

# Moving from Violence to Peace

*An International Working Group on Individuals and Communities in Transition*



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**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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## Acknowledgements

Special thanks for assistance and contributions to drafting this report go to Shona Bell, Claire Hazelden, and Teri Murphy for their invaluable insights over the course of writing the report, especially their reflections on the pedagogical framework of the working groups. Thanks also go to the sponsors of the working groups, which include The Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive's Department of Justice, and the Mershon Center for International Security Studies in the United States, and the incredible team of organizers who have given so much spirit to these efforts, including Shona Bell, Teri Murphy, Claire Hazelden, Duncan Morrow, and Hollie Nyseth Brehm. The Corrymeela Community's intern Laura Webber provided detailed and essential minutes for each recorded panel and evaluation reports, all of which were instrumental in drafting this document. Finally, a very special thank you to all of the participants for the time, energy, and thoughtfulness they committed to these efforts.

## List of Participants

- [Shona Bell](#) – The Corrymeela Community, Northern Ireland, main organizer
- [Teri Murphy](#) – The Ohio State University, USA, main organizer
- [Hollie Nyseth Brehm](#) – The Ohio State University, USA, contributing organizer
- [Duncan Morrow](#) – Ulster University, Northern Ireland, contributing organizer
- [Jonny Byrne](#) – Ulster University, Northern Ireland
- [Jose Antonio Fortou](#) – Universidad EAFIT, Columbia
- [Claire Hazelden](#) – NI Executive's Department of Justice, Northern Ireland
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- [Victoria Gurevich](#) – The Ohio State University, USA, observer



## Foreword

In January 2020 I had just started a new job with the Strategic Investment Board. I was going to be a research analyst within the Northern Ireland Executive's cross-government programme to tackle paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime, and one of the first events in my diary was at Corrymeela. Policy makers, practitioners and academics planned to share ideas and discuss their work. It is fair to say I couldn't wait! I have long admired the work The Corrymeela Community does, and was excited to visit a place I had heard was very special.

We all know what happened next. My disappointment was tempered by all of the other changes going on at that strange time, but I was delighted to receive an invitation to join a virtual series of discussions, hosted in conjunction with the Mershon Center. My delight turned slightly to panic as I realised I was the only non-academic attendee, but within a few minutes of that very first Zoom meeting I was both reassured and deeply engaged.

The facilitators expertly kept us in that elusive 'safe uncertain' space, where connections are forged and breakthroughs made possible. The curiosity, humility and humour brought by everyone meant that, very quickly, our sessions became a highlight of the week.

Each of the three iterations brought new intriguing people and ideas. Crucially, it also provided space to think, to challenge, be challenged and to connect with others – all things which can be difficult to carve out time for (never mind while negotiating a global pandemic). Every single attendee was both interesting and interested, which made for the rich discussions you will find in the rest of this paper.

In a funny way, this format became more rich and productive than the event which had originally been planned, maybe because we were otherwise so limited in both travel and interactions. It gave us all a window to virtually experience Rwanda, Yemen, Columbia, the Korean Peninsula, Sweden, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland through the stories of the participants. It opened our minds to different approaches and alternative ways of thinking about how we can all move from violence to peace. Finally, it underlined the many things we all have in common, no matter where in the world we find ourselves.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have been a part of each working group. It has been valuable, professionally, and a delight, personally. I look forward to the day when all of the wonderful people I got to know virtually can gather in person. Until then, I know that the connections we made and the ideas we shared will continue to percolate and develop. The report that follows captures those initial ideas and sets the foundations for our collective learning moving forward.

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## Introduction

Efforts to disassemble and successfully (re)integrate militarized non-state actors into civil society are complex and difficult. The transition from violence to peace represents important possibilities for change, yet it simultaneously presents critical challenges to all involved in the process. While the circumstances of re/integration will differ for paramilitaries, militias, jihadists, gangs, genocidal killing groups, or right-wing extensions of the state, the fundamental challenges that individuals, families, communities, and countries face can be quite similar.

Despite these similar challenges, much scholarly research and policy formation within different global contexts have largely been conducted on single cases and in silos. For instance, those studying gangs and terrorism to a lesser degree draw on literature from criminology, as criminologists have been analyzing prisoner reentry since the turn of the century. At the same time, a largely separate body of work has analyzed the factors that promote success in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs that help ex-combatants return to their communities. Although research on members of terror organizations has drawn upon DDR scholarship and criminological research as well, this work tends to fall under the umbrellas of Preventing, Countering or Deradicalizing Violent Extremism. Still, in other places, especially those where war was not officially declared, the language of DDR is not as relevant.

“Laying down the gun” is only one dimension of this transition. Communities out of which militarized nonstate actors have emerged, or in which they may return, are also implicated in the process. Although a wide range of scholarly disciplines study the impact of political violence on communities, understanding of the nature and extent of its effect is far from complete. For example, recent international awareness and interest in psychosocial issues have led to several policy and intervention priorities such as gender sensitivity, marginalization, resilience, traumatization, and focus on the social attitudes and narratives that feed into cycles of vengeance. But these priorities do not necessarily intersect with other sectors of community engagement such as economic recovery, employment, security and safeguarding, education or public health.

Against the backdrop of The Corrymeela Community’s broader work on sectarianism in Northern Ireland, and with the leadership of Shona Bell of The Corrymeela Community and Teri Murphy and Hollie Nyseth Brehm of the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, plans emerged last year to mobilize a global working group and community of practice focused on transitions after violence. Over the course of several months in 2020, three platforms were convened to discuss and share information on the theme of transitioning from violence. Each platform consisted of approximately 10 participants and met over the course of four to five consecutive weeks. The goal was to bring together a range of experts who are researching or intervening in various contexts dealing with militarized non-state actors and communities impacted by political violence and learn together what has worked well, what hasn’t worked so well, and what might lay ahead.

