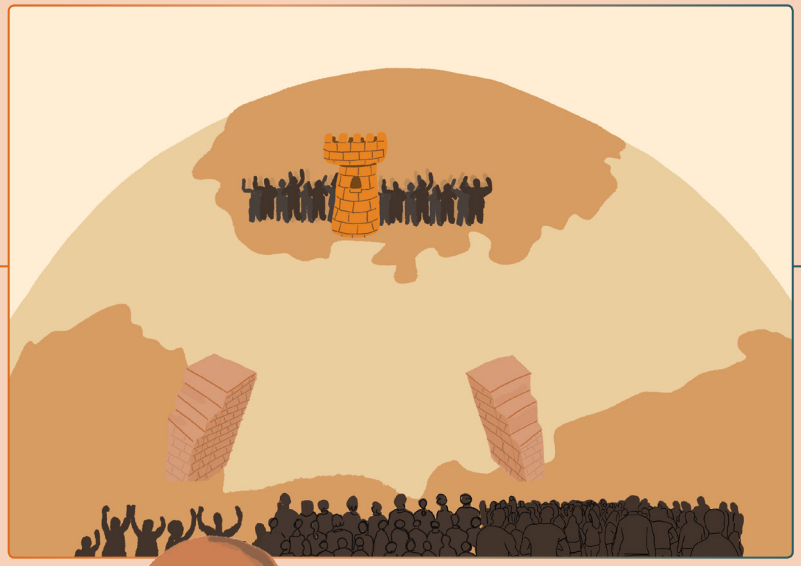
Geographic realities mean that some countries are left to fend for themselves; notably, island nations for which rising sea levels are a multidimensional threat. Others located at the interface of different regions (e.g. Turkey, Indonesia, Morocco and Afghanistan) try to act as a bridge, with varying degrees of success. Vulnerable groups within regions, such as stateless people, LGBTQ+ communities, women and others find it hard to mobilise. In the changed funding environment, rights issues, empowerment, inclusion and social justice get short shrift.

By **2035**, alternative governance arrangements have arisen in various regions, reflecting regional cultures and value systems. This often leads to a resurgence of neo-traditional leadership systems at local level, sometimes in combination with limits on the rights of LGBTQ+ communities or constraints on women. As civil society is more shaped by local and regional cultures, identities, and forms of working and knowing, there is considerable diversity in how communities cope with the effects of climate change. Strong identities form in regions that are linguistically or culturally relatively homogenous, such as Latin America and among Baltic and Nordic countries. More diverse regions, however, experience struggles for cultural hegemony and against assimilation. In academic circles, concern is growing that regional identities may ignore complexities within (sub)regions. Some academics reference increased resentment at and below the (sub)regional level, which is illustrated in small protests in various locations.

Some question what the regional paradigm means for youth, women and other marginalised groups, especially given the diminishing role of the global civil society networks that previously advocated on their behalf and facilitated access to resources and policymakers. Others deplore the absence of coherent global governance mechanisms to address climate change and other matters. Although the BRICS+ countries have become a more relevant forum for global discussions, the regions generally focus on internal issues and self-reliance. They have little incentive to push for a stronger and more capable global governance framework. Regions also follow distinct norms and values, with most inter-regional cooperation focused on trade, primarily in goods and raw materials that cannot be sourced regionally.

A few think tanks warn of the risk of instability and tensions between regions given their inward looking tendencies and self-perceptions of superiority. They also point to local civil society actors and communities. After playing a central role during the environmental disasters and their aftermath, they are increasingly pushed out of governance forums and pressed down upon by governments and economic interest groups that lean towards elite pacts and authoritarianism. This trend reduces civil society access to funding previously facilitated through regional bodies. With most economies in recession, this leaves few consistent funding sources available. As a result, civil societies are increasingly fragmented and start to align with various political and economic interests.

