

KOFF  
Newsletter  
No. 145, May 2016



Shrinking Space  
for Civil Society

# Editorial

The situation is paradoxical: despite repeated emphasis on the importance of civil society for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, its space for action and freedom to act are becoming increasingly restricted. What are the external and internal factors that have sparked these restrictions? And what measures can be taken to address them?

Honduras, Russia, Laos, Afghanistan, Palestine: the contexts that are presented in this edition provide an overview of some of the factors that have contributed to shrinking space for civil society. They also highlight some of the initiatives developed by Swiss peacebuilding actors to counteract this trend. The aim is to show that it is a worldwide issue that remains however highly context-specific.

Marie Seidel  
Editor

## Table of Contents

<b>FOCUS ARTICLE</b>		<b>IN DEPTH</b>	
> Honduras: Working Together to Create Space for Civil Society	3	> Study on the Situation of Civil Society in Four Countries	10
<b>REPORTS</b>		> CIVICUS – Building a Global Civil Society Network	10
> Israel and Palestine: What Enabling Environment Does Civil Society Have?	4	<b>NEWS</b>	
> Strengthening Civil Society in a Challenging Environment: Experiences from Laos	5	> swisspeace / KOFF	11
> Abkhazia: Creating Space through Art	6	> KOFF Members	12
> Protective Accompaniment for Civil Society in Kenya	6	> International Partner Organisations	12
> A Climate of Fear as Elections Loom in the DRC	7	<b>CALENDAR</b>	
> Shrinking Civil Society Space in the Post-Soviet Region	8	> Upcoming Events	13
> Space for Civil Society – The Case of Afghanistan	8		
> Shrinking Space: The Role of External Actors	9		

Publisher:  
Centre for Peacebuilding  
KOFF  
Sonnenbergstrasse 17  
P.O. Box, CH-3001 Bern  
Tel: +41 (0)31 330 12 12  
[www.koff.ch](http://www.koff.ch)

# KOFF

Kompetenzzentrum Friedensförderung  
Centre pour la promotion de la paix  
Centre for Peacebuilding

# Honduras: Working Together to Create Space for Civil Society

Political, legal, economic and social developments in Honduras are making the work of civil society organizations increasingly difficult. On the initiative of Peace Watch Switzerland (PWS) and HEKS/EPER and with support from five further Swiss NGOs and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), KOFF launched a joint learning process in Honduras with the aim of preparing a participatory and differentiated analysis of Honduran civil society and its space for action and developing common strategies for preserving and expanding this space. In light of these challenges, processes like these, which go beyond program work and promote innovative approaches and synergies, are very important.

## **KOFF**

Anna Leissing  
Program Officer

## **HEKS**

Una Hombrecher  
Peace and Conflict Transformation

## **Peace Watch Switzerland**

Marianne Widmer  
Director

## Links

### KOFF

HEKS/EPER

Peace Watch Switzerland

ACT Alliance/CIDSE. Space for Civil Society – How to Protect and Expand an Enabling Environment. 2014

CIVICUS. State of Civil Society Report. 2015

Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment. Review of Evidence of Progress on Civil Society-related Commitments of the Busan High Level Forum. 2013

Space for civil society action forms an essential basis for effective and sustainable development and peace policy. This space includes enjoying access to information, freedom of expression, the opportunity to participate in political processes, freedom of assembly, and the right to stage peaceful protests. However, numerous studies indicate that this very space has been on the decline across the world in the past few years. Since the “Arab Spring,” which demonstrated the potential offered by civil society, more and more governments have been passing laws to restrict movements that are critical of the state. Under the cloak of legitimacy provided by the “war on terror,” basic democratic rights are being withdrawn, despite repeated emphasis on the importance of civil society for international cooperation. Legislation is only part of the problem, however. Civil society organizations, and particularly those involved in human rights, are facing systematic public stigmatization and defamation, threats, and physical violence – even extending as far as murder.

On the initiative of PWS and HEKS/EPER and with support from five further Swiss NGOs and the SDC, KOFF launched a joint learning process in Honduras in spring 2015. Based on a method developed by ACT Alliance, a local process was initiated with the aim of preparing a participatory and differentiated analysis of Honduran civil society and its space for action and developing common strategies for preserving and expanding this space. Two workshops, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and an electronic questionnaire were used to collate the experiences of as many civil society organizations as possible.