By connecting individuals from around the world, the working groups aimed to leverage locally informed research to identify effective responses and facilitate the development of a shared research, policy, and practice agenda. In that way, connection and learning were central to the spirit of the platforms. In the true spirit of exploring these issues across contexts and building a community of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, The Corrymeela Community and the Mershon Center further developed the partnership with Claire Hazelden of the Tackling Paramilitarism Project and Dr. Duncan Morrow from Ulster University to foster a collaborative effort centered on collective learning. The following pages summarize key points of discussion, tease out the major lessons learned, and offer some broad takeaways to plant the first seeds of a shared learning process.



## Executive Summary

Communities and individuals across the world are in varying states of transition from violence to peace. While the character of violence might differ, from paramilitarism and criminal gangs to civil war and genocide, societies moving toward peace share similar challenges. As such, the lessons gleaned from one context are informative for others, though these lessons are rarely shared, as scholars and practitioners tend to work within their given case, theoretical framework, or methodology. To help bridge these divides, a collective learning platform was designed, bringing together individuals working on moving communities and individuals from violence to peace around the world. Though the participants discussed research and practice from highly diverse contexts, including Colombia, Northern Ireland, the Korean Peninsula, Rwanda, and Yemen, several overlapping themes emerged. This executive summary synthesizes these key themes, providing a high-level summary of the collective learning that took place within the platform.

*For ease of access, each key lesson connection has been color-coded, with corresponding color bars alongside individual panel summaries. We encourage readers to reference these color tags when searching the report for specific key lesson connections.*

### Re/integration

Transitions from violence involve complex re/integration processes at multiple levels within society. At the individual level, those who have engaged in violence often enter a society that is altogether different from the pre-conflict period, suggesting a need for integration into a transformed society, rather than re/integration into the society of old. Re/integration is complicated by several factors. These include the status afforded to men and women who fight, as well as the limited economic and social identity alternatives available in many societies recovering from violence. As the lines between current and former participants in violence are thin, interventions must bolster social and economic alternatives to limit the pull of armed groups. One panelist also emphasized the need to address the psychological causes and consequences of male-driven violence via trauma counseling, mental health services, and addiction treatment. At the group level, successful transitions may involve not only the complete dissolution of armed groups, but rather the re/integration of groups into institutional politics or civil society, leaving violent tactics behind. As armed groups are often deeply embedded in their communities and serve various social and economic functions, this approach may stave off the tendency to leave a social and organization void where armed groups used to operate. However, participants noted that supporting the transition of armed groups from violence may be controversial, especially if perceived as tacitly supportive of the armed group.

### Relationships, Trust, and Credibility

The importance of trust and building strong relationships cannot be emphasized enough. Panelists often focused on the crucial role that gaining credibility through clear and sustained commitment to vulnerable individuals plays in the success of interventions. Individuals in these organizations—paramilitary, gang, or otherwise—tend to carry a great deal of suspicion, fear, and mistrust within themselves, and cracking open the possibility for trust requires showing rather than talking. In other words, this work demands a long-term investment in the slow process of building trust. A common approach has been to use individuals with lived experiences similar to program participants as mentors. This often means bringing in ex-offenders to walk alongside youth in their journeys. In programs involving community partners who might have strained relationships with program participants, particularly police and other law enforcement bodies, trust and sustained relationship-building becomes vital. Notably, police have proven key actors in several of the programs offered across the panels, but their involvement can be tricky and is approached with great care. Finally, when panelists talked about relationship-building, they also referred to the need to build up a ‘coalition of the willing.’ Establishing partnerships with organizations and individuals with similar goals is key to tackling the complexities of this work. Simply put, this work cannot be done without a serious commitment to growing trust, relationships, and credibility, both between participants and the programs that serve them, participants and the partners invited to work alongside them, and between like-minded organizations willing to work together for a set of common goals or values.

## Identity and Labels

Like all individuals, those who have committed violent acts in the past simultaneously hold multiple identities, prioritizing certain identity components in different contexts. Re/integration requires allowing room for shifts among these identities. The use of person-first language can help avoid labeling those with violent histories as simply “violent people,” thereby providing space for identity shifts. Those who have committed violence can emphasize a shift away from violence by being active citizens, participating in activities like community meetings, engaging in politics, and joining social groups. The elements of one’s identity as a person who committed violence, however, does not entirely disappear and, in fact, may facilitate successful re/integration. Drawing on work with returning individuals following genocide convictions in Rwanda, for example, a participant described the social gatherings among those with similar histories and the solidarity these gatherings produced. Other participants noted possible drawbacks of strong group cohesion among those who have committed violence, citing the potential for recidivism.

## Rituals and Symbols

Rituals and symbols play an important role in spaces transitioning from violence, though they may both perpetuate conflict and facilitate transition at the same time. On one hand, rituals and symbols in the public sphere may amplify the social divisions underpinning conflict in the first place. On the other hand, the public display of symbols around shared identities may bring citizens together. Referencing the case of Northern Ireland, one participant suggested that effective conflict management must grapple with the tensions between allowing freedom to express potentially contentious identities with decisions to police public spaces. At the individual level, rituals and symbols of acceptance may help facilitate the community embrace of individuals transitioning from violence. Small social rituals like gift-giving or the sharing of meals act as symbols of community acceptance, signaling to the returnee that their transition is welcomed.

## Social Location and Power

An individual’s social location plays a substantial role in both why individuals can be drawn to violent organizations and how efforts to encourage re/integration are shaped by these positions and identities. Oftentimes, paramilitaries offer a distinct sense of purpose and belonging that becomes fundamental to how a person views themselves and their role in the world. These groups allow people, particularly youth, to be somebody in communities where youth often struggle to define their purpose or have very few opportunities to feel a sense of accomplishment or acceptance. And this upends some of the obstacles and stagnation that accompanies marginalized social locations. In other words, belonging to these groups frequently means (1) belonging to something bigger than themselves and (2) achieving a level of recognition, respect, or deference not typically afforded to these individuals otherwise. While some participants noted interventions are not likely to offer the same intense level of purpose or family that comes from membership in a paramilitary, a core concern has been highlighting alternative pathways for self-affirmation and opening up possibilities for people to feel needed, wanted, and capable of accomplishing their goals. For instance, one participant noted that young men from low socioeconomic backgrounds struggle to hold a vision for their future where they can see themselves growing, moving out of their neighborhoods, or getting a satisfying job. Programming that has had success in terms of social location and belonging has focused on helping craft a viable vision for the future and insisted on sustained investment in the individuals the program serves.

