
GLOBAL THINK TANK

POSITION PAPER with Policy Recommendations

Decolonizing Peace

How can peace processes be decolonized by centering perspectives from the **Global Majority**¹ and overcoming postcolonial power structures?

KENAKO Afrika Festival 2025 / 2026

**Vorgelegt von:
Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V.**

¹ “Global Majority” refers to people of African, Asian, Indigenous, Latin American, or mixed heritage, about 85% of the world’s population. It is used as an alternative to racialized terms like “ethnic minority”, broadly indicating origins in the so called “Global South”.

Summary of Contents / Overview

Core Position - Peacebuilding is: - not neutral - shaped by colonial power structures dominated by “Global North” frameworks and institutions - Peacebuilding requires: - shift from external control to local leadership - the recognition of the Global Majority as central actors - decolonization of peacebuilding n = transformation of unequal systems, not isolation - to include intersectional and gender-responsive approaches	Definition of Peace - peace = beyond war / violence / security - it includes: social justice • equality • resilience • education • environmental justice • everyday security - dynamic, context-specific, relational - grounded in local/community-based realities
Key Problems - Western-centric definitions & institutions - marginalization of Global Majority knowledge - top-down interventions - donor dependency and limited local agency - biased measurement tools and peace indices - gap between officially proclaimed peace and lived experiences - structural inequality as a major barrier to peace	Key Demands <i>Agency</i> - local actors to lead design + implementation - strengthening community-based peace practices <i>Funding</i> - direct, flexible, long-term support - reduced conditionality + bureaucracy <i>Knowledge</i> - co-production of knowledge

• local practices and epistemologies are often overlooked: Ubuntu • storytelling • arts • dialogue etc. • Exclusion of women from formal Peace processes despite leading role in community-level peacebuilding	• recognition of Indigenous + local community systems • challenging Western dominance in narratives • Gender equality and intersectional inclusion as a core principle across all levels of peacebuilding (leadership, funding, and implementation) <i>Measurement</i> • beyond security / state indicators • inclusion of lived experiences, justice, cohesion <i>Cooperation</i> • equitable global-to-local partnerships • South-to-South exchange • participatory peace platforms
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Introduction

Contemporary peacebuilding is not neutral. It is shaped by historical and ongoing power asymmetries rooted in colonialism. Dominant international approaches often reproduce these inequalities by privileging Western knowledge systems, institutions, and priorities. At the same time, perspectives from the Global Majority are marginalized, reflecting what Edward Said (1978) conceptualized as “Othering” in knowledge production. It constructs the “Global South” as a space of instability that requires external intervention, while positioning Western knowledge as neutral and universal and superior. These power relations are also deeply gendered, as dominant peacebuilding frameworks often reproduce patriarchal assumptions and marginalize feminist and intersectional perspectives from the Global Majority.

This position paper argues that **peace can only be sustainable and just if it is fundamentally decolonized**. This requires giving more power, resources, and decision-making authority to local actors and including different, context-specific understandings of peace.

This also includes addressing socio-economic inequalities and the political production of fear, anger, and exclusion, which can fuel conflict and violence.

It presents central structural challenges in current peacebuilding systems and outlines recommendations for policymakers, funders, and peacebuilding actors.

Background and Process

This position paper was developed within the Global Think Tank of the KENAKO Africa Festival 2025/26, a collaborative platform bringing together practitioners, researchers, and civil society actors from parts of Africa and Europe. The Think Tank aims to promote a fair exchange of knowledge, collaborative problem-solving and the development of policy-relevant recommendations on decolonial peacebuilding. Practical strategies should ensure that African perspectives are central to discussions about global peace and security.

The KENAKO Africa Festival, established in 2012 in Berlin, provides the broader institutional framework for this initiative. It promotes intercultural exchange and strengthens African, Afro-diasporic, and Global Majority perspectives in public discourse. Since 2023, the Global Think Tank has extended this work by creating a structured space for transnational dialogue and reflection.

The 2025/26 edition of the festival focuses on “Decolonizing Peace” in response to ongoing global conflicts and persistent inequalities in how these are perceived and addressed. Many conflicts in the “Global South” remain underrepresented in global discourse, even though they are closely linked to colonial histories and global inequalities. This reflects broader imbalances in global governance and knowledge production. Aram Ziai (2016) points out that international development and peacebuilding often reinforce these inequalities by defining problems and solutions from a Western perspective, which strengthens dependency and limits local agency.

Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V., the founding organisation of the KENAKO Festival, invited peace practitioners, experts, and representatives to online discussions. Together the participants addressed postcolonial power dynamics and fostered inclusive, locally informed strategies.

The findings presented in this paper are based on this collaborative process.

The participants point out that the paper was written in a European institutional setting, which itself shows the power imbalances that the paper critically engages with.

Meeting Summaries

Session 1

The participants explored peace as a multidimensional concept beyond the absence of war, including social, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions. Discussions critically examined how colonial legacies and Western frameworks shape dominant understandings of peace, often marginalizing perspectives from the Global Majority. The importance of local and community-based knowledge systems, such as Ubuntu, was emphasised.

Session 2

The concept of peace was further refined to include social justice, resilience, education, and the capacity to address structural violence and inequality. Participants questioned who defines peace and whose interests are served, highlighting the influence of governments, international actors, and former colonial powers, while noting the underrepresentation of local and community-based perspectives. Existing measurement tools, such as the Global Peace Index, were criticised for their Western bias in terms of its state-centric and security-focused indicators, which tend to privilege formal institutional stability over structural violence, inequality, and lived experiences of insecurity. Aram Ziai's (2016) work helps explain this critique, showing that global frameworks often reflect Western perspectives and therefore fail to capture local realities. As a result, participants emphasized the importance of bottom-up² approaches.

Session 3

Discussions focused on practical pathways for decolonial peacebuilding, stressing the need to centre local and community-based knowledge, leadership, and agency. Key recommendations included strengthening regional cooperation, integrating social and environmental justice, and valuing community-based everyday practices such as storytelling and the arts. Participants also called for reforms in international funding structures to enable flexible, long-term support and genuine local ownership. Sustainable peacebuilding must be grounded in perspectives from the Global Majority and strengthen local capacities.

Problem Definition: Peace as a Postcolonial Structure

This definition of peace emerged from the discussions of the Global Think Tank and synthesises the participants' perspectives:

Peace is understood as a complex, multilayered, and context-dependent concept that goes far beyond the absence of war or direct violence. It refers to the active presence of social justice, resilient institutions, safety, education, and the capacity of societies to withstand and recover from crises. It extends beyond state relations to include everyday human interactions, relationships with nature and the digital sphere, as well as efforts to address structural inequality, discrimination, exploitation and patriarchal power relations. It also requires critical engagement with historical (including colonial) social, economic, and political power structures.

² Bottom-up approaches are processes where local communities lead decision-making and design solutions based on their own needs and lived experiences, rather than external actors defining them from above ("top-down").

Ultimately, peace is not a fixed state but an ongoing and dynamic process that enables individuals, communities, regions, and nature to coexist in mutual respect. It encompasses human needs, social justice, education, protection, and resilience, and cannot be reduced to a single definition.

This participant-generated definition can be further complemented by emphasizing that sustainable peace also requires a sufficient socio-economic foundation that enables all individuals to live in dignity and freely develop their potential. It also depends on an intrinsic belief in the equal worth of all human beings as a condition for sustaining peace. Such an understanding implies decolonial ways of thinking and the recognition of Global Majority perspectives as fundamentally equal and central to peacebuilding.

However, dominant international frameworks still tend to define peace in a narrow, technical way, focusing on stability, institutional reform, and security. These frameworks are not neutral. They are shaped by global power inequalities that influence who defines peace, whose knowledge is recognized, and who benefits from peace interventions. Aram Ziai (2016) highlights that international peacebuilding is largely designed, funded, and evaluated by actors in the “Global North”. As a result, tools such as global peace indices, funding mechanisms, and policy frameworks often rely on Western knowledge systems and fail to reflect local realities.

Despite references to broader concepts such as “positive peace” by Johan Galtung (1969), many policy frameworks still reduce peace to the absence of armed conflict. This is often defined through ceasefires, elections, and reforms of state institutions. However, this approach can dismiss deeper issues such as inequality, injustice, and the long-term impact of past violence.

Scholarly work in peace and conflict studies highlights that dominant peace frameworks are historically shaped by unequal global hierarchies in knowledge production (Cordula Dittmer (2018)). As a result, perspectives from formerly colonized regions are often marginalized, despite these contexts being most affected by violent conflict and external intervention.