During the empirical survey stage, the immense scale of the challenges faced in Honduras became clear: farmers’ collectives reported brutal violence during conflicts with the government and companies over land, while journalists highlighted legal measures to restrict access to public information, women’s groups talked about the ban on showing public support for victims of domestic violence, and human rights organizations criticized the total lack of protection for people under threat due to corruption among the authorities and an impunity rate of around 96%. The majority of those surveyed do not envisage any possibility of asserting their concerns and rights and talk about an “armored state” that acts in the interests of the national and transnational elites and is paving the way for implementing a neoliberal development model. From this perspective, various constitutional and state welfare guarantees are seen merely as an obstacle to maximizing returns and are increasingly being abolished. An acute example of this can be seen in the special economic development zones, where the Honduran constitution does not apply. These dynamics have intensified since the coup in 2009 and are fueling widespread criminal violence, which is having an impact on everyday life and posing a serious risk to security. The homicide rate has almost doubled since 2008 and has been the highest in the world since 2012.

Social organizations in Honduras seem overwhelmed by these developments. Although they are putting up resistance, they often remain reactive, focusing on defending sectoral rights or even on simply safeguarding their existence and protecting their members. This is severely weakening what is already a heavily

fragmented civil society. Moreover, friction is arising between content-related criticism leveled at international cooperation on the one hand and the simultaneous reliance on and competition surrounding the funding for it on the other, with organizations quickly being labeled as either “too close to the government” or “too left-wing.” With hardly any sign of an objective dialog that could promote understanding and trust, there is no basis for building a common long-term strategic vision.

This is where the joint learning process comes in, which offers great potential but also brings with it challenges of its own. For instance, while a joint analysis undoubtedly creates a space for dialog and mutual understanding, it also requires a certain degree of trust, which needs to be built up first through such spaces. Mistrust and security concerns meant that there were hardly any responses to the electronic survey, for example. Bilateral contact had to be established through a trusted person and the number of direct meetings increased to make it possible to collect a comprehensive pool of data. Close, long-established links with Swiss NGOs in Honduran civil society also paid off here. Another dilemma is that although joint strategies certainly benefit from synergies and from sharing the knowledge of various actors, they will not be effective as long as civil society is having to battle with existential threats that can only be tackled through these strategies. One tragic example of this is the murder of Berta Cáceres, who, with her organization COPINH, had been defending the land and rights of the indigenous people of Honduras. The circumstances of this crime are symbolic of the situation as a whole: the murder in spite of protective measures taken by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the media speculation surrounding the motive behind the crime, and the inhumane treatment of the witness Gustavo Gastro Soto at the hands of the Honduran authorities.

In light of these challenges, joint learning processes that go beyond program work and promote innovative approaches and synergies are very important – as a planning framework for the organizations involved, as a basis for political lobbying in the context of conflict-sensitive peace and development work, and as a way of providing positive impetus in a long-term process of transformation toward peace and justice in Honduras.

## REPORTS

# Israel and Palestine: What Enabling Environment Does Civil Society Have?

### HEKS

Rula Hamdan Atamneh  
Country Director

Una Hombrecher  
Peace and conflict transformation

### [Link](#)

[HEKS in Palestine/Israel](#)

Together with five other members of ACT Alliance, HEKS has conducted a study on the enabling environment for civil society by analyzing perspectives and experiences from civil society in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Most survey respondents consider their freedom of action to have been curtailed on every level in the past five years, especially the right to freedom of association, which is seen as clearly under threat.

The impact of the Israeli occupation, the breakdown of the Palestinian institutions and the split between Hamas and Fatah have all contributed to shrinking space for civil society both in the West Bank and in Gaza. Civil society organizations (CSOs) regularly find their work hampered by administrative hurdles, restrictions on movements and direct physical threats. Uneven and arbitrary application of the Palestinian NGO law in the West Bank further curtail their spaces. In all the focus group discussions in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, donor policies emerged as an important challenge. Indeed, participants stated that donors

sometimes attach ideological conditions to allocating funds, such as stipulating not to support boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel (BDS) or “Stop the Wall” movements, for instance.

CSOs in Israel brought up the lack of tolerance on the part of the authorities and other stakeholders toward the work of human rights organizations, and the mounting atmosphere of harassment that has beset them in the last six years. Respondents also refer to the current stigmatization campaign that undermines their work and further stigma that is likely to ensue from any kind of collaboration with other peaceful organizations dealing with human rights, religion or sexuality.

Among the coping strategies that emerged from the focus group discussions were stronger networking and coalition building to enhance advocacy, as well as CSOs strengthening their legitimacy through adhering to recognized codes of conduct. Recommendations for donors and governments include systematically applying a human rights-based approach rather than an approach based on humanitarian aid, which would then result in a clear stance against occupation.