## History

The divisions that produce conflict are often deeply embedded within history, yet peacebuilding interventions often target short-term change without grappling with this history. Historical legacies of violence also condition community perceptions of what a peaceful society should look like, with certain levels of violence often seen as normal or justifiable. One panelist described the particularly embedded nature of sectarian conflicts, where even acts unrelated to sectarian divisions come to be understood through a sectarian lens. At the same time, a collective understanding of history may facilitate individual transitions from violence, especially if this understanding situates decisions to commit violence within a broader social, political, and economic context. This collective historical



understanding, however, may be forcibly imposed by the state rather than organically constructed, as in the case of post-Genocide Rwanda. Participants suggested that if this imposed understanding of history becomes questioned or the state's control weakens, an alternative historical narrative may be used to justify further violence. Others described the balance between the need to reckon with history and an overemphasis on the past, which might fail to address present inequities or rekindle instability.

## Measurement and Evaluation

Nearly all the panels lamented the obstacles with determining intervention 'success.' An emphasis on 'bean-counting' and quantifiable outcomes is particularly problematic for most programs. Funders and governing authorities tend to focus on the numbers—how many programs are delivered, how many individuals served, how much it cost—which is a rather rudimentary metric for determining if a program is effective, meets its goals, or changes lives. Panelists also suggested that many of the goals of interventions are inherently un-quantifiable and direct causality is nearly impossible to trace. In one panel, the idea of approaching interventions as an ecological model, rather than a machine, was introduced. In other words, if interventions can be imagined as something like planting trees and watching what fruit comes of it, then an approach to measurement and evaluation might capture the paths and small step building blocks towards the emerging fruit of those trees. Repeatedly, panelists noted that intervention and the transformations it calls for can only be accomplished over a long stretch of time, perhaps even ten or more years. Evaluating whether an intervention is 'working' under the short-term model of most funding cycles means programming can be treated as ineffective, even when it may build to the sort of long-term transformation intended. Bean-counting, then, becomes a Band-Aid for proving a program's worth in the interim. Ultimately, there appeared to be consensus on the need to think in terms of processes and growth, rather than focus on an end-point or pre-determined outcomes.

## Gender

Social norms and everyday experiences around gender were at the core of many program findings. It is true that women can often be victims of violence, but panelists suggested that this acknowledgement is not enough to understand the integral role gender plays in paramilitary violence and also risks essentializing women's experiences. For instance, women can and are active in paramilitaries and are perpetrators of violence themselves. An emphasis on men's violences neglects to address drivers for women and also fails to capture re/integration experiences for women. In fact, women who are active tend to be more ostracized from their communities and struggle to gain the same sort of belonging and recognition afforded to men. Further, there is a distinct tension between the sometimes-empowered roles women take on during conflict and the backslide violence against women after men return to everyday life. Conflict can change gender dynamics and gendered social roles, but re/integrating men back into communities sometimes means those altered dynamics stoke violence within the home. Of course, gender is not solely the realm of women, and when we talk about gender, we must also pay attention to the ways that social norms impact men. In particular, expectations for male behavior are a crucial part of the story of paramilitarism, violence, and re/integration. In one panel, the question of how to transform violent masculinities that are so embedded in society emerged. Flattening men's roles to their violent behaviors was also highlighted, with a concern that not enough attention is paid to men's mental health and its connections to violence.

## Terminology and the Use of Language

How programs and organizations talk about their work—the terms they use and what their intended meanings are—is complicated. And it is an obstacle both between organizations and the individuals they serve, as well as between organizations and the communities they work within. Language in this space is often contested and understood differently in different contexts or even by different parties to the same conflict. At times, those differences are highly controversial, as is the case of programs labeled CVE or 'Countering Violent Extremism,' which can evoke concerns about surveillance and spying for some target populations. In some contexts, paramilitaries might be labeled extremist by the government but seen as protectors in the communities they operate. Individuals belonging to what have been labeled paramilitary groups might not see themselves as paramilitary at all. How we adopt language or communicate in ways that are heard the way we mean them to be heard is a struggle. Further, panelists offered that, even between programs, there is disagreement on the meaning of the words used. For instance, what is meant by terms like re/integration? Social cohesion? These words enact a sense of common language that is, in reality, far more complex and contested, and attention must be paid to ensure the words we use carry similar meanings for our audiences.

## Reflections on Pedagogy

From the outset, the aim of the international working groups was to establish a connected team of individuals all interested in the issues that arise when people and communities transition from violence. Bridging the gaps between practitioners, academics, and policymakers was at the heart of these efforts. In that way, the working groups began with an assumption that building a shared community across these traditional divides might percolate new insights—that by bringing them together, they would learn from one another. Modeling a collaborative, collegial spirit despite the differences that exist between these groups was essential to this endeavor. The ultimate goal was to establish opportunities for shared learning and reflective practice. While this report details the lessons that came out of these collaborative conversations, the process itself and the pedagogy baked into the working group model offered important insights as well.

Like many plans in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic substantially altered the original arrangements of the working groups, which was designed to kick-off as a brief, in-person symposium. When the world, and the working groups, turned to an online format, there were certainly concerns that this new format might undermine the collegial atmosphere at the heart of these efforts. What would it mean to be in relationship with one another through a screen? To learn together while existing in different countries and time-zones? How can the working groups build up the desired energy and excitement when participants will only ‘be together’ digitally?

