

INTRODUCTION

Editorial

ICIP

We were finishing revising the translations for this monograph when the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February, devastating the lives of millions of people and giving rise to new concerns about peace and security around the globe.

With Ukraine painfully present in all of us, we also believe it is necessary to keep working on other violent situations causing pain in different parts of the world. War is still wreaking havoc on Yemen, Tigre, the Central African Republic, and Syria. Afghanistan spends every day under merciless Taliban rule. The population of Palestine has been suffering an apartheid regime for decades. Extremist groups are continuing their lethal expansion across the Sahel. Around the world, 690 million people are hungry. More and more people are forced to leave their birthplace every year.

Other situations of significant violence are not related to extremism or traditional warfare. These do not necessarily occur in authoritarian regimes, in what is known as “failed states”, or in the poorest countries. They are situations of violence that are closely linked with criminality and the inadequate response of governments. Hence, it is direct violence coexisting with high structural and cultural violence levels.

During the last four years, ICIP has focused on situations we call “violence in non-war settings” when we need to provide a label. This characterisation has not been free of debate because, as very well expressed in one of the articles that follow, the line separating the violence of an armed conflict and an unarmed conflict becomes very difficult to discern in countries like Mexico.

“In recent years, the ICIP has endeavoured to focus on situations of intense violence in non-war settings”

The view that ICIP wants to take on these difficult-to-label realities is, as it could not be otherwise, a peacebuilding vision. What does this peace perspective mean? Among many other things, it entails a multidimensional reading of these kinds of violence without seeing it as being limited to its more direct and visible expressions. It goes to the root of conflicts, understanding their dynamics and identifying the actors who play roles in them. It pays attention to how violence affects people’s everyday lives and projects. It draws attention to individual and especially collective initiatives to change these situations. It determines the extent to which classical peacebuilding measures are applicable in contexts that have been given very little attention unless from an exclusive security viewpoint. It recognises victims’ rights to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition as an essential condition for coping with the future.

In this regard, the ICIP has organised various activities to exchange knowledge, experiences, and tools. Notable among them is the online seminar series “Amèrica Llatina. Fer front a les violències des de la construcció de pau” (Latin America: Confronting Violence by Constructing Peace), in which some twenty well-known speakers discussed how the lessons of peacebuilding can contribute transformative proposals in these complex situations of violence in non-war settings.

With this monograph, the ICIP aims to keep presenting ideas in the hope that they will help to make visible situations that are highly alarming but of low priority, to provide tools to people, groups, and institutions striving to deal better with them, and to propose measures which, rather than feeding back into more violence, can bring about real change.

“This monograph aims to make highly alarming violent situations visible and provide tools to people, groups, and institutions working to change them”

The first article, written by Sabina Puig, coordinator of ICIP’s “Violence in non-war settings” programme, aims to identify some of the basic features of these kinds of violence that are characterised precisely by their many manifestations. Without aspiring to be exhaustive, it also lists some of the essential aspects that could be included in a peace agenda.

In the following article, Ana Glenda Tager (Alianza para la Paz) explores some of the expressions of violence that affect humanity without necessarily being related to the existence of armed conflict. These include gender violence, attacks against environmental defenders, human trafficking, organised crime, etcetera which, in the author’s view, have received scant attention by comparison with conflicts between states or struggles for political control of a state.

The response to criminality and its violent manifestations has mainly been based on a militarised and punitive security approach. In her article, the third in this publication, Carolina Ricardo of the Instituto Sou da Paz del Brasil, describes how such responses have not managed to diminish violence but, on the contrary, have fuelled it. Brazil is a clear example. She warns that routine use of the armed forces for public security leads to the logic of war being introduced into everyday public security, thus giving rise to serious human rights violations.

Next, José Antonio Guevara Bermúdez (Autonomous University of Tlaxcala) examines data from Mexico. This country presents enormous challenges in security and raises many questions for peacebuilding endeavours. In Guevara’s words, “In terms of international law, the situation of violence that Mexico is dealing with can only be understood as non-international armed conflict”. This fact is crucial when designing strategies to confront the kinds of violence it gives rise to and protects human rights.

These types of “violence in non-war settings” are frequently associated with Latin America, a continent that, while representing only 8% of the world’s population, accounts for one in every three homicides globally. Nevertheless, they also affect other parts of the world. Mohamed Daghar (ENACT- Enhancing Africa’s Response to Transnational Organised Crime) offers an account of what is occurring in the pastoral lands of East Africa. This region is gravely affected by violence associated with the presence of organised crime and the consequences of climate change, and the political marginalisation inflicted by the various governments.

“The types of “violence in non-war settings” are frequently associated with Latin America, but they also affect other parts of the world”

The three following articles offer a different picture when reflecting on the role of civil society in reporting, preventing, and even interrupting cycles of violence. Roger Mac Ginty, director of the Durham Global Security Institute, speaks about the potential of local and even individual actions to break cycles of violence, describing how small acts of resistance can disrupt the logic, stance, and narrative of actors in a conflict who are fighting to take control of social space.

Esperanza Hernández, a lecturer at the University of La Salle (Colombia), invites us to learn more about the meaning of civil resistance and everything that such initiatives can achieve, even in situations of vast asymmetries of power. Still, she warns of enormous challenges in contexts like those studied in this monograph. For her, as for the ICIP, “Experiences of civil resistance are a heritage of peace and must be recognised as such, defended, and strengthened by all relevant actors working in peacebuilding”.

Finally, and enlarging this focus, Jordi Mir, lecturer at the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona, offers some interesting thoughts on the role of social movements in peacebuilding. One of the significant contributions of these movements is that they manage to make visible a whole range of kinds of violence, especially structural violence, which are not recognised by society or the authorities, or that have not always

been acknowledged as such. This recognition is essential in any country and particularly relevant in situations where direct, lethal violence can eclipse other kinds of violence that are equally perverse but less visible, even when they affect the everyday lives of millions of people.

It is a pleasure for the ICIP to feature in the “Interview” space of this issue Mary Kaldor, an internationally known specialist in the study of armed conflict. This section discussed the points of connection between violent situations in non-war settings and what she described twenty years ago as “new wars”. As she notes, in the analysis of conflicts or violence, excessive attention is still being given to factors related to the political motives of confrontations to the detriment of other elements that are much more important today. This situation worsens severe security crises, which, without typically political causes, do not have the international visibility and attention they should be getting.

Once again, the ICIP wishes to express its gratitude for the contributions of the experts who have contributed to this monograph. We trust that this collection of articles will help endeavours working towards a broader understanding and knowledge about the situations of violence that are so devastating for millions of people. They will contribute by offering proposals to construct just, inclusive, and sustainable peace.

Photography

Photography by Ruido Photo for the exhibition ‘Facing Violence: Stories of Resilience in Central America’, produced by ICIP.