PEACEBUILDING LESSONS

FROM ISRAEL, PALESTINE AND BEYOND



Outcome Report

November 2026

Amidst deep regional trauma, widespread cynicism, and escalating polarisation, 80+ practitioners and decision-makers gathered in Brussels on 15 September 2026 for a full-day conference on **Peacebuilding Lessons** from Israel, Palestine and Beyond. Organised by the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), Search for Common Ground, and the Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF), the conference consisted of **Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders, comparative conflict experts** (including from Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Iran, Mali, Northern Ireland, Russia/Ukraine, Rwanda), and high-level EU, **Member State, and diplomatic representatives**.

These participants came together motivated by one reality: while no two conflicts are exactly alike, none is necessarily beyond resolution. In contexts such as Israel-Palestine, where public discourse often centres on the absence of a partner, peace, or a solution, comparative learning offers a way to expand the conversation. Looking beyond Israel-Palestine creates space to reflect on **what has worked, what has failed, and what lessons might apply.**

Interactive discussions drew Palestinian and Israeli peacebuilders into dialogue with diplomats, practitioners and experts from past and current conflicts. The discussions focused on four key – but by no means exhaustive – dynamics: **Track II mediation**'s limitations and new directions; the intersections of **religion, identity and the power of narratives** in peacebuilding; how to balance **reconciliation, rights and justice** during and after conflict; and the role and necessity of expanding our **political imagination**.[1]

Across these four tracks, a number of cross-cutting themes emerged:

THEME 1

CIVIL SOCIETY IS AN ESSENTIAL PILLAR OF PEACE.

Peace cannot be negotiated solely at the political level; it must be **built and sustained by people on the ground**. When politics stalls or breaks down, civil society sustains communities and dialogue, prevents violence, generates policy options, builds public support for a political horizon, and helps contain spoilers.

By showing what a shared future could look like, grassroots initiatives lay the foundations for peace long before an agreement is reached. This work complements and advances top-down diplomacy, helping create the conditions in which political agreements can be reached, implemented, and sustained. Civil society expertise is crucial to shape those agreements and enact the report's following recommendations.

THEME 2

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE RESPONSES ARE CRUCIAL.

Individual, collective, and intergenerational trauma shape societies and politics. Peace processes must build in space for **trauma from the outset**, creating space for healing, acknowledgment, and engagement with the "other's" narrative - without requiring agreement.

THEME 3

INCLUSIVITY IS BOTH NECESSARY AND EFFECTIVE.

Peace processes must reach **beyond the "usual suspects"** to reflect the full diversity of the societies they seek to transform. This requires language, framing, and communication methods that resonate with previously excluded communities and speak to them in terms they recognise and trust.

THEME 4

PROCESSES MUST ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES FROM THE START.

Core issues and grievances must be **confronted early**, as deferring them deepens divisions rather than resolving them. In addition, everyday peacebuilding and practical, bottom-up initiatives must not wait for formal negotiations to conclude but should advance alongside, and in connection with, political processes.

[1] This report does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of these topics, but rather to honestly reflect the conversations held on the day and serve as a starting point for continued discussion, collaboration and further elaboration. The maps displayed in this report are intended for illustrative purposes only. They are not intended to provide complete or definitive geopolitical representations.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS AT A GLANCE:

TRACK II MEDIATION:
Embed civil society as an independent, two-way bridge between diplomacy and communities, ensuring power imbalances, unequal costs, and dominant assumptions are addressed as part of the process, and incremental progress flows back to communities in language they trust.

JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION AND RIGHTS:
Build truth, accountability, and redress into peace processes from the outset – even where implementation must be phased – acknowledging unequal harms without reducing the past to competing narratives of victimhood or assigning strict "victim-perpetrator" labels, and building a record resistant to denial and political revision.

RELIGION, IDENTITY AND NARRATIVES:
Engage religion as a lived identity, not just an institution, recognising that faith shapes identity that can fuel division or build connection, invest in both intra- and interfaith dialogue, and treat narrative change as long-term infrastructure by funding locally led media, trusted messengers, and initiatives that challenge inherited narratives over time.

POLITICAL IMAGINATION:
Start with shared values and interests, not competing constitutional models, and use practical cooperation, such as protective presence, shared spaces, and joint service provision, to make alternative political futures tangible and credible.