Despite these concerns, what emerged from the first six months of collaboration was a sense of solidarity in a world that has felt increasingly disconnected. The organizers of the working groups approached the design with specific intentionality—who was selected to participate, why they were selected, who they represented, and how their experiences would fit with, build upon, or strengthen the knowledge of others in the group was carefully thought through. The gap that keeps specifically practitioners and scholars far apart was bridged because of this intentionality, because the people in the (digital) room came with a shared understanding of their desire to support one another and grow collectively. Efforts to bring together people across these divides is often strained, but with the thoughtful selection of participants and the fostering of humility from the onset, these divides were overcome.

At the center of this experience was the nurturing of a non-competitive atmosphere. Participants were invited to the table, first and foremost, to learn from one another. In that way, the working groups were approached with a spirit of generosity—panelists and their presentations were meant to evoke reflection and generate thoughtful, constructive conversations, rather than invite critique or stoke rivalry. Space was opened up for participants to belong in a mutually supportive group which cared about similar issues and was hungry to learn more. Camaraderie was built through the jointly imagined efforts of all those involved.

To sum up what made the working groups such a successful endeavor: there was careful intentionality from the beginning about the makeup of the groups, humility and generosity were modeled throughout, trust was nurtured through practices of reflection, and the process itself of learning together was respected just as much as the lessons that emerged. This mutually-acknowledged community of practice is sure to produce invaluable insights moving forward.





# Platform One



## Dr. Duncan Morrow and Dr. Jonny Byrne

Youthwork in Northern Ireland

### Key Lesson Connections

Terminology and the Use of Language; Re/integration; Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; History; Social Location and Power

Dr. Duncan Morrow and Dr. Jonny Byrne, both of Ulster University in Northern Ireland, kicked off the first platform with a discussion centered on their work with youth engagement through the Tackling Paramilitaries Program (TPP). They explained that, despite the intention of the Good Friday Agreement to transform social and political life in Northern Ireland away from violence and towards democratic ways of living together and resolving disputes, paramilitarism and the institutional structure of armed groups has persisted. In an effort to address these issues, TPP emerged in 2015 with a distinct emphasis on addressing paramilitarism among youth. Programming spans everything from inter-group sporting events to economic empowerment initiatives, personal mentoring, and mental health support. Relationship-building is central to TPP's approach, particularly in light of the sense of purpose and belonging that paramilitary membership provides. A focus on personal support and making youth feel valued and heard is crucial to providing an alternative sense of self in these contexts. Key challenges seem to center on inconsistency in the meaning and application of terminology (i.e. what do we mean when we say paramilitarism, DDR, etc.), as well as the difficulty in framing youth work as a long-term cultural transformation, rather than the sort of short-term deliveries funders are keen to support.

### Points of Consideration

- The distinction between Disarmament, Demobilization, and Re/integration (DDR) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is often blurred, and programming is not always clear on which goal it falls under. The language of DDR versus CVE carries different meanings and challenges across different communities, and attention must be paid to how these labels are heard and interpreted within the communities served by programming.
- Youth work programs have been reluctant to be associated with policing. Rather, alternative approaches to addressing violence and paramilitarism among youth are emphasized and policing, while it may be supported by communities, is often not the answer to long-term sustainable transformation.
- Relationship-building is paramount to youth work. Communities need to address the major pull toward a sense of purpose and belonging that paramilitary membership can offer young people. Paramilitaries provide an excellent source of identity for someone looking to find community and self-worth such that alternatives must be able to fill this hole.
- The moral quality of violence emerged as a central theme in the first working group. Violence is often justified or even valued in the eyes of the community or broadly seen as a viable solution. This results in a kind of ambivalence around violence—many are just not that bothered by normalized levels of violence. In that way, communities sometimes operate on the basis of acceptable levels of violence rather than an understanding of the state as having a monopoly on violence.



### **Hollie Nyseth Brehm**

Reentry and Reintegration of Rwandans Convicted of Genocide

#### **Key Lesson Connections**

Re/integration; History; Social Location and Power; Gender; Rituals and Symbols; Identity and Labels

Based on in-depth research with nearly 200 Rwandans convicted of genocide, Dr. Hollie Nyseth Brehm of The Ohio State University showed the importance of rituals and identity shifts for the reentry of participants in violence into communities following incarceration. Practices like welcoming those reentering society with dinners and gifts signaled community acceptance and allowed for an identity shift from being a participant in genocide and prisoner to a redeemable community member. According to Nyseth Brehm, the Rwandan state narrative of the genocide, which centers blame on macro-level factors like bad governance and colonialism, allows for narratives of redemption for those who participated in the genocide by contextualizing their decisions to engage in violence. However, women tend to experience a harsher path to re/integration and community acceptance. Relative to men convicted of similar crimes, women are not only often unmarried and much worse-off economically, but also face an increased risk of community shunning, as violence is seen as less acceptable when committed by women.

#### **Points of Consideration**

- Like all people, those who have committed violence in the past hold multiple identities simultaneously. Successful re/integration requires room for shifting identities, moving toward elevating their identity as a citizen and community member.
- Rituals of acceptance from community members can help encourage identity shifts for those with a violent past. These rituals may be as small as the sharing of a beer or meal and are often unexpected on the part of the returnee.
- State narratives of blame that contextualize individual actions provide additional room for identity shifts, though the government's narrative may be implemented with an authoritarian hand.
- Social location significantly conditions opportunities for re/integration and redemptive narratives. Programming must therefore be tailored toward these differences, addressing differences in experience across gender, socio-economic status, and age, among other factors.



