

# Bridging Divides

## Integrating Human Rights and Peacebuilding

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*SHARINPEACE Report #1.1*

Simulating Human Rights in Peacebuilding  
(SHARINPEACE)



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Bridging Divides: Integrating Human Rights and Peacebuilding  
Literature Review for Curriculum Development  
Project SHARINPEACE, Project Result 1  
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**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Cite as: Hanke, Tabea and Thora Pindus 2025. Bridging Divides: Integrating Human Rights and Peacebuilding – Literature Review for Curriculum Development. SHARINPEACE Report #1.1

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Simulating Human Rights in Peacebuilding (SHARINPEACE)  
Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships  
2021-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000031133

Human rights and peace as key elements of Europe's shared values and as cornerstones of our democratic constitutions are fundamentally challenged by today's multi-faceted crises. SHARINPEACE addresses these encounters and aims at qualifying the decision-makers of tomorrow in conceiving and practising human rights as intrinsic part of peacebuilding. SHARINPEACE offers an innovative approach to deal with the challenges of social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe and beyond. Through SHARINPEACE, students and educators increase their awareness on how to include human rights in the training of conflict management. The core objective is the implementation of an EU-wide organised two-part module. Students will first gain central competences in the interrelated domains of human rights and peacebuilding and, in the second part, put their gained competences in a network-wide Crisis Intervention Simulation (CRIS) into (simulated) practice.

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## Executive Summary

*The Erasmus+ project “Simulating Human Rights in Peacebuilding (SHARINPEACE)” aims to address contemporary crises affecting human rights and peace, and to integrate human rights education into peacebuilding practices. The project highlights the importance of human rights as a fundamental element in building sustainable peace, and proposes an educational framework to instill these principles in future peace and policymakers. Through an interdisciplinary two-part university module, SHARINPEACE seeks to promote a deeper understanding of human rights as an integral part of peacebuilding and to encourage collaboration between educational and policy initiatives. The SHARINPEACE project outlines several objectives to achieve this educational integration. Key among these are embedding human rights in peacebuilding education, establishing a Crisis Intervention Simulation (CRIS) for hands-on learning, and engaging peace and policymakers in educational development.*

*This report examines the state of the art concerning human rights and peacebuilding, establishing one of the bases for SHARINPEACE’s curriculum. Historically, human rights and peacebuilding have been regarded as separate spheres, with distinct theoretical underpinnings. However, as scholarship has advanced, these fields are now viewed as interdependent. Human rights provide a moral and legal foundation, advocating for accountability and justice, while peacebuilding seeks to rebuild and sustain peaceful societies, initially at a state level but increasingly incorporating local dynamics.*

*Human rights, traditionally codified through international conventions, aim to establish a universal framework for protecting individuals from state abuses. This legalistic approach has strengths, such as holding oppressive states accountable. Yet it also faces criticism for being overly Western-centric, which can undermine local human rights practices. The peacebuilding field, on the other hand, emerged with a focus on post-conflict recovery, emphasising reconciliation, institution-building, and social justice. Scholars advanced the concept of peacebuilding as a multi-dimensional strategy, from state-level interventions to grassroots efforts promoting social cohesion.*

*However, tensions between human rights and peacebuilding persist. Peacebuilding claims to implement politically neutral strategies aimed at fostering stability, which may conflict with human rights’ inherently political*

*nature. For instance, negotiations for peace may require compromise, sometimes seen as incompatible with a strict human rights approach. Conversely, failing to incorporate human rights can destabilise peace efforts by delegitimising agreements in the eyes of those who feel their rights are neglected. SHARINPEACE addresses these complexities by teaching students to navigate and reconcile these tensions.*

## 1. Introduction

Human rights and peace as key elements of Europe's shared values and as cornerstones of our democratic constitutions are fundamentally challenged by today's multifaceted crises. The Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership project "Simulating Human Rights in Peacebuilding (SHARINPEACE)" addresses these challenges and aims at qualifying the decision-makers of tomorrow in conceiving and practising human rights as an intrinsic part of peacebuilding. Through SHARINPEACE, students and educators increase their awareness on how to include human rights in the training of conflict management. Organisations in the domain of peacebuilding are invited to become partners in this education process within SHARINPEACE.

