



international
alert



Partners for peace

International Alert's strategy,
2024–2030

Our **vision** is a world where conflicts can be resolved without violence and people work together to support and sustain peace.

Our **purpose** is to support a sustainable and inclusive end to violence.

To fulfil this purpose, we:

- **work with people directly affected by violence** to support **lasting solutions**;
- advocate with them for the **changes to policies, practices and behaviours** that are required for peace to be inclusive and sustainable; and
- **collaborate openly and in solidarity with all those striving for peace**, to strengthen our common cause.

We base all our work on a **deep understanding of the root causes of violence** in each context, developed through long-term engagement. Our work draws on what we and others have learnt from decades of peace-building efforts.

We **value** progress, fairness, respect, inclusion and openness.

Timothy Asheto, an elder in the Jukun community, raises a point during a participatory discussion about the development of a local peace and adaptation plan in Fiidi ward in Benue state, Nigeria. © International Alert/Imaobong Edukere



Who we are

International Alert is a global non-governmental organisation (NGO) of around 250 staff in 15 countries working in a common cause with a common purpose.

We believe in global solidarity, and that international organisations such as Alert can be expressions of and partners for such solidarity. We seek to be clear both on our own role and on the humility, thoughtfulness and lived commitment to equity that we must practise in playing it. In creating this new strategy, we have challenged ourselves to think afresh about Alert’s role, structures and practices, confronting embedded power relations and assumptions.

We therefore began the development of this new strategy with a sustained process of consultation with local organisations with whom Alert partners in our peacebuilding work. We held further consultations with these partners as themes and priorities for the new strategy emerged from consultations among Alert’s own staff. The priorities set out in this document flow from this iterative and inclusive process of dialogue and engagement.

How we seek to realise our goals



Strategic context

The era of global progress that followed the end of the Cold War has stalled. Many factors have contributed to this, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing economic injustice, and the climate emergency, but violent conflict has become the single biggest obstacle to global progress.

The gains in world peace that followed the end of the Cold War have gone into reverse. The number of wars and conflict deaths, and of refugees and people forcibly displaced, all doubled in the decade from 2010 to 2020.¹ Conflict-related deaths in 2022 were the highest for 28 years,² and global military expenditure set a new record in the same year.³ Geopolitical tensions are at their highest in a generation.

Violent conflict destroys decades of hard-won gains in development, resilience and societal relationships. Cycles of violence are hard to break, in part because some who hold power continue to benefit from conflict and instability.

Communities living in violent conflict have missed out on decades of progress. Absolute poverty in fragile and conflict-affected states has increased over recent decades, despite hundreds of millions of people rising out of poverty elsewhere. Definitions of fragility vary, but the trends are clear: around three-quarters of the world's extremely poor people live in fragile contexts,⁴ and that proportion continues to grow.

Communities and nations in conflict are the hardest hit by today's global emergencies, and the least well placed to deal with the impacts. Just 20 countries, all affected by conflict, represent 90% of global humanitarian need, more than 80% of forcibly-displaced people and 80% of the world's food-insecure population.⁵ Humanitarian need is at record levels, with more than 100 million people currently displaced from their homes.⁶

Women and girls are often the most affected by violence, whether during conflict or day to day in communities and homes. Across their lifetime, one in three women is subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner.⁷ One woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes.⁸ Gender inequalities and patriarchal gender norms exacerbate the direct and indirect harms caused by conflict,⁹ and often hamper inclusive solutions for peace.¹⁰

Today's climate and conflict emergencies hit hardest in the same, most vulnerable places. Tensions over access to land, water or other natural resources are exacerbated by the impact of climate change. Ten of the 12 countries experiencing the highest ecological threats are in conflict.¹¹ They stand little chance of adapting to climate pressures, or protecting resources vital to our planet, without an end to violence.

New drivers of conflict continue to emerge. Increases in forced migration and displacement are driven by violence, and are a potential source of further conflict. Disinformation and political polarisation have become prevalent in many societies, even where democratic governance seems most entrenched. Artificial intelligence and new weapons systems add further threats. Meanwhile, the proportion of civil conflicts in which neighbouring or other countries are involved – so called 'internationalised' civil wars – has risen significantly, requiring responses that are regional and comprehensive.¹²

Two decades of militarised approaches to insecurity – from Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Sahel and elsewhere – have created new cycles of violence and sharply reversed progress in governance.