## Strengthening Civil Society in a Challenging Environment: Experiences from Laos

### **HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation**

Daniela Renner and Christoph Oertle  
Program Coordinators, Laos

Celestine Krösschell  
Country Director, Laos

Sarah Byrne  
Advisor, Local Governance and Civil Society

### Links

HELVETAS in Laos

Learning House for Development

INGO Network in Laos

Civil society in Laos is variously defined as “emergent”, “nascent”, and also as “limited” and “restricted”. The legal framework for organized civil society was first established in 2009, with the approval of a decree that legislated the official recognition and regulation of Non-Profit Associations (NPA) as legal entities. This decree and the 2010 integration of the Accra Agenda for Action into the Lao Aid Effectiveness agenda marked a major shift. Beyond officially registered non-profit associations, various organizations are active in the public space, including community-based and state-funded mass organizations.

However, civil society organizations (CSOs) operate in a challenging environment in which many government officials as well as other stakeholders have very limited understanding of the role of civil society in contributing to sustainable development. Legislation and procedures are cumbersome and counter-productive to the independence and productivity of CSOs. Most NPAs operate as service deliverers and implementers on behalf of the government, development partners and international organizations and thus have limited independence or accountability towards their constituencies.

Since 2009, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has supported the capacity development of Lao civil society organizations and has contributed to a variety of coordination mechanisms. For example, HELVETAS is a founding member of the “Learning House for Development”, an initiative where civil society meets to learn from each other, exchange experiences, strategize and coordinate with each other and relevant development partners. Through network-driven initiatives, HELVETAS advocates for an improved enabling environment with a particular focus on more inclusive policy dialogue, promotion and effective implementation of the rule of law, and strengthening governance. Together with partners, HELVETAS is currently a) providing capacity development to CSO partners; b) establishing provincial hubs to expand the scope of capacity development support to CSOs based outside of the capital city; and c) facilitating dialogue between policy-makers and civil society at different levels.

In this challenging environment, HELVETAS remains committed to supporting its CSO partners with the skills and resources needed to achieve their goals for contributing to sustainable and equitable development in Laos.

# Abkhazia: Creating Space through Art

**artasfoundation**  
 Sabine Jenni  
 Project Coordinator

[Link](#)

[artasfoundation](#)

Art calls for cooperation and dialog, enjoys the freedom of artistic license, and provides stimulation for debate. Artistic initiatives can therefore serve as an innovative approach for creating valuable spaces and moments for members of civil society to come together, especially when the civil society in conflict contexts only (re-)forms.

One example of this is the “Sklad” cultural center in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, a region that forms part of Georgia under international law. Abkhazia declared its independence following war in 1992-93, but has only been recognized as such since 2008 – and even then only by Russia. The conflict led to isolation and poverty, with ethnic tensions persisting and local politics heavily influenced by Russia.

The “Sklad” cultural center was set up on the initiative of the Swiss organization artasfoundation and it is the first institution of its kind in the region: it is not run by the state or affiliated with any particular political movement and it showcases local and international art. The initiators draw inspiration from the cultural life of major European cities and do not allow themselves to be influenced by any political group. Since art enjoys freedom of interpretation, it provides the kind of space for meetings and discussions needed for civil society to develop.

Three art exhibitions and numerous events have taken place since the opening of the center in October 2015. One exhibition, for example, was held by the artist Arkhip Labakhua, who is well-known in the local area, while on another occasion a writer presented his new book. An exhibition of Swiss art co-organized by artasfoundation attracted more than 500 visitors. Recently, a journalist applied for funding to show portraits of people from ethnic minorities at the “Sklad” center. The partnership with the cultural center receives financial support from the Human Security Division (HSD) of the FDFA.

The initiatives that have emerged attest to the need for a meeting place, but they also present a challenge for the limited resources available – a problem that local civil society initiatives are only too familiar with.

# Protective Accompaniment for Civil Society in Kenya

**Peace Brigades International Switzerland**  
 Shirin Fallahpour  
 Communication and Fundraising Assistant

[Links](#)

[PBI project in Kenya](#)

[PBI “facing PEACE” bulletin on Kenya from March 2016 \(in German only\)](#)

At the invitation of Peace Brigades International (PBI), Kenyan human rights defender Gacheke Gachihi paid a visit to Switzerland from April 6 to 10 to talk about his work and the challenges he faces. As a child, he was forced to leave his home for Nairobi in the violent aftermath of the presidential election in 1992. He then earned a living by washing cars in Mathare, one of the largest unofficial settlements in the Kenyan capital, where he experienced police brutality at first hand. This prompted him to seek protection from a human rights organization and to become actively involved in the human rights movement himself.