We are convinced that this topic deserves greater attention. It is of significant value to understand human rights as an inclusive part of peacebuilding processes and that it is correspondingly relevant to introduce this into teaching and learning. Hence, the core objective of the project is the EU-wide introduction and implementation of an interdisciplinary two-part university module on human rights and peacebuilding.

We aim to achieve this through the following four sub-items:

- 1) Introducing human rights in peacebuilding education
- 2) Implementing a network-wide Crisis Intervention Simulation (CRIS)
- 3) Involving policy and peacemakers
- 4) Planning joint MA modules

In this module, the participating students will first gain central skills in the interrelated areas of human rights and peacebuilding and, in the second part, put their newly acquired expertise into (simulated) practice.

To facilitate this learning experience, the SHARINPEACE project envisages six Project Results (PR1-6) which are tangible results of individual

Work Packages. The first Work Package dedicates itself to mapping the nexus of human rights education and peacebuilding. The results of PR1 form the basis for PR2, which explores needs and experiences by focusing on the stakeholder's perspectives; PR3 addresses the contents of the learning materials for teaching human rights in peacebuilding; technical tools for teaching and learning are subject of PR4; then, PR5 consists of the implementation of a pilot project of the module "Simulating Human Rights in Peacebuilding". Finally, PR6 is a policy brief on how to teach and learn human rights in peacebuilding within the EU.

PR1 is concluded by this report, which examines the state of the art of human rights in peacebuilding and provides an overview of human rights education curricula. First, we provide insights into the current and past discussions of human rights and peacebuilding in the academic literature, focusing on the need to think both together. Based on the findings of the literature review, we develop recommendations for teaching an integrated approach to human rights and peacebuilding. This is the focus of this report. Secondly, we examine curricula in human rights education and similar approaches by conducting and analysing qualitative interviews and written questionnaires (cf. Fridman/Stojanovic 2025).

## 2. A Brief History of Human Rights and Peacebuilding

The aim of PR1 is to establish the foundation for the SHARINPEACE project. By exploring the state of the art and reviewing how the discussion on human rights and peacebuilding has been shaped so far, we highlight the relevance of thinking both together. With this EU-funded project we contribute to the further development of the field, and above all, its teaching and learning of future generations.

Human rights and peacebuilding both play a crucial role in the attempt to build a peaceful and just world for everyone. For this reason, they have been included in the United Nations system after World War II. Already at the outset of the United Nations (UN), the purpose of the international body was tied to "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" (UN 1945: art. 1, para. 3). The importance of human rights has been reasserted in 1948 by the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which at the same

time signalled a change from a purely domestic to an international understanding of the concept (Sriram/Martin-Ortega/Herman 2010: 31). With UN peace operations becoming popular after the mid-1990s, the normative nature of human rights standards has often been perceived as complicating the practical demands of achieving peace (Parlevliet 2010: 15; Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014: 879).

The idea of human rights can be traced back long before the founding of the UN. Although similar ideas can be found in all societies, the human rights concept as it was established by the UN originated in the Enlightenment period in Europe and America (Sriram/Martin-Ortega/Herman 2010: 32). In ancient Greece or Rome, natural law was understood to be inherent in all humanity and implied a duty for everyone (ibid.). Later, natural rights were claimed to be inherent within individuals and asserted as the prerequisite for the social contract between citizens and their sovereign as these inalienable rights promote the necessary consent of the governed (ibid.). At the same time, however, the development of human rights has been a product of social struggle, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth century (ibid.: 33).

The concept of peacebuilding was initially conceived by peace researcher Johan Galtung (1976) and popularised as a UN concept in 1992 by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in “An Agenda for Peace” (UNSG 1992; Parlevliet 2017: 342). His report was requested by the UN Security Council to consider “preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping — to which [he] added a closely related concept, post-conflict peace-building” (UNSG 1992: para. 5). Boutros-Ghali understood peacebuilding as one of the central tools of the UN to prevent and resolve conflict and preserve peace by “rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures ... and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war” (ibid.: para. 15). This early conceptualisation of peacebuilding focused on the state-level and can thus be described as employing elite processes (Call/Cook 2003: 235). These two approaches to peacebuilding and human rights respectively, point to the possible tensions between a human rights and a peacebuilding perspective. According to Thorsten Bonacker and Sina Kowalewski,

*“the tension ... results ultimately from the political nature of human rights which, viewed historically, had to be fought for against government regulations and state authorities, and mobilize people to fight for their rights. In contrast, many instruments of conflict management, and in particular the*

