IN DEPTH

Notes for a peace agenda

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The idea that peace is not just the absence of war is well consolidated among specialists in the field. In all likelihood, a good part of public opinion also shares the insight that it is not only in the context of war that peace is missing. Difficulty of access to essential needs; obstacles to the exercise of human rights; real or perceived insecurity, at home or in the street; mistrust of public institutions; inequalities, discrimination and exclusion; and even polarised social relations are all determinant in whether people live in peace or not. The opposite of peace, then, is not war but violence in all its various direct, structural, and cultural manifestations, whether or not it occurs in the context of armed conflict.

This broad view of the concept of peace is especially relevant at a point in history when the statistics reveal extraordinarily high rates of violent deaths in supposedly "peaceful" countries, sometimes exceeding those of countries at war. Caution is advised when comparing statistics because ways of measuring can differ from place to place but even so, the regularly systematised information of the UNODOC Global Study on Homicide, the Conflict Data Program of Uppsala University, and the Homicide Monitor of the Igarapé Institute, among others, alerts us to the serious situations of homicidal violence in countries where there is no ongoing armed conflict recognised as such. The data about Latin America and the Caribbean countries are especially alarming in this regard.

There can be no doubt about it: peacebuilding must focus on these situations which are different from those where it has traditionally worked. To a considerable extent, these circumstances suggest that the analytical and methodological frameworks of

peacebuilding need to be rethought. They also raise new and vital questions.

We want to focus on violence in non-war settings, but what kinds of violence are we talking about? How do we characterise them? How do we rate them? How do we define them? Even if we consider direct violence alone, we find a phenomenon that is both huge in its impact and complex in its dynamics. Massacres and forced disappearances committed by organised crime in Mexico (frequently in collusion with the authorities); extorsion and murders committed by the "maras" of Central America; extrajudicial executions of young black people in the favelas of Brazil; excessive use of force by security forces in crushing social protest; pervasive and non- investigated femicide,; large-scale human trafficking; humanitarian crises and abuses along migratory routes… What do all these situations have in common? How can we think about them from the standpoint of peace?

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These are exceptionally high levels of direct violence, placing the territories where they occur at the top of worldwide rankings of homicide and other grave attacks on human beings' physical and mental integrity. However, this direct violence occurs in places that are deeply marked by structural violence with extremely grim indicators of inequality and social exclusion, poverty, and denial of basic human rights, including the rights to health, education, and decent housing. All of these abuses are aggravated by long-established forms of discrimination that condition the lives of girls, boys, women, and men. Direct and structural violence are, in turn, reinforced by a discourse that, is replete with the sexist, racist, individualist, and militarist values that have permeated society for years feed back into them.

A diversity of factors and the complexity of their highly fluid, dynamic interactions are other characteristic features of these situations. Tensions do not arise only in the case

of traditional armed conflicts and among a restricted, internally homogenous number of actors with a political agenda and evident power over a territory. We frequently find a kaleidoscope of armed groups with alliances and splits that are difficult to monitor. The dividing line between "legal" and "illegal" actors becomes blurred because of the collusion of the institutions with the delinquents. Many of these groups have diversified their activities to such an extent that they might operate both in criminal networks and legal markets. Then again, the political interests of these actors are essentially limited to controlling routes and markets.

The researcher John Paul Lederach recently analysed this as follows; "The aim of violence might be control over certain local, territorial spaces but, more importantly, it is control over the networks where people—very vulnerable people—flow, as do weapons, drugs, and illegal economies, etcetera. [...] These are transnational and *openly hidden* networks, in the sense that they have a powerful presence while working from clandestine positions. [...] Violence is often performative, symbolic, horrific, and exaggerated in its ways of conveying fear. This poses local and transnational challenges, but they are not struggles for political power in the national sphere. They are trying to control the nation's economic and social connections."[1]

Nevertheless, it has also been observed how criminal groups have gained legitimacy among sectors of the population for whom the state does not guarantee basic needs or offer any hope for the future. This became particularly evident in the most critical moments of the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] When suggesting a roadmap to peace, it is essential to consider the interlinking of the three—direct, structural, and cultural—dimensions of violence and its chronic character.[3] It is also crucially important to understand the complex dynamics through which this violence is expressed and to construct a map of the most prominent actors.

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Proposal for a peacebuilding agenda

When peace is understood as a plural, relational, contextual, and dynamic concept,[4] there is no single or fixed prescription for dealing with such complex violence. Action at different levels, in various dimensions, and at different times will always be necessary, adapted to the peculiarities of the places where conflicts and violence occur. However, some shared reflections could help outline the essential elements of a peacebuilding agenda. In 2021, the ICIP organised a series of online seminars to identify these elements: Amèrica Llatina. Fer front a les violències des de la construcció de pau.[5] The following reflections draw on some of the outstanding ideas endorsed by the ICIP that were presented in these discussions.

