



International Alert.

Is peace possible?

10 questions. 10 answers.

International Alert

International Alert is the UK's leading peacebuilding charity working in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

With 25 years of peacebuilding experience, we support local communities that have been affected by violent conflict to improve their prospects for a peaceful future.

Governments and international organisations also play a role in peacebuilding, which is why we work with decision-makers to improve international policy and practice.

It takes a lot of people, working together, to build a lasting peace. And it takes time – sometimes decades. *But we know it is possible.*



Peace is essential for development to take hold.

Peace does not automatically follow when a peace agreement is signed. When the fighting ends, the real work begins. And peacebuilding is the process of helping societies to handle their conflicts without resorting to violence and war.

Through peacebuilding, communities can learn to count on their governments and trust the police; citizens can have an equal opportunity to make a living; children can walk to school without the fear of violence. And the country can start to take steps to lift itself out of poverty.

At International Alert we work to understand the underlying causes of conflict, so that we can find the best solutions.

Is peace possible? We think so.

However, we often hear that people don't believe peace is possible... or that there's anything they can do to help.

But 20 years ago, that's what people thought about poverty reduction. While there are still intolerable levels of inequality, there has also been a huge amount of progress for many people.

We hope this leaflet will help you to understand the importance of peacebuilding, and what you can do to support it.

Q1



Isn't the world **more violent** today than it ever has been?

In actual fact, the world today is more peaceful than it used to be; the period since the end of WWII is the longest interval of uninterrupted peace between major powers in hundreds of years.

However the number of armed conflicts worldwide has started to creep up, from a 30 year low in 2003 of 29 armed conflicts, this number has risen to 35 by the end of 2008 (a 20% increase).

Despite highly visible conflicts in the 1990s such as Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the 2000s such as Afghanistan, Darfur and Iraq, verifiable progress was made towards a more peaceful world.

Much of this progress can be attributed to international peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities. With 25 years experience and over 160 partner organisations, International Alert is well-placed to make a positive impact for peace.



Q2



Isn't terrorism the biggest cause of war and instability around the world?

Although the focus of enormous attention, international terrorism has killed fewer than 1000 people a year, on average, over the past 30 years. In contrast, more than 13 million people have lost their lives as a result of violent conflict in the last 15 years.

The causes of conflict are as unique as the conflicts themselves, and are often fuelled by the desire to control natural resources, such as oil, gas, and diamonds as well as water and land access.

At International Alert we work in countries like Uganda and Colombia to ensure that natural resources are used as a tool for development rather than a fuel for conflict. Increasingly we are working with multinational corporations to improve their understanding of how their activities impact on local communities.

Q3



Isn't it better to give aid to help people out of poverty?

Did you know that the countries still struggling the most with poverty are the same ones that are experiencing, or have recently emerged from, violent conflict?

When a war ends, the threat of violence doesn't go away. And while there is only a fragile peace, aid alone is not effective: you can build a school, but while children don't feel safe they'll be too afraid to attend.

In so many ways, people living in fear of conflict are blocked from the means to lift themselves out of poverty. Building peace offers communities the chance to look forward to a peaceful future; a future where development can take hold.

Q4



Aren't most wars in Africa fought because of tribal rivalries that cannot be stopped?

Africa is the world's most conflict-prone continent, and each war has as many causes as solutions.

Some conflicts can appear to be between rival factions. But tribal issues often arise because of the underlying tensions and desperation generated by grinding poverty.

The causes of conflict are often complex and that's why it's so important to look at all the factors before looking for solutions. International Alert works across a whole range of issues including safety of women and girls, forgiveness and reconciliation and economic development.

Q5



Aren't most casualties of war soldiers that signed up for conflict?

Casualties of war are not just those involved directly in fighting. An estimated 90% of people who die in conflicts are civilians caught up in the fighting or who suffer from ensuing: malnutrition, disease and restricted access to medical treatment. In countries affected by conflict, the malarial death rate is nearly 13 times higher than elsewhere in the developing world.

