

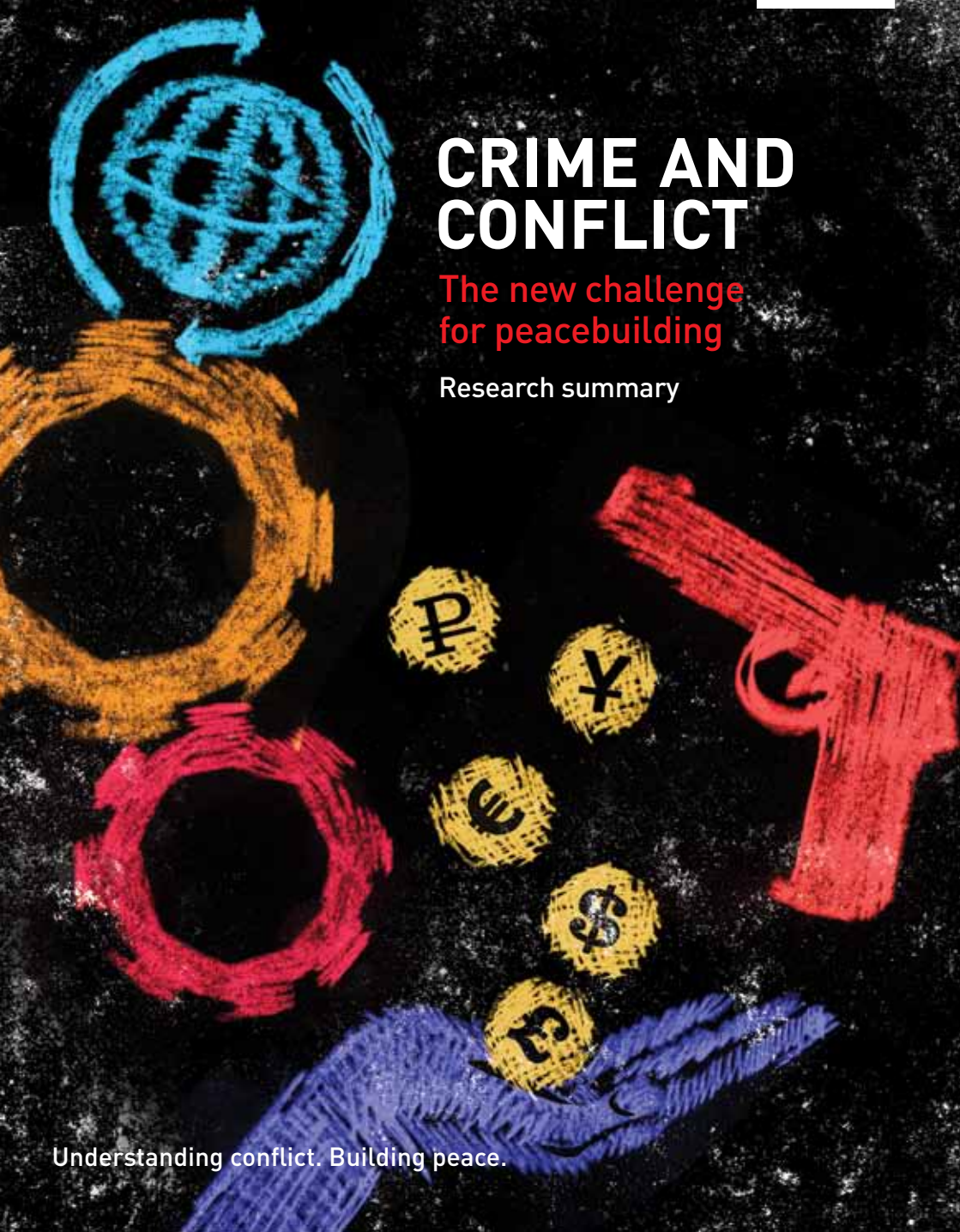
International Alert.

# CRIME AND CONFLICT

The new challenge  
for peacebuilding

Research summary

Understanding conflict. Building peace.



## **About International Alert**

International Alert helps people find peaceful solutions to conflict.

We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding organisations, with nearly 30 years of experience laying the foundations for peace.

We work with local people around the world to help them build peace and we advise governments, organisations and companies on how to support peace.

We focus on issues which influence peace, including governance, economics, gender relations, social development, climate change, and the role of businesses and international organisations in high-risk places.

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*International Alert is grateful for the support from our strategic donors: the UK Department for International Development UKAID; the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland.*

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Layout and cover illustration D. R. ink

# INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings of our research, *Crime and conflict: The new challenge for peacebuilding*. It explores the problem posed by the complex relationship between organised crime, armed violence and fragility, and offers some ideas on how to tackle this. The report responds to the changing global dynamics of conflict and violence and the growing policy attention to this phenomenon, as well as the shortcomings of effective responses to date by both state and civil society.

At the heart of the report is the hypothesis that peacebuilding approaches applied to armed conflict framed as war or civil war are also appropriate for tackling violence and instability associated with organised crime. This approach has not been widely tested in practice, but when it has, results are promising. It is time to question the predominance of state-centric approaches based purely on more efficient law enforcement.

