



## UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

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### **Local Peace Committees Contribute to Social Cohesion and Prevent Violence**

For Immediate Release

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(Washington)—In *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding*, a new volume published by the U.S. Institute of Peace, Andries Odendaal contends that local peacebuilding is a necessary aspect of a national peacebuilding strategy. Peace forged at the national level can be strengthened by community-level peacebuilding efforts, and investment at the local level lays the foundation for social cohesion and effective governance.

Odendaal draws on extensive field experience in 11 countries—including contexts as divergent as South Africa, Ghana, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, and Nepal—to research the connections between local and national peace processes, in particular as “infrastructures for peace,” where ties between local peace committees (LPCs) and national peace agreements have been formalized. LPCs provide a forum for the collective local leadership of a community to facilitate dialogue and build consensus, and infrastructures for peace connect them to national peacebuilding processes and facilitate support and resources.

“Peace, for communities, invariably means more than the settlement of the major national issues,” explains Odendaal. Local conflicts do not necessarily replicate the dominant sources of conflict at the national level; they have their own histories, conditions, and complexities. Sustainable national peace requires sufficient ownership at the local level, and local peace committees (LPCs) act as a building block for national agreements by providing a community forum for engagement and dialogue.

“LPCs have sufficiently demonstrated their potential to prevent or reduce violence in post-agreement contexts and promote social reconstruction,” says the author. “Peace infrastructures can legitimize these committees’ efforts by ensuring sufficient political legitimacy for local peacebuilding; allocating responsibility and leadership to a broad range of individuals; providing specialist support for dialogue, mediation, and violence prevention; and ensuring sufficient linkage between stakeholders and resources.”

Such efforts are still vulnerable to national and international political conditions, complex relations with public institutions, and fluctuations in international support. Despite these challenges, Odendaal praises the contributions of LPCs to peacebuilding. “This approach creates the political space for local peacebuilding and leverages the collective resources of a society in the pursuit of the stated peace objectives. More importantly, it goes about its task in a manner that strengthens the legitimacy of the peacebuilding agenda.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Andries Odendaal is a senior associate at the Centre for Mediation in Africa at the University of Pretoria and an independent conflict transformation specialist. Among his previous positions, he was a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace from 2009–10 and a senior trainer and program coordinator at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town. He was a regional coordinator of the Eastern Cape Peace Committee in South Africa (1993–94) and has also served on the expert roster of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recover of the UN Development Programme.

## **ABOUT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE**

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan conflict management center created by Congress to prevent and mitigate international conflict through nonviolent means. USIP saves lives, increases the government's ability to deal with conflicts before they escalate, reduces government costs, and enhances national security. USIP is headquartered in Washington, DC. To learn more, visit [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org).

### **A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding**

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*A Crucial Link*  
*Questions and Answers with the Author*

Andries Odendaal answers questions about his new book *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding*. Odendaal explains local peace committees and infrastructures for peace, the conditions under which they are successful, and how they can contribute to a reduction in violent conflict.

**What is a local peace committee?**

A local peace committee (or LPC) is an inclusive forum operating at the subnational level that provides a platform for the collective local leadership of a community to accept joint responsibility for building peace in that community. LPCs can exist at the district, municipality, town, or village level. Although the word “committee” implies some kind of formal or authoritative decision-making body, these types of groups generally operate more as loose spaces or forums for dialogue and consensus building. The term “committee” is commonly used to describe these groups, but it should not be taken too literally. These committees typically include representatives from all political parties, civil society, religious institutions, business networks, and government sectors.

LPCs can have many different tasks depending on the context, but generally they work to establish a minimum level of social cohesion, encourage collaboration on urgent tasks, and prevent violence. While they are not meant to be an alternative to local government structures, they can build consensus and community stability through facilitating dialogue and mediation.

**What is an infrastructure for peace?**

Also known as *peace architecture*, infrastructures for peace are systems for coordinating and supporting peace processes. They consciously link the local and national spheres and the formal and informal sectors of society. The infrastructure entails structures and procedures to enable the task of building peace, as well as the capacity to access and leverage relevant networks and resources within that society and externally. LPCs are an aspect of a peace infrastructure.

The focus of the book is on LPCs, but as an aspect of a formal infrastructure for peace. There are many examples of local peace committees that operate informally and without linkage to each other or to national processes. This book focuses on LPCs that form part of an official infrastructure for peace.

**What are the components of an infrastructure for peace?**

Typically an infrastructure will consist of (1) a national multistakeholder body that exercises oversight of the infrastructure, facilitates communication with and between peace committees, and provides political support to peace committees; (2) an administrative department that provides logistic and financial support to peace committees (which, in some cases, have been formalized into a dedicated government ministry); and (3) peace committees at various levels: national, provincial, and local.

The existence of an infrastructure further facilitates the flow of reliable information between these levels.

### **What are some examples or cases studies of infrastructures for peace that include local peace committees?**

In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 identified the transformation of policing as a peacebuilding priority. In all the districts of Northern Ireland, District Policing Partnerships were established to facilitate dialogue between local communities and the police. Their task has been to build consensus on local policing priorities in light of the severe distrust of the police.

Sierra Leone has used local peace committees to manage tensions during elections.. During the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007 and 2008, just a few years since the end of the civil war and the 1999 Lomé Peace agreement, there was international concern that the elections might be a catalyst for a return to war. However, they were relatively peaceful and succeeded in a transition of power. While many factors were at play, credit is due in part to the collaboration between national and local “code of conduct monitoring committees.” The national parties negotiated a code of conduct and monitored its implementation while local committees took responsibility for peace in their districts. They managed to resolve a number of potentially serious conflicts through timely interventions. The remarkable aspect of their performance was that, at the time, there was no other public institution with sufficient credibility and capacity to fulfill this role.

