



BEYOND 16: THE SDGS AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A MORE PEACEFUL WORLD

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PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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The foreign policy community faces a choice. It can continue to allow unacceptable levels of violence and conflict to undermine individual countries and the global order. Or it can build a new consensus that violence is a preventable epidemic. This would take seriously a growing body of evidence showing what is most likely to work to steer the world back toward global peace, resilient societies, and more sustainable prosperity.

INCREASED VIOLENCE REQUIRES AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

As we prepare to enter the 2020s, the world faces growing threats to peace and security. The “long crisis” of globalisation continues to generate new demographic, economic, and environmental risks that are increasingly converging, putting unprecedented stress on societies and states.¹ Relationships between major powers have deteriorated. Structures for international cooperation are being hollowed out. Domestically, most governments face a wave of distrust from their citizens, with populist forces increasingly organised across national borders.

Violence and violent conflicts are symptoms of this malaise. In the *Pathways for Peace* report, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the

The maintenance of international peace and security is the primary mission for the international system.

World Bank warned of a “dramatic resurgence” of conflict that has caused immense human suffering and led to significant damage to the global order.² Organised criminal violence is undermining democracies.³ Government abuses of human

rights, often themselves an ill-conceived reaction to violence, fuel further grievances, while interpersonal violence, especially against women and children, has emerged as a growing cause of public anger.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (right) with Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, at the SDG Media Zone.

The maintenance of international peace and security is the primary mission for the international system.⁴ Given the interconnections between different forms of violence and conflict, effective prevention is only possible if it spans the spectrum of conflict and non-conflict violence. And given the ease with which risks proliferate across borders, a renewed commitment to collective action offers the only path to greater resilience.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”⁵ For the first time, all countries have agreed to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.” Much of the responsibility for promoting implementation of this target rests with Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) and with the international and regional institutions they support.

The foreign policy can continue to allow unacceptable levels of violence and conflict to undermine individual countries and the global order. Or it can build a new consensus that violence is a preventable epidemic, taking seriously a growing body of evidence showing what is most likely to work to steer the world back toward global peace, resilient societies, and more sustainable prosperity.

WHY VIOLENCE MATTERS

The end of the Cold War delivered a substantial peace dividend. In 2011, the World Development Report (WDR) hailed the world's emergence from an era marked by "devastating global wars, colonial struggles, and ideological conflicts."⁶ Wars between states had become rare. Both the number and intensity of civil wars had decreased after peaking in the early 1990s, while homicide rates were also falling in most regions.

But there was bad news too. The 2011 WDR argued that insecurity had become a leading threat to development, as countries affected by high levels of conflict or non-conflict violence lagged those that were more peaceful. Many countries were locked into cycles of violence that threatened their futures and those of their neighbors. Growing threats – such as organised criminal violence and the illicit flows of people, drugs, and weapons – could only be confronted successfully if the international system was "refitted" to address the risks of the 21st century.

In 2018, the *Pathways for Peace* study was published.⁷ It built on much of its predecessor's analysis, but within the context of intensifying threats. Among these

Violent conflicts have become more complex and protracted, involving more non-state groups and regional and international actors. And they are increasingly linked to global challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, cyber security, and trans-national organised crime. It is projected that by 2030 more than half of the people living in poverty will be found in countries affected by high levels of violence.

threats is the continued spread of violent extremism in the years after 9/11, exploiting the potential offered by modern communication technologies and by the vulnerabilities of global systems. The Arab Spring, which began as a challenge to states which failed to address grievances concerning dignity and survival of their citizens, triggered a wave of conflicts with regional and global dimensions. And rapid social and economic change across many African countries has threatened to destabilise those with weak institutions and limited state legitimacy.