The context for this report is summed up by the World Bank as follows:

“One-and-a-half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict or large-scale, organised criminal violence ... New threats – organised crime and trafficking, civil unrest due to global economic shocks, terrorism – have supplemented continued preoccupations with conventional war between and within countries.”<sup>1</sup>

Globally, the average annual violent death rate was 7.9 per 100,000 inhabitants between 2004 and 2009. Yet a total of 58 countries exhibit violent death rates above 10 per 100,000 inhabitants. Moreover, 14 countries witness annual violent death rates above 30.<sup>2</sup> Most of these countries are not affected by violent conflict in the sense of civil war, but are experiencing different types of pervasive organised violence associated with gangs, criminal groups and violent protest. In other words, organised violence continues to affect many people’s lives despite the decline in conventional conflicts. Other kinds of conflict are becoming more prominent.

**Annual violent death rate (2004–2009)**

**In 58 countries**

**10+**  
per 100,000 people

**In 14 countries**

**30+**  
per 100,000 people

1 World Bank (2011). *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, security and development*. Washington DC. p.2. Available at <http://www.worldbank.org/wdr2011>

2 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2011). *The global burden of armed violence 2011*. Geneva. pp.60–61. Available at <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/?gbav-2011>

This context raises some important questions for the peacebuilding, security and development sectors. Some of these questions are conceptual and even definitional. In particular, should we apply the term ‘conflict’ to these new settings? Should we adopt the term ‘civil conflict’ to describe the dynamic?<sup>3</sup> And what do we consider to be ‘fragile’ when many of the countries most affected by organised crime and high rates of intentional homicide are in the middle income bracket? Other key questions concern the policy responses that are available. Are current international and national response mechanisms really fit for the purpose of tackling instability generated by crime and violence? And do we have the appropriate international institutional architecture? The World Bank’s 2011 report suggested not.

Peacebuilding has significant relevance here. The value of peacebuilding approaches that are pragmatic, inclusive, long-term, multi-level and ultimately transformative is now generally accepted within the development sector. However, such approaches have yet to be applied effectively and at a scale appropriate to the challenges posed by organised crime.

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3 A term coined by the London School of Economics and Political Science’s Crisis States Research Centre.

# ORGANISED CRIME

We can identify three broad dimensions of organised crime that help us hone in on the key problems to be tackled:

- 1 Its connection to power holders and political interests:** Organised crime is deeply intertwined with business and politics. Where the state itself is complicit, this poses considerable challenges to governance and statebuilding approaches.
- 2 The incentives that pull and/or push individuals into crime:** Organised crime can provide a level of security and livelihood that is invaluable to some marginalised people, thus distorting strategies and schemes designed to address the issue.
- 3 The globalised market structures:** Addressing organised crime not only affects local societal activities such as trade, but also points to the challenge for countries where high demand (for illegal drugs for example) sustains the financial flows and benefits.

Given this complexity, it is perhaps not surprising to discover a degree of consensus on the impotence of current approaches to the problem. Indeed, in June 2011, the Global Commission on Drug Policy released a critical report, declaring that:

“The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world.”<sup>4</sup>

For example, there is widespread recognition that notions of sovereignty can protect state officials complicit in organised crime. Also, the emphasis on locking up criminals, which is a major component of the global response to the problem, flies in the face of arguments from Western criminology that tell us that imprisonment makes little difference to crime rates.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, little headway has been made in reducing the receptivity of fragile contexts to criminal enterprise.

<sup>4</sup> Global Commission on Drug Policy (2011). *On drugs*. Available at [http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/themes/gcdp\\_v1/pdf/Global\\_Commission\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/themes/gcdp_v1/pdf/Global_Commission_Report_English.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance: B. Chasin (2004). *Inequality and violence in the United States: Casualties of capitalism*. New York: Prometheus.

Above all, given the links between organised crime and predatory power holders, as well as domestic politics more broadly, the limitations of dominant state-centric approaches to tackling the problem ought to be clear. The ‘law and order’ approach has in some instances overlooked problems in state legitimacy that exist in many of the countries affected. Thus, it “has the potential to reinforce historical enmities between the state and its citizens and notions of state power as coercive control rather than legitimate representation”.<sup>6</sup>



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6 R. Locke (2012). *Organised crime, conflict and fragility: A new approach*. New York: International Peace Institute.

# PEACEBUILDING

So what of peacebuilding? For a start, the peacebuilding sector must accept some responsibility for having been slow to come to the table, no doubt influenced by funders' priorities and institutional silos that currently work against the types of joined-up responses that are needed. The reasons for this tardiness may also relate to inadequate framing of the issue within their broader responses to conflict and violence. It may also be due to the fact that many of the worst-affected countries are off the map of development spending, on which much peacebuilding work depends.

Nonetheless, viewing the issues of organised crime, armed violence and fragility through the lens of conflict theory can help in the current search for a new generation of responses. After all, these are social problems that must be addressed through social and economic development, not simply issues of deviant behaviour to be addressed by better policing. Peacebuilding therefore needs to be part of the conversation.