JUMP TO:

Track II Mediation: Limitations and New Directions 4

Religion, Identity and the Power of Narratives in Peacebuilding 6

Beyond Conflict: Balancing Reconciliation, Justice and Rights 9

Expanding our Political Imagination: From Shared Values to Constitutional Agreements 12

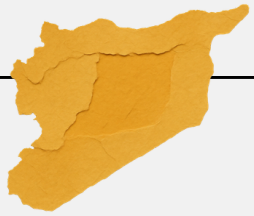
Further Resources 14

TRACK II MEDIATION: LIMITATIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

- **Track I mediation alone cannot solve conflict, but requires concurrent and complementary Track II and III efforts.** Track II and III can work through decentralised, bottom-up approaches, allowing them to overcome some of the limitations of Track I. When negotiation parties are unwilling or unable to move forward, these tracks can provide solutions and momentum to break deadlocks, feeding back into official talks at a later stage. At the same time, the existence of Track II and III processes should not prevent Track I from addressing difficult issues themselves.

- **Mediation process design should better account for power imbalances.** This requires actively addressing power imbalances in programme design, including who leads and shapes the process, and whose language and perspectives are prioritised. It also means accounting for unequal risks, access and costs of participation - for instance, in Israel-Palestine, for Palestinians - and ensuring that dialogue acknowledges the political and structural realities in which participants live rather than implying that relationship-building alone can resolve them.

- **Track II must be opened to a far larger diversity of voices to become a genuine driver of new thinking and conflict resolution**, including women, young people, diasporas, more conservative and religious groups (e.g. Orthodox Jewish, religious Islamist communities), and other communities not actively or under-engaged (e.g. Palestinian Citizens of Israel, Mizrahi communities). Bringing diverse voices and expertise into the process can expose blind spots, generate new ideas, and help address the underlying causes of conflict. Participants must also be challenged in their thinking, both by the "other side" and by technical experts who can question established assumptions, introduce new perspectives, and prevent dialogue from simply hardening existing positions. Without this broader inclusion and constructive challenge, Track II risks reproducing existing power imbalances and entrenched thinking rather than overcoming them.



SYRIA

In 2016, faced with women's exclusion from the Geneva talks' official delegations, UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura established the **Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB).** Through the WAB, independent women civil society representatives acted as observers in the talks as part of de Mistura's delegation; they consulted directly with the Special Envoy to raise matters missing from the agenda, build consensus, address key points of contention, and make recommendations for creative, gender-responsive solutions rooted in civil society expertise. While well-intended, the WAB has been widely criticised for lacking inclusivity, transparency, and real impact; these limitations offer important lessons that should inform the design of future processes.

- **Progress on specific, smaller-scale issues should be pursued in connection with the wider political process.** This includes working through municipalities and local leadership on initiatives that address everyday needs while creating spaces where communities can "build peace" through daily interactions and working together on shared practical goals - For example, Israelis and Palestinians working together on Gaza humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, bringing together professionals to jointly solve immediate needs - This "everyday peace" and visible wins resonate with constituencies on the ground and can build momentum for higher-level breakthroughs.

NORTHERN IRELAND



During the Troubles and the Good Friday Agreement negotiations, Northern Irish civil society groups set up **inter-community mobile phone networks** to counter misinformation and rumours that were feeding the violence. Through the networks, different communities could ring each other up to fact-check and better understand any information or news before taking action. This reduced the risk of violent reactions, civil unrest, and popular dissent pressuring negotiating leaders to walk away, leading to negotiation breakdowns.

- **Today's shifting conflict and mediation landscape creates both risks and opportunities for Track I processes, which will also affect how Track II and III can connect back to them.** The increase of coalitions of the willing and emerging middle powers with mediation ambitions creates an opportunity that should be further explored. Given the rising internationalisation of conflicts, mediation efforts should also integrate regional dimensions rather than treating conflicts as purely bilateral. They should seek to engage countries with leverage and proximity, recognising that each country brings different roles, interests, and legitimacy. As a result, mediators' own interests should not be ignored but leveraged, connecting interests into win-win outcomes, and acting in the spaces created by overlapping interests.