### **Jose Antonio Fortou**

Political Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings

#### **Key Lesson Connections**

Re/integration; Gender; Social Location and Power

Dr. Jose Antonio Fortou, a political scientist at Universidad EAFIT in Medellín, Colombia, explored how exposure to conflict influenced political engagement in Colombia. Following decades of violence, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) agreed to a peace deal in 2016. As a key element of



this agreement, FARC transitioned from a rebel group to a political party, referred to as Comunes. In elections following the peace agreement, Comunes candidates received little electoral support. Consistent with existing work that has linked exposure to violence to higher political participation, Fortou showed that those victimized by conflict-related violence in Colombia are more likely to express a partisan identification and participate in elections. However, simply living in a conflict-affected region appears unrelated to political engagement, suggesting personal victimization experiences with violence are more important for political participation than general exposure. While in other contexts, women increase their political participation following conflict, women continue to report significantly less participation than men in Colombia.

### Points of Consideration

- Integrating armed groups into institutional politics may be an important part of peace processes, but the newly integrated parties may fail to succeed. If electoral success is not viable, integrating armed groups into politics may not be a sustainable path to peace.
- Evidence across contexts continues to show that exposure to conflict increases political participation for certain populations. However, the mechanisms underpinning political participation in post-conflict settings must be more fully explored to design effective interventions.

### Reintegration Efforts and Research in Yemen

#### Key Lesson Connections

Gender; Re/integration; Measurement and Evaluation; Terminology and the Use of Language

The final meeting of the first platform featured a presentation from an international organization's work in Yemen related to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Using a participatory, whole-of-community approach emphasizing consultation with local populations, the research was split into three phases: (1) an assessment of fight flows and recruitment drivers drawn from interviews with key informants in civil society, the military, politics, and community stakeholders; (2) in-depth, extensive multi-methods research exploring the needs of ex-combatants and community members in five target locations; and (3) continued research in these five areas to track patterns and perceptual trends across time. The ultimate goal of this research was to inform the design and implementation of pilot programs aimed at building social cohesion within targeted communities where fighters are reintegrating. Three key lessons emerged from these initial phases. First, local conflict sensitivity is crucial. Even within country, what works in one area might be wholly ineffective or even inappropriate in another area. Second, gender analysis suggests a number of insights, including the dual impact that conflict has on Yemeni women by simultaneously increasing household and employment burdens for women and exposing women to increased levels of gender-based violence, while at the same time opening up spaces for women to play larger roles in public and private life, including taking up active roles in peacebuilding. Finally, financial motivations are a major factor in continued paramilitary participation. Any program that takes re/integration seriously needs to address the economic factors at play.



## Points of Consideration

- In some regions, masculinity and hypermasculine ideals place a great deal of pressure on men to resort to violence and take up arms. Even when men return home, a backslide in gender roles means men are increasingly re-asserting themselves as ‘fighters’ and ‘protectors.’
- The line between what it means to be ‘active’ and ‘ex’ combatant is quite fluid. Many return to fighting after a short period, and in interviews, many ex-combatants were either planning a return or were never disarmed to begin with.
- Sense of pride among young men is important to understand. While it might be difficult to replicate the level of status a fighter gains by taking up arms, efforts must be made to make young people feel safe and needed.
- What does it look like to measure social cohesion? There might be a danger in turning social cohesion into an object, rather than understanding that it is visible in the outcomes that it produces. Further, if social cohesion is focused on building bonds, then some thought must be given to which bonds and for whom.
- The language of DDR is sometimes deployed without specifying what we want people to re/integrate into. We run the risk of calling for re/integration into something quite toxic. In that way, the quality of what they are re/integrating into needs more consideration. Further, re/integration is more than just a process, it’s a value question—‘re’-integration is about returning to something or going back into something, while ‘integration’ seems to be a language of the future or towards something new.



## Platform Two



### Dr. Dominic Bryan

Conflict Transformation, Public Space, and Culture Wars

#### Key Lesson Connections

Rituals and Symbols; History; Social Location and Power; Identity and Labels

Dr. Dominic Bryan of Queen's University in Northern Ireland kicked off the second working group with a presentation centered on the role of public and civic spaces and disputes over symbolic spaces in post-conflict contexts. Focused on the Northern Ireland case, Bryan described public spaces as the arena or vehicle through which conflict becomes enacted, citing parades, memorials, and museums as critical spaces where power is enshrined, narratives are captured, and boundaries are marked. In conflict transformation, where significant shifts in relationships of power are necessary, confrontation in the public space is virtually inevitable. While the peace agreement process often ignores space, especially symbolic public space, this quickly becomes a key point of tension in the future management of conflict. Fundamentally, the question often becomes one of acceptable identity traditions—when do people have the right to display their identity traditions in civic spaces/how ought public spaces be policed? And in what ways do these public symbols become efforts at celebrating our own hostilities?

### Points of Consideration

- There is some hope in the potential for building public spheres of shared space, where rituals and events offer ways of being together and providing a sense of citizenship. Pride Parades in Northern Ireland, for example, bring people together around shared identities outside the identities that dominate the conflict landscape.
- A major point of contention is what sort of symbols and rituals can and should be banned from the public space. There is a desire to encourage the celebration of identities as part of conflict transformation, but that entails celebration not in opposition to other identities but in an understanding and acceptance of the Other. Banning or policing these spaces can foment conflict, but ritualizing problematic symbols also foments the conflict. What is the right balance?
- The importance of acknowledgement and need to remember the past and give voice to various groups remains a crucial point of consideration. Public symbols lend a sense of recognition and belonging for some, but they can also perpetuate conflict dynamics and draw out militarized narratives.
- What constitutes space? Symbols? The focus here has been on public spaces like memorials and symbols like flags, but the body, for example, is both a space and can also be a symbol. How can we relate this question about public spaces to consider other modes of space and symbology?





### Dr. Tim Wilson

Political Violence and Ethnic Frontiers

#### Key Lesson Connections

History; Identity and Labels

In reference to Northern Ireland, Dr. Tim Wilson of the University of St. Andrews discussed how conflict within deeply divided societies is often layered, with high-level issues like control of the state at the top, inter-community divisions and violence the middle, and local, within-community violence and control at the bottom. Wilson suggested that the middle level, often described as 'sectarian conflict,' receives less attention than the top and bottom levels. This layered perspective is motivated by the work of Frank Wright, whose *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis* captured the complexity of The Troubles and inspired those working on ethnically divided societies, in part through its focus on the middle layer. In contexts with deep ethnic divisions, even relatively small occurrences of sectarian violence put society collectively on edge. Moreover, sectarian symbols tend to dominate narratives following all sorts of violence, even without a clear connection to any overarching sectarian division.

