
Making peace in 2023 and evolving with
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Annual Report 2023 mediation for peace

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a pioneer of discreet, impartial and independent conflict mediation.

HD's global reach and extensive networks allow us to work beyond the constraints of traditional diplomacy and engage all parties in pursuit of peace.

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Making peace in 2023 and evolving with new conflict realities

To deal with the worst levels of conflict since the Second World War and prepare for an uncertain future, we are working to build better tools and outcomes.

In 2023, HD's operations, expertise and resources grew, along with our record of successful peacemaking.

At the same time, we were tested by some of the most challenging conditions since HD began discreet, impartial and independent conflict mediation in 1999.

The terrible violence, death and displacement show the limits of traditional diplomacy in a turbulent and multipolar world.

Geopolitical divides are deepening as technology, inequality and competition for resources fuel conflict on more fronts.

Conflicts mostly still happen within countries but rising tensions between neighbours and greater international involvement in specific countries add even more complexities.

With **70+ peacemaking projects**, HD was active in most conflicts and hot spots in 2023 – from Ukraine, the Sahel and the South China Sea to the impact of climate change, health challenges in high-risk areas and the frontiers of social media and artificial intelligence.

Our outlook was also evolving as we shaped **HD's global strategy for 2024-2027** to guide how we are adapting to shifts in geopolitics and conflict to deliver valuable peacemaking results, strengthen the practice of mediation and ensure our resilience as an agile, effective organisation.

In 2023, we expanded our commitment to inclusive and sustainable peace by integrating meaningful engagement and representation of women, youth and civil society groups into even more of our mediation processes, workshops and activities.

HD stayed widely engaged with armed groups and other conflict parties on the ground while also expanding work in inter-state mediation in response to growing geostrategic rivalries.

The deeper involvement of global and regional powers in intra-state conflicts called for even more collaboration among HD's regional, national and thematic teams.

As we strengthened HD's sector-leading monitoring and evaluation systems, we intensified our work across the digital, environmental, humanitarian and criminal factors that shape and inflame conflict.

In 2023, we already started embarking on many elements of the new strategy – including operations, security, processes and people.

In a more complex reality, we are building on **25 years of experience** with an evolution to ensure HD's peacemaking stays agile around the world and across the physical, digital and ideological lines of conflict.

As always, our founding values – **humanity, impartiality and independence** – guide our work to reduce suffering, end conflict and help build a better, peaceful future.

In Senegal, Commander Fatoma Coly of the Front Nord Diakaye faction shakes hands with government representative Admiral Papa Farba Sarr as his group became the first of four factions of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) to lay down their arms.





HD in the Ukrainian port of Odesa in August 2023
(©Mishchenko Oleksii)



With HD's guidance, communities in Niger's Tillabéri region signed a peace accord to end a prolonged conflict.



A local mediator in Sulu in the southern Philippines trained and supported by HD.



HD developing mediation skills of public security officials in Kyrgyzstan and responses to conflict on social media.



In Syria, HD supports a community reintegration programme for women and children released from Al Hol detention camp.



David Harland presents HD commendation to former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo for his work in Tigray.

Highlights of 2023

This selection of our activities and outcomes in 2023 reflects just some of HD's mediation and peacemaking work on more than 80% of the world's conflicts.

- In **Senegal**, the Front Nord Diakaye became the first of four factions of the separatist Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) to lay down arms – another major milestone in HD's efforts since 2014 to help end Africa's oldest insurgency.
- A new platform set up by HD addresses flashpoints in the **South China Sea**, convening influential experts from China, the United States and the Philippines.
- The **Oslo Forum**, co-hosted by Norway and HD, celebrated its 20th year as the premier event for mediators, diplomats, government leaders and conflict parties to deliberate on peacemaking. The Oslo Forum also held its first regional retreats in Latin America and the Middle East.
- Following up on our support for the mediation that ended the war in Tigray, HD worked with regional bodies to halt conflict in **Ethiopia's Oromia region**.
- Hailing **Olusegun Obasanjo** for his role in the Tigray ceasefire, HD's David Harland thanked the former Nigerian president for his tireless efforts with a letter and certificate from the HD Board.
- The Black Sea Initiative, incubated and supported by HD, expired in mid-2023 but not before a year of success in delivering 33 million tons of grain from **Ukraine** to world markets and people in need. In the second year of the war, HD continued to support mediation efforts.
- An agreement on sharing access to land, water and forest in **Nigeria's Benue State** ended a violent conflict that killed hundreds of people.
- Communities in southwestern **Niger** signed an agreement to end long-running conflict in the Tillabéri region fuelled by competition for natural resources.
- With risks of regional conflict rising, HD engaged networks across the **Middle East** to support efforts to avert escalation of the Israel-Gaza crisis.
- The Kochi Declaration by **Bay of Bengal** states launched a marine research network as HD-backed discussions by Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand opened wider cooperation on maritime security.
- In **Thailand**, 30 political parties signed an election code of conduct – including a section on responsible use of social media – after dialogue sessions hosted by HD.
- HD brought together nuclear stability and arms control experts for a **China-Europe dialogue** to reinforce common interests and identify confidence-building measures.
- As fighting in **Sudan** created a humanitarian crisis, HD supported mediators from the African Union and IGAD and worked with civilian actors to help prevent violence from spreading.
- In **Syria**, HD's mediation resulted in the release of more than 400 people from arbitrary detention and nearly 100 women and children from Al Hol detention camp. HD also supported women-led community reintegration projects and defused local violence over access to water.