- **More attention should be paid to ensure multidirectional information flows and interconnections between mediation tracks.** Information typically flows upwards from Track II and III to Track I to inform and support official mediators' work, while there is little investment in a reciprocal downward transfer. Information and mediation "wins" must also flow downwards to combat deep-rooted "no partner for peace" perceptions, to help prepare traumatised societies for peace, and to build engagement with Track III efforts. Links between tracks should acknowledge and safeguard their different functions; where Track II and III's roles are institutionalised, this must be done in a way that does not disconnect them from their constituencies or open them to accusations of cooptation into the process.

THROUGH TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CAN ENGAGE COMMUNITIES DIRECTLY TO LEARN THEIR WANTS AND NEEDS

- **Civil society support and input are needed throughout the mediation process.** Through trusted relationships, civil society organisations can engage communities directly to learn their wants and needs, or leverage credible intermediaries from within the group to relay messages and help phase in direct engagement. They can also access constituencies and actors that governments are unable or unwilling to reach directly (e.g. non-state armed groups), tapping into shared values or accessible language. Embedding civil society participation into mediation processes should be done in a contextualised and tailored manner. For example, Track I actors can consult with Track II civil society before official talks and feed back outcomes afterwards. Another option involves separate but parallel high-level or official tracks on one side, and a civil society track on the other, brought together during the finalisation of a comprehensive peace agreement.

---

*"**Track I diplomacy**: Official discussions typically involving high-level political and military leaders and focusing on cease-fires, peace talks, and treaties and other agreements.*
***Track II diplomacy**: Unofficial dialogue and problem-solving activities aimed at building relationships and encouraging new thinking that can inform the official process. Track 2 activities typically involve influential academic, religious, and NGO leaders and other civil society actors who can interact more freely than high-ranking officials. Some analysts use the term track 1.5 to denote a situation in which official and non-official actors work together to resolve conflicts.*
***Track III diplomacy**: People-to-people diplomacy undertaken by individuals and private groups to encourage interaction and understanding between hostile communities and involving awareness raising and empowerment within these communities. Normally focused at the grassroots level, this type of diplomacy often involves organizing meetings and conferences, generating media exposure, and political and legal advocacy for marginalized people and communities."*
(Source)

- **Civil society leaders can feed back information to their communities in a language those communities will hear, and gradually help to change public discourse.** Civil society can "translate" the language used in official political processes into language that is accessible to them. Framing should be community-specific to avoid alienation, and carefully communicate small wins to build incremental support and combat misinformation.



NORTHERN IRELAND

In 1995, the **Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust** (**NIVT**) ran a postal survey across 200+ communities to gauge grassroots priorities and better direct socioeconomic and peace-reconciliation funding – a bottom-up consultation process that had not been attempted before, and that brought the perspectives of previously unheard constituencies into policymaking. The survey revealed economic empowerment and investment in community infrastructure, especially for the most deprived communities, as the leading priority. Though the priorities were expressed only in vague language by the subsequent EU funding announcement, the novelty of the insights led to a meeting between Northern Irish civil society and EU Commission President Jacques Delors, and ultimately to NIVT being assigned to administer the **European Union's PEACE I package** - which, by sustaining and scaling civil society peacebuilding in the years leading up to final official negotiations, is considered to have helped create the conditions necessary for reaching the Good Friday Agreement.

RELIGION, IDENTITY AND THE POWER OF NARRATIVES IN PEACEBUILDING

- **Any Israeli-Palestinian peace process that ignores the religious dimension will ultimately encounter blockages and create or fuel spoilers.** Over the years, the (perceived) centrality of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has fluctuated, waxing and waning in importance along political, social, historical and economic dimensions. Yet, past attempts to separate religion from the conflict have not worked, nor has the repeated exclusion of religious actors from peace processes; on the contrary, the latter made it near-impossible for the religious leadership to endorse any of their outcomes. The Oslo process, in particular, sought to sidestep the issue of religion almost entirely, including through deferring discussions on the status of Jerusalem. Recognising the significance of Jerusalem not only to Israelis and Palestinians but to Muslims, Christians, and Jews worldwide, any future process must be willing to address this core issue.