Conflict increases women's exposure to other forms of violence,⁸ while gender-based violence is another early-warning signal.⁹ Children face large-scale abductions, recruitment into armed groups, sexual violence, and other forms of abuse.¹⁰ Individual exposure to violence has lifelong effects, including a greater risk of repeat victimisation and of becoming a perpetrator of violence. For societies, conflict "paves the way for higher tolerance of interpersonal violence,¹¹ increased weapons and drug trade, and political corruption."¹²

But we must also look beyond conflict. More than half of the world's 20 most violent countries are unaffected by a civil or interstate war and 82 per cent of violent deaths occur outside of conflict.¹³ Levels of criminal violence in some cities, mostly



In Caracas, Venezuela, the police block the pace of a demonstration.

in Latin America, are as high as in many war zones. Beyond the human impact, this poses political challenges. Gangs displace governments and offer a form of security and justice to the communities they control.¹⁴ The resulting violence is contagious in three ways. Most immediately, it “follows an epidemic-like process of social contagion” as it spreads through social networks.¹⁵ More broadly, it undermines a society’s resilience, as institutions and politicians are corrupted and implicated.¹⁶ And over the longer-term, cycles of violence are perpetuated, as children are raised to believe that violence is normal or inevitable.

If current trends continue, violence is likely to further intensify. Drawing on its lethal violence database, the Small Arms Survey has presented a business-as-usual survey that projects violent deaths to increase by 10 per cent from current levels by 2030.¹⁷ A more negative scenario is also possible, driven by “new armed conflicts or the intensification of existing ones, serious shortages of food or water on a regional scale, mass displacement or migration, or globally strengthened organised crime.”¹⁸ This convergence of threats would see lethal violence grow by almost 50 per cent by 2030, with the world losing control over violence in a way that would be certain to block or reverse progress on key social, economic, and environmental indicators.

In either scenario, firefighting violence will continue to soak up a growing proportion of the resources available to the international system. The humanitarian system is already under untenable levels of stress, with demand increasing by a factor of almost five over the past decade.¹⁹ Peacekeeping operations are also under strain, with a recent high-level panel reporting “a widely shared concern that changes in conflict may be outpacing the ability of UN Peace Operations to respond.”²⁰

VIOLENCE IS A GROWING THREAT TO ALL COUNTRIES

If levels of global violence remain at current levels or increase, we can expect to see a growing entanglement between different forms of violence, with conflict, violent extremism, and criminal violence reinforcing and feeding each other.²¹ This will have negative impacts at both national and international levels.

We can already observe that poverty is increasingly concentrated in those countries that are trapped in cycles of conflict and fragility.²² If current trends continue, these geographies of fragility will grow and continue to offer space for non-state actors, including organised crime and conflict opportunists, to leverage individual grievances towards their own ends. Insecurity continues to fuel spirals away from democratic norms, allowing for policies that put constraints on freedom of expression and association, while increasing reliance on incarceration and surveillance.²³ Many of these countries will not often make headlines, making them unlikely to receive the support and resources they need to break out of the fragility trap. Others will export enough disorder across their borders to pose a regional or global threat.

No country or region can be confident that it will remain unaffected by these trends. Violence is increasingly globalised, as are the illicit flows that accompany it.

It would be a mistake, though, to see violence purely as a problem for the poorest countries. In recent years, populist leaders and movements have become increasingly effective at channeling narratives of insecurity and exclusion to bolster support. Violence – alongside the corruption with which it interacts – has reshaped the politics of a growing number of otherwise resilient middle or high-income

countries such as Brazil, Hungary, and the United States. Even when violence levels are in decline, as is true in the United States, populist leaders have been effective at leveraging the fear of violence to enact policies which reinforce their aims.

