

# Geneva Peace Week 2022

## Thematic Track Report

Rights, inequalities and peace: Navigating tensions,  
finding opportunities

**Florence Foster**

Peace and Disarmament Programme Representative, Quaker United Nations Office

**Sabrina Mignone**

Peace and Disarmament Programme Assistant, Quaker United Nations Office

## 1. Overview

Peace is more than the absence of overt violence or destructive conflict, sustainable peace is fundamentally linked with human rights, social and economic justice, inclusion and political participation. Bearing this in mind, the focus of the track on Thursday, 3rd November was on exploring the relationship between human rights and sustainable peace, building upon the outcomes for the 2021 track edition on 'Confronting inequalities and advancing inclusion, peace, and SDG16'.

Having this full day dedicated to spotlighting the relevance of human rights was an opportunity to explore human rights not only as a normative framework for the analysis of root causes and to devise just solutions, but as a toolbox and procedural pathways for inclusive decision making and dialogue. The day also included a high-level panel, moderated by Florence Foster, Peace and Disarmament Representative at QUNO, and featured four panelists: Dr Anastasia Shesterinina, Director of the Centre for the Comparative Study of Civil War and Senior Lecturer at the University of Sheffield, Anjli Parrin, Director, University of Chicago Law School Global Human rights Clinic, Todd Howland, currently Chief of the Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch at OHCHR and Brian James Williams, Chief of Financing for Peacebuilding Branch, speaking on

## 2. Key Insights & Takeaways

The day's events did a deep dive into the notion of inclusion and the diversity of agents of change when it came to overcoming inequalities: from armed and political movements to civil society and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) including youth and women's participation. While the former actors are still under explored and often underrepresented in peacebuilding – it's a damning assessment on how far we have yet to go that we are *still* having to home in on the latter, namely women and youth participation.

### ***Normative framework for the analysis of root causes***

Importantly, events also addressed the challenges around identity politics – and the discrimination minorities face - with a particular focus on LGBT communities. An important takeaway in terms of prevention, was that the human rights abuse and violations these communities endure, along with other minorities, often foreshadows trajectories of more widespread violence and potential for destructive conflict.

Furthermore, these communities face heightened and *distinctive* levels of discrimination and violence, particularly in contexts affected by conflict.

### ***Toolbox and procedural pathways for inclusive decision making***

Interestingly, a workshop specifically addressed the critical need to protect the right to protest in conflict and crisis – as part of the broader rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Indeed, protests in many contexts affected by conflict is the last channel of dialogue or communication, enabling grievances to be aired and heard. All too often protests are seen as a crisis or ‘problem’ in and of themselves – and responded to with hostility and violence, catalyzing conflict rather than peaceful resolutions. They *actually* should be seen and welcomed as a hopeful sign that violence is not necessary, and that peaceful means are being sought by civilians to communicate issues of concern, in view of finding non-violent solutions.

### **3. Conclusions and Next Steps**

The conversations that took place on the day demonstrated new ways of integrating human rights and peace at the multilateral diplomacy and policy level. We heard about innovative practices, experiences, and stories from the field on how confronting human rights violations, injustice and exclusion has contributed to sustainable peace.

While much progress has been made to enable a more coherent and collaborative spirit between humanitarian, human rights, development, peace and security and other multi-mandated actors - much still needs to be done for this to shape up in practice. Siloed approaches and administrative heavy processes and projects still dominate, undermining the empowerment of local communities to devise creative solutions to conflict or social cohesion; and undermining the ability of the UN to deliver on the Charter.

A few ways forward:

- The need to further engage between the fragmented sectors and pillars in the UN system, building on the recognition of complementarity.
- Human rights bodies and mechanisms should continue to reflect on how sustaining peace functions can be integrated into respective mandates. This should be coupled with efforts to ensure that they engage with social cohesion

and peacebuilding actors for their recommendations to guide peacebuilding work, including that of the peacebuilding architecture.

- Continue to protect and grow civic space. Indeed, civil society actors, including human rights defenders and local community peacebuilders, often play key roles in prevention, early warning, mediation, and other peacebuilding activities in many contexts, particularly in conflict-affected societies and in situations of extreme fragility or transition.
- Continue building and speaking about the evidence base of the relevance and added value of human rights approaches and actions, and how they should be applied in joined-up and multidimensional sustaining peace efforts in *all* States, not simply those typically seen as conflict affected or fragile.

The spirit of the day can be captured by a powerful image shared with the audience during the high-level panel by Todd Howland - imagine three places - one called conflict and the other two peace & development, separated by a river. The bridge to get from conflict to the other two, is called human rights.