### Points of Consideration

- Ethnic conflicts are complex and layered. A focus only on macro-level issues like state control risks masking conflict and violence between communities.
- In societies with long histories of ethnic division, sectarian narratives tend to dominate the discussion around all sorts of social conflict, even when there is no clear connection to sectarianism.
- When conflict is deep-rooted and embedded in all facets of society, peace is seen as the radical alternative to violence.



### Dr. Donna Pankhurst

Peacebuilding and Men's Violences

#### Key Lesson Connections

Gender; Re/integration; Terminology and the Use of Language; Identity and Labels

Dr. Donna Pankhurst of the University of Bradford in England offered a discussion on her work related to masculinities in the postwar setting. She asked, "What difference could it make if we did pay more attention to male ex-combatants' violence in post-war contexts and share policy lessons that support change?" Following widespread violence, men, particularly young men, are viewed as the main security threat and are often blamed for disruptions to peace in post-conflict spaces. Research has also indicated that a violent backlash against women tends to occur after men return from war, especially as an effort to re-assert gendered orders in the home. At the same time, some policies have recognized a need to address the causes for male-driven violence, including trauma counseling, mental health services, and addiction

treatment programs, with an assumption that there is a connection between men's mental health and violence against women after war. Pankhurst framed the issue of understanding men's post-war mental health issues as a distinctly feminist issue; that is, if we can better understand, care for, and respond to former soldiers and ex-combatants, society as a whole, including women, are better served. Finally, she offered 'diminished responsibility' as an important point for discussion—how might we think about responsibility for violent crimes through a mental health lens in these spaces?

### Points of Consideration

- Gender sensitivities are broadly accepted as crucial for peacebuilding, but are not so easily applied in practice. Despite calls for attention to gender under UNSCR 1325, we appear to be stuck. It is still common to see zero or very few women at the peace negotiating table. And the 'add women and stir' approach to international peacebuilding means when women are included, little attention is paid to whether their voices are heard, or whether they have legitimate agency in that space.
- Masculinities, hegemonic and otherwise, are deeply embedded in society and offer behaviors towards which men can strive. As peacebuilders, how might we trace and transform something that is so embedded? More work needs to focus on understanding when and how men are transformed and what works in terms of encouraging 'healthy masculinities.'
- There can sometimes be a tension between gender sensitivity and local sensitivity. In the drive to invest in women-centered projects, external funders can emphasize projects that have broader, unintended consequences because they did not consider gender relations and the impact programming would have on those relations. Western interveners in particular have a tendency to impose Western brands of feminism in Global South contexts, which can result in serious backlash against women.
- If we treat 'women' as synonymous with 'gender,' then we miss a large piece of the puzzle in postwar contexts. Men, the masculinities that shape them, and the gendered factors that drive them toward violence must be understood and transformed.



#### Dr. Dong Jin Kim

Reciprocal Empowerment and Civil Society Peacebuilding

#### Key Lesson Connections

Terminology and the Use of Language; Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; History; Social Location and Power

Dr. Dong Jin Kim of Trinity College Dublin introduced the concept of "reciprocal empowerment," which refers to interactions between mutually self-interested parties that rise above social and political obstacles to produce change. Kim applied this concept to lesson-sharing between local peacebuilders working on the Korean peninsula and in Northern Ireland. Despite contextual differences between these conflicts, sharing lessons across cases not only served a capacity-building purpose, but also built solidarity and empowerment in the face of similar social and political challenges. The discussion problematized the concept of "civil society," a western liberal construct that may not apply in certain contexts. In authoritarian



North Korea, for example, everything must go through the ruling party, resulting in no true separation between state and non-state groups typically associated with civil society. At the same time, peacebuilding in North Korea still involves the building of trust across groups and person-to-person interactions. This suggests that peacebuilding processes across contexts share similar properties, even absent the presence of a western-style civil society.

### Points of Consideration

- Lesson-sharing across contexts may empower peacebuilders beyond learning about other cases by creating an environment of solidarity, empathy, and respect.
- Though the application of western concepts like “civil society” may not travel well to non-western contexts, critically analyzing their applicability can help identify parallels in peacebuilding practices untethered to theoretical constructs.

### Claire Hazelden

Tackling Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland

#### Key Lesson Connections

Measurement and Evaluation; Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; Re/integration; History; Terminology and the Use of Language

Claire Hazelden from the Northern Ireland Executive’s Department of Justice wrapped up the second platform with a discussion on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organized Crime Program (TPP) in Northern Ireland. Constituted by 43 program actions, TPP has emphasized locally-relevant and locally-driven interventions that include targeting the political, social, economic, and emotional needs of youth most at risk for turning to violence and paramilitarism. Established in 2015/2016, TPP focuses on four broad areas: promoting lawfulness, gaining support for transition, tackling criminality, and addressing systemic issues. Rooted in an ethos of ‘paramilitarism has no place,’ the program has emphasized developing safer and more confident communities and supporting individuals who seek to move away from paramilitary activity. In her role, Hazelden has worked on measuring the impact of TPP interventions within a context where intended outcomes have traditionally been unclear and not universally agreed upon. Indicators used to measure impact are: systemic, long-term prevention indicators (including total paramilitary style attacks, acceptance of paramilitary intimidation, extent of paramilitary influence in specific areas, and paramilitary related incidences); public support and confidence in the justice system; the ability to move away from paramilitary structures and existing support for transition; and general societal feelings of safety and confidence (total security incidents, deaths related to security situation, firearms found, number of organized crime groups disrupted or dismantled). Moving forward, a key goal is to increase collaboration across the board—between communities, governmental departments, academia, etc.—and reduce duplication.