Women and children are often the hardest hit. During the war in Sierra Leone, more than half of the women experienced some type of sexual violence. It's thought that children fight in almost 75% of today's armed conflicts: in Liberia's recent war, about 70% of all combatants were children.

International Alert works across Africa to tackle violence against women and children, providing support to victims and raising awareness of the issue with police and local communities.



Why should we get involved in the problems of other countries, haven't we got **enough of our own**?

The problems of other countries have an impact on us, and our problems in turn have an impact on them. In today's interdependent world, we play a huge part in each others' lives and we have a responsibility to take care of one another.

The risk of new wars breaking out—or old ones resuming—is very real in the absence of peacebuilding. While we cannot create peace for other people, we can help them to come to their own solutions and give them the skills to transform their societies.

A safer world is in all of our interests.



I heard that **climate change** is going to cause more violent conflict—what's the link between the two?

Many of the countries predicted to be worst affected by climate change are also those affected by violent conflict.

Our research has found that climate change and violent conflict are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Therefore in working towards creating a lasting peace through peacebuilding, we also need to support countries so that they are able to adapt to climate change. If a society can develop ways to cope with climate change they will also be well equipped to avoid armed conflict.

International Alert is carrying out research in Africa and South Asia to develop conflict-sensitive responses to climate change so that they do no harm and, where possible, promote peace.



What is peacebuilding?

While more peace agreements have been achieved in the past 15 years than the last two decades combined, nearly half fail within five years.

This is why peacebuilding is so important—it's the process of helping societies to handle their conflicts without resorting to violence and war. It is done through encouraging the attitudes, behaviours and social conditions that make lasting peace possible.

Peacebuilding is essential; it ensures that more treaties work and more communities can look forward to a future of lasting peace.

And it works—it's why the number of wars is quietly falling.

Q9



What can **one** UK organisation like International Alert do if governments fail to enforce peace?

A surprising amount. As we work at both the international level and with local communities we can advise on the needs of all parties and can monitor and influence situations from the bottom up.

Our 25 years of experience in peacebuilding has emphasised to us how unique each conflict is and how it requires the involvement of a lot of actors to bring about peace.

We know it's not easy but by working across sectors, across divides and with real results, our marathon mentality quietly improves millions of lives.

Q10



Is there anything that I can personally do to help build peace in other countries?
How would I even **make a difference**?

At International Alert, we believe peace is possible and that there **IS** something you can do:

- Get informed by visiting our website/ Facebook/ Twitter page and signing up to our monthly e-bulletin.
- Join the debate about international support versus home grown charities.
- Support International Alert by helping us to raise money and get involved in our fundraising events.
- Make a donation at www.international-alert.org

Building peace is a vital investment in the future. And it takes time – sometimes decades – but with your help, we know it's possible.

How we build peace

- Helping to strengthen the peacebuilding role of international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank

- Advising and training the European Union and member governments, including the UK, on its role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention

- Building businesses from across the conflict divide in the South Caucasus together in economic development and trade initiatives

- Strengthening the capacity of the Tajik state to engage in dialogue with religious communities

- Giving young people, businessman and community groups the support they need to create a safer, more prosperous and more just society in Nepal

