

Live Learning Experience: *Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19*

The Peace Agenda in the post-COVID19 reconstruction

Briefing & Learning Note
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The Live Learning Experience, hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat, with the collaboration of the World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace, brought to the table local and regional governments who presented the local governments' agenda for peace and presented the way toward the third World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace, to be held in Mexico City.

Local and regional governments and the Peace Agenda in the aftermath

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened many of the inequalities of which we were already aware, and violence is no exception. The tensions generated by the situation of emergency have been the perfect breeding ground for the proliferation of hate speech that seeks to generate confrontations, make the pain of the most vulnerable populations invisible, and use the social emergencies for political gain.

The resurgence of racism poses a major challenge to local and regional governments, which are working to protect the populations that the pandemic has made invisible by seeking to eliminate the conditions that cause and reproduce racial and origin-based discrimination.

It been precisely local and regional governments that have sought to promote dialogue with citizens in order to curb racist attitudes, working to develop a governance that puts people and those who care for our communities at the centre, and working to develop a culture of peace as the actors on the front line of recovery, ensuring that the health crisis does not lead to a social crisis.





It is the local and territorial level, therefore, the ideal setting to promote dialogue among citizens, to develop a governance that allows us to reverse the dynamics that generate violence, based on the logic of solidarity and cooperation that has been shared during the crisis. The local and territorial level will be fundamental to the renewed social contract that can support this interactive and open transformation and generate a culture of peace that is not only anchored in the approach of peace as security.

Based on the collective learning of the editions of the World Forum of Cities and Territories of Peace, as well as on UCLG's Peace Strategy, the Live Learning Experience on peace explored the peace experiences of local governments in the midst of the biggest health and social crisis of the 21st century.

How do local and regional governments think about peace in the aftermath?

Addressing inequalities will be fundamental in our recovery phase, but what mechanisms do local and regional governments need to promote inclusion? What role can accessibility towards ensuring that we leave no one behind in emergency response? What resources and partnerships can help guide and localize in the principles of inclusion?

The first question aimed at starting a conversation by asking participants to associate one word with cities and territories of peace. "Culture", "equality", and "feminism" were among the most repeated, with "solidarity", "cohesion", and "coexistence" (in Spanish and English) coming closely behind. Participants felt, very strongly, that the link between equality -be it equality among peoples, among genders, and among different cultures- was integral to the achievement of peace





What risks has the outbreak brought about for the consolidation of peace in our cities and territories?

UCLG

Racismo

domestic violence

Inequality

police brutality

Repression

Inseguridad

social exclusion, unemployment and precariousness

Pobreza

La brecha social

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Indeed, the pandemic has exacerbated many of the shortcomings of our systems, and this rings true, as well, for urban violence and for peacebuilding in our territories. Participants weighed in on the greater risks in terms of consolidation of peace in urban territories and, in line with their responses in the previous question, addressed the rise in gender-based violence, in racism and discrimination

towards vulnerable populations, and of course in inequalities, as key aspects that that could disrupt peace in our territories. Indeed, the rise unrest and the mismanagement of civil demands by institutions and police force in the pandemic could not be left unaddressed. Participants, through the use of terms such as “police brutality” or “repression”, and the events -at the time of writing the briefing- that are taking place in many cities in the United States and over the world, with people protesting unfair actions by the police, can hardly be disassociated from the worldview of participants at this point.

The final question asked participants to rate what elements should local and regional governments foster in order to ensure peace in their territories. Participants rated a human-rights approach to the policymaking in the aftermath of the pandemic, as well as moving forward with diversity, as the key responses from local and regional governments in order to develop communities of peace. Legal frameworks and sanctioning conducts were among the least well-regarded responses, with many participants commenting on how sanctioning isn’t always the solution, and arguing that perhaps it is hardly a relevant approach, since often LRGs do not have the competences to modify legal frameworks.





What type of responses should local and regional governments prioritize to foster peace beyond the outbreak?



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Building peace in our territories through the fulfilment of rights.

Setting the scene: Peace within the context of our present and our shared future

The session was introduced by stating how far our world has come in the past 75 years, and framed by stating how the current state of crisis needs to make us focus on the reconstruction, as past generations had done. The concept of peace was explored in these opening moments, in which the outcomes of the previous World Forums on Cities and Territories of Peace, which had taken place in Madrid, were showcased. Peace, as is understood by LRGs, does not mean the contrary of war, or conflicts, but rather the opposite of violence. Understanding why violence is caused, and how it flourishes in cities and territories was identified as a key issue for the LRG constituency. The world looked worse than now. It was coming out of a war, it was a situation with a universal impact that led humanity to create the UN.

The need to rethink public space and ensuring equal access was further elaborated upon at the start of the session. The role of public servants and public leaders, as





service deliverers, was also deemed critical as a way to bring citizens closer to their institutions and to bring about innovative approaches to how we co-create peace in our territories.