PAST ATTEMPTS TO SEPARATE RELIGION FROM THE CONFLICT HAVE NOT WORKED, NOR HAS THE REPEATED EXCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS FROM PEACE PROCESSES

- **It is crucial to right-size the role of religion in conflict, neither under- nor overestimating its importance.** Religion is frequently instrumentalised by different actors to advance their own agenda – serving not as the engine of conflict but as its fuel. This, in turn, can deepen divisions and undermine religious actors' credibility beyond their own narrow constituencies. At the same time, religion can be a powerful force for peace, as shared messages and actions for coexistence, nonviolence and respect resonate across dividing lines. Strong religious literacy – i.e. the understanding of the various ways religion intersects with social, political, and cultural life – is therefore an essential skill that mediators at all levels must develop to be able to navigate these dynamics.

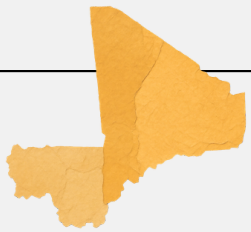


BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion was instrumentalised to reinforce national identities and justify exclusion, displacement, and violence. Religious identity became a marker for **targeting people, regardless of their actual beliefs**, and religious sites were among the first to be destroyed. Three decades later, young people continue to inherit the narratives and divisions of the war, while genocide and war crimes denial remain prevalent. Religion remains deeply entangled in these inherited national narratives, complicating efforts to build peace while also offering an important entry point for dialogue and reconciliation.

- **Peacebuilding must be sensitive to how religion interplays with the conflict and itself - particularly when social and religious identities are closely intertwined, as in Israel and Palestine.** Not all initiatives should seek to directly address religion, but neither should participants be asked to leave their identities at the door. This also affects how conflict issues are addressed: when arguments are couched in religious terms, e.g. a "divine mission", strictly secular approaches will likely be unsuccessful and even counterproductive. Peacebuilding by religious actors, however, can reframe faith as a source of connection rather than division, drawing on shared holy sites and heritage, and inviting recognition of each other's identity, beliefs and connection to the land. Religious participation in Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilding and peace processes should therefore be supported. This includes involving them in civil society consultations on peace, as well as funding (inter)faith peacebuilding initiatives, particularly those of women, youth, and other informal but influential actors.

PEACEBUILDING BY RELIGIOUS ACTORS CAN REFRAME FAITH AS A SOURCE OF CONNECTION RATHER THAN DIVISION, DRAWING ON SHARED HOLY SITES AND HERITAGE



MALI

In Mali, faith-based peace initiatives began with **intrafaith dialogue**, facilitating interdenominational forums bringing together religious actors within a broader faith group (e.g. Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Muslims; Catholic and Protestant Christians) to build cohesion, consensus, and trust internally. Building on these forums, **interfaith initiatives** then brought Christian and Muslim community actors together to create a shared platform for peace across religions and denominations while allowing space for nuance and division within and between belief communities.

- **Religious engagement should be broad both in scale and in scope.** This begins by adopting a broad definition of "religious actor": while formal religious leaders and institutions naturally carry weight, they also face constraints and senior figures can suffer from the same disconnection from their congregations as other high-level leaders. As a result, religious engagement should include a broad range of religious actors, including lay leaders, women and young people who have influence in their religious communities. These actors can access less-heard segments of communities, and are often actively involved in grassroots peacebuilding. Additionally, much like mediation, interreligious peacebuilding should seek to bring in perspectives from groups that may (initially) be skeptical of its benefits.

- **We must pay particular attention to how religions, identities and narratives are transmitted from one generation to the next.** In long-standing conflicts, older generations may remember positive interactions with the other side that younger generations never experienced. Prolonged separation between communities creates a generational divide and fuels dehumanisation that is exploited for extremist narratives. Peacebuilding efforts must therefore centre youth by providing alternative environments and opportunities to remove physical, ideological, and perceived barriers that enable extremism and dehumanisation, and thereby enable youth to become agents of change.

PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS MUST CENTRE YOUTH BY PROVIDING (...) OPPORTUNITIES TO REMOVE PHYSICAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS THAT ENABLE EXTREMISM AND DEHUMANISATION

- **Working with the media can have transformative effects.** Often dismissed as shallow, the media has broad reach and is believed by the public, so peace actors should utilise the media to foster narrative shifts and counter destructive attempts to fuel conflict through media.



