



50 YEARS OF CONFLICT  
TRANSFORMATION

Berghof Foundation

# Strategic Priorities 2022-25

## **About the Berghof Foundation**

The Berghof Foundation is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation supporting people in conflict in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace. For 50 years, we have worked to bring people in conflict together and enable them to find ways to live peacefully. We engage with all relevant state and non-state actors to support dialogue, mediation and negotiation processes.

Grounded in a nexus of practice, learning and research, our work spans many regions and societies, encompassing conflicts between and within states, whether new or entrenched. We also work to address underlying social grievances which, if ignored, deepen divisions and inflame tensions. Our work is underpinned by the principles of partnership, inclusivity, sustainability and local ownership.

The Berghof Foundation is known internationally for its longstanding and innovative work in conflict regions, its cutting-edge research, and its peace education work. We have worked in over 50 countries to promote peace, research trends and solutions, and enable conflict parties to move toward sustainable peace.

## **Our Vision**

*A world changing for the better through constructive conflict transformation.*

Even in the midst of destruction, social and political conflict can develop forces of positive change, when people engage with each other constructively and together seek inclusive and peaceful ways to address the grievances and issues that divide them.

## **Our Mission**

*To create space for conflict transformation.*

We bring people in conflict together. We enable and support learning processes that inspire the development of new perspectives, relationships and behaviour, thus opening possibilities for addressing conflict and finding ways of living together peacefully.

## Foreword

In October 2021, the Berghof Foundation celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Berlin. Founded in a divided country and continent at the height of the Cold War, Berghof's purpose was to reduce sources of tension and improve dialogue.

To commemorate the occasion, we published a book entitled *50 years of Conflict Transformation*. It is available online, and I would especially commend the interview with Johannes Zundel, the son of our founder, who provides the background and an overview of Berghof's history.

Though the last half-century has witnessed vast changes in every aspect of life, including the nature of threats to peace and also in the ways Berghof carries out its work in many parts of the world, our organisation's overall purpose of conflict transformation remains the same.

Over the years, Berghof has built up a truly unique combination of activities and expertise – i) operational peace support in all its forms, ii) peace education and learning, and iii) conflict research. Each of these areas complements and contributes to our work in other areas.

Berghof has worked to adapt to a digitalised world in which mass disinformation and hate speech have become hallmarks; to a planet facing ecocide through climate change and pollution; to the uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic; and to dramatic changes in the status and postures of the world superpowers.

During its five decades of intensive work, Berghof has built up a solid reputation in two broad areas. The first is its intellectual and practical competence; the second is the ethical underpinnings that lie behind its work. For Berghof staff, peace has always signified much more than the absence of violent conflict, and this is why such emphasis is placed on dealing systematically with the complex structural or root causes of conflict in all their forms.

Working on a number of mediation and peace building tracks, Berghof constantly analyses evolving conditions in the countries and regions where it operates. And then it puts its ideas into effect using a wide variety of approaches and techniques, including grassroots reconciliation and peace education, participatory research and policy reviews, and high-level dialogue and mediation support. The aim is to tackle the underlying causes of conflicts – human rights violations, exclusion and discrimination, as well as manipulation of historical narratives – thereby reducing tensions and transforming conflicts.

During the coming years, Berghof has decided – without diminishing the work and expertise built up in its traditional core topics – to focus on six additional thematic areas: i) Climate change and conflict transformation; ii) Engaging with protest movements to strengthen non-violent strategies; iii) Inclusive governance and accountability to mitigate corruption and other economic drivers of conflict; iv) Digital revolution and its impact on our work; v) Dealing with the past in conflict transformation; vi) The role of women and gender in conflict transformation and mediation.

Our analysis of global trends leads us to believe that the work of mediation and peacebuilding organisations – including Berghof and our sister institutions, with many of whom we are

intensifying our collaboration – will remain absolutely critical. The current weakening of the multilateralism and of the UN as global preeminent global peacemaker – a trend we very much hope will be reversed, though this largely depends on the behaviour of the permanent members of the Security Council, and the current outlook on that score is not very encouraging – inevitably means that complementary forms of mediation and expertise in dialogue support will need to help fill the void. Challenges of this scale provide Berghof with the responsibility to step up its support for peace and human rights, to help vulnerable societies, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

As we worked to prepare our Strategic Plan for the next five years, we witnessed dramatic setbacks to peace and prosperity in a number of the countries where Berghof focusses a large portion of its attention: Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Lebanon – while the peace processes and humanitarian situations in other priority countries for us such as Yemen and Syria continue to deteriorate. The enormity of the human suffering in these countries, and by extension the instability in their respective regions, means we need to redouble our efforts in all of these places in the coming years, fully recognising the lengthy time frames that may be required before meaningful progress is achieved.