Counter-productive responses to this violence can then further undermine institutions and fuel additional grievances. *Mano Dura* (“Firm Hand”) or tough-on-crime approaches are popular with both politicians and the public, but they have proved largely ineffective, while undermining democratic norms and often providing new opportunities for violent non-state actors to compete with the state.²⁴

No country or region can be confident that it will remain unaffected by these trends. As Robert Cooper argued, “We may not be interested in chaos, but chaos is interested in us.”²⁵ Violence is increasingly globalised, as are the illicit financial and resource flows that accompany it. Neighboring regions now have a shared demographic destiny – Africa and Europe, Latin and North America – which is heavily influenced by patterns of violence and political instability. In some cases, the involvement of proxy actors, as seen in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, reduces political space for

constructive engagement and has broader impacts on the functioning of multilateral systems. The fear of violence will also shape international engagement by limiting response options, as already exemplified around terrorism and migration policies. Malicious actors will also enjoy opportunities to manipulate both elite and public opinion, framing foreign policy responses in ways that fuel further grievances.

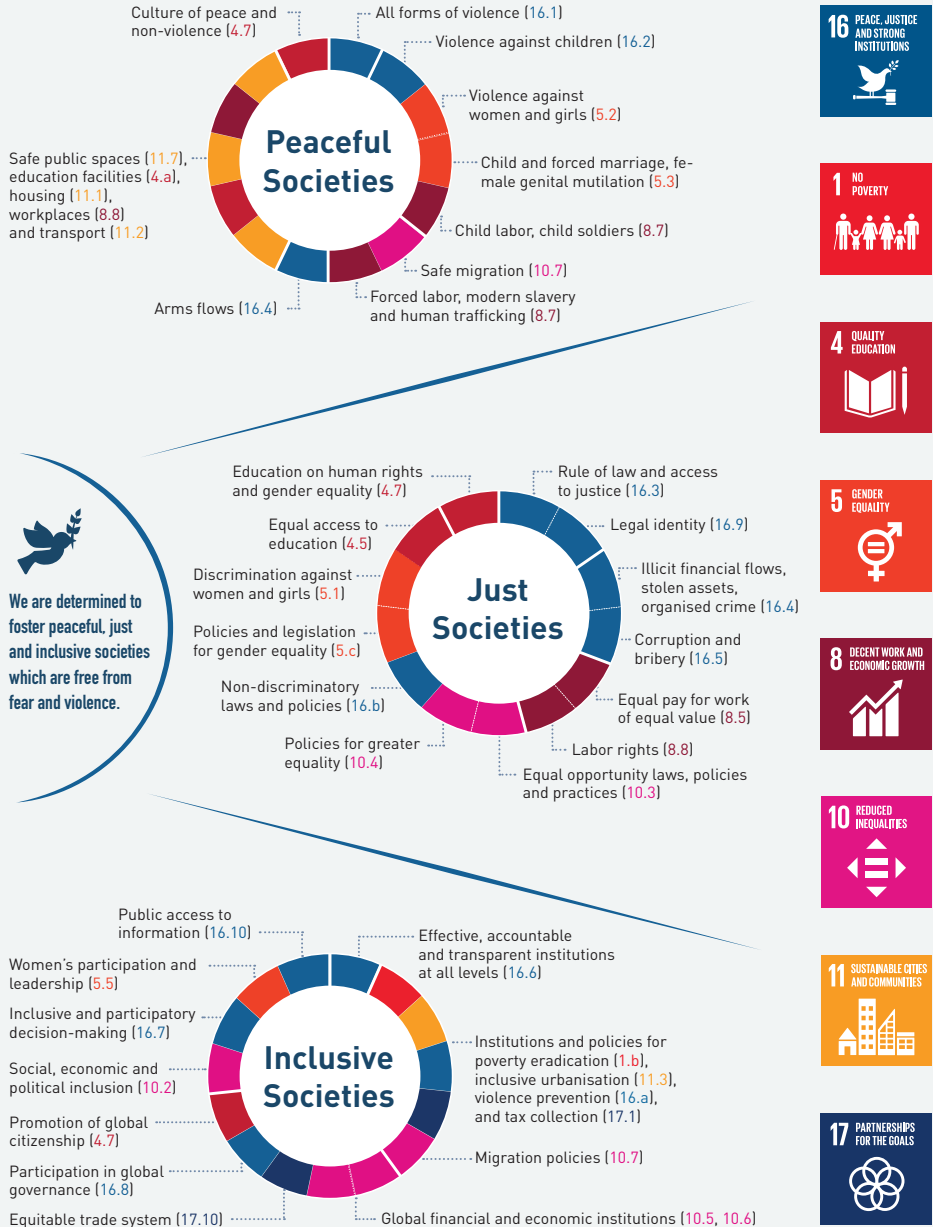
The internationalisation of violence is a foreign policy challenge with development dimensions, not the other way around. High levels of violence stress international systems and cooperation at a time when they are most urgently needed. The world has undoubtedly lost capacity to respond to conflict and non-conflict shocks in recent years. Populism is undermining the “future-oriented” behaviors needed to support collective action, leading to a failure to invest in the hardware and software of international cooperation. It is unlikely that the international system has the political resilience needed for crisis management during the financial crisis that began in 2008, for example. A further wave of rapid political change – akin to the Arab Spring – would stretch global capacity to respond and could lead to significant friction between major powers. The foreign policy community – or at least those parts of it still committed to a rules-based global order – urgently needs to find a new platform to strengthen the capacity for international collective action.