Towers



Box 8
Climate Change and Armed Conflict

Positive temperature deviations and extreme precipitation events are associated with an increased global risk of armed conflict. These climatic changes contribute to the escalation of conflicts, particularly in regions that already possess vulnerabilities. However, long-term, stable background factors, such as geographic, political, and socio-economic conditions, exert the most significant influence on the risk of armed conflict. While climate change exacerbates these risks, it is not the primary driver.

Natural disasters can either escalate, de-escalate, or have no effect on ongoing armed conflicts. The outcome depends on the specific context and how the disaster reshapes the strategic environment for the parties involved in the conflict. Disasters may lead to the escalation of conflict when they weaken government control, heighten grievances, or create opportunities for rebel groups to recruit members or launch attacks. Conversely, de-escalation may occur when disasters inflict substantial damage on one or more conflict parties, thereby limiting their capacity to engage in violence. Weakened infrastructure or diminished military capability can prompt a temporary state of peace. Changes in conflict intensity are more likely to be explained by strategic shifts rather than grievances or solidarity. Rebel and government forces adapt to changes in resources, public sentiment, and military conditions in the aftermath of a disaster.

Sources:

Understanding Digital Conflict Drivers. Puig Larrauri, H., Morrison, M. (2022). In: Mahmoudi, H., Allen, Modelling armed conflict risk under climate change with machine learning and time-series data.
Ge, Q., Hao, M., Ding, F., Jiang, D., Scheffran, J., Helman, D., & Ide, T. (2022). Nature Communications, 13, 2839. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-30356-x
Catastrophes, Confrontations, and Constraints: How Disasters Shape the Dynamics of Armed Conflicts. Ide, T. (2023). The MIT Press. Cambridge, MA, London, England. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14970.001.0001

Box 9
Shrinking Civic Space

- Almost 3 out of 4 people live in authoritarian regimes.
- Only 2.1% of people live in countries with open civic space.
- 10 authoritarian states account for 80% of transnational repression of activism.

Global civic space is shrinking, making it harder for people to advance the solutions required by today's crises. According to CIVICUS, a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists that conducts ongoing analysis of the state of civil society, 30.6% of the world currently lives in countries with closed civic space, the highest proportion in years. This alarming trend is linked to the rise of authoritarianism across the globe. In several regions, elected leaders have undermined democratic processes to consolidate power. Additionally, far-right movements have gained influence, even shifting political norms without holding offices. Civil society organisations face increasing challenges due to the weaponisation of technology for disinformation and the use of artificial intelligence to suppress dissent.

As global civic space continues to shrink, the future of global civil society is uncertain. Authoritarianism, technological manipulation, and the rise of far-right movements have the potential to undermine efforts to address pressing challenges such as climate change, inequality, and violent conflict.

Sources:
2024 State of Civil Society Report from CIVICUS, published March 2024
https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2024
Rethinking civic space in an age of intersectional crises: a briefing for funders, published March 2019 https://www.fundersinitiativeforcivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FICS- Rethinking-Civic-Space-Report-FINAL1.pdf

Box 10
Inequality and Armed Conflict

Inequality and conflict are intricately connected, as highlighted in various studies across different dimensions of inequality. Horizontal inequality—the disparities between groups based on factors such as ethnicity, region, or religion—is strongly linked to the onset of armed conflict. A review of the literature shows robust evidence that economic and political inequalities among marginalised groups significantly raise the risk of violent conflict.

Horizontal inequality exacerbates feelings of injustice and motivates groups to engage in rebellion when they perceive their group as being systematically deprived compared to others. This group-based inequality provides both the motive and opportunity for mobilisation, especially when combined with strong group identity and leadership. However, while deprived groups seek to address grievances, relatively privileged groups may resort to violence to protect their dominance and resources.