Global peace governance reflects these asymmetries. Key institutions, funding structures, and measurement tools such as the Global Peace Index are largely based in the “Global North”. This is further reflected in Achille Mbembe’s (2001/2003) concept of postcolonial governance, which shows how colonial power structures persist in contemporary systems of security and control, including questions of who has the authority to define peace or war, and whose deaths are recognised as requiring a response. This shapes not only how peace is defined, but also who is seen as deserving it.

Scholars such as Aram Ziai (2016) describe how this reproduces patterns of “othering” and legitimizes external intervention, while devaluing local knowledge and agency.

In line with this, participants of the Global Think Tank emphasized the importance of generating independent knowledge systems and data that is grounded in local realities. They argued that dominant peace frameworks often fail to reflect the social, cultural and economic contexts of the Global Majority and reproduce colonial legacies of racism and structural inequality in global peace definitions.

Concepts such as Ubuntu, a Southern African philosophy meaning “a person is a person through others” (“I am because we are”), show a relational understanding of peace based on community, interdependence, and collective responsibility. Scholars such as Timothy Murithi (2008) show that African philosophical frameworks, including Ubuntu ethics, provide important foundations for peacebuilding design, evaluation, and governance, and are not only cultural ideas. These frameworks differ from individualist and state-centered peace models that are dominant in Western peacebuilding discourse.

This critique of knowledge hierarchies is further supported by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), who argues that colonial power persists through the dominance of Western languages and epistemologies (knowledge systems), shaping what is recognised as legitimate knowledge. This is directly relevant to peacebuilding: when negotiations, funding applications, and evaluation frameworks are conducted in languages such as English, French, or German, local actors must translate not only their words but also their understanding of peace into these colonial languages. Thereby important meaning, context, and authority can be lost. In this sense, peacebuilding frameworks are shaped not only by politics but also by the knowledge systems that colonialism produced.

At the same time, research and practice show that sustainable peace often emerges from local, everyday practices rather than external frameworks. Concepts such as “everyday peace” by Roger Mac Ginty (2014), highlight informal community strategies for coexistence, trust-building, and conflict transformation. Empirical examples from community-based reconciliation and sociotherapy approaches, for instance in Rwanda and Liberia, demonstrate the relevance of locally rooted forms of social repair.

Historical and contemporary examples, particularly Rwanda, illustrate locally grounded approaches to peace that differ from hierarchical, externally designed models. At the same time, Rwanda’s post-conflict stability has also involved significant restrictions on political opposition. This shows that locally rooted reconciliation efforts can exist alongside political control, and that no single case should be seen as a simple or fully positive model.

Wangari Maathai, who received the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her work linking environmental protection, democracy and peace through the Green Belt Movement (1977), demonstrates how peace is deeply connected to environmental justice, community empowerment, and grassroots action. Her work shows that sustainable peace emerges through the protection of local ecosystems and collective responsibility, making her a key example of decolonial peace in practice.

Despite growing recognition of these perspectives, structural inequalities continue to shape peacebuilding systems. Funding mechanisms often require local actors to adopt dominant Western terminology and frameworks, reinforcing existing asymmetries in knowledge production and institutional dependence.

Participants of the meetings critically reflected on these dynamics by raising the questions of who defines peace, who benefits from these definitions, and whose voices are excluded. The example of Uganda illustrated this tension, where official narratives of peace coexist with continued experiences of insecurity and inequality at community level. They further emphasized that dominant peace agendas are shaped by powerful states, international organizations, and former colonial powers, while local communities remain marginalized in decision-making processes. This highlights that international involvement, while central to global peace governance, is often shaped by unequal power relations between international and local actors.

In sum, current peacebuilding systems reflect global inequalities rooted in colonial histories. These asymmetries shape how peace is defined, measured, and implemented, and they determine whose knowledge and experiences are prioritized in global peace governance.

Our Position

We argue that:

- **Peacebuilding must shift from externally driven interventions to locally led processes.**
- **Global Majority perspectives are not complementary but central to redefining peace.**
- **Without addressing colonial continuities in knowledge, funding and governance, peacebuilding will remain ineffective and unjust.**

This position does not argue that international involvement is inherently illegitimate; rather, it argues that the terms, conditions and authority must be fundamentally renegotiated with Global Majority actors as equal partners, not as recipients.