Negotiators and facilitators have worked hard for deals and treaties to end fighting, but too many such agreements disintegrate quickly. Some 60% of the conflicts that ended in the early 2000s relapsed within five years.¹³ Too many conflicts have seen repeated peace agreements, but no lasting peace.

Some conflicts remain high on the global agenda, but millions of people remain trapped in protracted crises that are largely ignored by global decision-makers. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said, “Without a dramatic reduction in conflict, violence and the spread of weapons, the 2030 Agenda will remain out of reach for a large percentage of humanity.”¹⁴

This strategy sets out how we see International Alert’s contribution to building the more peaceful world that is so urgently needed. As a global team, we have agreed collectively and inclusively the priorities set out in the strategy, and will pursue them with ambition and focus. We do not claim to have all the answers: building sustainable peace requires many actors, approaches and coalitions. This strategy also affirms and strengthens our commitment to working in partnership, collaboration and solidarity with all who strive for peace around the world.

Our strategic goals

Goal 1: Building peace

Conflict is inevitable in any society. Violence is not.

Peace is when people resolve conflicts without using violence. It allows for respectful coexistence, positive social change, and sustainable development.

We have refreshed and updated Alert’s approach to peacebuilding in preparation for this strategy, drawing on what we and others have learnt from almost four decades of peacebuilding work.¹⁵ Our approach to peacebuilding seeks lasting and transformative change in the contexts in which we work. It is based on a **deep understanding of the drivers and root causes of violence** in each context, formed through continued engagement with the communities affected by that violence.

We **work with those affected by conflict** to end violence and create the conditions for peaceful coexistence and positive social change. We support the inclusion of people of all groups and identities in decision-making, placing a particular emphasis on understanding and addressing gender dynamics and other factors of marginalisation, such as youth. We work alongside local, national, regional and global partners to bring about change.

Our work supports **building peaceful relationships** between all sectors of society. We believe that decisions made by those with power should respond to the needs of everyone in society, and that all should have opportunities to participate in governance discussions. We work to prevent election-related violence and support improved transparency and social accountability by states or others in power.

Much of our work focuses on **strengthening social cohesion** within communities, including reintegration of former combatants back into their communities and reconciliation between previously conflicting parties. We also seek to address sexual and gender-based violence in families and communities. We engage with religion’s significant potential in peacebuilding.

We support societies’ mechanisms for **keeping the peace**, to enable justice to be done, and so that everyone can live their lives in security without undue fear of physical or psychological threat. We work to maintain the space for a free media and support journalists to work in a conflict-sensitive way, enabling people to access, share and debate information about what is happening in their society. Our work on early warning of violence can prevent escalation and enable swift support to those affected by violence.

We work to address structural limitations and ensure fair access to services, to enable everyone to **live peaceful lives** and to have access to fair and inclusive economic opportunities. Systematic, inclusive and responsive natural resource management ensures that competition over resources does not result in violent conflict. This is vital to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

We **work with education sectors** to reduce direct violence between individuals, address structural factors that drive conflict, and support physical and mental wellbeing by challenging structural inequalities in health provision. Mental health and psychosocial support helps individuals heal, and rebuilds trust and relationships to ensure that future conflicts can be addressed peacefully.

As an international organisation we can also bring – where this is wanted and helpful in the context – **a different perspective** that complements the outlooks of local peace actors, or creates spaces for people to come together in different ways.