BURUNDI

Following the widespread use of radio broadcasts to fuel ethnic violence in the Great Lakes region, particularly during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, **Studio Ijambo** was launched in Burundi in 1995 to counter "hate radio" with programmes that promoted dialogue, peace, and reconciliation with the slogan "Dialogue is the future". Broadcasts, produced by an ethnically balanced team of journalists, examined all sides of the conflict and highlighted the points that can unite, rather than divide Burundians. Over time, Studio Ijambo gained a reputation for credible and unbiased reporting, becoming an effective channel for dialogue and peacebuilding in a region where many rely on the radio to access information. The initiative continues to run to this day, training Burundian journalists and operating as a production studio, with programming broadcast across several radio stations.

- **Narrative work requires long-term commitments to creating safe spaces where different actors can challenge their own narrative(s) and listen to the other without interruption or threat.** The substance of work, and the ways of expressing it, must be locally rooted, since those who understand their communities know what is viable, what isn't, and what puts people at risk. Narrative change and media engagement should therefore be conceptualised as and planned for as long-term, everyday processes rather than tied to single moments. International support should focus on long-term support for these initiatives, while leaving control of the substance to local actors and allowing for the presence of parties international actors may disagree with. This should not prevent civil society and its supporters from identifying and seizing opportunities to create big narrative shifts on a conflict, where consequential or unexpected events create openings for new ideas or perspectives.

BEYOND CONFLICT:
BALANCING RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

- **Any effort to build a lasting peace must contend with differing, and sometimes competing, understandings of justice** – from restitution, to prosecution, to acknowledgement – and can take many forms including: criminal, civil, restorative, transitional, etc. Post-conflict justice must therefore not restrict itself to one approach, and should combine elements of truth processes, criminal justice, restorative and transitional justice, and institutional reform as part of a comprehensive and context-specific approach, rooted in survivors' perspectives. While criminal justice is important to many, it has limitations: procedural requirements mean that acquittals do not necessarily reflect innocence or guilt, while even successful prosecutions cannot restore the dead, undo past harms, or meet every survivor's needs. Alternative forms of redress can therefore complement criminal justice by addressing harms it cannot fully remedy, whilst always centring victims' perspectives.

- **Similarly, terms such as "reconciliation", "peace", "justice" and "accountability" are contested and context-dependent.** In some settings they have proved detrimental, in others avoiding them has had the same effect. Framing must strike a balance between avoiding alienation and emptying words of meaning, and above all, speak the language of the general population it seeks to address. In Israel-Palestine, such language can alienate many Palestinians when it feels far removed from reality on the ground or is seen to be used to sanitise and detach. For many, "peace" and "reconciliation" have become associated with demands to move on without justice or accountability. Rebuilding trust in these concepts therefore requires more than changing the language: it requires demonstrating in practice that peace and reconciliation go hand in hand with truth, justice and accountability. Conversely, three decades of distancing from peace and reconciliation, in language and in practice, have left "peace" synonymous with danger or treason, and simply 'softening' the language has not overcome this resistance; some therefore argue that peace must be reclaimed as a meaningful goal rooted in justice and accountability.

- **The transition from conflict to peace to reconciliation is not linear.** No single mechanism is sufficient, and justice cannot be achieved at once, but it must be pursued as a process. Peace negotiations and post-conflict frameworks must include justice processes and mechanisms to address victims' rights from the start, either implementing them from the outset or planning to phase them in where readiness is insufficient. Deferring justice does not work; hurt does not fade, but deepens and becomes ingrained in generational trauma. Trust and security must proceed hand-in-hand. After conflict, mistrust and fear of renewed violence are pervasive. Post-conflict governance actors must guarantee the security of the entire population, beyond victim-perpetrator dichotomies. Alongside physical safety, dialogue and trust-building initiatives that tackle hatred and misunderstanding, and enable people to feel safe within and across their communities, are a precondition for reconciliation.