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THE SDGS AS A PLATFORM FOR FOREIGN POLICY

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an action plan of “unprecedented scope of significance... accepted by all countries and applicable to all.”²⁶ The SDGs correct the most important failing of their predecessor – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – by including ambitious targets for building “peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence.”

While SDG16 is the main goal for peace, justice, and inclusion, the agenda’s negotiators included targets related to these aspirations in other goals as well. In all 36 targets from eight SDGs directly measure an aspect of peace, justice, or inclusion. The framing of “SDG16+” (see Figure 1) brings together targets for reducing various forms of violence with those for strengthening access to justice and the rule of law, transforming standards of governance, and promoting social, economic, and political inclusion. The 2030 Agenda is universal in nature, providing a basis for cooperation between countries from all regions and income groups. But it also promises to “reach the furthest behind first,” encouraging greater efforts to support countries and communities whose path to sustainable development is currently blocked by violence, insecurity, and injustice.²⁷



Source: Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies 2017: The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies – A Call to Action to Change our World. New York: Center on International Cooperation.

Global Goals have little impact on their own. They only prove influential if they provide a focus for increasing political will, mobilising partnerships, strengthening strategies that are based on evidence of what works, and securing the finance needed for effective implementation. But this is exactly what the foreign policy community requires if it is to shape an ambitious agenda for tackling violence. It is precisely the commitments contained within the MDGs, for example, that coalesced actors around extreme poverty, forcing them to think in a more integrated manner about what strategies were needed to reach the poorest people.

SDG16+ is beginning to stimulate this kind of cooperation for peace and security, not through formal structures alone, but through the hard work of building coalitions to address the most important risks to peace.

The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies was formed by a group of member states, international organisations, global partnerships, and civil society networks. At the UN General Assembly in September 2017, the group published the Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies as a “first guide” for those working to implement SDG16+. Other “umbrella” partnerships for SDG16+ include the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, which assists member states in tracking progress, and the 16+ Forum, which runs an annual showcase to “demonstrate SDG16+ in action.”²⁸

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Partners have also mobilised around individual SDG16+ targets or clusters of related targets.²⁹ Some examples include:

- The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. Alliance 8.7 is working to end child labor and modern slavery.
- The Task Force on Justice, which has brought together member states and a growing group of international partners to accelerate implementation of SDG16.3 (access to justice for all).
- The Open Government Partnership. Although formed before the agreement of the 2030 Agenda, its national action plans are increasingly seen as an opportunity “to promote transparent and accountable implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

These examples demonstrate how new and collaborative partnerships can build off formal structures to heighten attention, increase knowledge, and leverage resources.