The current government under President Kenyatta is imposing increasing limits on civil society’s scope for action. “The main challenge we come up against is the restriction of our freedom of expression,” says Gachihi. In 2014, for example, he was arrested, tortured and detained arbitrarily while conducting a peaceful protest against a new security law. Although officially intended as a counterterrorism instrument, the law in fact restricts freedom of movement and the right of

assembly. As well as having to pay a substantial fine, Gachihi was taken to court and accused of taking part in an illegal gathering and inciting violence – a charge that has not yet been dropped.

How can activists carry on working and gain recognition in the face of such constraints? “Many human rights defenders in Nairobi work in unofficial settlements. They have no known names that appear in the media. Organizations like Peace Brigades International (PBI) offer helpful assistance in this respect”, explains Gachihi. PBI volunteers provide support by accompanying human rights defenders to police stations or in dealing with local authorities. This exerts international pressure, which prevents excessive violence and allows the human rights defenders to continue their work and thus help civil society retain its scope for action.

## A Climate of Fear as Elections Loom in the DRC

**Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund**  
[Valérie Lange](#)  
 Desk officer Fundraising /  
 Conflict Sensitive Action  
 Approach

### [Links](#)

[Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund's activities in the DRC](#)

[Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#)

[Commission on Natural Resources of the DRC Bishops' Conference](#)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) appears to have stable political institutions. Joseph Kabila has been in power since 2001 and, in accordance with the constitution, his mandate will come to an end in December 2016. The presidential elections are due to take place on 27 November, but the Independent National Electoral Commission is calling for a postponement, stating that the electoral register needs to be updated.

An atmosphere of uncertainty and concern prevails among the population, who are growing tired of poor living conditions and the lack of prospects. Since the demonstrations in January 2015, infringements on human rights, particularly wrongful arrests and detainments, have continued to multiply.

The partners of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund such as CERN (Commission on Natural Resources of the DRC Bishops' Conference), who face several challenges in carrying out their activities, are also being put under pressure and find their work hindered. Representatives of CERN observatories have experienced various forms of intimidation and threats. The abuses committed by the regime have created a climate of fear.

Among the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund's partners, and with all Congolese civil society, the exchange of information is intensifying. Pooling information among partners and the Congolese NGO network is the first step in identifying risks and defining the available scope for action. Moreover, the Swiss Embassy has been contacted to request that measures be applied as stipulated in the Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. The European Parliament also echoed these fears in its emergency resolution passed on 10 March 2016, and is calling, among other things, for the cessation of wrongful arrests, the prosecution of human rights violators and compliance with the electoral calendar.

# Shrinking Civil Society Space in the Post-Soviet Region

**International Partnership  
for Human Rights**  
Brigitte Dufour  
Director

## [Links](#)

[Civic Solidarity Platform](#)

[OSCE Guidelines on the  
Protection of Human Rights  
Defenders](#)

[OSCE Guidelines on Freedom  
of Association](#)

[OSCE Guidelines on Freedom  
of Peaceful Assembly](#)

In the past years, the ability of civil society organizations to carry out their work has dramatically deteriorated in the post-Soviet space. Increasingly, restrictions on fundamental freedoms have had a negative impact on the space for civil society to operate freely and without the fear of reprisals.

Russia has in many ways set a problematic example with its so-called “foreign agents” law that requires organizations that engage in “political activity” – a term that has been excessively broadly defined – and receive foreign funding to register as “foreign agents” and use this label in their activities. Another recent law gives the Russian authorities the right to declare foreign organizations “undesirable”, and several NGOs and donor organizations have already been forced to roll back their programs in the country. Repressive Russian legislation has been enforced also in relation to Crimean civil society, and human rights defenders have faced restrictions on leaving and entering the territory of the peninsula. Advocates for the rights of the Tatar minority have been highly vulnerable to harassment.

In Azerbaijan, NGO legislation imposes restrictions on the registration and access to funding of NGOs. Restrictive provisions have been actively used by the Azerbaijani authorities to put pressure on independent NGOs and imprison their leaders. Most recently, a number of leading civil society defenders were pardoned, and the prison sentences of a few were transformed into suspended sentences. However, all others are still unjustly in prison, and without necessary legislative reforms, all human rights defenders remain at high risk of persecution.

Across Central Asia, human rights groups and defenders are subjected to pressure. While the civil society climate remains extremely repressive in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the situation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has recently deteriorated, with arguments about national security being exploited to go after and curtail the rights of NGOs and activists.

Given the scope of the problem, more consistent and determined efforts are needed by actors at all levels to help bring about real positive change. The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) has been trying to counter this negative trend in the OSCE region by providing support to human rights groups and defenders at risk. In May, the CSP is organizing a workshop supported by the German OSCE Chairmanship on the topic of “Shrinking Space for Civil Society” in Tbilisi, aiming at developing strategies to address current challenges.