We are in the process of scaling up our activities in as many areas as possible, while seeking wider and deeper collaboration with new partners. We immensely appreciate the support of our principal backers which enables us to accomplish all this.



Andrew Gilmour

Executive Director      24 January 2022

# The Berghof approach

Our approach is summarised in our overall mission, *creating space for conflict transformation*. We support the people and processes that seek to transform destructive conflicts into nonviolent social and political forms of solving competing interests. Our role is to offer policy advice, inspiration, knowledge and methodological and technical support to enable people to find their own paths away from violence towards sustainable peace.

We believe that transforming conflict requires sustained activities that address the deep-rooted structural and cultural sources of violent behaviour. It requires the involvement of all actors affected by conflict. We strive for trusted, long-term partnerships with local actors to ensure ownership and collaborate with a broad range of actors to enhance the effectiveness of our engagement.

Our work is solidly grounded in a nexus of practice, learning and research. To ensure best possible support to parties in conflict, our operational engagement and activities are informed by reflective learning, innovative and collaborative research.

There is no one-size-fits-all panacea – every conflict has its unique characteristics. Drawing on half a century’s worth of experience, we use a variety of approaches – mediation and negotiation support, dialogue approaches and facilitation, inclusion and participation, collaborative research, and peace education – and engage at different levels of society. Be it at the grassroots, working with intermediary organisations, or at the leadership level, we carefully choose the most promising approach for our contribution to maximise impact and sustainability. Where appropriate, we work on multiple levels – or tracks – simultaneously with a view to seeing how progress on one might help resolve an impasse on another.



# Three main fields of activity: Practice—Learning— Research

Supported by a team of advisors, our operational work is organised in three complementary fields of activity:

## 1 Practice: Regional peace support

We engage in hands-on, on-the-ground activities that support conflict transformation in around twenty specific countries and regions. We have carried out activities in the Middle East, Caucasus, Germany, Afghanistan, Turkey, Latin America, South- and South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa for many years, allowing us to build trust and deep engagement with local partners.

Over the next years, we seek to expand our activities in regions and countries where we already work, as well as respond to and pursue new opportunities where our engagement could have significant impact.

## 2 Learning: Global learning for conflict transformation



Peace Education Summer Camp in Jordan, Image: Berghof Foundation

In a world of growing uncertainty, people's need for orientation is increasing. We provide inspiration and settings for joint learning processes based on our conviction that learning

together is a key to achieving sustainable peace. We develop materials and innovative approaches for peace education, and offer training to people grappling with conflicts.

Beyond peace education, peer exchange networks are another important aspect of our learning work. We seek to enable resistance and liberation movements to engage substantively in de-escalation and peace processes, as well as the post-war political space. We also foster a network of faith-based mediators to explore the interface of religion, mediation and peacebuilding.

To broaden our impact, we will convert our experience and expertise into online media and curricula and enlarge our portfolio of trainings and facilitated courses to enable peace practitioners to enhance their skills.

### 3 Research: Conflict transformation research

Internationally recognised for pioneering participatory research, we conduct cutting-edge research that enables us to analyse the drivers of conflict and peace, inform policy debates, and identify solutions.

We will continue to build on the strength of our collaborative and participatory research methods. To support our in-country work and influence policy-making on the national and international stage, we centre our research around three thematic streams: (1) violence prevention with a focus on community resilience towards violent extremism; (2) peace process design with a focus on better understanding the conditions and effects of inclusivity and participation in peace processes; and (3) post-war reconciliation and peacebuilding with a focus on the political transformation of armed groups and the reintegration experiences of female ex-combatants.



Workshop participants at Azraq refugee camp, Jordan, Image: Berghof Foundation

## Three strategic goals

Our overarching strategic goals result from a deep, often systemic analysis of the environment in which we work and our confidence in the strengths of our long-term approach.

### I Enhance and expand the practice of constructive conflict transformation in key conflict settings

In light of growing spread and fragmentation of conflict, our unique approach to conflict transformation will be vital and we will enhance the following four focal areas:

#### 1 Mediation and negotiation support

Mediation and negotiation support from third parties are critical in the preparation of – as well as during and after – peace processes. While originally the domain of the UN and a few states, there has been fast-growing need for additional mediation and negotiation support and an increase in capacity among a number of specialised INGOs. These include Berghof, which has a

track record of supporting peace processes from Afghanistan and Ethiopia, to Sri Lanka and Yemen.