In South Africa local peace committees were established to prevent violence while negotiations were continuing between national actors. The LPCs could not prevent all violence, but had been instrumental in containing the spread of violence through mediating local agreements and monitoring potential violent events.

### **Why local peacebuilding? Why is a national peace accord not sufficient in establishing peace and reducing violent conflict?**

Conditions at the local level in the aftermath of violent conflict often encourage rather than discourage ongoing violence. Conflict management institutions are often damaged or rendered dysfunctional. Whether in pursuit of interests that are shared by substantial sections of a community, or whether for more opportunistic reasons, local actors exploit the absence of authority and resort to violence. Furthermore, the occurrence of violence has a devastating impact on local communities; it ruptures the social fabric of a community. Extensive violence not only deepens polarizations to the point where collaboration is almost impossible, but alters long-held customs and practices. Social reconstruction at the local level in the aftermath of violence therefore poses particularly complex and difficult challenges. An aspect of this challenge is the deeply emotional and personal nature of conflict in close-knit communities. On the whole, because of the extensive damage done to social and political institutions and personal relationships, the task of peacebuilding at the local level cannot be achieved by barking instructions from the top. It requires specific and focused interventions.

For local communities, peace invariably means more than the settlement of the major national issues. It does not mean that local communities are disinterested in national issues; rather, it means that local, concrete issues coupled with day-to-day survival and coexistence are more immediate. Peace is therefore inextricably linked to the absence of violence, economic survival, the healing of family and community, the settlement of local disputes, and the reliability of government institutions.

As far as LPCs are concerned, the peace they can realistically contribute to relates to an end to the violence suffered in the past; a prevention of the occurrence or recurrence of violence; an acknowledgement of the local patterns of exclusion and discrimination that have to be transformed; a commitment to collaborate in that transformation; and joint action in dealing with the most threatening and urgent problems facing the community.

### **When can we consider a local peacebuilding committee to be successful?**

Peace will have been built by LPCs if, in a specific context, incidents of violence are reduced or stopped; and if former protagonists collaborate in local initiatives to stabilize, rebuild, and transform their communities. Peace will also have been achieved when governance and development can take place free from the debilitation of excessive social or political polarization.

### **How do peace infrastructures actually function? What methods and approaches do they use that are effective?**

Formal peace infrastructures support LPCs in four ways: (1) by legitimizing the pursuit of peace at all levels, including the local level; (2) by allocating responsibility for violence prevention and peacebuilding to a specific collection of persons, including individuals trusted across a broad spectrum of society to take leadership in peacebuilding; (3) by ensuring that LPCs have access to specialist support in facilitating dialogue and violence prevention; and (4) by ensuring that sufficient linkage takes place between relative stakeholders and resources.

## Praise for *A Crucial Link*

“Odendaal impressively distills a wide variety of experiences with local peace committees and explains the complex interplay between national and local, formal and informal actors in an environment where conflicting groups can work together to forestall violence and take the first steps in what will be a lengthy peacebuilding process. He rightly stresses the importance of ownership of peace processes at the local level as a key condition for success and provides ample evidence for how this local ownership can be achieved. *A Crucial Link* is a must-read for peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers.”

—**Nicole Ball**, Center for International Policy

“Odendaal draws on his deep experience as well as broad comparative research to identify lessons about when and how local level peace committees contribute to national level peacebuilding. This book is an important resource for practitioners and researchers alike working to improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding.”

—**Diana V. Chigas**, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

"Exploring the connection between frameworks for peacebuilding at both the government and local levels, *A Crucial Link* underscores the importance of understanding peace processes as multilayered and complex, cross-cutting all levels of society. A valuable addition to course reading lists, this volume rightly emphasizes the need for grassroots ownership of peacebuilding processes and provides examples of successes where governmental bodies have collaborated with NGOs and local entities for greater overall effectiveness."

—**Landon Hancock**, Center for Applied Conflict Management, Kent State University

“Odendaal’s well-conceived and well-crafted book on global experiences with local peace committees presents cutting-edge comparative knowledge and practitioner lessons on local-level conflict resolution. This balanced and carefully researched book makes the case that international conflict resolvers must focus intently at the local level for conflict prevention in volatile transitions. This book is highly relevant for practitioners, scholars, and students of conflict resolution at a time when so many countries experiencing volatile transitions are in deep need of comparative lessons and international support for local-level processes to prevent violence and build peace.”

—**Timothy D. Sisk**, Center for 21st Century Global Governance, University of Denver

“A convincing case for the centrality of local peace initiatives in securing the sustainability of national peace agreements. Odendaal provides a lucid practitioner’s perspective on the process of local peacebuilding and critically reflects on the interconnections between the local and national peace processes. He combines personal experiences as a peacemaker with a thorough review of comparable international experience to provide both a conceptual mapping of the challenges of local peacebuilding and nuanced assessment of the practical lessons that can be drawn from these varied experiences.”

—**Hugo van der Merwe**, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

“This comparative study comes at the right moment, as many countries simply lack the capacity, structures, and mechanisms to deal with increased violent conflict. Through

experiences from dozens of countries, Odendaal convincingly describes how local peace committees have contributed to preventing violence and promoting peaceful coexistence. An essential lesson is that local peacebuilding should be an integral aspect of a national peacebuilding strategy, and *A Crucial Link* optimizes the linkage between local and national levels, and between stakeholders that are prepared to give peace a chance. This book deserves to be read by many, while the described approach deserves a fair chance in many more countries.”

—**Paul van Tongeren**, International Civil Society Network on Infrastructures for Peace