## Space for Civil Society – The Case of Afghanistan

[For further information](#)

**SDC**  
Anne Savary

The building of democratical state structures as well as the presence of the international community and funding provided new opportunities for the Afghan civil society. The government is committed to facilitating a constructive dialogue with civil society to ensure its full and meaningful involvement in key political and policy reform processes. The legislative framework has been improved to facilitate registration procedures and access to foreign grants to all categories of civil society organizations (CSOs), and a mutual cooperation mechanism has been set up between the civil society and the government to foster mutual cooperation and accountability.



## [Links](#)

[The SDC in Afghanistan](#)

[Civil Society & Human Rights Network](#)

[Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit](#)

[Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding](#)

[International Safety Organisation Network](#)

However, external funding has also encouraged CSOs to fit donors' short-term priorities instead of strengthening a long-term strategy. The nature of granting procedures, the imperative to manage bigger contracts together with the donors' low appetite for financial risks has also prevented the participation of weaker, but truly rooted CSOs.

Building on these lessons and acknowledging the important role of civil society actors, the SDC facilitates – through its program – spaces for dialogue in order to foster an enabling environment and state-society relations. Through its support to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, it advocates for the respect of civil and political rights, allowing CSOs to act in a safe environment. It takes part in the Human Rights Defenders working group which monitors CSOs' environment and raises critical cases with the Afghan government. It supports civil society strengthening programs such as the Civil Society & Human Rights Network, helping build effective and sustainable CSO coalitions for better advocacy. It also fosters participation and accountability mechanisms with local governments as well as inclusivity in local governance processes.

The SDC also supports research organizations such as the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, which foster evidenced-based policy development and public debates. Furthermore, it supports an independent NGO (INSO) providing CSOs with security advice and analysis, allowing them to maintain their operations in fragile contexts. Finally, it supports the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, a global network that includes Afghanistan and coordinates civil society participation in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding.

# Shrinking Space: The Role of External Actors

## **FriEnt**

[Anja Justen](#)

Civil Peace Service (CPS)  
Representative

[Claudia Rolf](#)

Heinrich Böll Foundation  
Representative

## [Links](#)

[FriEnt](#)

[FriEnt Peacebuilding Forum 2015 – Session: Shrinking space – creating space!?](#)

When it comes to organizing transformation processes in a sustainable way and promoting ways of preventing and dealing with conflict, civil society actors play an important role and need appropriate framework conditions to work in at legal, administrative, financial, and – not least – political level. However, their efforts are being hampered by a global trend that is increasingly constricting their space for action.

These restrictions are posing a major challenge for those working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts in particular. They make the need for dialog, inclusivity, participation, and responsibility – crucial elements of peace policy processes – virtually impossible to meet. Responses from governments and donors to repressive measures – often labeled as a defense against terrorism or as a way of harmonizing national development priorities – have so far fallen short of the mark. The trend is also alarming because international support and solidarity for peace-making initiatives by civil society are suffering as a result.

FriEnt addressed this issue at its Peacebuilding Forum in 2015. The organization focuses on peacebuilding approaches and strategies adopted by civil society actors that are aimed at preserving and expanding civil society's space for action. In doing so, it also intends to find an answer to the question of what this means for international support.

State and non-state actors involved in peace policy and working in conflict contexts in an external capacity need to be aware of their role and responsibility since in times of shrinking space, their involvement will have repercussions for the role of civil society. Knowledge of the local context and local civil society in all its

diversity is an essential requirement. External action should therefore take into consideration the impact of restrictions on local civil society and its protection.

Geostrategic, economic and security-related interests also have a role to play in determining how to respond to the limits posed on civil society. Given the restrictions on civil society, external actors need to bear in mind the reciprocal effects that different policy areas have on one another. Looking at things from various perspectives – i.e. those of state, civil society, internal and external actors – is therefore important for promoting dialog.

## IN DEPTH

# Study on the Situation of Civil Society in Four Countries

### [Link](#)

[ACT Alliance/CIDSE. Space for Civil Society. How to Protect and Expand an Enabling Environment. 2014](#)

Based on the examples of Malawi, Rwanda, Colombia and Zimbabwe between 2009 and 2013, the study “Space for Civil Society. How to Protect and Expand an Enabling Environment” conducted by ACT Alliance and CIDSE reveals that many people working for civil society organizations feel a sense of fear, and that their work is being hampered by harassment, censorship, and unreasonable legislation. However, as well as examining the mechanisms that restrict the space available to civil society, the study also documents and analyzes approaches that have had a favorable impact in terms of creating an enabling environment. The recommendations gleaned from the study – to safeguard space for civil society action and thus ensure sustainable development – are aimed at both international organizations and local grassroots movements.