The narrative of the past editions of the World Forum on Urban Violence (now World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace) was shared during the introduction as a means to start the conversation, showcasing that local and regional governments understand peace not only as the lack of violence, but as a positive peace that is built on the foundation of equal access to basic services, and with human and social rights as the backbone.

The pandemic has showcased, as these experiences have introduced over the past months, the value of basic services in times of the pandemic, but in order to co-create a “positive” peace in the aftermath, equal access to public spaces, and to the city and all of its services, needs to be fostered. The reconstruction can only be done with everyone in mind, in order to ensure a peaceful future for all.

Involving communities in peacebuilding and reconstruction

The debate on peace and urban violence in our communities cannot be disconnected from precisely what they are experiencing. The live debate allowed to showcase the initiatives of local and regional governments from all over the world who were already including their citizens in the response to the outbreak, to ensure that the spikes of urban violence could be managed jointly by communities and their local leaders, and involving women, marginalised, and invisibilized populations in the recovery.

To this end, State Senator **Patricia Torres Ray** laid out how the growing inequalities between people of colour and white people, as well as the treatment of minorities in the United States by the police, had long been a factor in social unrest, with the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis being the breaking point that sparked the protests.





Said protests, she argued, can be seen as an incentive to bring about the conversation on inequalities that are running rampant, in particular throughout the United States, and highlighted how activists are essential to push boundaries, to make local and regional governments and their representatives aware of just how much is needed, still, to advance the conversation and to bring peace to our communities. The local level and activists, she argued, are part of the same mechanism that can achieve changes in the long-term, since it is at the local level that voices and experiences are connected and able to foster change.

Community-led initiatives, in particular, were highlighted as essential to the recovery by the Chief-Resilient officer of the city of Ramallah, who highlighted that only by bringing to light those solutions that stem from our people during the pandemic, and including community-led proposals in urban planning and leveraging on the skills of the populations, even during critical times, that peace could be achieved and managed successfully during the pandemic.

This human-rights approach to peace also included ensuring that people could strengthen community ties by celebrating their religious faith even during the lockdown, by ensuring religious services continued in the state of alarm.

“The work we need to do to achieve global social change is born at the local level and the world governance needs to see and acknowledge this.”

Patricia Torres Ray, **State Senator, State of Minnesota.**

Regaining trust among governments and communities, essential for the way forward

The outbreak has led to an increase in urban violence, which has engendered a situation of mistrust among citizens and their institutions. Dialogues among citizens, and among different generations, was highlighted by participants of the session, who viewed them as integral to build communities of peace and inclusion in the aftermath.

Vladimir Rodríguez, High Councillor for the Rights of the Victims, Peace, and Reconciliation of Bogotá explained how, the greatest challenge, in a city that has





often been the scenario of violent armed conflict, was to reconstruct and re-signify public spaces as spaces of peace. He laid out the “*blocks of care*” (*Manzanas de Cuidado*, in the original Spanish) initiative, that were meant for vulnerable populations to overcome dynamics of violence that are still present.

Bogotá, he argued, needed to include empathy and solidarity as key values for a peaceful coexistence, especially after violent conflicts. He argued for the value of dialogue among populations to build a culture of peace that would allow communities to look to the future and build new, emerging citizenships that were free of hate. To this end, he also called to foster resolution mechanisms that could put these dialogues into policymaking and solve conflict at the local and regional level.

“We call not for punitive justice, but for dialogical justice, to reach agreements through the channels of democracy.” Vladimir Rodríguez, High Councillor for the Rights of the Victims, Peace, and Reconciliation of Bogotá

Vasu Gounden, Executive Director, ACCORD, also laid out the importance of dialogue. As many participants before him, he viewed conflict not necessarily as a bad thing, and argued that it is conflicting views, through a peaceful resolution, that often result in positive change for our communities.

Gounden, then explained how witnessed a sharp increase in gender-based violence and civil unrest throughout Africa, and argued that the organization had worked on building capacities for peace, training people in mediation even on-line. Talking to each other, he argued, and applying facts and, were the only way in which hate speech and fake narratives could be tackled. In particular, he stated, it is essential to enter dialogue among the youth and the elderly, to involve women and people who live and work in informality in order to learn from each other and develop a more inclusive multilateralism.

“We need to motivate precisely the younger generations to carry on the torch and to build on the knowledge of the previous generations with their own capacities”. Vasu Gounden, ACCORD





Equality and access to resources, key to the recovery.

One of the key aspects to maintaining peace in our territories is equal access to services and economic resources. The pandemic has stressed our systems enough that equal access to services is a challenge, and the situations of lockdown have underscored the importance of being able to live decently even in the situation of emergency.