*approach of the United Nations, are based on de-politicization and the creation of a neutral framework for negotiations and peace treaties” (2014: 879).*

Still, the promotion of human rights and efforts of peacebuilding can go hand in hand (ibid.: 877). The importance of protecting human rights within a peacebuilding process can hardly be disregarded any longer, and human rights are accepted at least to some extent by all governments and acknowledged as fundamental for peace, prosperity and security (Mihir/Gibney 2014: 3). Nevertheless, how societies interpret and apply these rights may differ (ibid.). The aforementioned tensions and synergies between human rights and peacebuilding depend above all on the respective understandings of the concepts that have evolved over time. In the following, we will examine the various conceptualisations of human rights and peacebuilding in more detail, as well as the consequences for their perceived interrelations.

### 3. Understandings of Human Rights

Human rights can be understood as internationally agreed values or entitlements that govern the behaviour of states towards their citizens (Baehr 1999). Traditionally, international human rights law and the legal claims associated with human rights (ibid., Parlevliet 2017: 341, Murphy/Månsson 2008: 458, Hannum 2016: 411) provide a neutral framework (Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014) to hold power accountable (Gready/Phillips 2009) and to redress extreme power asymmetries. States are no longer the only target, as non-state actors, from multinational corporations to the World Bank, can also be considered as holders of power (ibid: 1, Freeman 2011: vii). When human rights advocates move beyond a nation-state orientation to include individuals and semi-governmental groups, humanitarian law becomes a critical tool for addressing human rights (Mertus/Helsing 2006c: 511). In the context of conflict resolution, human rights can be used to address power asymmetries by empowering the weaker party, while at the same time pressing the responsibility to protect civilians that flows from state sovereignty (Babbitt 2012). Eileen Babbitt asserts that it is the responsibility of the international community to integrate human rights into conflict resolution efforts for peacebuilding (ibid.).



Claiming the neutral, legal framework of human rights on an international level has been the common approach (Freeman 2011: 8). Most modern states have ratified international human rights conventions by now, and “[e]ven oppressive states feel obliged to engage in rhetorical deference toward human rights instruments” (Ignatieff 2001: 7). Denouncing the human rights record of a state has real consequences since it makes it harder to secure international loans or political and military help (ibid.: 11-12).

One risk of the legalistic and neutralised understanding of human rights lies in the undermining of local human rights culture by exclusively focusing on the international set of rights that are often criticised as Western (Mertus 2001; Manikkalingam 2008). To prevent this, rights bearers should promote a conscientization of rights and strengthen civil society (Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014: 885).

At the same time, however, deviating from a core universal concept of human rights and promoting a so-called “rights inflation” is also perceived as a risk (Freeman 2011, Hannum 2016). Striving to include more and more causes within the concept of human rights might end up delegitimising it (Freeman 2011: 6). Not only does the conflation of human rights enhance situations of conflicting rights (ibid.), it might also strengthen anti-human rights tendencies that challenge the universal application of human rights by privileging cultural relativism over globally shared values (Hannum 2016: 413).

Still, many human rights activists emphasise the notion of human rights as universal moral claims to achieve their goals (Ignatieff 2001: 9). This universalism can be questioned on various grounds. As mentioned above, local human rights cultures cannot be disregarded, even when there is usually a great overlap between them (Manikkalingam 2008). Moreover, according to Michael Ignatieff, human rights are political and they naturally conflict (2001). There are situations that require “painful compromises not only between means and ends, but between ends themselves” (ibid.: 22, cf. Freeman 2011: 6). Accordingly, human rights should start a discussion rather than resolving it (Ignatieff 2001.).

Ignatieff believes that it is impossible to be truly neutral and defend everyone’s human rights equally (ibid.: 9). He assumes that human rights activists themselves take their moral universalism for granted, even though in reality they pursue particularist interests (ibid.: 10). They use human rights as seemingly universal values to strengthen their own

position and “pressure states to practise what they preach” (ibid.: 8). Still, he is convinced that human rights are important to empower individuals so that they have the agency to protect themselves against injustice (ibid.: 57).

Wendy Brown challenges this assumption of empowerment by questioning if the human rights discourse does not simply “trade one form of subjection for another, an intervention by an external agent or set of institutions that promises to protect individuals from abusive state power in part by replacing that power” (2004: 455). Moreover, she criticises that the form of “empowerment” described by Ignatieff, “fully equates empowerment with liberal individualism” (ibid.).