# CIVICUS – Building a Global Civil Society Network

### [Links](#)

[CIVICUS. State of Civil Society Report 2015](#)

[CIVICUS website](#)

In its “State of Civil Society Report 2015,” CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, provides an overview of civil society developments over the past year based on assessments and contributions from its member organizations across the globe. The result is a diverse compilation of thematic articles on topics ranging from the civil war situations in Syria and Yemen and the challenges facing civil society in the context of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa to civil rights movements in the USA. Opportunities and useful experiences are discussed as well as the challenges encountered. CIVICUS’s website also provides a platform for information and exchange for civil society organizations worldwide. It features studies, indexes, and analyses that could serve as useful tools for civil society in carrying out context-specific work. It also includes information on collaborative projects designed to provide advice and support for organizations to help them achieve their goals. The “Events” section presents a series of important events and conferences relating to civil society all over the world.

# swisspeace / KOFF

## KOFF

Marie Seidel  
Communications officer

## [Link](#)

[KOFF in Transition – Annual Report 2015](#)

## swisspeace

Manuel Respondek  
Intern, Communication

## swisspeace

Ursina Bentele  
Program Officer, Training

## [Links](#)

[More information](#)

[Registration](#)

[Master of Advanced Studies in Civilian Peacebuilding](#)

[International Graduate School North-South](#)

[MA studies at the University of Basel](#)

## [KOFF in Transition – Annual Report 2015](#)

In many respects, the events of 2015, whether on an international or national level, have had a significant impact on KOFF, which is approaching its 15th anniversary. In view of those events, the KOFF annual report draws attention to some highlights of the year 2015. These include the launch of the Conflict Sensitivity Community-Hub and learning processes in local contexts, the establishment of a Swiss parliamentary group on peacebuilding, the activities of the “Women Peace Security – reloaded” working group on the limits and opportunities offered by the UN agenda on women, peace and security, and the KOFF roundtable series run in parallel with the election and peace processes in Myanmar.

## [New swisspeace Publications at a Glance](#)

In February, swisspeace released the Essential publication “[On Gender. The Role of Norms in International Peace Mediation](#)” by Julia Palmiano Federer, which casts a critical eye on the precise role played by gender-based norms in mediation processes. This was followed by another issue in the Essential series – “[A Transformative Approach to Dealing with the Past](#),” which was produced by Briony Jones, Elisabeth Baumgartner, and Sidonia Gabriel and focuses on how an approach based on conflict transformation can contribute to dealing with the past processes. Other recent publications include a Spanish translation of the Essential “[Securing Police Archives. A Guide for Practitioners](#)” and an Arabic edition of the Essential “[A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past](#).” Finally, in the latest swisspeace Working Paper on “[Promoting Conflict-Sensitive Business Activity during Peacebuilding](#),” Jolyon Ford examines the extent to which the view that economic recovery is crucial for peacebuilding can still be justified when private investments cause adverse effects.

## [Summer School: Myanmar - Lessons for Peace and Conflict Studies](#)

How can peace and conflict studies contribute to understanding the conflict dynamics in Myanmar, and how can lessons drawn from the context advance academic research? Building on key peace and conflict theories, swisspeace’ 5-day summer school provides an overview of current academic and policy debates on peacebuilding and critically reflects on their relevance for the Myanmar context. Following an introduction to peace and conflict theories and the architecture of international peacebuilding, participants will analyze the Myanmar context and reflect on scenarios for future developments. Who are the key actors and what are the main drivers and dynamics of the transition? How do state and non-state actors interact and what role do external actors play in the peace process? Participants will focus on specific topics relevant to the Myanmar context including peace process design, political transitions, nation-building, civil society and communal violence.

The Summer School will take place from 27 June - 1 July 2016 in Basel. It can be taken as one module of the Master of Advanced Studies in Civilian Peacebuilding program offered by swisspeace and the University of Basel, as part of the International Graduate School North-South or as part of MA studies at the University of Basel. Registrations are open until 15 May.