The conflict-inequality trap suggests that not only does inequality lead to conflict, but conflict also worsens inequality. High-intensity conflicts, especially those lasting over five years with significant casualties, disproportionately affect already disadvantaged regions, exacerbating social and economic disparities. This creates a vicious cycle where inequality fuels conflict, and conflict further deepens inequality, trapping societies in prolonged instability.

Economic structures also play a role in this dynamic. A dual-sector approach can demonstrate that countries with large traditional sectors, where wages are low and wealth is immobile, are more prone to conflict. In contrast, those with more productive modern sectors tend to experience less violence, as economic development raises wages and reduces the appeal of rebellion.

Sources:

The Conflict-Inequality Trap: How Internal Armed Conflict Affects Horizontal Inequality. Dahlum, S., Nygård, H. M., Rustad, S. A., & Østby, G. (2019). UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper No. 2-2019. United Nations Development Programme. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr19bpconflictinequalitytrapfinal.pdf

Horizontal inequality and armed conflict: A comprehensive literature review. Hillesund, S., Bahgat, K., Barrett, G., Dupuy, K., Gates, S., Nygård, H. M., Rustad, S. A., Strand, H., Urdal, H., & Østby, G. (2018). Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement, 39(4), 463-480. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2018.1517641

Why do some poor countries see armed conflict while others do not? A dual sector approach. Vestby, J., Buhaug, H., & von Uexkull, N. (2021). World Development, 138, 105273. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105273

Scenario Matrix

The actual future that unfolds in reality may well include a combination of all four scenarios, as well as others not envisioned here. To see and discuss these complex dynamics more clearly, we imagine them as distinct scenarios. The table below compares the scenarios based on several factors relevant to global collaboration for peace.

	Walls	Maze	Bridges	Towers
Which mindsets and issues take precedent?	Isolationism, authoritarianism and nationalist priorities dominate, with governments focusing heavily on military defense and border control over diplomacy	Reformist multilateralism gaining momentum, with a focus on structural reforms to outdated global governance systems	A growing mindset of grassroots-driven solidarity and bottom–up collaboration prevails, pushing for inclusivity and shared humanity	Regionalism and economic protectionism, driven by resistance to former colonial powers and expanding regional economic blocks
Who are the main protagonists?	Nationalist governments, military alliances and corporate elites	Coalition of UN reform advocates, civil society, and major and emerging global powers	Civic actors, local communities, youth movements, translocal solidarity networks	Regional organisations and powers, and regional civil society actors
How is violent conflict addressed and peace pursued?	Primarily through militarisation, increasing defense budgets and militaristic interventions	Peacebuilding efforts tied to UN reforms and renewed focus on strong multilateral roles in peace processes	Peace efforts in large and small conflicts increasingly led by civic actors focused on demilitarisation and community-owned approaches	Power-brokerage by regional actors, and fragile contested power-sharing agreements
Where does collaboration mostly take place?	Limited and largely contained to security alliances	Focused on multilateral platforms; e.g. UN reform processes, peacebuilding efforts	Spans local, regional and translocal/ global civic networks	Primarily within regional organisations and (sub)regional networks
What happens to funding for collaboration?	Severely reduced, with resources redirected toward military expenditure	Moderately increases for reform-driven initiatives (global system; local peacebuilding efforts)	Significantly increases, with resources coming from broad and diverse base (grassroots and civic-led movements), with emphasis on translocal ecosystems	Reduced, but refocused on regional self-reliance and economic protectionism
How do civic actors fare?	Marginalised, with many facing repression and restrictions on their activities	Gaining increased influence in reform processes and included in global governance mechanisms	More autonomous and powerful, taking leadership in transnational initiatives and influencing governance structures	Active in regional initiatives, but fragmented due to lack of consistent funding and support

Using the Scenarios

In developing scenarios, we create a common language that allows us to talk about present and future challenges and opportunities. This exchange enables us to make informed decisions and build strategic alliances to promote our desired future. Therefore, for scenarios to be effective, it is essential for people to reflect on and engage in conversation about them. This reflection may be individual or collective, face-to-face or virtual