Peacebuilding offers an approach well suited to tackling the complex connections between crime, violence and fragility. It has been defined by Jean Paul Lederach as:

“...more than post-accord reconstruction ... [It] is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities and functions that both precede and follow formal peace accords.”<sup>7</sup>

One way of determining the value of this broad area of transformative activity is to focus on the following three key interconnected peacebuilding methods.

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7 J.P. Lederach (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press. p.20.

<p><b>1</b> <b>Conflict analysis</b></p>	<p>This is crucial to understanding the dynamics at play. Casting organised crime-related armed violence and fragility solely as a problem of criminality requiring a law and order response is a reflection of an incomplete definition of the problem. More rounded analysis through a conflict lens, differentiating between root causes, proximate causes and triggers, will help to inform more holistic responses and ensure projects 'do no harm', in other words avoiding the unintentional reinforcement of negative conflict dynamics.<sup>8</sup></p>
<p><b>2</b> <b>Dialogue</b></p>	<p>This is often initiated, facilitated and sustained by third parties who are trusted for their impartiality and/or expertise. It can bring together the actors involved in and affected by the problem in order to generate solutions. In the context of the relationship between organised crime, armed violence and fragility, such dialogue processes appear to be notable for their absence. Even at the policy level, it is evident that institutional silos across crime prevention, public health, development and peacebuilding are preventing the full range of stakeholders working together to formulate joined-up responses.</p>
<p><b>3</b> <b>Civic activism</b></p>	<p>This emphasises the importance of bringing a wider range of actors to the fore. The value of this approach can be appreciated when one considers cases in which the distinction between combatant, criminal and civilian has broken down and entire populations may be affected or take part in crime and conflict in different ways. In such contexts, the capacity for solutions is to be found beyond state institutions and within and across communities, including not only non-governmental organisations but also business leaders, women's organisations, religious institutions and academics.</p>

<sup>8</sup> See: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Co-operation Directorate (OECD DAC) (2007). *Principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations*. Paris. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/45/38368714.pdf>; and Saferworld, International Alert et al (2004). *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource pack*. London. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/conflict-sensitive-approaches-resource-pack>



# RECOMMENDATIONS

In considering the interaction between the problems associated with organised crime and the value peacebuilding can bring through analysis, dialogue and civic empowerment, we offer five priority areas for action as follows.

## ■ Conflict-sensitive approaches being brought to bear on law enforcement

Law enforcement will remain a key response mechanism, but needs to adopt a ‘do no harm’ approach, as advocated by the peacebuilding sector in relation to development assistance. The law enforcement sector needs to consider the potential negative effects of its strategies and how these can make situations worse rather than better.

## ■ Improved analysis and information flow across the whole range of local, national and global dimensions of organised crime

While there has been a flurry of attention paid to this issue, enormous knowledge gaps remain. The information void in those societies affected is huge. Greater analysis of all the dimensions of this issue will facilitate better monitoring of the impact of policy responses, improving understanding of what is working and what is not.

## ■ More innovative and creative ways of dealing with predatory power holders

Current statebuilding approaches do not seem to factor in the influence of patronage systems. There is some merit in ideas exhorting the uncoupling of governance processes from organised crime – for example, through improved transparency mechanisms, the provision of more legitimate business opportunities and private sector development. However, there is still the need for a deeper understanding of the role of predatory power holders, including how criminal agendas can be factored into peace negotiations and processes.

## ■ A step change in tackling crime-incentive structures

To do this, we need a better grasp of the reasons why individuals are drawn into crime. More attention should be given to civil empowerment through, for example, establishing mechanisms for coalition-building among civil society and improving the effectiveness of the media. Furthermore, there is a need to push forward on pro-poor growth across society in countries that are vulnerable to organised crime, whether these countries are targets of development aid or not. Such interventions need to become more sensitive and explicit about the links between informal and illicit economies.

■ **Paying attention to the need to disrupt globalised market structures**

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls for “cooperation and shared responsibility along the supply chain”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the developed countries that receive and consume illegal goods need to address their side of the problem as much as producer and intermediary countries are expected to deal with theirs. This is clearly highly sensitive and a difficult issue to handle. The debates are detailed and complex. But developed countries nevertheless have a responsibility to recognise that they are part of the problem.

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9 OECD (2012). *Think global, act global: Confronting global factors that influence conflict and fragility*. Paris. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/globalfactors.htm>

# CONCLUSION

Violent conflict is a dynamic, ever-changing process. In its current manifestations, framing violent conflict in terms that are limited to war and civil war restricts our ability to address it. Criminal networks and organised crime are strongly linked to widespread instability and fragility, and not only in those countries labelled 'fragile states'.

Yet the systematic and deliberate application of peacebuilding approaches to the relationship between organised crime, violence and fragility remains well overdue. Whilst law enforcement is clearly part of the solution, the capacities within broader civil society urgently need to be drawn in. The silo mentality that dominates thinking needs to be broken.

Peacebuilding approaches that focus on analysis, dialogue and civic empowerment can help us find new ways of addressing what is a highly complex and global problem in dire need of bold and creative solutions.



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ISBN: 978-1-909578-50-0



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