This was the main focus of the intervention of **Émile Gros Raymond Nakombo**, Mayor of Bangui, who pointed out the importance of local governments, and especially local communities, having access to economic resources. The inequality generated by the pandemic, he warned, is the element that puts peace most at risk, and it is necessary to have the means to maintain and care for peace so that it does not become an empty term.

Mexico City, represented by Undersecretary of Human Rights **Jaime Morales** laid out the approach of the city in the recovery, with Peace is the guiding thread to a recovery that includes all citizens. The undersecretary then argued that incorporating the dimension of care in the approach of the city is vital. The “adopt an elderly” policy implemented in the city had allowed young people to interact and help those that do not have a social network of their own

In an effort to envision ways to tackle the spikes in violence brought by the outbreak, the government launched a strategy titled “what is the city that you dream of”, aimed at the younger generations to help build a better Mexico in the aftermath, and involving them through the initiative, in an endeavour to recover the voices of the citizens through different tools. The initiative also aimed at reflecting a human rights-approach to the recovery, aiming to build back in the aftermath through the eyes of the people who live in the city.





“We have to talk to each other, listen, as friends. We cannot allow this pandemic to exclude us, to put back in place the borders that have cost many people their lives.”

Jaime Morales, Undersecretary of Human Rights of Mexico City.

The Sustainable Development Goals and peacebuilding

Urban approaches to localize the SDGs and fostering peaceful societies were among the experiences shared by participants. While it is Sustainable Development Goal 16, in particular calls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, local and regional governments are aware that only by addressing them as one, and by owning the global agendas locally, will it be able to truly foster sustainable and resilient societies.

The City of Praia, in particular, provided an example of this endeavour. The deputy mayor highlighted the work done to mainstream the SDGs in the city, to reduce inequalities in terms of access to basic services, public space, and justice. Mainstreaming the universal development agendas, he argued, meant realising the reality of work, the need for food and services in informal settlements, and working from the bottom-up to provide services to all.

“The 2030 Agenda is an important framework to rebuild after the pandemic, and we need to involve informal communities to recover better”. **Antonio Carlos López da Silva**, vice mayor of Praia.

Patrick Bwire, Program Coordinator in charge of peacebuilding at the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), presented the SDG16+ project, highlighting also the integral relationship between SDG16, inclusion, and the local development on Peace. He noted the Centre’s efforts to map the work on peace in Uganda. CECORE had worked with national, regional, and local governments to conduct a study on SDG16 on the ground, and aimed at including the most vulnerable communities and populations in order to achieve it by 2030.





Local visions to build the concept of peace

Mayor of Granollers Josep Mayoral reminded of the outcomes of the Forum on Urban Violence that took place in Madrid recalling the compromises that local leaders and stakeholders had undertaken. Mayors, Networks, and other institutions gathered to call for developing local strategies to peacebuilding, of ensuring all visions are acknowledged in the development of peace strategies, involving communities and fighting the proliferation of violence from the local level.

“A global vision is essential to build agendas for peace. We need to develop spaces for municipalism, allowing dialogue and words to be the protagonists in the construction of peace”. Josep Mayoral, Mayor of Granollers

A slightly different approach was laid out by Maria Deeva, Councillor of Volgograd, who showcased the **twinning** initiatives that her city had undertaken in the aftermath of World War II and laid out the concept of “People’s Diplomacy”. The initiative has since gone worldwide, with twin cities now being a common occurrence. Her intervention showcased how successful twinning events had allowed Volgograd to access PPE during the outbreak, and encouraged participants during the meeting to join Volgograd in the upcoming Forum of People’s Diplomacy in October 2020.

Promoting local initiatives on Peace.

The session provided an opportunity for sharing initiatives on peace by the Networks gathered within the Experience. **Sanne van Amerongen**, from VNG International showcased the UCLG Peace Prize, an award that celebrates local approaches to peace, highlighting just how critical the role of local and regional governments is in their approach to peace, not only during the pandemic but also in the aftermath, as essential actors for mediation and facilitation in conflict resolution and essential to keep the value of peace alive.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of promoting peace among our populations, and has galvanised the role LRG networks in leveraging the work of local





and regional governments. This second edition has been awarded to Aarsal, from the Lebanon in November in Durban, for its work on coexistence

Antonio Zurita, from UNDP-ART, and representing the World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace, presented the historical perspective of the Forum. Introducing it as a multi-stakeholder and multi-level meeting place with more than 20 international, national and local institutions in its organizing committee that had contributed to move the conversation on urban violence and the role that LRGs can play in fostering a culture of peace, and for ensuring that the conflicts that take place within our day-to-day lives and in the borders of our cities do not become expressions of violence.

The presentation also set the path for the third Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace, which has been postponed to 2021, and will be centred around towards cities and territories as spaces of coexistence, building on the positive definition of peace that is built from the bottom-up. The pathway towards the forum begins in June, and the Live Learning Exercise on Peace is kickstarting the events towards the physical event, which will take place in 2021. A virtual event at world level will take place in October, as a pathway to the Forum.