You can use the scenarios in the groups and networks to which you belong in various ways, as the examples below suggest:

As a civil society activist or community builder, consider promoting dialogue about the scenarios and their implications among community groups, women's groups, environmental groups, etc.	As a teacher or university professor, consider using the scenarios in your teaching	As a businessperson, consider using the scenarios for strategic planning, testing the robustness of your strategy in different futures.
As an artist, consider how to translate the scenario stories into exhibitions, illustrations, graffiti, theatre, film, etc.	As a government official, consider using the scenarios to test the robustness of your political programme and to consider what more you can do to positively influence the future.	As a citizen, consider how these scenarios relate to your political choices and engagement, as well as your work at community level.
As an (inter)national development professional, consider using the scenarios to foster internal dialogue within your organisation to reflect on the effectiveness and relevance of your current ways of working.	As a media professional, consider featuring the scenarios to introduce them into the public narrative and encourage public reflection and dialogue.	As an (inter)national civil servant, consider using the scenarios to identify opportunities to promote greater equity and sustainability within the current peacebuilding system.

Towards Collaborative Action

In a world shaped by shared global challenges and distinct local contexts, building lasting peace requires collaborations that bridge and transform the spaces we work within and engage from. The RESPACE initiative envisions a future where global collaboration for peace transcends the established systems and enables the leadership of diverse civic actors across the globe. We believe that without reimagining and building beyond our current architectures and mechanisms, preventing violent conflict and creating sustainable peace will not be possible. As we move from scenario development towards pursuing collaborative action, the need for equitable global spaces and infrastructures for sustainable peace becomes acutely clear.

This vision is inherently translocal—not confined to 'the local' or 'the global' but networked and entangled. It encourages communities, organisations, and individuals to engage across regions and sectors, co-creating spaces for peace that are deeply rooted yet interconnected—transcending state, institutional, or cultural boundaries.

RESPACE advocates for collaborations and partnerships that actively 'respace' how we connect, organise, and support one another. The scenarios present possible paths to the future that harbour detrimental forces but also embrace profound potentials for transformative change. The destructive dynamics should urge us to acknowledge this horrifying juncture in history and to break away from patterns that perpetuate inequality, polarisation, and armed violence. Conversely, the creative energy and worldwide mobilisation should open our minds to systemic alternatives and guide our pursuit of sustainable paths offered by the scenarios.

Pointing to just a few of the catalytic elements in the scenarios: the shared interest of people in democratic self-organisation at various levels can lead to (global) citizen assemblies and democratised architectures for regional and global governance. Technology can be reappropriated to equitably include marginalised voices in global discourses, fostering mutual understanding in an increasingly divided world. The opportunity to reform the UN Charter exists and could enable it to effectively fulfil its potential in curbing military aggression and promoting equitable and just development. A choice can be made for economic policies and cooperation that enable everybody to live with dignity and to freely associate with others, while also securing the future of our planet and its inhabitants.

Moving forward and creating a more peaceful world won't be possible if we cannot overcome siloed, mechanised, and sectorised conceptions of what human progress means and how it can happen—at least, this is one insight we take away from the scenarios. While they offer glimpses into the future, the scenarios also call on us to refresh our memories, remembering the histories of diverse places and peoples, and to feed this into our vision for social change as a global practice that is not donor-driven and hierarchical but built on solidarity and mutual support.

To bring this vision to life, we call on everyone with a stake in the future of peace—locally and globally, whether in multilateral settings, as part of a government, transnational movement, civil society or the private sector—to become practising architects in reshaping how we work together across borders, causes, and communities. Collaboration

can be transformative when we weave new networks, co-create spaces, and foster relationships that are inclusive, equitable, adaptable, and resilient. A new ecosystem could emerge as we exchange knowledges, share resources, and reinforce each other's efforts while valuing diverse imaginations for a better future. Here, global and local efforts are interdependent, each supporting the other to build infrastructures for peace that reflect local realities while drawing on global solidarity.