NORTHERN IRELAND

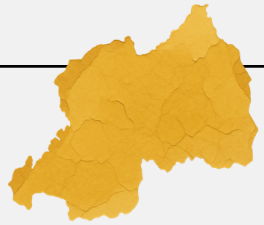
Northern Ireland's 1998 Good Friday Agreement did not contain **transitional justice mechanisms**, as the pursuit of justice was perceived as premature. Later attempts to establish a cohesive justice process have repeatedly failed as a result of enduring denial, immunity schemes limiting criminal accountability, and policy changes dismantling previous achievements, leaving families from all sides without answers or avenues for redress.

- **Justice processes should balance a forward-looking approach with acknowledgement of the past.** Justice should aim to secure rights for the next generation and create a future in which such injustices do not recur, which requires addressing the root causes of injustice, grievance and abuse. Societies may not share a common memory, but a "complex memory" should be compiled encompassing different communities' histories to allow for a common future. This means countering denial of atrocities committed by any group, avoiding competing narratives that rank suffering, and acknowledging asymmetries both in the harms experienced and in the structural positions of power from which harm was inflicted. Genuine acknowledgement and truth rooted in reckoning with the past can also give victims a minimum sense of justice and create alternative avenues for redress where formal justice hits a wall.

VICTIM/ PERPETRATOR ROLES SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS A SPECTRUM, AND REFRAMED TO COUNTER DEHUMANISATION

- **"Victim" and "perpetrator" identities should be recognised as complex and not mutually exclusive. Cleavages emerge between the community and individual level** – a person may be part of a perpetrator collective while being an individual victim, or vice versa – and each person can become one or the other or both through time. Framing these roles as a binary fuels competition over suffering, and can lead to one group's victimhood to be privileged over another's in public memory and memorialisation. While recognising systemic asymmetries, dichotomies should be avoided. Victim/perpetrator roles should rather be understood as a spectrum, and reframed to counter dehumanisation rooted in lack of knowledge and acknowledgement of the other, that can become a pathway to further violence and atrocities. Recognising the humanity in others, including understanding how perpetrators' actions can be shaped by circumstance, is essential.

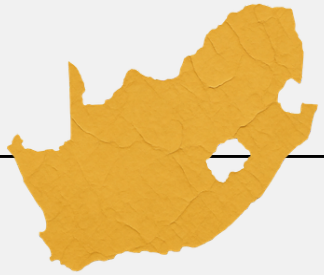
RWANDA



Following the genocide in Rwanda, the government focused on citizens' physical security, whether they were assigned "perpetrator" or "victim" labels, and on promoting a **unitary national identity** beyond ethnic divisions. By "standing between" communities, security measures allowed for a reduction in physical violence, but at the same time surfaced deeper questions, such as how to reckon with atrocities committed and build trust. Lessons from South Africa underpinned the structure and mandate of Rwanda's transitional mechanisms. **Gacaca courts**, a traditional, grassroots community court system, were central to the justice process, as conventional judicial bodies lacked the material capacity and reach to address the scale of atrocities. Locally elected judges heard and tried genocide suspects, giving perpetrators the opportunity to confess crimes and seek the community's forgiveness, while providing bereaved families with the truth about what happened to their relatives. The courts then passed criminal sentences on perpetrators while chiefly focusing on **community reconciliation**. Yet Rwanda's formal reaction and memorialisation initiatives have been criticised for failing to acknowledge that the **distinction between "victim" and "perpetrator"** was far from clear cut, and that atrocities were committed asymmetrically but on both sides.

- **Ownership of transitional mechanisms – including truth, reconciliation, and justice processes** – should be held across society. Some conflict survivors have preferred government-led processes that leverage state authority and resources for implementation, while others stress the need for fully independent, locally owned mechanisms, or even externally imposed ones. At the same time, healing and reconciliation should be embedded in every part of society and people's lives. There are opportunities to advance them in infrastructure, cross-border environment and water projects, transport, shared spaces, businesses, media, etc. This allows them to exist outside of negotiations and even start before official tracks are established or acknowledged. The international community should collaborate with transitional efforts without leading them, and engage with people at the grassroots across conflict lines rather than only interfacing with governments and official tracks.

