Forum: Special Conference on Culture & Heritage 2 (SPCCH2)

Issue: Reconciliation through cultural dialogue in post-conflict societies

Student Officer: Luca Stefan Popescu

Position: Deputy President

Introduction

Many wars stem from intolerance, whether ethnic, religious, or ideological. Examples include the Yugoslav wars and the Sri Lankan civil war of 2009. Although such conflicts often end with peace treaties, post-conflict societies face enduring challenges: resettling displaced persons, rebuilding infrastructure and institutions, restoring investor confidence, and managing national assets. These material difficulties, compounded by political instability, highlight the fragility of peace.

Beyond structural issues, resentment and hatred often persist among citizens. In revolutions or civil wars, hostility toward opposing ethnicities or ideologies can endure across generations, sustaining tensions that risk reigniting conflict. The Balkans illustrate this vividly. Despite NATO's intervention, mistrust remains among former Yugoslav nations. Kosovo, claimed by Serbia but ethnically aligned with Albanians, remains a flashpoint where religious, ethnic, and political divisions combined with memories of war fuel suspicion. The absence of dialogue only deepens hostility.

For nations scarred by war, civil strife, or ethnic violence, Intercultural Dialogue (ICD) is essential. Today, more than 30 countries are engaged in conflicts[1], ranging from insurgencies (e.g., the DRC against M23) to open wars (Russia–Ukraine, Israel–Palestine) and civil wars (Myanmar). Even when hostilities end, societies remain marked by resentment and division. Promoting ICD is therefore crucial, as it fosters acceptance and peaceful coexistence between cultures and identities ICD is not merely theoretical it has shown success. Countries once divided by conflict now cooperate as allies through initiatives rooted in dialogue. These examples demonstrate the long-term benefits of intercultural engagement, underscoring the need for nations to embrace dialogue as a pathway to reconciliation and lasting peace.

Definition of Key Terms

Cultural dialogue

Also called Intercultural dialogue (ICD), Intercultural dialogue is an approach for aligning diverse interests around shared priorities; whether that means building more cohesive communities, fostering economic resilience, or responding effectively to crises. It helps create the human connections and shared language that are essential for joint action.

Post-conflict society

A post-conflict society is one that has recently emerged from armed conflict, though the exact timing is unclear. This fragile phase involves rebuilding institutions, addressing the causes of violence, and working toward lasting peace through reforms, justice, economic recovery, and social healing.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to the restoration of friendly relations, typically when making two opposing sides or ideas compatible again. This is especially important when discussing cultural clashes in society.

Background information

End of a conflict and the persistence of tensions

Even when hostilities between belligerents come to an end, violence often persists[2]. In many cases, peace remains fragile, particularly after civil wars where former combatants are not properly reintegrated into society and continue to fuel instability. El Salvador provides a striking example[3]. After its civil war ended in 1992, many former soldiers of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), left without employment opportunities or professional skills, returned to violence. At the same time, members of the American MS-21 criminal organization who were deported to El Salvador exploited the political instability to dominate the streets through violence. As a result, crime rates soared, and in the years following the war, the number of deaths exceeded those recorded during the conflict itself.

Post-conflict societies also face significant economic challenges[4]. Restoring investor confidence is crucial to relaunching the private economy. However, countries with low gross domestic product (GDP) often resort to borrowing during conflicts, which leaves them burdened with debt. Once peace is achieved, these nations cannot dedicate all their resources to reconstruction, as a portion of their capital must be directed toward debt repayment. This financial strain contributes to ongoing instability. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), such economic hardships increase the likelihood of renewed conflict, even after peace has been formally established.

Sidelining dialogue

Closing the door to Intercultural Dialogue (ICD) can lead to significant disadvantages. Firstly, whenever dialogue between cultures is not actively pursued, stereotypes and hatred take root within

communities, making it even more difficult to establish ICD in the future. Moreover, while isolation may initially create the illusion of security by avoiding engagement with former adversaries, it ultimately fosters comfort in separation and prevents openness to other cultures, an essential asset in today's globalized world. In cases of internal conflict, isolating one group from another to avoid renewed tensions can result in segregation and deepen divisions between communities. A clear example of how the absence of ICD can fuel conflict is the current situation in Sudan[5], where hate speech continues to fuel hostilities.

The youth, inheritor of the worlds issue

Currently representing 16% of the world's population[6], today's youth will become the adults of tomorrow. As they assume this role, they will face a wide range of global challenges, including climate change, rising inequalities, ongoing conflicts, and the complex issues related to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. At the same time, they will inherit the vast and diverse cultural heritage of nations across the world. Immersed in their countries' cultures, it is vital that they are prepared to embrace the principles of interculturalism. By doing so, they will be better equipped to address these pressing challenges and work toward achieving lasting peace.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The United Nations (UN)

The UN has passed multiple resolutions promoting ICD and mentioning its importance in our current world

- Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, 6th October 1999 (A/RES/53/243)
- Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech, 2nd July 2025 (A/RES/79/316)
- Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, 21st December 2023 (A/RES/78/129)

The United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO has long promoted ICD through a series of projects[7]. The agency defines ICD as a process aimed at achieving transformative communication across cultures and identities. Its initiatives include policies such as "Mobilising data to create space and opportunity for dialogue," "Promoting dialogue for conflict transformation," and "Promoting culture and heritage as vehicles for dialogue."

Rwanda

Only a few years after the Rwandan genocide, the country took important steps to foster dialogue between Hutu and Tutsi communities by drawing on cultural practices shared by both ethnic groups.

Cyprus

Following the 1974 Turkish invasion, Cyprus was divided into two communities composed of different ethnic groups that have historically struggled to coexist. Efforts to ease tensions and promote reconciliation have focused on restoring and preserving shared heritage between the communities.

Timeline of events

Date	Description of events
1999	The Rwandan government creates the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which inspires other local programmes in the country
October, 6th, 1999	A/RES/53/243 *"Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace"* is implemented. Emphasising the importance of ICD to ensure world peace
2019	*Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community* is put into action in Bosnia and Herzegovina
December, 2nd, 2023	A/RES/78/129 *"Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace"* is passed. Further emphasizing the importance of cultural dialogue in our world
July, 2nd, 2025	A/RES/79/316 *"Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech"* is passed. The resolution informs on how ICD can tackle hate speech

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Tools currently in place

UN promoted ICD through its sub-bodies. During the 53rd General Assembly, it adopted the *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace* (A/RES/53/243). While encouraging cooperation, the resolution remains vague on how to pursue ICD and does not address post-conflict societies. In response, several nations have developed their own initiatives to foster dialogue after conflict.

An artistic approach

Art-based methods have gained attention as alternatives to traditional reconciliation practices. King's College London, together with Balkan institutions, launched the *Art & Reconciliation: Conflict,*

Culture and Community exposition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project successfully supported peacebuilding, highlighted the role of art in reconciliation, and demonstrated its potential to heal divided communities[8].

The power of the voice

After the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the TRC created spaces for survivor dialogue[9]. Inspired by this, local organizations developed storytelling initiatives such as *Healing Life Wounds* and *Stories for Hope*, which revived the cultural practice of *imvugo nziza* (art of conversation). These programs rebuilt trust, encouraged acknowledgment and remorse, and promoted peaceful coexistence, showing the transformative power of dialogue in post-conflict societies

Possible solutions

Setting up a clear guide

While current UN resolutions emphasize the importance of ICD in achieving reconciliation in post-conflict societies, they do not provide a step-by-step guide for implementation. A resolution that not only highlights the significance of ICD but also outlines practical methods and multiple reasons for its application could greatly assist countries in the future, by giving them examples that can be implemented as fast as the conflict ends without needing to wait multiple years to create their own solution

Planning for the resolution of ongoing conflict

Currently, multiple countries are engaged in various conflicts. When these eventually come to an end, it will be essential to quickly address the issue of Intercultural Dialogue (ICD) in these territories to ensure that tensions ease and to promote lasting peace among the former belligerents. This can be achieved through a series of measures, such as establishing a UN sub-body mandated to promote ICD while national governments focus on rebuilding and stabilizing the country. Alternatively, clear guidelines could be developed for nations to follow once hostilities cease.

Going longterm, planning a new mindset for the youth

It is no surprise that today's youth will become the leaders of tomorrow. It is therefore essential to integrate the importance of ICD into their education and teach them how to achieve it. When the time comes for them to assume leadership roles, we can hope they will be equipped to introduce ICD in post-conflict societies. By doing so, they may help ensure that tensions are resolved peacefully and that future wars are prevented.

Endnotes

1. World Population Review. "Countries Currently at War 2025." *World Population Review*, 2025, worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-currently-at-war.

2. "Violence in the Post-Conflict State." *CMI - Chr. Michelsen Institute*, 2012, www.cmi.no/projects/886-violence-in-the-post-conflict-state.

3. Langfield, Martin. "Decoder: El Salvador's Wheel of Violence Turns and Turns Again." *Https://News-Decoder.com/*, news-decoder.com/el-salvadors-wheel-of-violence-turns-once-more/.

4. Gudmundsson, Ragnar. *The Economics of Postconflict Countries: A Survey of the Literature*. www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/book/9781589062528/ch03.pdf.

5. "A War Fueled by Hate Speech: Sudan's Fall into Fragmentation." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2025, carnegieendowment.org/sada/2025/10/a-war-fueled-by-hate-speech-sudans-fall-into-fragmentation?lang=en.

6. UNESCO. "Youth | UNESCO." *Www.unesco.org*, 2020, www.unesco.org/en/youth.

7. "Intercultural Dialogue." *Unesco.org*, 2025, www.unesco.org/en/interculturaldialogue.

8. London, King's College. "Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community." *King's College London*, 2019, www.kcl.ac.uk/research/art-and-reconciliation-1.

9. "Comparison of Dialogue Practices | beyond Intractability." *Beyondintractability.org*, 2020, www.beyondintractability.org/essay/comparison-of-dialogue-practices.

Bibliography

"A War Fueled by Hate Speech: Sudan's Fall into Fragmentation." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2025, carnegieendowment.org/sada/2025/10/a-war-fueled-by-hate-speech-sudans-fall-into-fragmentation?lang=en.

Blattman, Christopher. "The Five Reasons Wars Happen." *Modern War Institute*, 14 Oct. 2022, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/the-five-reasons-wars-happen/.

"Comparison of Dialogue Practices beyond Intractability." *Beyondintractability.org*, 2020, www.beyondintractability.org/essay/comparison-of-dialogue-practices.

Council of Europe. "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue." *Living Together as Equals in Dignity*, 7 May 2008, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/pub_white_paper/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf.

"Cyprus - the Republic of Cyprus." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/place/Cyprus/The-Republic-of-Cyprus.

Gudmundsson, Ragnar. *The Economics of Postconflict Countries: A Survey of Literature.*
www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/book/9781589062528/ch03.pdf. Accessed 15 Dec. 2025.

"Home E-Platform on Intercultural Dialogue." *UNESCO*, www.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/en.

Institute, German. "Post-Conflict Societies: Chances for Peace and Types of International Support."
Idos-Research, 2017,
www.idos-research.de/briefing-paper/article/post-conflict-societies-chances-for-peace-and-types-of-intern
ational-support/.

"Intercultural Dialogue." *Unesco.org*, 2025, www.unesco.org/en/interculturaldialogue.

"Is there some kind of beed between the Rwandan and the Congolese diaspora?" *Quora.com*, 2025,
www.quora.com/Is-there-some-kind-of-beef-between-the-Rwandan-and-the-Congolese-diaspora.

John, Ohiorhenuan. "Post‑conflict Recovery: Approaches, Policies and Partnerships." *Centre for
Research on Peace and Development*, Dec. 2011.

Krishna, Kumar. "Promoting Social Reconciliation In Postconflict Societies." *USAID*, Jan. 1999.

Langfield, Martin. "Decoder: El Salvador's Wheel of Violence Turns and Turns Again."
News-Decoder.com, news-decoder.com/el-salvadors-wheel-of-violence-turns-once-more/.

London, King's College. "Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community." *King's College
London*, 2019, www.kcl.ac.uk/research/art-and-reconciliation-1.

"Minorities Must Not Be Left out of Burma Relief Efforts." *Blog*, 12 Jan. 2024,
minorityrights.org/minorities-must-not-be-left-out-of-burma-relief-efforts/.

Prunier, Gérard. "The Myth of the Hutus and Tutsis." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1 Feb. 2016,
mondediplo.com/2016/02/05burundi.

Reuter, Tina. "Ethnic Conflict Definition, Examples, Causes, Types, & Facts Britannica." *Ethnic Conflict*, 7
May 2025, www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-conflict.

UN. "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace : Resolutions : Adopted by the General
Assembly." *United Nations Digital Library System*, UN, 6 Oct. 1999,
digitallibrary.un.org/record/285677?ln=en&v=pdf.

UNESCO. "Cutting Edge Youth and Cultural Policies: Coming of Age." *Unesco.org*, 2022,
www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-youth-and-cultural-policies-coming-age.

University of Minnesota. "Rwanda." *College of Liberal Arts University of Minnesota*, University of
Minnesota, 2025, cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/rwanda.

"Violence in the Post-Conflict State." *CMI - Chr. Michelsen Institute*, 2012,
www.cmi.no/projects/886-violence-in-the-post-conflict-state.

World Population Review. "Countries Currently at War 2025." *World Population Review*, 2025,
worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-currently-at-war.

"What Is Intercultural Dialogue." *Unesco.org*, 2021,
www.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/en/what-intercultural-dialogue.

"Youth for Peace: UNESCO Intercultural Leadership Programme." *Unesco.org*, 2025, www.unesco.org/en/interculturaldialogue/youthforpeace.