We will continue supporting official processes (track 1), while also facilitating more flexible formats (track 1.5). We will engage with all key actors, including both armed and peaceful opposition groups, provide

training and coaching of track 1 and 2 mediators, and strengthen insider mediators. We will offer policy advice on mediation and negotiation support to mediation teams and other experts, and contribute to the advancement of mediation concepts and approaches. In particular, we will address the intersection of mediation and constitution building, mediation and gender, and mediation and faith-based actors, as well as challenges in asymmetric negotiation processes.



Dr. Habiba Sarābi speaking at the Intra-Afghan Conference for Peace, Image: Berghof Foundation



## 2 Dialogue approaches and facilitation

Informal high-level dialogues are increasingly recognised by state actors as a useful tool to generate new ideas for solving complex conflicts. They can provide flexible and complementary support to official peace negotiations, and help conflicting parties and communities to re-establish communication and trust.

Our work on broad-based national dialogues, innovative community-based dialogue processes as well as on history dialogues to transform the narratives of deeply divided societies, has made us one of the leading organisations in this area.

We will continue to develop the concepts, practice and tools of dialogue and dialogue facilitation further, with specific interest in the facilitation of regional and cross-border dialogues, and broad-based inclusive dialogue processes. In addition, we will also strengthen the work at the intersection of dialogue and mediation processes.

## 3 Inclusion and participation

Inclusive peace process design and mechanisms that allow for the effective participation of a broad range of actors beyond the main warring parties are needed for any peace to be sustainable. Advancing knowledge on the timing and modalities of inclusive participation in peace processes is key. We will continue our collaborative research, capacity building, policy advice and practical engagement with marginalised social sectors and ‘hard-to-reach’ actors, including women, armed actors, nonviolent social movements and traditional community leaders. We will also increase our work with youth with the aim of supporting more constructive engagement based on the huge untapped potential of youth.



Young people coming together at the Step Forward workshop in Sukhum/I, Image: Yana Bzhania

## 4 Peace education

When disinformation fuels hatred and violence, conflicts polarise society, and peace is threatened, peace education is an urgently needed response.

We promote peace education by organising online and offline trainings, workshops and direct encounters, developing curricula and multimedia learning materials as well as cooperating with ministries, universities and schools to integrate peace education systematically into broader education plans and practice.

Our work in this area is based on decades of experience inside Germany. Over the next three years, we will continue to promote peace education in Germany and elsewhere in Europe – touching on topics from disinformation and conspiracy theories to polarisation and radicalisation – as well as in conflict regions, where we develop learning components for refugees and trainers.

We will also deepen the theoretical background of our peace education approaches and integrate the experiences from other related fields, such as education on sustainable development, climate change or human rights.

### II Develop and mainstream six new thematic areas related to the challenges and opportunities of the current global context

We have identified six additional focal areas that will be of increasing strategic importance for our field in the coming years, which we are looking to partner on with actors who have specialised in those areas:

#### 1 Climate change and conflict transformation

While a strong international climate change community has emerged over the past decades, there is relatively little interaction between the climate and peacebuilding sectors. We aim to contribute to bridging this gap and engage with climate change actors and experts to develop joint policy approaches and effective projects on the ground.

We will strengthen accessible conflict analysis by ensuring that an understanding of climate change, environmental degradation and natural resource dispute dynamics are meaningfully integrated.

Peace mediation and negotiation processes can be an opportunity to discuss and agree on approaches to sustainable management of natural resources and to national coping strategies regarding climate change and environmental degradation. Working together to mitigate the effects of climate change and resource scarcity is also an opportunity to collaborate across

conflict lines, and can help sustain post-conflict stability by providing an incentive for further peacebuilding.

Our aim is two-fold: i) to increase the effectiveness of peace-making initiatives by properly reflecting climate change considerations into our work at every stage; ii) to help our local and international partners who are directly working on climate change to achieve a greater understanding of how peace and conflict issues can contribute to their strategies for mitigation and adaptation.

Over the next three years, we will design and implement initiatives in countries where climate change and conflict have entered into a reinforcing relationship. We will aim to use inclusive peace processes to create political space to tackle the long-term challenges of climate change.

## 2 Engaging with protest movements to strengthen nonviolent strategies

While 2019 and 2020 have both already been dubbed as a ‘year of protest’, we expect that climate change, resource scarcities, inequalities, electoral fraud, police brutality, corrupt regimes, military coups, and populist appeals, will trigger the emergence of further mass mobilisations in the coming years.