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION SHOULD BE EMBEDDED IN EVERY PART OF SOCIETY AND PEOPLE'S LIVES



SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** (**TRC**) was established as a national, rather than international endeavour, and tasked with advancing, not achieving, reconciliation in a deeply divided and wounded society. Central to its work was the creation of a **complex**, rather than common, **memory**: one that could be owned by those who implemented apartheid, by those who fought against it, and by ordinary citizens who claimed ignorance while benefiting from the system. The Commission's core principle held that "**we have to turn the page of history... but it's our view that you first have to read the page before you turn it**". Through victim, amnesty, and institutional hearings, the TRC compiled the experiences of people and communities across South Africa, and examined violence and violations by both state and liberation forces, as well as the role of sectors such as healthcare, education, the media, and the police as active or silent sustainers of apartheid. Its hearings were broadcast daily for two years across radio and television, filling the public space and **making denial of apartheid and violence impossible**. Perpetrator testimonies – made possible by the amnesty law – were particularly impactful: atrocities were confirmed by those who had committed them firsthand, challenging denial and claims of exaggeration. Though the Commission recommended cases that did not fulfil the amnesty requirements for prosecution, few were ever carried forward, and **criminal justice remains largely unrealised**. Nevertheless, the TRC's work in establishing factual truth and countering revisionism is considered a vital first step towards accountability, particularly as it began to reshape black South Africans' experience of a legal system that had long ignored or persecuted them. In some cases, moreover, perpetrators who were never prosecuted have undertaken practical, reparative action, based on victims' views of what meaningful and appropriate redress would look like.

EXPANDING OUR POLITICAL IMAGINATION: FROM SHARED VALUES TO CONSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENTS

- **Keeping political imagination alive during a conflict is essential, yet gruelling when survival is the immediate priority.** People often lack the tools for political imagination: societies experiencing long-term conflict may struggle to imagine life beyond it, while most people have little insight into political processes or awareness of the work already underway to propose alternatives. Many Palestinians, specifically, feel disillusioned since different futures they imagined, and were promised, were never implemented. Meanwhile, those invested in perpetuating conflict are often highly effective at pushing their vision, no matter how unrealistic. The Israeli and Palestinian peace camps must reclaim space for their own political imagination and lay the groundwork for a shared future. This includes moving beyond defending peace as not dangerous or unrealistic to presenting a compelling vision of what it could offer: greater security, freedom, dignity and opportunity in everyday life. By making this future tangible and relatable, peacebuilders can help shift public perceptions of peace from a threat to a desirable, achievable alternative.

- **Political imagination precedes political decisions, and can be most effective when its initial focus is on shared values, interests, and goals.** Lasting agreements may be better approached by first identifying the values they should uphold – or shared interests to pursue – before considering constitutional forms. Political arrangements – including the two-state vs. one-state solution in Israel and Palestine – can themselves be understood as a guiding framework rather than an end goal, in that they are tools to enable living based on one's values.

- **Translating political imagination into reality requires leadership and organised action beyond the political realm.** While visionary political leadership and political will play a key role, communities need not – and should not – wait for political actors to drive the process. Broad coalitions, including religious actors and institutions, trade unions, women's organisations, youth movements, academics, diaspora groups and wider civil society, are essential to mobilising, sustaining and disseminating a shared vision. Existing political leaders and governments, on the other hand, must be willing to take political risks and understand that dialogue is not surrender, but an investment in the future. Constitutional agreements must move beyond negotiating tables and elite buy-in, to become concepts embraced by citizens, since no sustainable future can be built by force alone. Bottom-up efforts, and working with municipalities, regional institutions, and community-level structures, are key: high-level decisions must be translated down into societies while local approaches must empower communities and enable new political leadership to emerge from the grassroots.

- **Young people must be at the heart of discussions on political imagination and future arrangements.** Youth are both present actors for peace and conflict, and future implementers of any peace agreements. As such they must be recognised and supported by both donors and civil society organisations as key stakeholders in political mobilisation, with voting rights and a genuine voice in shaping the future. Where their exclusion from peace conversations increases polarisation and mutual distrust, their inclusion brings new solutions, updated understandings of the conflict, and can revitalise peace efforts with fresh energy and hope. Intergenerational exchanges also allow us to learn from the past – reappropriating it, understanding the context from which the present emerged, while not overlooking its human costs – in order to imagine a shared future.