1. Taking a comprehensive, long-term perspective

Peacebuilding is a slow process that requires a long-term perspective, looking back at the past and with specific actions in the present. It is necessary to accept that this is complex and difficult. It would be illusory to imagine that problems that have been entrenched for decades or centuries can be solved with a single election cycle, for example.

Immediate measures are certainly needed to reduce violence and guarantee the physical security of people. Still, they will be ineffective unless they are part of a genuine effort to ensure access to all human rights—economic, social, cultural, civil, and political—without discrimination at either the individual or the collective level.

In some cases of chronic, multidimensional violence, a peace agenda must study the historical inequalities (including those related to gender) that have led to conflict and not rule out the systemic transformation, even in power structures. Undoubtedly, this would be met with resistance by both armed groups and the political, social, and economic elites benefiting from the conflict and responsible for the reproduction of violence over decades.[6] Modifying the roles of some elite members so that, with their powers of influence and bringing about change, they will work for peace must also be part of the agenda.

These changes must also include strengthening democratic institutions to endow them legitimacy and the ability to deal with social conflict in a nonviolent manner.[7]

"Good governance – exhibited by states that are participatory, accountable, effective and founded on the rule of law – sets the foundation for building and strengthening institutional and non-state frameworks to better society and counter organised crime."
[8]

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2. Adopting another security model

To return to the measures that are necessary to guarantee the human rights to life and physical integrity, it is evident that, given all the kinds of violence described above, security policies are a priority for peacebuilding. But what policies, and what security?

The concept of security has been hijacked by a very restricted and exclusive standpoint that does not take into account the plurality of vulnerabilities, threats, and needs while also prioritising control and order over the necessary conditions for full exercise of human rights. When confronting delinquency, most governments have chosen to apply their coercive power with more social control, securitisation of public space, involvement of the armed forces in internal security operations, creation of special armed forces, and toughening of prison sentences.

Decades after introducing these "iron-fisted" policies, no significant reduction has been observed in the statistics on violence. More importantly, everything suggests that repressive policies have encouraged its reproduction.

How can the failure of security policies that have predominantly been applied so far be reversed? Some of the proposals that are being considered as ways of bringing about change are a comprehensive view of security that also responds to many kinds of social

problems; high-level political will, sustained over time; precise diagnoses; more transparency; decentralisation; more capacity building and cultural changes in the security forces; and civilian control over security forces.[9]

In other words, peacebuilding means reorienting security efforts towards a human security model aiming to create the conditions for people to have a dignified existence and develop their skills in freedom with full respect for their human rights. It is worth adding here that truly valuable contributions are being made in enriching this concept of security from the theoretical and practical standpoints of feminism, proposing models that are "less antagonistic, more cooperative, and intercommunity, where networks of support and companionship, and relations of mutual care make a virtue of interdependence."[10]

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3. Deciphering the connections between organised crime, violence, and peace

The various expressions of violence perpetrated by organised crime and its adverse effects on economic and democratic development in the countries where it is active represent an obvious challenge for global peace and security. Nevertheless, peacebuilding endeavours are now beginning to tackle the problem and offer proposals. [11]

It is essential to understand how criminal groups—in all their heterogeneity—function if we want to combat them. Owing to their opacity and complexity, the picture we have of them is still very partial and blurred. In this regard, there is still much work to be done, especially in peace studies.

What exactly is the relationship between organised crime and violence? The presence of criminal groups does not necessarily mean more violent episodes. On the contrary, in places where they exercise their power, which is directly proportional to the fragility of state institutions, they can sometimes regulate the occurrence of homicide and, when it suits them, reduce it.[12] Naturally, however, this comes at the price of other severe

forms of abuse and scrapping the rule of law. The use of violence by organised crime is highly tactical. The type and level of violence may depend on the message that is to be sent to the authorities, rival groups, and the population. There are times when criminal groups need the violence to be brutal and visible. On other occasions, their business interests need a "pacified" milieu where violence is avoided or hidden.[13] These dynamics, which vary from place to place, need to be thoroughly understood if they are to be combatted. A misguided response can exacerbate the violence perpetrated by criminal groups. In keeping with the approaches I have outlined in other sections, it is necessary to think about informed, innovative, and creative strategies to improve on the repressive, compartmentalised responses that have been applied so far.

One of the pending issues for peacebuilding is the need to explore in greater depth the conditions in which dialogue and negotiation with actors linked with organised crime would be possible and desirable.[14] What legitimacy would these groups have? What can be negotiated? What might motivate negotiation with the groups that benefit from conflict and violence?[15]

Another set of questions is concerned with the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of members of these groups. The lessons we have accumulated from such processes should guide activities aimed at demobilising people linked with violent organised crime.

4. Restorative justice for victims

Extraordinarily high levels of violence coincide with extraordinarily high levels of impunity, which aggravate even more the pain of victims and feed back into the cycles of violence. In these situations, reinforcing the justice-peace binomial is essential.

There are several factors explaining the impunity enjoyed in each country by people implicated in human rights violations and violent crimes: connivance of the authorities with criminal actors, lack of training, weak institutions, and so on. Dealing with each of these factors will require specific reforms in the structures of government, the judiciary, and the security forces. In cases where ordinary legal resources are not sufficient for responding to vast numbers of serious crimes, it may be necessary to introduce extraordinary measures that could provide truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of

non-repetition for victims and society as a whole.

The various experiences of transitional justice we know about are really helpful in what they tell us about how to deal with episodes of mass violence. These experiences have so far occurred with regimes "in transition" from a conflict to a post-conflict state or from a dictatorship to a democracy. Does it make sense to transfer the lessons and tools of transitional justice to situations that are (apparently) not "in transition" to regime change?

No formula is applicable *per se* in other contexts. Still, the vast number of victims and the seriousness of human rights violations involved, the overload that is paralysing ordinary legal mechanisms, the urgency of introducing mechanisms to guarantee non-repetition, and the need, as mentioned above, to probe to the roots of conflicts unquestionably demonstrate the appropriateness of being inspired by contributions from the domain of transitional justice when dealing with these kinds of violence. They are inputs that are not limited to criminal proceedings alone since they also contemplate a whole series of practices of restorative justice that contribute enormously to change and satisfy the victims' needs for justice.[16]

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5. Creating a cohesive civil society

Although the state is a mainstay, the peacebuilding process does not involve only the institutions or, still less, only the elites in power. It is essential to have an active, cohesive social fabric that challenges tolerance of violence and makes proposals for positive change in times of conflict. A growing number of people are moving away from the postulates of "liberal peace"[17] and saying that peacebuilding must start at the local level with the participation of people and communities, especially those who are affected by conflicts.

Civil society involvement becomes a marvellous array of actions that can range from exercises of nonviolent civil resistance, encouragement of dialogue, protest, projects for preventing violence, training, and simple, individual, often unnoticed gestures against the reproduction of violence.

However, the terror engendered by violence can separate and create even more tension among people groups and communities. It is therefore especially important to create conditions for keeping dialogue alive and fostering social cohesion, not only to promote peaceful coexistence but also to work collectively to cope with the most entrenched problems, and to construct shared visions of the future.

In situations of extreme violence, people and groups that are working for change are at high risk. The list of murdered local authorities, community leaders, journalists, and human rights and environmental defenders is growing by the year to levels that recall the darkest times of the worst dictatorships.

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International peacebuilding actors must support these individuals and groups and reaffirm the legitimacy others have tried to take from them, make their voices more heard globally, and to provide protection for them. Another task for these actors is to draw attention to the efforts of organised civil society and ensure that they become part of peace processes that transcend the strictly local level.

6. Understanding the relations between local violence and global phenomena

Most of the more brutal expressions of violence in non-war settings described above tend to occur in peripheral areas, far from centres of power and decision-making and escaping international scrutiny. Yet, a more or less close relationship with transnational

phenomena can be identified in many cases.

The connection between local violence and global affairs is especially stark in the following statistic: 75% of violent deaths in Latin America are caused by weapons (legally and illegally) imported from other continents . [18] Added to the arms trade are human trafficking and other illegal economic activity, extractive practices to meet the demands of different populations, and restrictive migration policies that worsen the situation. Neither is the inordinate liberalisation of the global economy any stranger to the expansion of illegal markets and bolstering of the criminals who dominate them.

These phenomena have in common the fact that they produce profits in the international sphere while, at the same time, causing violence, exploitation, and impoverishment in some populations, as well as ravaging the environment.[19]

Suppose one of the great lessons of peacebuilding is that its processes must be focused on local conflicts and led by local actors in all their diversity. In that case, this transnational dimension of violence means that processes in the local sphere need to be combined with actions of global influence. Being able to intervene in a more effective, coordinated way at the different levels—local, national, regional, and international—is another of the significant challenges faced in peacebuilding. And it is one that directly meets us.

To conclude, violence in non-war settings pose colossal challenges, but we have valuable insight; we have accumulated knowledge about how to deal with them from a peace perspective, and, above all, we have a constellation of people, organisations, communities and institutions with the capacity and the will to transform violent situations into more peaceful, just, inclusive, and sustainable conditions. Identifying them, connecting them, and expanding their influence is also peacebuilding. It is both necessary and urgent to give to these challenging situations the priority they deserve.