Our experiences in the RESPACE initiative remind us that collaboration is not a distant ideal; it begins with real, practical conversations and joint actions, where diverse voices come together to learn, strategise, and grow as a cohesive force. For us, collaboration is not limited to responding to immediate needs; rather, it opens spaces where dialogue, creativity, and new structures can emerge.

It is up to each of us, then, to reconsider the roles we play, revise the ways our organisations and institutions operate, and open our platforms and movements to diverse ideas and partners. Depending on where we stand and the capacities we bring, there will be different responsibilities to carry and opportunities to seize. The scenarios are clear: there is no natural progression towards a better future, nor are there easy solutions that spare us from the need to fundamentally change our ways or working and organisations. If you are anchored within the aid system, it may fall upon you to collaborate for a radical transformation of international civil society or to seek allies to reform our global governance architecture. If you stand firmly outside the aid industry, you might look for partners in new places and seek to build each other up from below while co-creating operational alternatives to existing systems.

Scenario-based thinking can guide our choices and help us consider potential paths forward, equipping ourselves to respond thoughtfully to both anticipated and unforeseen challenges. Such an approach, rooted in foresight, enables us to keep our actions aligned with a long-term vision while remaining adaptable and open to change along the way.

In respacing global collaboration for peace, we aim to inspire and engage new partners from all sectors and levels of society to join forces—not as donors or participants, but as co-creators of a shared future. The magnitude of the challenge we face in ensuring equitable collaboration requires the full extent of our collective human potential. Collaboration that is translocal—both grounded in place and connected globally—can cultivate an environment for sustainable peace to flourish. Each new connection, shared resource, and aligned strategy forms a foundation for lasting, transformative change, lighting the way towards making a peaceful and equitable world

About the RESPACE Initiative

RESPACE is a living initiative that is constantly evolving and welcomes the involvement of people, organisations and networks beyond the initial RESPACE team. For updates and more ideas on how to use the scenarios, visit https://www.respacepeace.org/. Also find out how you can become part of our growing community.

RESPACE Team

Abdul Halim Halim	*Director General, Citizens Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR), Afghanistan*
Aldrin Calixte	*Working for peace concerns us all; let's act together.*
Befekadu Hailu	*Human rights advocate in Ethiopia, co-founder and former director of the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD Ethiopia).*
Buthaina Tareq Ali Alselwi	*Programs and projects writing and management specialist and human rights advocate.*
Cedric de Coning	*Is a research professor with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and a senior advisor with the South African-based ACCORD.*
Gay Rosenblum-Kumar	*Is a conflict transformation and peacebuilding practitioner with 25 years' experience designing and managing conflict prevention and peacebuilding projects with the UN and international NGOs.*
Gunjan Veda	*Believes in the power of people to transform systems and relentlessly seeks to create spaces where this power can be collectively exercised for unlearning and learning.*
Jenny Hodgson	*Through her work at the Global Fund for Community Foundations, Jenny has spent the last 18 years advocating for community philanthropy to be recognised by the dominant aid system as a legitimate development strategy that builds assets, agency, and, most importantly, trust (both within and between communities), which must be part of any reimagining of the "good society we want."*
Joanna Makhlouf	*Is a world citizen focusing her work on locally-led sustainable peace, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and active citizenship. She is committed to translocally-driven action as the cornerstone of global justice, solidarity, and development.*
Laura Cortés Varón	*Social and public innovator, using creativity and innovation to build peace.*
Luate Joseph John	*Is a prominent activist dedicated to promoting human rights, peace, transparency, and accountability in South Sudan. He is the founder and Executive Director of Amalna South Sudan, bringing extensive experience in media and communication to his work.*

Lulseged Mekonnen Yimer	*Executive Director, AISDA Ethiopia.*
Marwa Eissa	*A humanitarian; an advocate of peace, a champion of localisation, a strategist, and a voice of hope! Marwa is the Director of Partnership Development and Management (DPDM) for TAS.*
Mie Roesdahl	*Founder of Conducive Space for Peace with a commitment to equity and dignity as the defining characteristics of future global collaboration for sustainable peace.*
Minal Wickrematunge	*Minal Wickrematunge is an artist and designer from Colombo, Sri Lanka. She is an ambassador for the Fearless Foundation, a feminist arts foundation that paints murals of misrepresented communities on the streets across South Asia and beyond. Her work explores the intersection of art and activism.*
Riva Kantowitz	*For more than two decades, Riva has accompanied human rights, humanitarian, and peacebuilding organisations around the world and now focuses on effective support to grassroots social change via equitable partnerships and innovative funding approaches.*
Ruby Quantson Davis	*Is a Scholar-Practitioner in the fields of deliberative dialogues, peace-making and democratic practices, co-creating transformative learning and knowledge systems with communities. (Ghana/UK)*
Sever Dzigurski	*Activist and professional committed to peace, passionate about creative learning, critical analysis and social change processes.*
Stella Nyanzi	*Is a Ugandan medical anthropologist, human rights activist, dissident poet and scholarship-holder of the Writers-in-Exile programme of PEN Zentrum Deutschland (Germany).*
Tim Murithi	*Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town, South Africa.*
† Yves Kayene Kulondwa	*"I come from Bukavu, a city in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, ranked the richest country in mineral resources in Africa and 7th in the world. Paradoxically, it is also one of the countries with one of the poorest populations in the world, ranked 143rd out of 197 in terms of literacy. Add to this a long colonial history, decades of dictatorship, several deadly armed conflicts and widespread corruption.My passion for justice and equality naturally influenced my talent as an artist and led me to become a cartoonist. I use caricature because it often makes it possible to address sensitive, harsh or taboo subjects in our society with a touch of lightness."*[7]
Zachary Metz	*Is a peacebuilding practitioner, scholar and professor, emphasising the unique, consequential political power that local peace actors generate when they act to redefine the conflict landscape. He is also a partner at Consensus.*

[7] My Point, Your View: An exhibition by Artists' Safe Haven guest Yves Kulondwa, Justice & Peace, https://justiceandpeace.nl/en/news-my-point-your-view-exhibition-by-yves-kulondwa/. His quote on the dedication page is taken from "In memoriam of Yves Kulondwa", https://youtu.be/ebRwoTbQCKg?si=zxBe4Y5SS1DukPgc.

Organising Team

The RESPACE team, and the larger RESPACE initiative of which these four scenarios form a part, is organised and facilitated by a partnership consisting of Conducive Space for Peace (CSP), Reos Partners and the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR).

CSP	*Kara Wong* *Mathilde Wieland Thorsen* *Mie Roesdahl*	*Ralph Ellermann* *Sweta Velpillay*
Reos Partners	*David Winter* *Lerato Mpofu*	*Michelle Parlevliet* *Sydney Hayes*
NEAR	*Falastin Omar*	
Illustration	*Minal Wickrematunge*	*Njung'e Wanjiru*
Layout	*Aitana Blasco*	

Funding

The RESPACE initiative and the development of these four scenarios has been generously supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and Humanity United, two philanthropic foundations committed to systems change in peacebuilding. Other support was provided by ADRA Denmark and the Global Fund for Community Foundations.

About Conducive Space for Peace

Conducive Space for Peace (CSP) is a Danish registered INGO specialising in facilitating transformation in the peacebuilding system to enable greater local leadership for more equitable, dignified and sustainable peace. CSP works with an extensive global network of change agents and partners across the peacebuilding, development and humanitarian sectors, convening, accompanying and developing analysis for systems change globally and in specific country contexts. At CSP, we understand our evolving role in the peacebuilding and development field as a catalyst and convener of change agents in and around civil society, providing a space where they can radically rethink, envision and strategise to change the global system and shift power to local civil society actors.