# KOFF Members

**Mission 21**  
Detlef Lienau

[Link](#)

[Mission 21](#)

**FDFA**  
Jean-Marc Crevoisier  
Head of FDFA Information

[Links](#)

[“FDFA interactive” blog](#)

[Dispatch on Switzerland’s  
International Cooperation  
2017-2020](#)

## What Can be Done to Help Combat Religious Radicalization?

Almost 80 participants attended the “Tschüss, ich geh in den #Krieg” (“Bye! I’m going to #war”) symposium organized by Mission 21 in Basel at the end of February, where discussions focused on how preventive measures can stop people from falling into religious radicalism. Social scientist Edit Schläpfer talked about her women’s network SAVE, which provides training and education for mothers in crisis regions, while educationalist Miryam Eser Davolio presented her study on “The background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland,” which explores the variety of motives and contexts behind this movement. Imam Mustafa Memeti demonstrated how Islamic religious leaders can use their authority to prevent the formation of parallel societies. Detlef Lienau and Magdalena Zimmermann from Mission 21 argued for religious socialization based on sound reflection and developed through dialog as a means of offering protection against fundamentalism. With this in mind, they expressed their support for training for imams and those involved in teaching the religion of Islam and stressed that the interfaith dialog should not exclude controversial questions on values. Mission 21 is set to continue its series of symposiums in early 2017.

## New “FDFA interactive” blog

A world without poverty, and in peace, as well as the promotion of sustainable global development will be the focus of the joint efforts of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SCD), the FDFA’s Human Security Division (HSD), and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) over the next few years. To mark the Federal Council’s adoption of the new Dispatch on Switzerland’s International Cooperation 2017-2020, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs launched a blog to stimulate an exchange of ideas on international cooperation and its objectives. This new platform features regular blog posts, food for thought, articles, and guest contributions. You are welcome to comment on articles, write about your impressions, pose questions directly to the Head of the FDFA, and share views with others in the forum.

# International Partner Organisations

## Stockholm Declaration

Members of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding from over 40 countries gathered in Stockholm in April to agree new commitments to support fragile and conflict affected states. In the Stockholm Declaration, they concretely committed to 1) accelerating and improving the effort to address root causes of fragility, conflict and violence, and to use the New Deal Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals as tools to guide their interventions; 2) strengthening women’s active participation in peacebuilding by linking the implementation of the New Deal to the implementation of UNSCR 1325; 3) developing coherent approaches to make politics inclusive and building effective structures for conflict management and reconciliation; 4) using development aid more effectively and coordinated, and bridging the gap between humanitarian and development aid, and 5) building stronger partnership in order to build trust and share experiences between countries as well as donors and civil society organizations.

### Berghof Foundation

The latest Berghof Handbook Dialogue on “Transforming War-Related Identities. Individual and Social Approaches to Healing and Dealing with the Past” investigates how individuals and collectives can come to terms with war memories or trauma after mass atrocities. Brandon Hamber’s lead article analyzes diverse approaches for dealing with painful memories and discusses how different dimensions (interpersonal and intergroup relations, individual and collective memories and identities) relate to one another. Scholar-practitioners from other contexts comment on his thoughts by focusing on working with trauma and reflect on experiences in coping with painful memories in the Balkans, bringing in examples from the Caucasus as well as South Africa and Germany.

### CDA - Collaborative Learning Projects

In Conflict Sensitivity Mainstreaming Efforts, Nicole Goddard seeks to review what has been done in an effort to mainstream conflict sensitivity over the past fifteen years and what the impacts of those efforts have been. It is meant to look at the types of efforts in an attempt to look forward at what more could be done to fully integrate conflict-sensitive thinking and analysis into the work of aid agencies.

## CALENDAR

# Upcoming Events

[5-7 May 2016](#)

The second OSCE workshop for civil society organizations will be held in Tbilisi. Organized by the Civic Solidarity Platform, it will be dedicated to the topics of shrinking space for civil society and the protection of human rights defenders. [Further information.](#)

[9-13 May 2016](#)

How can a dealing with the past process be locally relevant and effective? Different approaches and frameworks will be drawn upon in the swisspeace course on “dealing with the Past: Theory & Practice” to look at the potentials and challenges of dealing with a violent past. [Further information](#) and [registration](#) ASAP.

[12 May 2016](#)

The KOFF members’ assembly will be held on the afternoon of 12 May 2016 at the Ateliers Bollwerkstadt in Bern. The first section of the meeting will primarily be dedicated to electing members to the new KOFF Advisory Board. The meeting’s thematic section will be an opportunity for Human Security Division Head of Departments to present their regional and thematic priorities. Their presentation, which will be followed by a discussion, aims to highlight potential synergies between the Human Security Division and the NGOs. [Further information](#) and [registration](#).

[18 May 2016](#)

On 18 May 2016 at 6:15 p.m. in Bern, swisspeace is holding an information event to present its range of postgraduate courses. It will be an opportunity to discover the vast range of thematic courses, training opportunities and various postgraduate courses offered by swisspeace and the University of Basel. [Further information.](#)

[21 and 22 May 2016](#)

You are sitting on a bus, coming home from work. Suddenly, you witness a verbal altercation. Do you go and help? It takes a lot of courage to intervene in situations like this. By participating in Amnesty International’s workshop on civil courage, you will learn how to overcome fear and insecurity and react better in conflict situations. The training session lasts for one day and takes place in Zurich or Bern. [Further information](#) and [registration](#).

