

Why training more soldiers won't keep global peace:



Conflict is just the tip of the iceberg.

No matter where it happens, the devastating legacy and impact of conflict is clear to see: destroyed families and homes, a breakdown of public services, food and water shortages, forced migration, and emotional trauma. These impacts are felt most intensely by women and marginalized communities; they also make existing poverty worse and are impacts that can continue for generations to come.

Global *security* addresses the symptoms of conflict through military might. But in order to work for global *peace*, we need to tackle the root causes of rising conflict and violence through just means. Each conflict is different, triggered by a unique combination of factors, but across the globe there are common elements – such as prejudice, struggles over mineral wealth, human rights violations, corruption, and unequal access to land, water, and decent work.

Addressing power imbalances, safeguarding our planet, working for transparent legal systems, and advancing human rights for all is a more sustainable way to create peaceful, safe, and inclusive societies than military might. It's not easy, but here's where we can start:

Equality and Power

Across history and cultures, access to land, water, minerals, and other natural resources has created huge amounts of wealth and power. Often, groups that have suffered from prejudice and a lower social standing – including women and Indigenous peoples – have less access to these resources, lowering their social standing even further. Globally, profits from mining and other industries that use large amounts of resources tend to stay in the hands of top government or company officials, rather than in the communities where they operate.

For some societies, wealth from natural resources may belong to everyone in the community, or may be valued more for cultural or spiritual reasons than for the money it can make. Often when countries sell their natural resources, either by force or by choice, this can divide communities, creating tensions over who owns the land that is being mined or to the money earned, leading to social conflict and violence.

The result of conflict, and the stories that most people are told about that conflict, are also shaped by power (i.e., whose voice is heard loudest). By searching for independent, alternative sources of information, questioning reports that only tell

one side of the story, and creating space to hear the stories of those who are most impacted, we can help to re-balance the power scales to find more just solutions.

Healthy Ecosystems

As the impacts of climate change intensify, more and more people are becoming climate refugees – forced to leave their homes because of droughts, floods, storms, or shifting growing seasons. Looking for a safe, healthy place to live, this massive movement of people strains the capacity of other countries to support new citizens, and can increase social or cultural tensions.

Without oversight, industries such as mining and agriculture are polluting vital water systems that people rely on for their very survival and livelihood. In some countries, water is only available for sale, not treated as a free human right, which has led to water wars.

Taking responsibility for our role in reversing climate change, demanding better, more sustainable systems of production and consumption, and speaking out against harmful industries endangering our planet are ways that we can ensure a healthy, resilient environment, and prevent many conflicts before they begin.

Partnerships and Solidarity

Our world is deeply connected, more than ever before. As global citizens, we share a responsibility to follow the money path to understand how our governments, companies, and personal choices impact our neighbours at home and around the world. Whether it is the food we eat, the everyday products we use, materials mined by our companies in areas of conflict, or weapons that our country builds that are used to harm others, our involuntary participation in these systems - the very thing that can make us feel hopeless – is actually our source of power. As citizens and consumers, we can speak out in partnership with the people who are harmed through these processes.

War is big business. [Close to \\$100 billion \(with a B!\)](#) is invested in building and shipping weapons and military supplies each year. By holding our governments accountable in respecting human rights, enforcing rules about the global arms trade, and not supporting companies that operate in areas where profits fuel local conflict, we can help make sure that the financial benefit of war is no longer a barrier to finding peaceful resolutions.

Dignity and Human Rights

Every person has equal rights to religious identity, cultural expression, political affiliation, and spiritual practices. Yet not everyone is given the same opportunity to express their cultural and religious identities free from violence or persecution. Conflict, whether local or global in scale, is often rooted in misunderstanding and fueled by rumours, and has the ability to escalate when individuals don't challenge

these misunderstandings or rumors within society. Working for peace is not about finding out “who’s right.” Rather, it is about creating space where we can learn from different perspectives, and where harmful stereotypes are not welcome.

Conflict is both a symptom and a cause of poverty, which means that there will be no development without peace, and there will be no peace without development. Supporting local industries that offer safe, decent work, especially for youth, is also an essential tool to contribute to building safe and inclusive societies.

Listening to others and taking leadership from those who have experienced racism, sexism, or other forms of persecution, are ways that we can help build local and global communities where human rights are respected, and peace-building can take place.

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Peacebuilding thrives amidst Burundi unrest

SCIC Member: [Mennonite Central Committee](#)

As political unrest brings increased violence in Burundi, [Mennonite Central Committee](#)’s (MCC) partners continue building on two decades of peacebuilding to encourage peace.

The current political unrest began in the spring of 2015, when President Pierre Nkurunziza’s political party nominated him for a third term. Some Burundians believed his nomination was unconstitutional, sparking protests that became violent.

After the president won the election, members of the opposition movement were targeted for imprisonment, torture and assassinations. Independent radio stations were destroyed, allowing rumours and inaccurate information to be disseminated.

However, sprinkled like salt across Burundi are peacebuilders who have been trained at MCC-supported trainings during the Burundi Civil War in 1993-2005 and at the Great Lakes Peacebuilding Institute (GLPI) since 2004.

Some peacebuilders share their knowledge with members of hundreds of community peace committees that have spread across Burundi since 1994. Peacebuilders and the thousands who have been trained by them have worked diligently during this situation to keep violence and ethnic conflict from escalating.

Working with youth from opposing political parties

Conflict: [LookDeeper.ca](#)

Emmanuel Ntakirutimana is one of those peacebuilders, he works in Cibitoke, a western region where conflicts between youth from different political parties have caused tension in the community.

He has been coordinating a project since 2013 that brings youth together to learn the practical skills he learned at GLPI — conflict transformation and prevention, non-violent communication, how to manage rumours, tolerance and mutual respect. Youth meet twice a week with their local administrator (mayor) to discuss problems in the community and look for positive solutions.

Only two months after the project started, youth who previously refused to even greet each other on the street were sitting together regularly and discussing their differing views, Ntakirutimana said.

However, in this year's election period, members of the Ibonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling party, started placing a white mark on each house where a Tutsi family lives. This caused people to fear that the political dispute would become an ethnic dispute, pitting Hutus and Tutsis against each other as they were during the civil war.

A rumour spread quickly that the Ibonerakure-associated youth were working with a rebel group to prepare a Tutsi massacre. People believed that a certain Rwandan businessman was using his warehouses to hide machetes and gasoline in order to attack Tutsis and burn their homes.

This rumour caused numerous people to flee Cibitoke, but Ntakirutimana saw that this rumour would be easy to verify. He sent members of the project's youth discussion groups to talk to this businessman who gave permission for the group to go through his warehouses to verify that he wasn't hiding anything. Discussion group members were able to calm the community, confirming that the rumour was not true.

Ntakirutimana said that people in the community also have protected those who were targets to be assassinated.

"Rather than dividing over political values or ethnicity, they are choosing to unite to protect their community, understanding that everyone has the right to live even if they have different ideas," said Ntakirutimana.

Ntakirutimana is among 200 GLPI alumni whose peacebuilding training was paid for by MCC. They do peacebuilding work across the African Great Lakes region.

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Story by Melody Musser, originally published
at mcccanada.ca



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