Besides legal-positivist understandings there are also constructivist approaches to human rights (Parlevliet 2017: 341). Some authors incline towards one or the other, others allude to both (ibid.). Daniel Chong, in his work on the inclusion of freedom from poverty and subsistence rights in the NGOs’ human rights praxis, identifies a moral approach to rights in addition to the common legal one (2010). Chong finds that

*“[l]egal and moral approaches to rights are not mutually exclusive, and sometimes occur within the same organization, but they have generally been used by different groups of actors, with different strategic implications” (2010: 133).*

While human rights organisations tend to uphold a legal approach, social justice and humanitarian organisations usually champion a moral approach that is consistent with their historical mandates and social contexts (ibid.: 134). From a moral perspective, rights are basic moral principles such as equality, justice, participation, empowerment, and dignity, and questions of right and wrong are more important than the lawfulness of an act (ibid.). In this vein, human rights are expected to lead to social and political action, which may include but is not limited to legal accountability (ibid.). With their focus on changes in culture, economic policy, the private sector, and political accountability, moral approaches are a crucial tool and can even have an influence on the process of advancing the law (Chong 2010: 5). Both legal and moral approaches to human rights have their own unique costs and benefits, and therefore can be employed strategically to make human rights effective (ibid.).

Michelle Parlevliet summarises the conceptions of human rights in the socio-legal literature in three categories:

*“system of law (focusing on legal instruments, codification, and enforcement); a set of values (focusing on the aspirational, the principled, social justice and social change); or a vision of good governance (highlighting process matters such as participation, accountability and transparency)” (2017: 341).*

Freeman highlights that the field of human rights has been dominated by lawyers because it is so intrinsically connected to the field of law (2011: 8). Similar to Chong, he points out, however, that those defining, interpreting, enacting and calling for human rights are political actors (ibid.). Therefore, it is crucial to address human rights also in the social sciences and consider its political nature. Human rights are often not enforceable, which contrary to legal positivist belief, does not make them less valuable:

*“If human rights were legally enforceable, one could, and normally would, appeal to one’s legal rights, and would not need to appeal to one’s human rights. One appeals to human rights precisely when legal institutions fail to recognize and enforce them. If legal positivism were true, an important basis for criticizing unjust legal systems would be eliminated” (Freeman 2011: 11).*

To sum up, human rights can be described as international values that correspond to legal entitlements providing a neutral framework to hold power accountable. In the literature and the field, there is an ongoing debate on the issue of universalism. A universalist understanding of human rights, on the one hand, risks undermining local particularities. On the other hand, a conflation of human rights enhances the incompatibility of different rights in practice. Furthermore, there is the question of whether a truly neutral stance is even possible, and if all actors, including human rights activists, do not always have their own particularist interests.

An answer to this, may be to go beyond a purely legalistic approach to human rights. A moral approach can be used strategically by considering rather what is right or wrong, than what is inscribed in the law. Moreover, moral and political considerations of human rights affect its law-making. Therefore, a solely legalistic approach to human rights cannot be sufficient.

## 4. Understandings of Peacebuilding

While there is no conceptual consensus on the definition of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2013), it can generally be seen as a process of (re)constructing potentially violent social relations into sustainable peaceful and secure relationships and outcomes through the identification of structures that strengthen peace and avoid relapse into conflict (Lucuta 2014; Schirch 2006).

Systematically distinguished from peacemaking and peacekeeping, peacebuilding refers to an extensive deployment of international forces to protect, maintain and restore a self-sustaining peace (UNSG 1992; Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014). Within peacebuilding, a further distinction is usually made between

- a) institution building (democratisation and rule of law)
- b) security and
- c) development as three core components.<sup>1</sup>

Lisa Schirch identifies the following four categories of peacebuilding that should be applied both at the macro level (institutions, decision-making) and at the micro level (social relations between hostile groups) to complement and build on one another:

- 1) waging conflict nonviolently
- 2) reducing direct violence
- 3) transforming relationships
- 4) building capacity for a just peace (2006: 74-9)

Here, peace involves more than just the absence of war and physical violence, which Johan Galtung has called “negative peace” (1969). The understanding of peacebuilding that springs from “An Agenda for Peace” (UNSG 1992) includes “the conditions making peace sustainable in the long term, such as social justice, inclusion, political liberty and cooperative intergroup relations within society” (Parlevliet 2017: 342), or what Galtung dubbed “positive peace” (1969).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also UNSG 1992, 2005; OHCHR 2020; Lidén 2009; Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014; Parlevliet 2017; Lucuta 2014; Athie/Mahmoud 2017; Schirch 2006.