About Reos Partners

Reos Partners is an international social enterprise that helps people move forward together on their most important and intractable issues. Reos Partners designs, facilitates and guides processes that enable teams of stakeholders to make progress on their toughest challenges. The approach is systemic, collaborative and creative. Reos engages with governments, corporations and civil society organisations on challenges such as conservation, food, energy, climate, education, health, education and justice. Reos Partners has been pioneering the participatory use of futures work in conflict-affected contexts—Columbia, South Africa and Ethiopia, among others—and developed the Transformative Scenario Process.

About Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR)

The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) is a movement of local and national civil society organisations (CSOs) from the Global South rooted in our communities and which share a common goal of promoting fair, equitable and dignified partnerships in the current aid system. We focus on genuine local participation at all levels of development and disaster management to ensure effective aid is delivered to people in need. NEAR acknowledges the vital role played by our members, who are closer to their communities and often first to respond in times of crisis. It is their effectiveness and speediness in responding that often saves lives within the first few days of an emergency.

Glossary

BRICS+	*An economic alliance comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa that was formed to promote cooperation among major emerging economies. It seeks to enhance multilateral trade, financial collaboration and political dialogue, while providing a counterbalance to Western-dominated institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. BRICS+ refers to an initiative to expand this group by including additional emerging economies, with the goal of increasing its influence in global governance and fostering greater cooperation among the Global South. Both BRICS and BRICS+ aim to promote a more multipolar world order and offer alternative pathways for global development and decision-making.*
Dedollarisation	*Refers to the process by which countries reduce their reliance on the US dollar in international trade and financial transactions, and as a reserve currency. This can involve promoting the use of alternative currencies (such as local currencies or other major currencies such as the euro or yuan) in global commerce, diversifying foreign exchange reserves and decreasing dependence on the dollar for debt issuance or international settlements. Dedollarisation is often pursued by countries seeking to mitigate the influence of US monetary policy on their economies, reduce exposure to dollar-related sanctions or promote financial sovereignty*
Demilitarising peace	*The process of reducing or eliminating the role of military forces and strategies in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. It advocates for resolving conflicts and promoting peace through nonviolent means, such as diplomacy, dialogue, reconciliation, economic cooperation and social justice, rather than through the threat or use of force. It may entail shifting away from military solutions, reducing defence spending, challenging militarised institutions, and promoting sustainable development and human security*
Elected Ten	*Refers to the ten non-permanent member states of the UN Security Council. Each year, the UN General Assembly elects five member states to serve a two-year term in this capacity. This ensures a rotation of members, with five new countries joining the UN Security Council on 1 January each year, while the other five finish their term on 31 December of the same year.*
G20	*An international forum of 19 countries plus the European Union, representing the world's largest economies. The G20 focuses on global economic governance, financial stability, and addressing key global challenges.* *Member Countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.*