In 2019, the High-level Political Forum will review SDGs for the first time at ministerial level, under the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”³⁰ Heads of State and Government will also gather for the first SDG Summit, marking the end of the first cycle of the 2030 Agenda. They are asked to “mobilise further actions to accelerate implementation” of all 17 SDGs. These events will provide a focus for increased commitments to the implementation of the SDG targets for peace, justice, and inclusion. They are also an opportunity for ministries of foreign affairs to mainstream the SDG16+ targets into their influencing strategies.

TOWARDS ACHIEVING SDG16.1

SDG16.1 makes a commitment to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.”³¹

While targets for specific forms of violence have received considerable attention (against women and children, in particular), this “headline” target for violence prevention has considerable untapped potential. In the MDG era, “halving poverty” encouraged actors from multiple sectors to develop integrated strategies to reach the poorest people. Similarly, SDG16.1 asks the foreign policy community to explore what it would take to achieve sustained reductions in violence. By asking, “What would it take to halve global violence in a generation?” foreign policy actors can begin to galvanise the partnerships that are needed to make a more ambitious approach to prevention possible.

SDG16.1 can be used to bring together communities working on five inter-related forms of prevention:

- **Conflict prevention**, drawing on the Pathways for Peace framework and the joint Sustaining Peace resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. This is also an opportunity to take forward the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda, in particular his call for a “new focus on disarmament that saves lives” as conflict becomes “more deadly, destructive and complex.”³²
- The prevention of **organised and criminal violence**, especially in urban areas. In this area, there is growing evidence of what works to reduce violence in the most heavily-affected communities.³³

- The prevention of **interpersonal violence**, especially against women and children. There is also a strong evidence base in this area, and growing efforts to “package” it for policymakers, for example through the internationally-endorsed INSPIRE strategies for ending violence against children.³⁴
- The prevention of **human rights abuses and mass atrocities**, where the newly-appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights has described “every step towards implementation of the human rights agenda [as] an act of prevention, strengthening the bonds between communities and reinforcing inclusive development and peace.”
- The prevention of **violent extremism**, where the UN’s plan of action has proposed that each country should develop a multi-disciplinary approach that fortifies the social contract and that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.³⁵

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A man waiting by the cars going through a checkpoint in Ramallah, Palestinian Territories.



Solutions also tend to be cross-cutting, requiring a commitment to evidence-based strategies that increase the capacity of security and justice institutions to manage disputes peacefully; a strengthened role for other sectors such as health, education, and social protection; a commitment to including communities and addressing their grievances; and a willingness to promote human rights and gender equality.³⁶ These prevention activities should be aligned with more short-term stabilisation efforts and long-term and broader resilience building which addresses the root causes of violence and conflict. While these communities tend to work in silos, different forms of violence and conflict are heavily inter-related. Joint risk analysis will bring political, development, and security actors together, as they “think together to act together.”³⁷

THE ROLE OF MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN REDUCING VIOLENCE

A global objective to halve poverty was first proposed in the World Development Report in 1990.³⁸ It was promoted throughout the 1990s by the World Bank and other international organisations, and by the Development Ministers from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK, who formed the Utstein Group.³⁹

Leadership from Ministers and Ministries of Foreign Affairs will be similarly important if SDG16.1 is to emerge as a central objective for the 2030 Agenda. International actors are already involved. The UN Secretary-General has identified prevention as a central priority for his time in office and the Pathways for Peace report has created a foundation for unprecedented cooperation between the UN and World Bank. The global public health community has increasingly focused on violence, with the World Health Assembly passing a resolution in 2014 on the role of health systems in reducing violence.⁴⁰ The World Health Organisation will publish the second Global Status Report on Violence Prevention in 2019, providing an update on what governments across the world are doing to prevent violence.⁴¹ International organisations have supported new partnerships and campaigns on violence against women and children.