Pathways, Demands and Recommendations

To apply decolonial peacebuilding in practice, structural changes are required across policy, funding, knowledge systems and practice.

These changes require action across micro (community and civil society), meso (national and regional institutions), and macro (international organisations and donors) levels, involving different but interconnected actors.

1. Strengthen Local Agency and Everyday Peace Practices

- Shift decision-making power in peace processes to local communities and civil society actors
- Ensure that local actors lead the design, implementation, and evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives
- Move international actors from directive roles to supportive and facilitative functions
- Recognise and strengthen everyday practices such as community education, dialogue, solidarity, mediation, storytelling, arts, and collective problem-solving as central to bottom-up peacebuilding
- Embed peacebuilding in education, social relations, care, and well-being
- Ensure that local leadership is gender-responsive and includes women, youth, and marginalized groups, recognising that gender equality is a core dimension of decolonial peacebuilding rather than an add-on

2. Reform Funding Structures

- Increase direct funding to local organisations
- Ensure flexible and long-term funding aligned with local priorities
- Simplify application and reporting procedures and adapt them to local contexts
- Remove or reduce funding conditionalities that limit local agency
- Replace externally imposed reporting requirements with locally designed accountability systems, such as community oversight and South-to-South peer review

3. Transform Knowledge Systems and Narratives

- Integrate Indigenous, cultural, ecological and community-based knowledge systems
- Recognise relational, spiritual and context-specific understandings of peace as equally valid
- Co-produce research, data and evaluation with local actors
- Challenge dominant narratives that portray non-Western societies as passive or conflict-prone
- Strengthen South-to-South cooperation and regional knowledge exchange

4. Reframe Peace Measurement and Evaluation Systems

- Critically reassess existing peace indices for Western and state-centric bias
- Move beyond security-focused and institutional stability indicators
- Include lived experiences of justice, safety, social cohesion and environmental relations
- Develop co-created, context-sensitive evaluation frameworks with local actors

5. Ensure Equitable Global–Local Cooperation

- Guarantee meaningful participation of Global Majority actors in global peace processes
- Establish multidimensional dialogue platforms connecting local communities, policymakers, and international institutions
- Recognise cultural and participatory practices (e.g. storytelling, music, rituals) as integral to peacebuilding
- Recognise and support existing African peace infrastructures, including the African Union Peace and Security Council and ECOWAS mechanisms, as key rather than secondary actors in continental peace processes

Conclusion

In summary, sustainable and just peace cannot be achieved through standard solutions or top-down approaches rooted in Western frameworks. As the problem definition shows, dominant international peace systems often reinforce colonial power structures, marginalize local knowledge, and use narrow indicators that ignore social justice and lived experiences. These structural imbalances reduce the effectiveness and credibility of peacebuilding efforts, especially from the Global Majority.

Insights from participatory dialogues, as reflected in the three meetings, demonstrate that decolonising peace requires a fundamental shift in how peace is defined, governed, and practised. This includes redistributing decision-making power to local actors, integrating local and Indigenous knowledge systems as equal sources of expertise, and transforming how peace is measured and legitimised. It also requires strengthening everyday, community-based practices of peace and ensuring that global peace processes are co-produced across local, national and international levels.

Taken together, peace can be decolonized by shifting authority, knowledge production, and evaluation systems away from Western-dominated frameworks towards equitable, context-sensitive and locally grounded approaches.

Progress towards decolonised peacebuilding therefore requires not only a shift in principles, but also in how success is evaluated in practice. This includes concrete indicators such as the share of peacebuilding funding directed to local organisations, the representation of Global Majority actors in peace negotiation leadership, and the extent to which communities are involved in evaluating their own conditions rather than relying solely on external indices. Without such mechanisms of accountability, decolonial peacebuilding risks remaining purely aspirational; with them, it gains stronger grounding in practice and implementation.

The inclusion of perspectives from the Global Majority is therefore not an add-on, but a structural precondition for overcoming postcolonial power relations and rethinking peace processes at all levels.

Ultimately, the evidence underscores that peace is a dynamic, relational and context-dependent process. It emerges when local actors are empowered, everyday practices are valued, and structural inequalities are addressed. By bringing together academic knowledge and lived experience, more sustainable, inclusive and decolonial peace pathways can be developed.

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