The Oslo Forum



The Oslo Forum – which marked its **20th anniversary** in 2023 – is a cornerstone of HD's global engagement.

Co-hosted by HD and Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the annual retreat is the premier event for mediators, diplomats, high-level government officials, conflict parties and other experts working to create pathways to peace.

From humble beginnings in 2003 with a small group of mediators sitting around a wooden dining table, the Oslo Forum's 20th anniversary brought together 130 participants from 50 countries to assess the state of peacemaking in a volatile world.

At a time when the tools of mediation have never been more necessary, topics ranged from fractious geopolitics and Africa's security architecture to individual country situations and the impact of artificial intelligence on conflict and mediation.

In the shadow of the biggest war in Europe in 80 years, a session on the tradecraft of the Black Sea Initiative highlighted the potential for third parties to shape innovative deals.

Despite a difficult environment, speakers consistently underlined the importance of continuing to talk, no matter how challenging the political context.

"If the language of war is the only one spoken, where is that going to take us?" Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said in his opening remarks.

The Oslo Forum series has expanded rapidly in recent years and – for the first time in 2023 – convened regional retreats in Latin America and the Middle East.

The first, in Mexico, gathered more than 50 delegates from 25 Latin American and

Caribbean countries for discussions on the lessons of regional peace processes and the opportunities for future efforts.

The second event focused on regional diplomacy and mediation initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa with nearly 60 participants from 26 countries.

Held under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution, the retreats in Norway and the regional events remain safe, discreet spaces to share knowledge, assess crises and work on practical ways to resolve conflicts.

To share perspectives and knowledge, the Oslo Forum team also produces The Mediator's Studio podcast series hosted by Adam Cooper, director of HD's Digital Conflict programme.

Recorded at Oslo Forum events, **The Mediator's Studio** launched Season 5 in 2023, taking listeners behind the scenes with more exceptional stories and insights from prominent peacemakers.





At the Paris Peace Forum, Special Envoy for Christchurch Call Jacinda Ardern visits the HD booth to talk about our Negotiating Digital Peace programme with the European Commission.

Digital conflict

The flash points and front lines of conflict and international security are ever more digital.

The rapid shifts in the use and sophistication of social media, artificial intelligence (AI) and cyber are far outpacing the capacity of international organisations to respond.

In a world of geopolitical complexity, HD is working on the risks associated with AI in weapons systems and cyber threats to critical infrastructure.

We also foster agreements to mitigate damage from toxic social media behaviour and harness positive aspects in peacemaking.

In 2023, HD pursued multi-level engagement in Europe, the Middle East and Asia on developing confidence-building measures to add some stability in cyber space.

HD is consulting experts close to various governments to identify common ground for developing good practices on military uses of AI and to explore interest in additional diplomacy on outer space.

Everywhere HD works, we see sophisticated use of social media to spread disinformation, stoke division and incite violence. HD has responded by pushing the frontiers of social media use in mediation.

In 2023, HD moved to a second generation of social media agreements and engaged with social media influencers to protect peace talks from destructive abuse.

Around elections in Thailand, HD reinforced codes of conduct on social media use by political parties and supporters with robust monitoring mechanisms.

HD also integrated elements of social media risk into mediation in Yemen and Sudan.

Encouraging social media platforms to better address the harmful impact of online abuse is another key element of our digital work.

In 2023, HD's table-top mediation exercises for two social media companies led to more cooperation and commitments to protect peace processes from online harm.

Mediation support

The Mediation Support and Policy Unit is the nerve centre of HD's strategy, operations, innovation and excellence.

Known as MESU, the team in Geneva ensures programmes are aligned with HD's peacemaking strategy as we evolve to meet the changing nature of conflicts.