### Points of Consideration

- Language continues to be a complicating factor. What constitutes paramilitarism is not universal, even within communities. This means the aim of an intervention becomes unclear—what exactly is the intervention addressing if ‘paramilitarism’ is so contested or communities carry varying definitions?
- Silence and avoidance are also an issue. Talking about paramilitaries can be taboo. And sometimes these organizations establish themselves as providers of security and/or social services, so speaking against them can be seen as against one’s own best interests.
- Managing expectations is difficult but necessary. There is always hope that interventions will fundamentally transform society, but this must be measured in increments. Balancing visions for a better future, realistic timeframes, and the immediacy under which these issues are framed is difficult. This calls for a level of ‘imaginative seriousness’ where peacebuilders recognize time constraints and the limits to change that interventions can foster while also maintaining a creative, forward-thinking outlook.
- The historical reality of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland is particularly important for understanding how deep-seated norms around violence can be. The permissibility and acceptability of violence means there is sometimes limited energy or concern for changing the situation or tackling persistent, normalized violence.



## Platform Three

### Stephen Hughes and Alastair Muir

Public Health Approaches to Violence, Two Case Studies

#### Key lesson connections

Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; Measurement and Evaluation; History; Social Location and Power

Stephen Hughes of Youth Work Alliance (YWA) detailed his organization's efforts in Northern Ireland. YWA acts as a supporting and coordinating organization for youthwork efforts across the island. The organization emphasizes strong, independent voices for members, a skilled and confident youth sector workforce, youth organizations that are well-managed and governed effectively, and youth settings that are inclusive and safe. As such, collaboration, coordination, and support for local delivery are key aspects of YWA's efforts. Ultimately, the goal is to divert young people away from paramilitary gangs and expose the coercion and exploitation of young people. One major challenge has been dealing with the legacy of violence in Northern Ireland—that violence has become an acceptable solution, particularly when carried out under informal structures like paramilitaries. Intergenerational trauma and childhood adversity remain at the forefront of youthwork concerns, and Hughes emphasized the need to think about and track violence as a health-related issue, rather than a simple policing issue.

Building off this, Alastair Muir of Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) described his organization's public health approach to criminality and violence. Having been considered one of the most violent countries in the developing world, Scotland's efforts to address violence through the VRU have centered on education, working through schools and communities, and encouraging participatory, peer-led programming on social issues and norms surrounding bullying, violence, gender-based violence, etc. One major intervention approach has been working through hospitals. Research suggests that reaching both victims and perpetrators through Accident and Emergency departments (A&E) at a time when they are in 'reachable or teachable' moments would prove beneficial. Based on this information, VRU began talking to those affected by violence through mentors at the hospital. Key to this approach is the use of mentors with shared lived experiences, which means sometimes employing ex-offenders to speak to young people about the realities of the path they are heading down. The public health approach to reducing violence also embraces understanding violence as an outcome of other issues, including adverse childhood experiences and trauma. As many other panelists emphasized, trust and relationship-building are crucial such that work of this nature demands long-term commitments and sitting comfortably with the fact that you may not see the results of your efforts for years to come.

### Points of Consideration

A 'quick success' can take 10 years or more. In terms of funding, this is especially difficult to justify. The investment needed to create sustained change is often more than funders are willing to give, as they would prefer short-term, easily-measurable goals or bean-counting strategies. The key is to balance small wins and outcomes that can be communicated to funders while always keeping an eye on long-term goals. At the same time, when youth workers invest so much time on a journey with these young people, if funding is suddenly lost, it can sometimes reinforce youth's expectations of abandonment and disappointment.

- The media, while tricky to deal with in many polarized contexts, can be important for amplifying an organization's message. Public opinion and support can be informed and shaped by media messaging.
- Siloed thinking, or approaches to violence reduction which view each challenge as distinct from one another and not part of a larger system, is all too common. This results in treating the symptoms of violence, rather than seeing the issues driving violence as broader societal challenges to be addressed. Siloed thinking has also made information sharing difficult, with organizations, departments, and other structures rarely working together or learning from one another.
- A public health approach gives voice to the context from which violence emerges. It understands that violence does not develop in a vacuum, and that many young people need alternative ways of belonging, mental health services, and other wellness programs to build a sense of worth and open up new pathways of behavior.



### **Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Liza Wilkinson**

Cases in Rwanda and Northern Ireland

#### **Key Lesson Connections**

Re/integration; History; Social Location and Power; Gender; Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; Identity and Labels

Dr. Hollie Nyseth Brehm of the Ohio State University discussed the importance of person-first language in encouraging acceptance for those convicted of genocide in Rwanda. Rather than genocidaires or perpetrators of violence, returnees emphasized that they were people who committed genocide, allowing for a separation between the person and their previous actions. As means of expressing their identity as Rwandan citizens, those who committed genocide emphasized participation in community activities like attending meetings and voting. At the same time, their identity as a person who committed genocide did not simply disappear, as each person convicted stood trial and generally accepted responsibility for their crimes in front of the community. Their identity as a person who committed genocide was also elevated through social groups with other returnees, where they supported one another during their transitions and build solidarity through shared experience.

Liza Wilkinson described TIDES (Transformation, Interdependence, Diversity, Equity, and Sustainability), an organization that works on building peace and mediating conflict at the community-level in Northern Ireland. In societies with a long history of paramilitarism like Northern Ireland, paramilitaries often serve many functions in society, from acting as major social identity markers to providing opportunities for unemployed youth. Oftentimes, individuals struggle to fully commit to leaving the social benefits of paramilitaries behind, though such a commitment is crucial to transition from violence. According to Wilkinson, there is a need to capacitate local organizations that citizens could turn to instead of paramilitaries for these functions. At the same time, interventions could help paramilitaries retain some of their organizational capacity while still transitioning away from violence. Like all people, those with violent histories hold multiple identities simultaneously and are often victims of conflict themselves. Rather than labeling people as “paramilitary” or “ex-paramilitary,” it is instead vital to acknowledge the complexity of one’s experiences.