At a regional level, the Instinto de Vida campaign aims to reduce homicides in Latin America by 50 per cent.⁴² The African Union has made a commitment to “silencing the guns” with the aim of ending wars, gender-based violence, and genocide in the region.⁴³ There are strong campaigns in these areas, such as #SafetoLearn (which aims to end violence in schools), the #MeToo movement (gender-based violence), or the newly-formed Global Peacebuilding Coalition. Cities are also important actors, given the burden of violence in some urban areas and the risks of further violence as Africa and parts of Asia urbanise at an unprecedented rate.⁴⁴ New partnerships, moreover, such as the Global Network on Safer Cities, are beginning to provide a greater voice for the world’s mayors.

Ministries of Foreign Affairs are integrators who see the bigger picture and have a mandate to work across sectors through their international, regional, and bilateral cooperation.

But political leadership is urgently needed. Ministries of Foreign Affairs are integrators. They see the bigger picture and have a mandate to work across sectors through their international, regional, and bilateral cooperation, managing the global risks that their citizens face.⁴⁵ At home, the 2030 Agenda challenges them to provide a platform for national line ministries to engage in collective action to deliver on the SDGs. By making SDG16.1 central to foreign policy, ministries can build a movement to address converging risks, integrating prevention approaches across different forms of violence. They can do so in a way that prioritises tackling universal and long-term challenges, such as addressing gender norms which tolerate high levels of violence, while simultaneously tackling the most immediate opportunities to reduce violence; by supporting prevention in the world’s most violent cities; or by developing new models for engaging with countries as they emerge from conflict.

Richer countries should support national actors in advancing effective violence prevention, particularly in conflict-affected states and other states with high risks but limited capacity. Engaging the voice and leadership of countries suffering the worst forms of violence will be critical, but it is important not to overwhelm countries with multiple overlapping agendas. Instead they should be approached with a coherent strategy that focuses on synergies and mutual benefits. Foreign policy-makers can also use SDG16.1 to focus renewed attention on the external stresses that increase the risks of violence, in areas such as illicit financial and arms flows and transnational crime (SDG16.4), or the globalisation of corruption (SDG16.5). They are also in a unique position to ensure that other risk multipliers are taken into account, highlighting the links between violence and insecurity and geopolitical factors, such as climate change, the clean energy transition, and the governance of natural resources and land.

WHAT MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MUST DO

If SDG16.1 is to inspire increased commitments to achieve quantified reductions in violence, foreign policymakers will need to:

- Increase **political will** by winning the argument that violence is a preventable epidemic. In order to combat the fatalism that inhibits action, this will require raising awareness of the evidence that shows that rapid reductions in violence are possible with the right strategies and investment.
- Build the consensus needed to accelerate implementation of evidence-based **strategies** and to reduce reliance on approaches that are politically expedient but which often worsen violence and undermine the legitimacy of institutions and governments.
- Strengthen **partnerships**, both by supporting formal multi-stakeholder platforms and, more importantly, by building bridges between actors from different sectors. A priority is to create more space for partners who can drive ambition and innovation, while protecting human rights defenders, humanitarian actors, the media, and others who are under threat.
- Promote **investment** in prevention, based on the business case for conflict prevention from the *Pathways for Peace* report and business cases for preventing other forms of violence, and develop new financing mechanisms that address violence and insecurity in a holistic manner.

Making a success of SDG16.1 – and linking it to the rest of SDG16+ and to the 2030 Agenda as a whole – requires dynamic and outward-looking diplomacy. These are challenges that cannot be solved unilaterally or solely through technical approaches but require integrated and coordinated action across levels, actors and thematic silos. Quantified targets for reducing violence have opened a window for a new dialogue to which all countries can bring their challenges and potential solutions. This could create national ownership and leadership for prevention that goes far beyond the usual suspects. Ministries of Foreign Affairs will need to use the full range of multilateral tools at their disposal, working through the UN system, but also the G20 and regional forums.

Making a success of SDG16.1 – and linking it to the rest of SDG16+ and to the 2030 Agenda as a whole – requires dynamic and outward-looking diplomacy.

Most of all, they will need to generate a new vision and greater ambition. Collective action *could* halve global violence.⁴⁶ But, to our cost, we haven't yet tried.

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