CYPRUS

Cyprus's **Technical Committee on Youth (TCY),** established in March 2025 as part of the UN-facilitated peace process, offers a valuable model for **institutionalising youth and civil society** participation in conflict resolution. Comprising equal numbers of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot members, with full gender parity and representation from diverse professional and social backgrounds, the committee moves youth engagement beyond symbolic consultation and into the formal architecture of diplomacy. Its establishment followed sustained international advocacy, particularly by the UN, while the EU has played an important supporting role through funding for bicommunal cooperation, institutional support and direct engagement with the committee, including at senior EU leadership level. Crucially, the TCY provides a standing mechanism through which young people can develop practical confidence-building initiatives, engage with political leaders and connect local peacebuilding efforts to international policymaking. The broader lesson for other conflicts is that meaningful inclusion requires more than occasional consultations or parallel civil society forums: it requires formally recognised, representative and adequately supported structures that connect grassroots constituencies to political decision-makers and international institutions. The TCY demonstrates how international actors can help create and sustain such mechanisms, embedding **wider societal participation** within peace processes without requiring civil society representatives to become formal negotiators.

- **Political imagination should provide a vision, but stay grounded in practical, iterative steps.** Proposed solutions should be tested for their physical, political, and public feasibility, including support from political institutions, grassroots communities, and the international community. Data and evidence are key: previous experiences should be assessed empirically rather than allowing political imagination to be shaped by narratives, theories or assumptions alone. Transitions can take years or decades, and require bottom-up work, international efforts, popular buy-in, and political leadership to act in concert – and even then, the process may remain incomplete. Civil society and political actors alike should therefore move their political imagination away from a definitive end point where the conflict is "resolved" forever, and instead recognise that their work must continue and adapt over time.

- **Political imagination and new institutional designs should involve a regional approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and leverage already existing regional infrastructure for peace.** Involving regional dimensions, for instance, can increase Israeli public support for a negotiated solution: when asked about Israel's integration into the region alongside a Palestinian state, rather than about the two-state solution as such, a majority of Israelis express support. Cross-border or cross-divide shared institutions can foster – or even compel – cooperation, translating trust-building measures into practice and thereby reinforcing them. New institutions should therefore be created that bypass conventional instruments and forms. Where institutions cannot be established through official government channels, civil society should create bottom-up institutions that can over time acquire institutional standing. At the political level, implementation and concrete steps, even if small, are needed to make imagination credible, and international leadership can help shift public opinion when it makes prospects tangible again.



ISRAEL-PALESTINE

In Israel-Palestine, both societies differ greatly from those of 30 years ago: Palestinian and Israeli societies are both young, and most people today were not alive during past peace processes. Target groups have fundamentally changed, so the framing and narratives for peace should change alongside them to resonate with the current audiences. Today's youth is a **post-Oslo generation**, born into the reality of occupation and annexation rather than the dream of two states. Although their lives are more intertwined than ever, young Israelis and Palestinians rarely meet one another. Work that addresses **immediate needs** on the ground, however, can be leveraged to bridge this divide and act as a vehicle for **political imagination** driving long-term change, since direct exposure to realities on the ground and to the other can be a potent form of **political education**. During protective presence, Israeli volunteers accompany Palestinian families in the West Bank through their daily activities to protect them from settler violence or document attacks. These initiatives address an immediate need for protection of Palestinians, but they also provide space for Palestinians and Israelis to meet one another, understand that both communities are not monolithic, and grasp the material dimensions of daily life under conflict. Beyond providing immediate safety, then, the experience can overturn assumptions about the conflict and the other, and spark meaningful political imagination.

The conference was supported by:
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands;
The Belgian Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation;
David and Mehra Rimer;
Harold Erdman;
The Schöpflin Foundation;
Sir Victor Blank

Scan to explore sources and further reading

How to cite this report:
ALLMEP, Search for Common Ground & The Parents Circle – Families Forum. (November 2026), *Peacebuilding Lessons from Israel, Palestine and Beyond: Outcome Report.*

Contact:
ALLMEP: europe@allmep.org
Search for Common Ground: rforster@sfcg.org
Parents Circle - Families Forum: ayeleth@theparentscircle.org

The conference was organized by: