



## Focus #5: Peacebuilding

Whether war is ended via negotiation, or averted by prevention, follow-on peacebuilding can help avert future violence. If pursued too quickly, however, some traditional approaches – including democratization, refugee return, and liberalization of the economy and media – may undermine peace, as detailed in Issue Brief #6. It is safer to pursue incremental steps: improving security for civilians, incorporating former rebels into politics and society, and implementing dispute resolution mechanisms. Since peace deals often leave some issues unresolved to expedite the halt of violence, it is important during implementation that “the conversation continues, but with a broader group of participants, over a longer period of time,” evolving from mere conflict management to genuine *conflict resolution* (Hayner, 2018). However, pursuit of justice must be careful not to reignite violence. Power-sharing, which may be necessary to end a civil war, can later give way to centripetalism that enhances government efficiency and promotes a unified national identity.

### Peacekeeping and Disarmament

Peacebuilding requires former enemies to trust each other’s commitments, including demobilization and disarmament. However, combatants typically are reluctant to disarm and demobilize because they fear their opponents will renege. Incentives such as job training often prove inadequate, and weapons buyback programs may actually backfire if rebels turn in decrepit arms just to get money to buy better ones (Goebel and Levy, 2020).

### Key Points

- Post-conflict peacebuilding is less risky if pursued gradually rather than with rapid democratization and liberalization that may increase risks of civil war.
- Following a peace deal, deploying peacekeeping forces or monitors can reduce fears of cheating and thus promote compliance.
- To achieve both peace and justice, the best strategy may be to offer amnesty to end the war, then later pursue prosecution after peace is consolidated.
- Grassroots reconciliation can be achieved either face-to-face, or more efficiently via nationwide media efforts.

To guard against cheating, international actors can provide security guarantees, ranging from mere verbal pledges to actual deployment of peacekeeping forces (Coulon and Liégeois, 2010). A middle option is to dispatch credible third-party monitors from an international or regional organization, to provide transparency that can both deter cheating and reduce fear of compliance. The international community may also need to prevent nefarious foreign actors from taking sides and reigniting violence (Walter, 1999).

## Transitional Justice

The dilemma between peace and justice can be overcome in some cases by proper sequencing, according to Hayner (2018). Demanding justice prematurely, before combatants are reintegrated into society, may backfire if the alleged perpetrators would prefer to resume fighting than spend years in jail. It can thus be more prudent for a peace deal to grant amnesty for past crimes, and for the international community to eschew extraterritorial justice at least initially (Mbeki and Mamdani, 2014). However, this need not foster impunity, because civil society can and often does demand justice retroactively, after peace is consolidated, when it is harder for ex-combatants to remobilize. Therefore, delaying justice does not necessarily deny it, but may actually facilitate the achievement of both peace and justice in the long run. A cautionary note is that revoking amnesty retroactively could make it harder in the future to end wars by offering such amnesty.

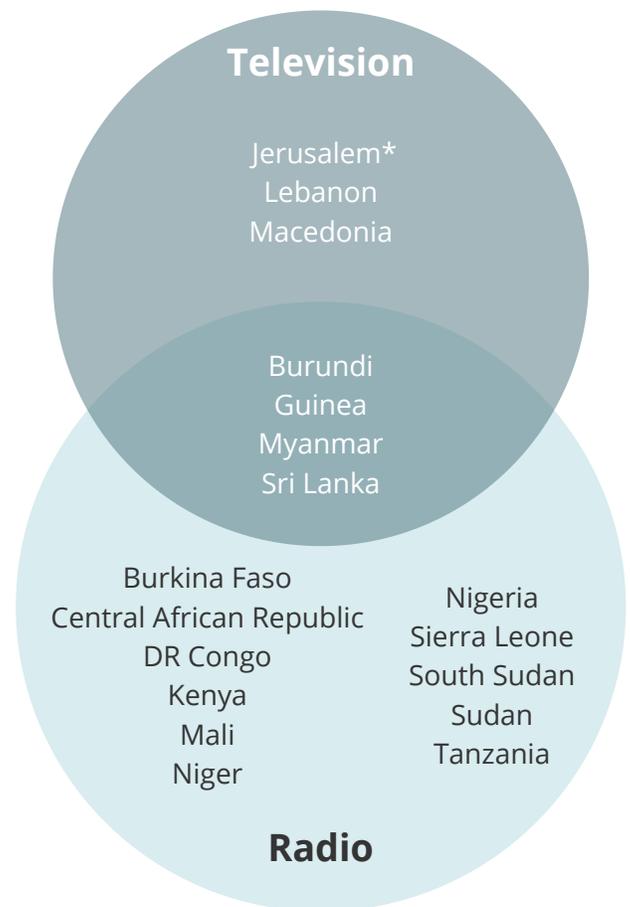
Transitional justice is often achieved via *truth and reconciliation commissions*, which can include various tasks. They may publish victim narratives, investigate crimes for prosecution, exchange amnesty for confession, or authorize reparations. Goals typically are to provide psychological closure for survivors, deter future crimes, and promote societal reconciliation (Hayner, 2011).

## Bottom-up Peacebuilding

In contrast to strategies that reconcile a country's elites so that peace can trickle down to society, some initiatives focus on bottom-up reconciliation. The scope of such efforts can range from face-to-face meetings in a village, to nationwide broadcasts on radio, television, or Internet. Local initiatives focus on topics such as psychosocial trauma of war, indigenous reconciliation mechanisms, and peace committees (Vernon, 2019). National efforts can be more efficient, but must reflect local concerns. An illustration is Talking Drum Studio, a radio station in Sierra Leone created by an international NGO, Search for Common Ground (Konings and James, 2009).

This project fostered post-war reconciliation via a popular soap opera in which the characters themselves confronted and overcame inter-group distrust. The station also provided objective information about politics, to dispel rumors and help build faith in elections. Such media approaches are a relatively inexpensive way to address grassroots hostility that can hinder peacebuilding, and the NGO is currently utilizing it via both radio and TV in 18 countries (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Radio & Television for Peacebuilding**



**Note:** Includes only the current initiatives of Search for Common Ground.  
\*The Jerusalem station's audience includes both Israelis and Palestinians.