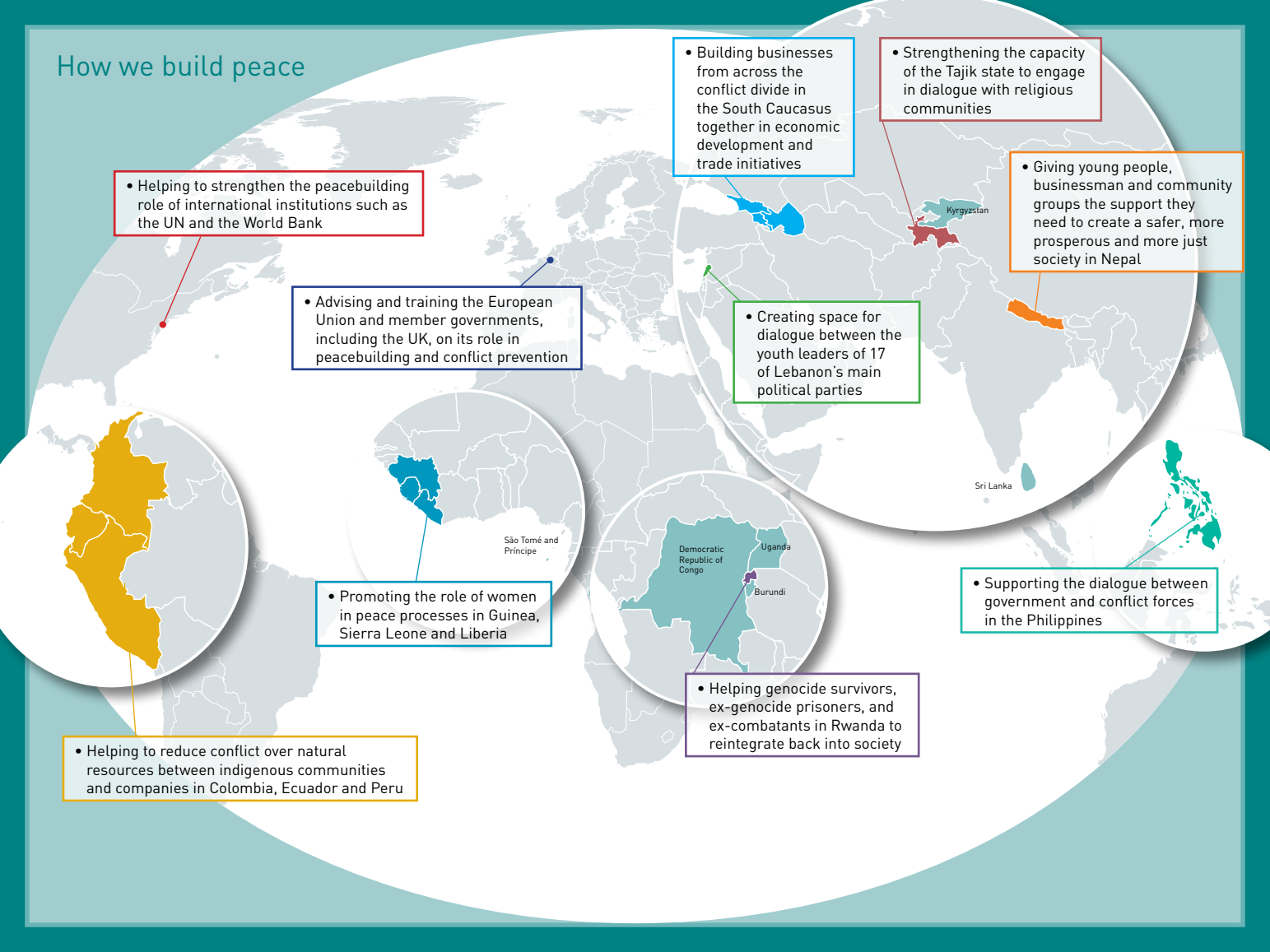
- Creating space for dialogue between the youth leaders of 17 of Lebanon's main political parties

- Promoting the role of women in peace processes in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia

- Helping genocide survivors, ex-genocide prisoners, and ex-combatants in Rwanda to reintegrate back into society

- Supporting the dialogue between government and conflict forces in the Philippines

- Helping to reduce conflict over natural resources between indigenous communities and companies in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru





www.international-alert.org

Peace Is Possible

International Alert is working towards a world where differences are resolved without erupting into violence; a world where, when people seek better lives for their families and communities, any conflicts that arise are managed peacefully, with honesty and wisdom.

We aim to do this by:

- Working directly with people affected by violent conflict in support of their efforts to improve their prospects for peace
- Shaping international policy and practice that affect peacebuilding
- Strengthening the expertise, impact and public profile of the peacebuilding sector

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At International Alert,
we believe peace is possible.

Do you?

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Understanding conflict. Building peace.