As we implement this strategy:

- We will integrate more into our peacebuilding work **responses to the other needs and aspirations of the communities** we serve, such as better work, equitable access to basic services, or mental health and psychosocial support. As well as responding to what communities and partners ask of us, such approaches help to sustain and entrench social cohesion, which in turn lays a stronger foundation for economic and institutional development. Delivering this goal requires stronger partnerships with those who can best work on these issues, whether among civil society, governments or the private sector.
- We will place a greater focus in our peacebuilding work on influencing those with the power, capacity or mandate to **change structures, policies and practices** in ways that support peace. With our partners, we will more consistently link the voices of those affected by violence to broader political processes and institutions, including where appropriate to national and regional peace-making efforts. We will seek to influence power-holders constructively, ensuring that we do not inadvertently reduce the scope for the partners and communities we work with to choose their own tone and approach (noting that they are often navigating challenging relationships with power). We will build and support coalitions that challenge structures and conditions that perpetuate violence. Our country strategies and our peacebuilding projects will embed such influencing priorities.



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“ The situation changed. No fights have been witnessed in the recent days. No life has been lost in the recent months. Cross-border trade is almost taking up again.”

Charles Losike, plumber, vice-chair of the Kibish water association and member of the peace committee, Lake Turkana region, Kenya



“ I was able to share my story with the members of the group, narrating the challenges my children faced, including threats and being forced to distance themselves and drop out of school. However, with ... the formation of the group, I found healing and became comfortable approaching different people, which was something I could not do before. As a result, my children returned to school, and my eldest child is now about to complete advanced secondary education.”

Spouse of ex-soldier of the Armed Forces of Rwanda, Rubavu, Rwanda

“ I now feel I have a responsibility to give my new-found openness to the people I meet in the village – to pass it along and improve our society as a whole. Peace cannot be achieved with force, but with dialogue and tolerance, and if we want a peaceful society, this is how we must always be. I now feel ready to apply the mediation skills I learned to help when tensions or conflicts arise and find a way for [people] to communicate their needs peacefully.”

Abir El Tawm Bitar, Baalbek, Lebanon



© International Alert/UN Women



Group therapy session in Rwanda to help heal the wounds of the genocide against the Tutsi, run by International Alert and ARCT-Ruhuka. © Jimmy Adam Ndayizigiye/International Alert

Goal 2: Transforming our peacebuilding partnerships

Violent conflict can be resolved sustainably only through the participation of people directly affected by it. Our work with partners in peacebuilding contexts is therefore central to our ability to contribute to positive social change.

In preparation for this strategy, we held discussions with 30 of our partners in the countries where we work, alongside a broader survey, to look afresh at what they need and want from us. We then undertook further consultations with partners on the emerging themes and choices within this strategy as they took shape.

From this we set the following strategic objectives:

- Our **partnerships will be equitable, effective, deep and diverse**. Our peacebuilding will be increasingly led and managed by our partners.
- We will **plan and design projects and advocacy together with our partners**, strengthening their capacity where needed, and agreeing and documenting joint aspirations, expectations and needs.
- We will foster and convene **connections between our partners in different contexts**, particularly regionally, supporting networks of collaboration, learning and influence on regional and global conflict issues.
- We will undertake **annual joint reflections with each of our partners** and country team progress reviews to hold ourselves to account. We will report on our partnership progress annually.

Goal 3: Integrating peace

The global trends are clear: working towards a world where no one is left behind requires, now more than ever, a **focus on the needs and aspirations of people who live in the most fragile and conflict-affected places**.

Addressing conflict opens paths for development – and protects and sustains the progress that has been made. Conversely, if development or investment interventions are not sensitive to conflict dynamics, they can do real harm.

Alert has a long track record of embedding conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding and social cohesion approaches in the work of others, and of working directly with business or on business and human rights in conflict-affected contexts. Our research has highlighted a particular need to address the risks around climate finance in fragile contexts.

We work on these issues through institutional relationships (service provision, advice or strategic partnering), joint project consortia (such as providing a peacebuilding element to a development or humanitarian intervention), conflict hubs, and conflict reporting and monitoring systems. Much of this work is with donors (including development finance institutions), implementing agencies and international NGOs.

Under this strategy, we set the goal of **significantly increasing this element of our work**. We see it as crucial to increasing the positive peace impact of interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, contributing to a more peaceful world in which no one is left behind.