Charles T. Call and Susan E. Cook point out three strands in the peacebuilding literature (2003: 235). The first subset of peacebuilding scholars continues the legacy of “An Agenda for Peace” (UNSG 1992) and understands the concept as post-conflict social and political reconstruction activities to avoid relapse into conflict (Call/Cook 2003: 235). This school of thought focuses mainly on processes that are being advanced by elite actors, such as reconciliation and state building (ibid.). Scholars building on Galtung’s work, who originally conceived of the concept of peacebuilding in 1976, emphasise “conflict prevention and resolution initiatives at levels beyond or below the state”, so “non-elite processes” (Call/Cook 2003: 235). In contrast, the last set of scholars uses the term peacebuilding to refer broadly to efforts related to peacekeeping, peacemaking, and conflict prevention, because they do not believe that these activities differ in a post conflict context (ibid.).

Schirch’s understanding of peacebuilding falls into the last category of scholars identified by Call and Cook. She writes:

*“Peacebuilding prevents, reduces, transforms, and helps people to recover from violence in all forms while at the same time empowering people to foster relationships at all levels to create structural justice. It both nurtures the capacity within societies to prevent violence and provides healing and help in the midst of war or in postwar societies. Peacebuilding pursues a just peace” (Schirch 2006: 64).*

Lastly, the concept known as “liberal peacebuilding” has long been prominent but also sparked a lot of criticism, leading to the “fall of liberal peacebuilding” according to Kristoffer Lidén (2009: 617). He describes liberal peacebuilding as reflecting

*“the overarching objective of building sustainable ‘liberal market democracies’ that has framed the operations as an apparently neutral reflection of their political environment in the post-Cold-War-era” (ibid.).*

In reality, however, political and economic liberalisation have rather had “destabilizing effects that worked against the consolidation of peace” as noted by Roland Paris who examined major peacebuilding missions between 1989 and 1999 (2005: 151). He traces the idea of liberal peacebuilding back to US President Woodrow Wilson who, at the end of World War I, promoted the American model of market democracy to achieve peace in both domestic and international affairs (ibid.: 40).

As has been shown, this liberal approach to peacebuilding is inherently problematic. Michelle Parlevliet summarises the prevalent criticism as follows:

*“Liberal peacebuilding has been denounced for its tendency to come in standardized, technocratic formats; for relying on Western values and models of the state; for imposing change from above and outside; for being naïve and culturally insensitive; and for ignoring non-state forms of governance, sub-national conflict dynamics, and issues of sociopolitical cohesion” (2017: 342-3).*<sup>2</sup>

Mac Ginty highlights three aspects of the critique of liberal peacebuilding: First, a co-optation of actors, such as NGOs, who could have acted “as a critical bulwark against the liberal peace framework” (2008: 144). Second, the assumption of superiority of the liberal market democracy connected to liberal peace (ibid.). And lastly, the high degree of standardisation of liberal peace that risks uniformity, disregards precise needs of the recipient society and minimises “the space for organic, local, traditional, or indigenous contributions to peace-making” (ibid.: 145).

Despite all of these legitimate criticisms, Paris pleads not to be “hyper-critical”, but rather to critically assess international practices to explore alternatives within liberal peacebuilding (2011: 32-3). He identifies flaws within the critique of liberal peace and claims that presenting liberal peacebuilding as “exploitative or imperialist” goes too far (ibid.: 40).

One such alternative comes from Oliver P. Richmond, who suggests “[a] localised perspective of peacebuilding ... [as] the starting point for a reassessment of the liberal peace project” (2011: 3). A local-liberal hybrid offers an alternative that considers the capacity of international liberal and local peacebuilding actors to engage with each other (ibid.: 17). Richmond expects this to be a “long-term process of political evolution towards a post-liberal form of peace, representing both hegemony and the local in complex ways” (ibid: 19).

Some of the critique seems to have made its way to the UN. A thematic paper published by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on “[t]he Contribution of Human Rights to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace” states the following:

<sup>2</sup> Parlevliet refers here to Sriram 2007; Paris 2005; McAuliffe 2017; Leib 2016; Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty 2008.