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[1] John Paul Lederach in the opening session of the seminar cycle "Amèrica Llatina. Fer front a les violències des de la construcció de pau". Accessible at: https://youtu.be/7cpMZTV80XU

[2] See the discussion "Las despensas del crimen organizado", organised by the College of Mexico on 13 May 2020. Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqWSQPXdlgc.

[3] By chronic violence we understand "violence that is reproduced in all spaces of socialisation and between generations, taking many forms and mutating over time. There is lethal violence and non-lethal violence, including disappearances, forced displacement, intrafamily aggression, and police violence, among other variations. Chronic violence profoundly affects the ways in which people relate among themselves, with state institutions, in the spaces they inhabit, and their expectations of the future." Pearce, Jenny et al., *Hacia una agenda de Seguridad nacional humana en México: Por una seguridad que no reproduzca las violencias*, London School of Economics and Political Science. Accessible at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/lacc/assets/documents/AGENDA-NACIONAL.pdf.

[4] Pearce, J., Dietrich, W. "Many violences, many peaces: Wolfgang Dietrich and Jenny Pearce in conversation", *Peacebuilding*, 7:3 (2019), 268-282, https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1632056

[5] Summaries and the videos of the sessions are accessible at: https://www.icip.cat/ca/seminaris/america-llatina-fer-front-a-les-violencies-des-de-la-construccio-de-pau/

[6] See the session with Jenny Pearce and Mariano Aguirre, "Conceptualitzar una agenda de pau enmig de violències cròniques" of the ICIP seminar cycle at https://youtu.be/_DbOdcz_660.

[7] See the session with Esperanza Hernández, Sabine Kurtenbach, and Verónica Zubillaga, "Democràcia participativa, moviments socials i resistències noviolentes" of the ICIP seminar cycle at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sYfFT6ACmE&t=3s

[8] "Global Initiative Against Organized Transnational Crime", *Global Organized Crime Index 2021*, p. 16. Accessible at GITOC-Global-Organized-Crime-Index-2021.pdf (globalinitiative.net).

[9] See the session with Lucía Dammert, Miguel Garza, and Geoff Thale, "Polítiques de seguretat per a la construcció de pau" of the ICIP seminar cycle at https://youtu.be/ucw6yu4CLSA. See also Maydeu-Olivares, Sergio, "Per a una nova estratègia de reducció de les violències fora de contextos bèl·lics", *Policy Paper* 19, ICIP, Abril 2019. Accessible at: https://www.icip.cat/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/pp18_cat.pdf

[10] "Introducció. Reorientant la seguretat des del feminisme", *Revista per la Pau*, ICIP 2021. Accessible at: http://www.icip-perlapau.cat/numero39/portada

[11] Banfield, J., *Crime and Conflict: the new challenge for peacebuilding*. International Alert, 2014. Accessible at: https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CVI-Crime-Conflict-EN-2014.pdf

[12] Garzón-Vergara, Juan Carlos, "What is the relationship between organized crime and homicide in Latin America", in *Homicide Dispatch* 3, Igaraoé Institute, June 2016.

[13] Durán-Martínez, Angélica, "Les múltiples dimensions de la violència relacionada amb les drogues", in *Per la Pau*, ICIP, November 2018. Accessible at: http://www.icip-perlapau.cat/numero35/articles_centrals/article_central_1/

[14] See Angélica Durán, Falko Ernst, and Achim Wennmann in the session, "Diàleg, negociació i mediació amb actors violents" of the ICIP seminar cycle: https://youtu.be/tTHlSnuE-Bw

[15] The Institute for Integrated Transitions has made a notable contribution with its work on issues in this area. See Freeman M., and Felbab-Brown V., *Negotiating with Violent Criminal Groups: Lessons and Guidelines from Global Practice*, IFIT, 2021. Accessible at: https://ifit-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/001-Negotiating-with-Violent-Criminal-Groups-v4.pdf

[16] See the session with Guillermo Trejo, María Camila Moreno, and other expert guests, "Mecanismes extraordinaris per a violències extraordinàries" of the ICIP seminar cycle: https://youtu.be/njL1T3TFQV4. See also the contributions of Glaucia Foley, Marisol Ramírez, and Raul Calvo Soler in the session "Justícia i transformació dels conflictes

violents" in the same series: https://youtu.be/7OPUvMci4_g

[17] Pérez de Armiño, Karlos, and Zirion Landaluze, Iker (eds.), *Pax crítica, aportes teóricos a las perspectives de paz posliberal*, Tecnos, Hegoa, 2019.

[18] This is not to underestimate the importance of Brazil's arms industry.

[19] See the conversation of Robert Muggah and Luis Jorge Garay in the session, "Reptes globals en construcció de pau en l'àmbit local" of the ICIP seminar cycle: https://youtu.be/kPXOCBlDkuE.

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