### Points of Consideration

- Person-first language avoids labeling those who have committed violence in the past as simply the sum of their previous actions. These narratives provide room for those who have committed violence to elevate other elements of their identities, like members of a community and productive citizens. The elevation of these non-violent identities does not, however, remove a person's history with violence.
- Accepting responsibility for violent crimes and proceeding through legal and punitive mechanisms may help facilitate community recognition of these elevated non-violent identities.
- Paramilitaries and other armed groups are deeply embedded within the societies in which they operate. While their use of violence is a defining factor, paramilitaries serve many social functions that entice support and participation.
- Interventions targeted at countering paramilitarism must take into these “pull” factors by offering alternatives or risk paramilitarism being the only viable option. Interventions might also help shift paramilitaries away from the use of violence as a tactic, though support for this approach may be seen as tacit support for paramilitary groups.

### Lee Hamilton and Sarah Dolah

De-Radicalization in the UK and Sweden

#### Key Lesson Connections

Terminology and the Use of Language; Relationship-building, Trust, and Credibility; Social Location and Power; Measurement and Evaluation

Lee Hamilton of the UK's Prevent program described efforts to localize early intervention and de-radicalization approaches under the Prevent duty law of 2015. Focused on issues of extremism and radicalization to violence, programming under Prevent places more responsibility on local institutions and authorities, particularly education and other early years providers. The goals have been to understand and tackle root causes of radicalization, identifying those at risk early, and provide avenues for rehabilitation. Engagement with and within schools has been a major component of programming as this has been viewed as a safe space where young people can have difficult conversations, explore, and create avenues for extremist narratives to be challenged. Knowing that the vast majority of radicalization occurs online, Prevent has also established online workshops for parents to better understand what children can be exposed to online and how to watch for concerning behaviors. The narrative around Prevent, however, has presented challenges. When the program was first established 15 to 20 years ago, it was primarily known as a surveillance initiative. Today, that reputation is difficult to shake despite major overhauls to Prevent's approach. Finally, measuring success proves difficult given the program's emphasis on prevention—how do you measure whether you have stopped a potential behavior from taking place?

Sarah Dolah of Fryshuset's Young Peacebuilders in Sweden led discussion on her organization's youth work. Founded in 1984, Fryshuset is one of Sweden's largest civil society organizations, serving approximately 13,000 individuals each month. Their goals focus on meeting the urgent social needs of Sweden's youth, particularly individuals vulnerable to radicalization and criminality. With an 'our door is always open' mantra, Fryshuset has found that credible messengers and building trust through informal peacemakers who can reach youth most at risk are absolutely crucial to addressing the needs and empowering youth as peacebuilders. By identifying and capacitating leaders who share many of the lived experiences of Fryshuset's youth participants, Dolah indicated they are able to offer youth a different way forward and a vision for how that different way forward is possible. Like other youthwork discussions in the working group platforms, Dolah noted that marginalization from society, a sense of not belonging, and poverty all play a central role in youth's escalation to violence. This work is not without its challenge, though, including difficulty with identifying and using a shared language that isn't politically charged or problematic in different contexts, as well as a need to build up individual change into larger socio-political change.

### Points of Consideration

- On language, one of the biggest obstacles seems to be who owns the language and what sort of baggage and suspicion surrounds that language. For instance, when Prevent uses the language of 'safeguarding' and connotes that they will safeguard vulnerable peoples, that might not be received well by Muslim populations who might equate 'safeguard' with 'spy' or 'surveil.' Work in this area needs to recognize that words may be heard differently than was intended.
- The question of credibility and who gets to be a credible messenger is complicated. On the one hand, lived experience has proven to be an important source of credibility—engaging individuals through mentors who understand them and have lived similar struggles is a proven method for building trust and communicating messages effectively. At the same time, credibility is often informal in these spaces, is sometimes temporary in nature, and can actually vary from space to space. For instance, women might have strong credibility in one setting, and due to gender dynamics, zero credibility in another. It remains unclear what the best tools are for ascertaining credibility.
- Cooperation with the police has worked in some contexts but can be viewed as collusion in other communities. While a whole-of-community approach and collaboration across institutions and structures is emphasized, partnerships with police take long-term investment with intentional and sustained trust-building efforts. This is not an easy balance, but it has proven important to a number of interventions.



## Moving Forward

From June to December 2020, a group of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world gathered online as an international working group under the theme, 'Moving from Violence to Peace: Individuals and Communities in Transition.' The goal was to share their research and learn from one another on issues related to paramilitarism, non-state actor violence, and opportunities and challenges for re/integration after war. They grappled with questions related to how best to support communities and individuals in transition, what approaches have proven most effective, and what lessons might be translated across contexts.

Towards that end, the report above details a number of broad lessons that emerged. These included everything from the importance of belonging and social location to the use of rituals to both foster and challenge transitions. Trust and credibility were key to efforts across all panels. Without building relationships and investing in long-term commitments to individuals and communities, attempts at re/integration or transition are not likely to succeed. Even then, the fruits of re/integration work are both difficult to measure and define, and they require a sustained vision for change that might take years to emerge. Panel participants exhibited both a passion and excitement for their work and the communities they work within, as well as frustration with the conditions under which this work is carried out, especially in light of funder demands for quick successes and short-term funding cycles.

Connection was at the heart of the working groups—to build connection across programs, countries, cultures, and individuals. What resulted was a profound and robust learning community that has centered shared research, policy, and practice knowledges to better address issues of re/integration and transition after violence. Already, participants have begun networking in significant ways, including growing partnerships around the world and engaging in collective projects beyond the working groups. The broad lessons laid out in this report are only the beginning of what is sure to be a fruitful journey of reflective practice and collective growth.



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