Cities as spaces of peace: Lessons learnt to ensure peaceful and equal cities in the outbreak.

UCLG, Metropolis, the World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace) and the partners in the session (including ACCORD, CECORE, and UNDP-ART) highlighted, over all the need to include local views in the governance of peace; argued for a human-rights approach to peace in cities; laid out the local visions on peacebuilding; highlighted the importance of the 2030 Agenda and the global goals as the framework upon which to build the recovery; and called for reducing inequalities as a means to ensure the peaceful cities of the future.

1) Equal access to basic services is critical to build communities of peace





Public services, and those that deliver them, are critical to the response to the pandemic. To this end, the positive conception of peace, built from the local level, needs to ensure that all of populations have equal access to basic services, and that those that care for our communities are also cared for. Service delivery, in turn, must be well funded, mindful of populations that are often invisible, and guarantee equality among men and women. Overall, participants made clear that inclusive, transparent, equal, service delivery is critical to link peace with local policies, reduce inequalities and the possibility of conflict turning into urban violence, and ensuring an inclusive recovery of the pandemic.

2) Building peace from the local level needs communities in the decision-making processes.

Throughout the session, participants presented the innovative measures undertaken to ensure that the people that live in our territories are involved in the recovery. From measures to enhance community dialogue, to involving citizens in the conversation on the recovery through digital technologies. Involving invisible and marginalized populations in decision-making is essential not just to reduce structural inequalities, and thus structural violence, in our territories- but is also essential in order to rethink the relationships between our institutions and our communities, the way they are perceived by populations, and the changes necessary in the aftermath. Moreover, involving women in the recovery is as essential as it was before the outbreak, since it will allow to radically address inequalities and gender violence that has been exacerbated throughout the pandemic.

3) Dialogue needs to be at the centre of any and all reconstruction efforts.

To further the peace agenda in the aftermath of the pandemic, the value of dialogues remains invaluable and links between our populations will need to rebuilt. Participants highlighted the value of engaging in intergenerational dialogues to learn from each other, and to build physical closeness in a time in which people are separated from





each other. To this end, local and regional governments are ensuring that the social fabric is maintained through solidarity and by fostering dialogues among communities, and engaging them in the COVID-19 recovery. Dialogue is a key value of the municipalist agenda, and it is through dialogue that we can transform the current models of governance, and our multilateral system to be more inclusive to everybody's needs.

4) The universal development agendas are the framework upon which the recovery needs to be based.

The pandemic has made our governments focus on what is urgent, but that cannot be an excuse to lose sight of the ambitious commitments undertaken over the last years. Throughout the session, participants highlighted the value of the universal development agendas as the framework for transformation, and the localization of the SDGs, owned by local spheres, as the necessary first step to including our citizens in the recovery, to foster peaceful responses to the outbreak and to truly rebuild our societies leaving no-one and no place behind. SDG 16, participants reminded, is more important than ever to maintain social cohesion and prevent urban violence, but it needs to be achieved with all the other goals in mind.

5) The territorial conception of peace and the importance of city diplomacy

One of the innovations that the Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace brought to the debate on Peace was the idea of peace being the opposite of war, and not violence. Thus, the local and territorial view of peace includes the full adoption of the right to the city, the fulfilment of human rights in the city, and the intersection of social, environmental, and human rights built from the ground-up. Participants reiterated their commitments to achieve this positive construction of peace by ensuring full access to basic services for all.





6) Networks are essential interlocutors to promote peacebuilding

Local and Regional Governments Networks have been promoting city diplomacy, and fostering initiatives of peace throughout the world. Their role, however, goes beyond linking the work on peace with local policies, and in the coming months and years, they will need be bringing local knowledge, to the global decision-making tables. The session has provided a first platform to showcase local views on peace, and this debate on peace in the recovery of the pandemic only just starting . It now needs to feed into the global discussions and local and regional government networks such as UCLG are critical to make this happen.

Resources

(Link to UCLG’s page with cities’ presentations, Cities for Global Health Platform, and other links of relevant material shared during session)

- UCLG Peace Prize: <https://peaceprize.uclg.org/the-prize/>
- On-line Declaration of the II World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace, “Commitment to the Agenda of Cities for Coexistence and Peace: <https://www.metropolis.org/sites/default/files/resources/COMPROMISO-AGENDA-Ciudades-de-Convivencia-y-Paz-EN.pdf>
- Center for Conflict Resolution of Uganda, home of the SDG16+ project <https://www.cecore.or.ug/>
- Website of the African Peacebuilding Coordination Programme, by ACCORD <https://www.accord.org.za/work/peacebuilding/>
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict: <https://www.gppac.net/>