[23-27 May 2016](#)

Conflict and women's rights expert Justine Mbabazi will be a week-long guest of PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG). Discussions and conferences are being organized for the occasion, to be held in Basel, Zurich and Bern. As part of these events, KOFF will hold a roundtable on 23 May on "Transitional justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: Lessons from an expert on gender issues". [Further information](#) and [roundtable registration](#).

[12-19 June 2016](#)

The Institute for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding (ICP) is organizing its 9th International Summer Academy and Forum on Peace Mediation and dialogue. This year, it will focus on conflict mediation between communities and companies. The Summer Academy is organized in partnership with the CAUX-Initiatives of Change Foundation, and will be held at the Caux Conference Center. [Further information](#).

[Until 15 June 2016](#)

The CAUX-Initiatives of Change Foundation celebrates 70 years of trustbuilding with its traveling exhibition "First Steps". The exhibition, which will be in Montreux until 15 June, will use portraits and stories from people who have visited Caux over the years to inspire and encourage visitors to take their own "First Steps" toward change. [Further information](#).

[27 June - 1 July 2016](#)

How can peace and conflict studies contribute to understanding the conflict dynamics in Myanmar, and how can lessons drawn from the context advance academic research? Building on key peace and conflict theories, swisspeace' 5-day summer school provides an overview of current academic and policy debates on peacebuilding and critically reflects on their relevance for the Myanmar context. [Further information](#) and [registration](#) by 15 May 2016.

[Until 30 June 2016](#)

You have until 30 June 2016 to register for the 2016/2017 Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Civilian Peacebuilding Essentials. This postgraduate course, which is run by swisspeace and the University of Basel, teaches participants about the latest developments in the main fields of civilian peacebuilding and familiarizes them with practical methods. [Further information](#) and [registration](#).

[22 August - 2 September 2016](#)

From 22 August to 2 September, the Centre for Rural Development (SLE) at Humboldt University in Berlin is organizing a training course on conflict management and transformation. [Further information](#) and [registration](#) (ASAP).

[28-30 September 2016](#)

How a society deals with its past conflicts decisively influences how it will deal with present and future conflicts. The "Shaping and experiencing cultural memory" training course by Steps for Peace addresses individuals who are working on dealing with the past and cultural memory in crisis regions and would like some inspirations for their work. [Further information](#) and [registration](#).

[KOFF calendar](#)

On the [KOFF website](#) you can find more information about upcoming roundtables and events organised by KOFF.

# KOFF

Kompetenzzentrum Friedensförderung  
Centre pour la promotion de la paix  
Centre for Peacebuilding

## Publisher

KOFF of swisspeace

## Contact

Sonnenbergstr. 17  
P.O. Box, CH-3001 Bern  
Phone: +41 (0)31 330 12 12

## Editing

Marie Seidel, Manuel Respondek

## Layout

Liliana Rossier

## Translation

Furrer Übersetzungen  
Übersetzergruppe Zürich

## Cover

In the streets of Tegucigalpa,  
Honduras, 2016. Copyright:  
Anna Leissing/swisspeace

[Previous issues available online](#)

KOFF is a project of swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

Alliance Sud  
APRED  
artasfoundation  
BAHA'I  
Brücke · Le pont  
Caritas Switzerland  
Caux - Initiatives of Change  
cfd  
DCAF  
Eirene Switzerland  
Fondation Hironnelle  
Geneva Call  
Grains of Peace  
Green Cross Switzerland  
GSoA  
HELVETAS Swiss  
Intercooperation  
HEKS  
IAMANEH Schweiz

Institute for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding  
Interpeace  
Lucerne Initiative for Peace and Security (LIPS)  
medico international schweiz  
mission 21  
MIR-Switzerland  
miva Suisse - transporte l'aide  
Palmyrah  
Peace Brigades International  
Peace Watch Switzerland  
PeaceWomen Across the Globe  
Pestalozzi Children's Foundation  
Quaker United Nations Office  
Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund

SCI Switzerland  
Society for Threatened Peoples Switzerland  
Solidar Switzerland  
SOS Children's Villages  
Swiss Academy for Development  
SWISSAID  
Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund  
Swiss Peace Council  
Swiss Red Cross  
Swiss Refugee Council  
Terre des Femmes Switzerland  
terre des hommes schweiz  
TRIAL  
Women for Peace Switzerland  
World Vision Switzerland