*“The focus on national ownership of peacebuilding processes is an acknowledgement that peace can only be sustainable if it results from the efforts of government and all segments of society - reflecting their priorities. ... Inclusivity and inclusive national ownership are also key in peacebuilding processes and outcomes to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account. A human rights approach similarly focuses on inclusive and meaningful participation, including for example in negotiation and consultation processes or the setting-up of mechanisms relating to peace at the national and sub-national levels” (OHCHR 2020: 3).*

An important aspect here, that Mac Ginty already identified in 2008, is that of human rights (2008: 145). In the following, we will explore the nexus of human rights and peacebuilding further.

## 5. Integrating Human Rights in Peacebuilding

Traditionally, human rights and peacebuilding have been regarded as two separate fields (Fuentes-Julio/Ibrahim 2019: 262). Nevertheless, when exploring both concepts in more detail, it becomes inevitable to think both together. Accordingly, we were able to observe a trend of human rights and peacebuilding growing closer together in practice and theory, with scholars considering both fields to be intertwined and investigating their tensions as well as synergies.

Julie A. Mertus and Jeffrey W. Helsing assert and show, together with the contributors to their book “Human Rights and Conflict: Exploring Links between Rights, Law and Peacebuilding” (2006a)

*“that there is a growing awareness of the complementarity of [the fields of human rights, international humanitarian law, and conflict resolution]. The success of those working to prevent, manage, or resolve conflict is enhanced by incorporating human rights advocacy into their efforts. At the same time, efforts to secure greater respect for human rights and humanitarian norms are furthered when coordinated with efforts to build peace by laying the foundations for a society that is not only just but also stable” (ibid.: 509).*

This trend is reflected in the three pillars of the UN's engagement: human rights, peace and security, and development (Athie/Mahmoud 2017: 1). Nevertheless, the implementation is not always easy and the human rights situation in many societies that were targeted by UN peacekeeping missions after a violent conflict remains as bad as it was before the mission. That is why, as early as 2000 the ‘Brahimi Report’

(UNGA 2000) stressed the importance of integrating human rights into UN peacekeeping missions by developing the parallel concept of integrated peace missions to ensure a human rights trail in all peace missions (Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014; Månsson 2006: 548). The synergy of human rights and peacebuilding was reasserted by the OHCHR in their recent thematic paper “The Contribution of Human Rights to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace” where they state the following:

*“Peacebuilding, sustaining peace and the promotion and protection of human rights are ... goals and processes towards building resilient, inclusive and peaceful societies – the primary responsibility for which rests with States” (2020: 3).*

According to Parlevliet, an approximation of human rights and peacebuilding by widening the two concepts can be witnessed at grassroots and elite level (2017: 336).

Especially when considering that human rights violations can both be the cause and consequence of violent conflict (Babbitt 2012; Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014; Parlevliet 2010; Manikkalingam 2008), it becomes only logical to think human rights and peacebuilding together. It has been largely accepted that the protection and promotion of human rights are crucial for long-term stability (Parlevliet 2010; Athie/Mahmoud 2017).

Ram Manikkalingam would add, however, that even though societies where rights are being protected are less likely to fall into conflict and tend to be more stable in the long term, it “does not necessarily mean that once you have conflict, establishing and strengthening rights ... will help resolve conflict” (2008: 3). He further explores advantages as well as tensions that can arise when including human rights in a peace process and how to reduce them (ibid.). Among other aspects, he refers to the aforementioned neutral framework that a human rights approach provides. Although international human rights may be controversial, they can be helpful in presenting reasonable demands since they are regarded as “free-standing obligations that parties can be asked to and are expected to uphold” (ibid.: 5).

However, when parties to a conflict have radically different conceptions of what (human) rights entail, “a human rights approach may sometimes hinder the pursuit of peace” (Manikkalingam 2008: 10). According to Schirch, relying solely on a Western legal model can lead to



revictimisation and leave out victims' needs (2006: 82). The focus on punishment obstructs the cooperation and commitment of human rights violators to participate in the justice process and tends to stimulate even more criminal behavior (ibid.). More importantly, ignoring that human rights violators view their own crimes as a struggle for justice could further perpetuate violence (ibid.). Bonacker and Kowalewski argue similarly:

*"A narrow human rights perspective that divides a society in victims and perpetrators tends to politicize, whereas, in peace processes, strategies of de-politicization are often the priority" (2014: 888).*

At the same time, in the attempt to restore peace, the practice of conflict resolution may conflict with expectations of a comprehensive human rights approach. For instance, the use of military force to protect human rights carries the risk of human rights violations (Bonacker/Kowalewski 2014). Tensions between the two areas can arise acutely in the context of negotiations to end violent conflict. Despite the UN's commitment to human rights, some UN officials still seem to fear that an inclusion of human rights defenders might disrupt the process of negotiating peace (Mertus/Helsing 2006c: 509). Part of this problem might be related to a reduction of a human rights perspective to punishing perpetrators and an unawareness of the more diverse set of practices in human rights work (Parlevliet 2017: 347). Some human rights practitioners, on the other hand,

*"equate peacebuilding with seeking to stop violence, ensuring deals between elites while excluding everyone else, staying silent about wrongs, and being willing to shake hands with the devil" (ibid.).*

Bonacker and Kowalewski assert, however, that "peace treaties which do not recognize human rights remain unstable for they are not respected as legitimate by those whose rights have been infringed" (2014: 13). Moreover, contributions of human rights and peacebuilding run in both directions (Parlevliet 2017: 349). Coming from either perspective, it is thus advisable to keep finding ways of integrating human rights into peacebuilding, since differences between them

*“are real but not necessarily inherently problematic. Instead of treating the two approaches as presenting a fixed either-or dichotomy, it is more productive and useful to regard them as evolving and changeable social practices that interact with and constitute each other” (Fuentes-Julio/Ibrahim 2019).*

In order to advance a successful peacebuilding process, the right timing and adequate way of addressing human rights issues is necessary to avoid alienating parties to a conflict (Manikkalingam 2008: 7). If implemented correctly, human rights, international law and conflict resolution can work complementary over the long term (Mertus/Helsing 2006b&c). In fact, they are crucial to creating a lasting and sustainable peace (ibid.) and

*“fill ‘gaps’ in one another, in that each contributes to a better understanding of the other by highlighting elements that are relatively under-explored in the theory and practice of each separate field” (Parlevliet 2010: 16).*

Understanding the sources behind systematic human rights violations is indispensable to address root causes and create a stable peace (Mertus/Helsing 2006c). Tensions between human rights and peacebuilding rather arise with a short-term focus (ibid.).

Schirch also considers human rights and conflict transformation to be similar and even deems them just two of many different approaches to peacebuilding (2006). She advocates for a growing awareness of the sense of competition and the potential for coordination between the two to foster innovation (ibid.: 92). She suggests that restorative justice can bridge the tensions between human rights and peacebuilding (ibid.: 82).

Mertus and Helsing add that incorporating human rights into peacebuilding helps attract new and important voices to the peace process (2006c: 521). Human rights organisations can inform diplomats and conflict resolution practitioners about cultural practices and understandings of peace, justice, and reconciliation (ibid.: 522). A risk in the integration of human rights in peacebuilding missions consists in depoliticizing human rights as was the case in Cambodia (Hughes 2005). Caroline Hughes describes how the promotion of human rights became a top-down process and reduced the agency of local human rights activists to use the concept to challenge state power (ibid.: 205-6).

## 6. Recommendations for Teaching and Learning Human Rights in Peacebuilding

Exploring the state of the art of the human rights and peacebuilding nexus and its historical developments offers insights and implications for current and future practice. The two fields have evolved from being conceptualised as two separate spheres to becoming a synergy where one is impossible to think without the other. Still, difficulties and tensions arise when integrating human rights into peacebuilding. However, it cannot be denied that human rights are necessary for a sustainable peacebuilding approach. At the same time, peacebuilding methods can help to secure human rights.

With the SHARINPEACE project we can start here to contribute to an effective implementation and synergy of human rights and peacebuilding. By teaching these issues in the SHARINPEACE module, we can prepare the decision-makers and practitioners of tomorrow to critically assess how to implement both approaches. First, we teach how different conceptualisations of the two fields can induce tensions. Accordingly, too narrow understandings of each field can be overcome. Additional tensions can be considered and strategies to circumvent these can be found in order to make the most of the valuable synergies of human rights and peacebuilding. In CRIS, students get the chance to experience tensions and synergies themselves and, in a safe environment, try out their own ideas of how to constructively integrate human rights in peacebuilding.

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