Global governance architecture	*A broad concept that includes both multilateral institutions and informal arrangements, regional bodies, private sector actors, civil society organisations and other stakeholders that contribute to the regulation and coordination of global affairs. This term highlights the overall structure that governs global interactions, including non-state actors, international norms and global rules beyond state-centric institutions.*
Local actors	*Individuals, groups, organisations and institutions within conflict-affected contexts that are directly engaged in efforts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and support communities in various other ways. Their leadership and involvement in the design and implementation of initiatives is crucial for ensuring that these are relevant, effective and sustainable. Examples include community-based organisations, activist groups, traditional and religious leaders, women's groups, youth groups, community networks, community radio stations, small and medium business enterprises, etc.*
Multilateral system	*The cooperative framework in which countries work together on common issues through formal institutions or agreements, facilitating collaboration between three or more states on political, economic, security, environmental, health, digital and other matters. Examples include institutions such as the United Nations (and all its agencies), World Trade Organization, World Bank, and regional organisations (e.g. African Union, Organisation of American States, Association of Southeast Asian Associations), all of which represent platforms through which countries negotiate and implement shared policies. Focusing specifically on formal cooperation between states, the multilateral system is a subset of the broader global governance architecture, which involves a wider range of actors and structures.*
Polycrisis	*Refers to a situation in which multiple interconnected crises occur simultaneously, with the interactions between them amplifying their overall impact. These crises—whether economic, environmental, political or social—are not isolated, but instead compound one another, creating complex and unpredictable challenges on a global scale.*
Respace (also respacing)	*A verb used to encapsulate how spatial dimensions reflect and reinforce the inequities in global collaboration and relationships, and to highlight the need for transforming these spatial arrangements. For example, respacing calls attention to the power imbalances between actors from different regions, where those from wealthier nations often dominate decision-making. It also refers to the unequal access to spaces—such as how some people enjoy unrestricted mobility, while others face visa restrictions or border controls. Respacing addresses where violence is concentrated, such as in areas prone to conflict or within marginalised communities, and considers the unequal spatial distribution of social groups, such as segregated neighbourhoods or resource-poor regions. Ultimately, to respace means challenging and reconfiguring these spatial inequalities to enable more just and equitable global collaboration.*

Spaces and infrastructures for peace	*Substitute terms for the phrase 'ways of collaboration'. The terms 'spaces' refers to conducive conditions within which people can informally collaborate. The term 'infrastructures' indicates a need for some degree of governance or structured relations that allow the conducive conditions to be sustained over time.*
Sawubona	*Traditional Zulu greeting meaning, 'I see you'. It goes beyond the simple act of greeting, as it conveys recognition of the person's presence, humanity and worth. In the philosophy behind Sawubona, it implies deep acknowledgment and connection, whereby the person being greeted is truly seen in both a physical and spiritual sense. In essence, Sawubona embodies a spirit of community, respect and shared humanity.*
Stabilisation	*Actions taken to restore order and stability in a region or country experiencing conflict or crisis. This often involves efforts to strengthen security, governance and basic services. In peacebuilding terminology this is considered equivalent to the notion of 'negative peace' as it does not imply addressing the underlying causes of conflict which would be required in order to build 'positive' or sustainable peace.*
Systems change	*Refers to a deliberate process of altering the underlying structures, relationships and dynamics within a complex system to achieve long-term and sustainable transformation. This can involve shifts in policies, practices, mindsets, power dynamics and resource flows to address the root causes of social, environmental or economic challenges. Rather than focusing on isolated interventions, systems change seeks to influence the entire ecosystem in which problems exist, recognising that lasting solutions require changes at multiple levels.*
Translocal	*Refers to collaboration between actors rooted in distinct places all over the world that constitute an alternative globality to the hegemonic imagination of the terms 'the global' and 'international' as the relationship between sovereign nations; e.g. embodied by the UN system. The kinds of actors engaging in translocal relationships can be vastly different and are mostly defined by decentring nation states as protagonists. Examples include global city networks; the transnational organisation of trade unions; social movement coordination across societies; translocal/transnational civil society ecosystems, etc.*
Triple planetary crisis	*Three interrelated environmental challenges that threaten the health of the planet and humanity; namely, climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. These three crises are deeply interconnected, with climate change accelerating biodiversity loss, pollution affecting ecosystems and climate regulation, and the loss of biodiversity limiting the resilience of the Earth to climate impacts.*
Ubuntu	*An African philosophy that emphasises community, interconnectedness and shared humanity. Originating from the Bantu languages of southern Africa, the term is often translated as 'I am because we are' or 'humanity towards others'. It underscores the idea that individual well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of others and the collective community. Ubuntu promotes values such as compassion, empathy and mutual support, advocating for a world in which relationships and human dignity are prioritised over individualism.*