Video training with women from demobilised armed groups in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Image: Berghof Foundation

Protest movements tend to be made up of decentralised coalitions that are united in key demands for change, but often lack a unified vision for what comes next. This presents a challenge to joining inter-party dialogue or to constructive engagement in reform processes. In the face of

harsh repression and other provocations, there are risks that some movements may lose their commitment to nonviolent action, and instead become trapped in a spiral of violent escalation. Peacebuilding skills can help movements maintain their nonviolent spirit and prepare themselves for effective participation in dialogue processes.

Over the next three years, we will use our long-standing experience in participatory research, capacity-building in mediation, peer-learning approaches, and dialogue facilitation to analyse and engage with protest movements as key drivers of conflict transformation. Our aim is to help insider mediators and other third parties play constructive roles in preventing violent escalation and supporting inclusive transitions from civil resistance to democratic change. In addition, we will enhance synergies with other emerging focal areas by developing projects with protest movements mobilising for climate justice, gender equity, transparency and transitional justice.

### **3 Inclusive governance and accountability to mitigate corruption and other economic drivers of conflict**

Economic factors contribute to the emergence and prolongation of war. In our work, we need to take the following areas into consideration, where economic factors directly feed into violence and influence the prospect of conflict transformation:

Unequal resource distribution is a key source of violent conflict. Resources might entail natural resources, financial benefits or more complex systems of corruption (both political and economic). Besides the enrichment of a particular social group, systems of patronage secure political loyalty by granting economic privileges. If conflict transformation does not address these resource distribution systems, it will not succeed.

War also produces its own shadow economy that creates incentives for a new set of actors who have a strong interest in maintaining their war-related profits and benefits. In order to contribute to a meaningful transformation of conflicts, these incentives have to be well understood and taken into consideration.

At the same time, positive economic incentives can contribute to successful conflict transformation. The support of societal groups, including the private sector, can be mobilised for needed reforms and to ensure their ongoing backing for peace agreements, for example through tangible peace dividends, such as improved service provisions, safety and security, employment opportunities, land reform, and renewable energy infrastructure. Therefore, we will support inclusive governance and accountability mechanisms to help re-build trust in the state and its institutions and reduce corruption.

## 4 Digital revolution and its impact on our work

Developments in digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) are fundamentally reshaping the nature of conflicts, and the tools and methods to transform them.

Information technology and big data continue to increase the volume and variety of information that can be gathered at low-cost and in real-time. We will make increased use of that information to improve our conflict analysis and explore new, innovative means to manage and visualise it.

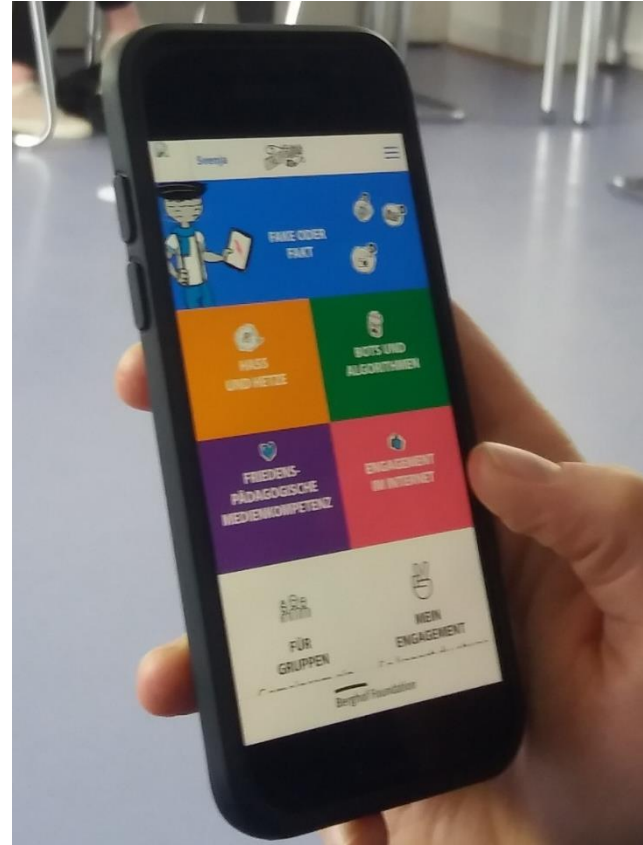
The digital space plays an increasingly important role in conflicts and peace processes. Today, news can be easily manipulated, and social media is subject to little quality control, which makes it all too easy to fuel hatred and exacerbate polarisation. Conflict parties or spoilers of peace processes can use this as part of their information warfare or to undermine a negotiated settlement. To navigate in this context, we will explore new communication technologies and build on our experience in combining conflict transformation, peace education and digitalisation to de-escalate new media and communication wars.