Specifically, we will:

- build **strategic partnerships with international development and humanitarian organisations** open to joint programme development, consortium funding and joint delivery through our country teams and local and national peacebuilding partnership networks;
- expand **conflict-sensitivity integration hubs**, and seek to **integrate peace-positive approaches** into the programme portfolios of at least two major development agencies or development finance institutions;
- lead cross-sector coalitions to advocate for **conflict-sensitive climate action**, including climate finance;
- deepen our relationships with **private sector investors** to provide conflict-sensitive accompaniment, advice and training, where our values align, and to deliver our peacebuilding mission; and
- embed these goals in each of our **country strategies**, with each country team setting targets for new partnerships on peace-positive action that best fit the local context.

Goal 4: Making connections to advocate for global change

We will use our partnerships, and our ability to convene stakeholders across countries and sectors, to **influence positive global change** and so that **the voices of people affected by conflict** shape the decisions that affect them.

We seek to influence based on **evidence, data and learning**. Through this strategy, we will increase the proportion of our research that is aimed explicitly at influencing decision-makers on both conflict-specific and global themes.

Every conflict is different, but each also has something in common with conflicts elsewhere. Peacebuilders everywhere want to **connect with others** – to share reflections, draw lessons, and offer mutual support in a common cause. Making these connections is an important part of the value we can add as an international organisation, and a central theme of our research, publications and advocacy.

Each of our peacebuilding teams works on the **themes and issues** that matter most to addressing the root causes of violence in that context. Our global influencing work will support this as each context requires.

Meanwhile, our cross-cutting influencing approaches will centre on those themes where we see the greatest scope for Alert to contribute to systemic global change on peacebuilding issues:

- climate change and natural resource management;
- gender, including LGBTQ+ issues and masculinities; and
- peace economies – working with the private sector to advance peace.

Goal 5: An international, equitable, inclusive, sustainable and effective organisation

This strategy sets the following principles for International Alert’s organisational structure, governance and business model:

- We are **international**, making the most of our diverse international expertise and connections in a common cause.
- We put **equity** and **inclusion** at the heart of our work. As an organisation we will:
 - work to fair global standards and principles agreed and understood among us
 - take decisions within a clear and transparent framework and at the level that they affect (individual, team, organisation);
 - meaningfully include the voices of those most impacted in our decision-making, at all levels; and
 - implement more inclusive and equitable staffing models, including for thematic and functional expertise and for leadership roles.
- We are **sustainable**:
 - for our partners and communities – through long-term engagement;
 - for our staff – with a focus on wellbeing and growth;
 - financially – by 2026 we will achieve a model that no longer relies on significant core funding; and
 - for our planet – reducing our impact on the environment and being transparent about that impact.
- We are **effective**, meeting high standards in our programme delivery, partnerships, safeguarding, compliance and controls, and learning. We will invest in our people and in their diverse talents and expertise. We will strengthen our systems that support delivery and impact, manage finances and risks, allow our people and our partnerships to flourish, and ensure we fulfil regulatory and donor best practice.



A dialogue session between members of the community and police in Lumbini province as part of our Community Score Card session, which aims to improve collaboration and mutual accountability between communities and the police in Nepal. © Nireesh Chapagain/ International Alert

To fulfil these overall principles:

- We will move to a **globally-distributed staffing model**. By default, we will recruit for roles in our country teams in-country, roles in our regional teams in the region of operation, and roles in our global teams globally (wherever Alert works), except where the requirements of the job dictate otherwise. We will phase in this approach over the course of this strategy period, as roles become available. We will improve our recruitment practices to ensure that we attract strong applicants from the Global South for global jobs. We will invest in team cohesion across geographies, and in management and leadership skills, to make the most of globally-distributed teams.
- We will develop and implement a **new model for our thematic expert roles**, which have previously been based mainly in the Global North. We will consider the right balance between thematic advisory roles and global thematic programming; options for more country- and region-based thematic roles; and building expertise across wider groups of staff, including through communities of practice or expertise networks.
- We will invest in our capabilities for **collaboration and learning**, and in an organisational culture that supports these. This includes more joint programming between teams and partners across country contexts (in particular, regional programming addressing regional conflict issues); and further strengthening our practices of learning, mutual peer review, joint programme design, and internal communication. We will implement a programme of staff exchanges between Alert's teams. Alongside the mutual commitments required to foster an even stronger collaborative culture, we will develop a resourcing model that makes clear that such collaboration within Alert and with our partners is a core part of our work.
- We will redesign our **organisational planning and resource allocation processes** so that they better align with our strategic engagement with communities and partners, and are truly driven by their needs. We will test approaches for this when making country implementation plans for this new strategy in early 2024. Drawing on the lessons from this, we will embed a new approach in our annual organisational planning and budgeting for 2025.
- We will further strengthen our **internal systems and compliance frameworks and culture** to ensure we meet the highest standards for participants, partners, stakeholders and donors. We will continue to support partners' capacity to access donor funds directly. Where partners want us to act as a bridge to donor funds, we will ensure Alert offers systems and frameworks that maximise their access to high-quality funding.
- We will **be transparent about, and reduce, our impact on the environment**, implementing the recommendations of our 2022 eco-audit. We will mainstream environmental issues in our programme design approaches; implement protocols for approving flights, and the maximising of alternatives such as videoconferencing and train alternatives (e.g. in Europe); integrate eco-audit reporting into our annual report by 2025; implement energy efficiency improvements on offices and vehicle purchases; and, where possible, switch bank accounts and any reserves across the organisation to financial institutions that do not invest in fossil fuels.

Raising funds

This strategy is launched in a challenging donor context. We are deeply grateful for our partnerships with donors, which allow Alert to build peace during a challenging period for conflict globally.

Research by the Institute for Economics and Peace found that each dollar invested in peacebuilding leads to a US\$16 decline in the cost of conflict.¹⁶ We will continue to work with peacebuilders globally to **make the case for investment in peacebuilding**.

As a mission-driven organisation, our focus will always be first and foremost on the peacebuilding impact we can achieve. We will seek at least to sustain our current levels of income in a challenging funding context. As

many donors phase out core or flexible funding, and given our focus on long-term root causes, we will prioritise seeking high-quality **funding that is as long-term and flexible as possible**, and that covers the full costs of our and our partners' peacebuilding work in a sustainable way. We aim to be **sustainable without relying on significant core funding by 2026**.

We expect **institutional partnerships** (governments and multilateral institutions) to continue to provide the largest proportion of our funding. We will continue to strengthen our relationships with key institutional donors, seeking also to shape their policy approaches in ways that support sustainable peace, and to learn from each other. We will ensure that we have strong internal systems in place to manage such partnerships, including for commercial contracts, as well as traditional international NGO grant funding.

We will continue to work with non-institutional donors such as **trusts and foundations**, in particular to fund work that institutional donors are less likely to support, or to work in contexts where institutional funding is scarce.

Managing risk

We will maintain a robust, thorough and regularly-reviewed approach to **operational risk management** as we deliver this strategy. We will ensure that Alert's systems, policies, capabilities and culture meet the challenges of working in fragile and complex environments, keeping people safe from harm; maintaining high standards of compliance and controls; ensuring cyber and information security; and being ready to respond quickly and robustly to risks when they materialise.

As we implement the new approaches foreseen in this strategy, including changes to our partnerships and to our staffing and business models, we will clearly identify and mitigate the risks linked to them. We will work openly and collaboratively with our partners on risk management, supporting and learning from each other as we do so.

Securing sustainable funding for our work is a significant risk at a time of reductions in many donor budgets. We will implement a robust and realistic fundraising strategy to support the goals and partnerships set out in this strategy. We also recognise that the peacebuilding sector is relatively small overall, and therefore the vital importance of collaboration, and we remain open to merging if we can achieve greater impact through that route.

A number of **external and contextual risks** may affect the delivery of this strategy in a difficult global context. In coalition with other peace actors and through our networks of advocacy, we will **make the case for peacebuilding** in a tense and inward-looking world, measuring and demonstrating the impact achieved, and work to protect the space for civil society to operate, at a time when this is under threat in many contexts.

Afterword

This strategy comes at the most challenging period for peace in many years. We have developed it through deep engagement with our partners and among all our staff, and agreed collectively and inclusively the priorities and goals set out within it. As we deliver this strategy we will seek to follow the same guiding principles, as partners for peace, working with others towards the vision of a world without violence.

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