We will also continue to try out new communication techniques to create creative forms of engagement that can complement our traditional communication channels. New formats can be used as an opportunity for more inclusive dialogue, and allow for the integration of a broader variety of perspectives. This can increase the legitimacy and ownership of peace processes.

As conflicts increasingly move into cyberspace and make use of AI, cyber diplomacy is needed to prevent escalation. We will explore which new possibilities for conflict transformation could be opened up by cyber diplomacy and AI tools.

## 5 Dealing with the past in conflict transformation

It is widely acknowledged that the way in which past gross human rights violations are discussed and addressed, influences the likelihood of sustainable conflict transformation. For peacebuilding to work, all levels of society must be able to constructively deal with the violence of the past to ensure that the conflict will not resume.



The app “Streitkultur 3.0” helps young people identify and counter disinformation and hate speech online, Image: Berghof Foundation

Our long track record of working on the area of transitional justice includes themes such as memorialisation and the role of historical narratives in mediation and national dialogue, trauma-sensitive work with refugees and migrants, and biographical history dialogue work.

We plan to intensify our efforts on dealing with the past in a number of conflict areas, based on five pillars: 1) accountability, 2) truth recovery, 3) reparations, 4) institutional reform, and 5) reconciliation and education.

## **6 The role of women and gender in conflict transformation and mediation**

Peace processes in which both women and men have a strong role, are more sustainable, with the importance of gender equality enshrined in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Yet despite advances, implementation of that agenda is still often lacking, especially as far as more gendered approaches are concerned (including men as well as women, accounting too for LGBTQI+ identities).

Over the next three years, we will build on the strong participatory research and practice engagements of previous years to support gender-inclusive peacebuilding. Complementing efforts to support the participation of women in peace negotiations, we are also looking to apply a broader perspective by taking into consideration gender-specific roles in mediation and engaging with other facets of gender dynamics.

### **III Increase awareness of and provide a model for integrated and collaborative conflict transformation approaches**

The need for collaboration, both among peacebuilding agencies, and across different areas of expertise and approaches, has become more urgent in the face of the global transformations in geopolitics and in the causes and dynamics of violent conflict, as well as trends in the peacebuilding field and institutional and funding context for peacebuilding. We want to confront negative developments and challenges at an early stage and in collaboration with both our local and international partners.

#### **1 Collaboration and Partnership**

To achieve our ambitious goals, we will continue to work in partnership and establish mutually beneficial cooperation with international, national, regional and local partners. Especially in regard to the six new thematic areas in which we will work, we do not intend to become e.g. climate experts ourselves but rather work closely with the respective communities to establish regular exchange, mutual learning and close cooperation.

A people-centred approach and local ownership are already key principles of our work, which is why we – in most cases – aren't operating through field offices but are instead working with partner organisations in the respective countries and regions that provide local expertise, contextual knowledge, and relevant networks. Our goal is to ensure sustainable conflict transformation, providing tools, building networks and increasing capacities on the ground beyond our own interventions.

To maximise our impact, we will work more closely with other local and international peace actors. We believe it is vital for us to be at the centre of efforts to increase collaboration among our sister institutions and actors in our field, as well as with those who have specialised in some of our emerging focal areas.

## **2 Communications and outreach**

To achieve our organisational goals, we want to become a more visible player in the field of conflict transformation and beyond. We will create opportunities to offer substantive political analysis, while also recognising the importance of confidentiality when dealing with particularly sensitive issues. We will use communications as a tool to advance peace processes, promote conflict transformation as an approach in the political sphere, and provide advice on peacebuilding agendas and policies.

## **3 Staff development**

The most valuable, and fragile, asset in any peacebuilding setting – trust – is built on the expertise, experience, empathy, and social skills of our staff. Whether engaging and supporting conflict parties in mediation or negotiation, conducting trainings or carrying participatory research, all of our core activities depend on highly competent and committed staff. We thus strive to continue to offer a working environment that will attract skilled people from various international backgrounds.

## **4 Design, monitoring, evaluation and learning**

Just as the environments we are working in are constantly changing, our approaches need to adapt and evolve. We will further invest in our design, monitoring, evaluation and learning capacities to directly support and advance our work. We want to improve our understanding, achievement and communication of peacebuilding impact by learning from past experiences.

An integrated approach to project design that is based on adaptive management and constant learning will be key to our work. We will further refine a learning approach to peacebuilding and conflict transformation work. We will employ a wide range of monitoring and evaluation tools in order to analyse the impact of our projects and use key lessons in planning future projects.

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