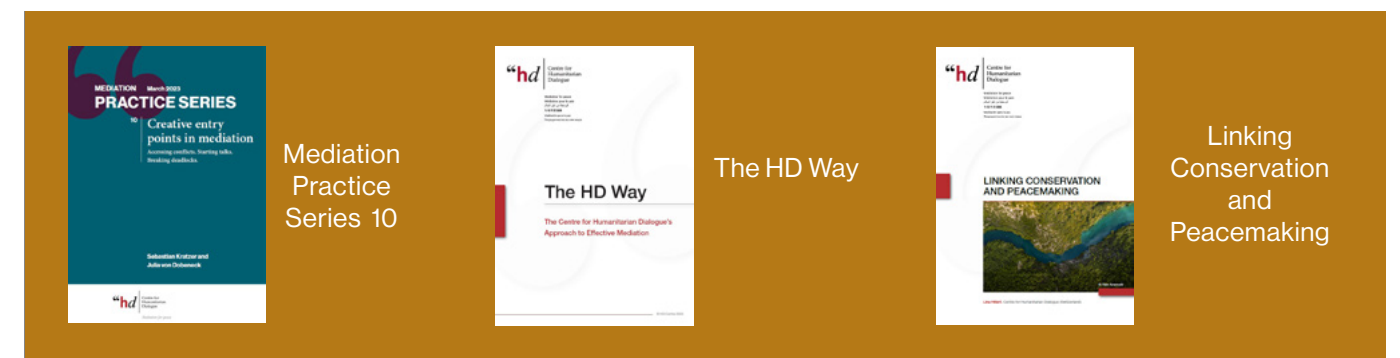
MESU supports HD initiatives around the world with project design, planning, training and technical advice – plus rigorous monitoring and evaluation – to keep HD accountable and effective.

In 2023, that wide range of work included consulting across HD to inform our new global

strategy, supporting operations in all regions, organising peer reviews of projects and delivering advanced mediation training.

To enhance HD's perspective and effectiveness, MESU builds relationships with a broad range of experts and institutions across the mediation, diplomacy, humanitarian and academic communities.

To ensure we contribute to the wider peacemaking world, MESU engages at international forums, hosts workshops on best practices and publishes a variety of insights – including the flagship Mediation Practice Series.



Humanitarian mediation

HD's impartiality, discreet profile and long experience in dealing with armed groups make us an essential partner for humanitarian organisations working in high-risk regions.

In 2023, our Humanitarian Mediation Programme continued to advise and assist international organisations delivering aid and healthcare to people isolated by conflict in various parts of the world.

Channels of communication and trust opened up by these activities add a humanitarian component to mediation efforts and can improve the climate for peacemaking.

When political dialogue is difficult or impossible, HD's humanitarian programme can help conflict parties to address key issues ranging from the protection of civilians to the special needs of women and children, displaced people and minority groups.

Overall, HD works to improve the commitment to humanitarian protection principles by conflict parties and promote adequate safeguards in peace processes.

Inclusive peacemaking

The inclusion of women, young people and civil society makes peace processes more legitimate and more durable.

HD's commitment to inclusion goes far beyond the negotiating table by engaging people often excluded from mediation and political processes.

Our Gender & Inclusion unit (GINC) provides technical advice, training, resources and seed funds to support project teams in the field.

To strengthen inclusion more broadly, GINC also shares knowledge and practical guidance with the mediation, diplomatic and humanitarian communities.

In 2023, GINC gave detailed support to roughly half of HD's projects – including

initiatives in Ethiopia, Libya, Thailand, Nigeria and across the Sahel.

GINC trained HD staff and representatives of key donors and ran workshops to help HD teams in the Philippines, Cameroon, Niger and the Greater Mekong region take stock of progress on inclusion.

A series of cross-regional discussions offered practical insights on how to deal with resistance to the participation of women in peace processes.

With strong networks across multiple levels, HD is building strategic opportunities around the world for diverse groups to contribute to inclusive and sustainable peace.

Environmental peacemaking

As a peacemaking priority in HD's new global strategy, the links between violence, the environment and climate change are clear.

By the end of 2023, HD had significant environmental and climate components in more than a dozen projects.

These included efforts to reduce clashes between farmers and herders across the Sahel, defuse local violence in Syria over access to water and address the dangers of ecological disaster in Ukraine.

To reduce wider geopolitical tensions and risks, HD promotes cooperation in scientific research and management of marine resources around the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea.

HD's environmental mediation team published a variety of articles and papers in 2023, gave technical support to about 20 projects and collaborated with our Humanitarian Mediation Programme to support climate action in areas controlled by non-state armed groups.



Organised crime

From financial scams to the trafficking of drugs, weapons and people, the impact of organised crime and illicit economies has grown in recent years as a driver of instability and conflict.

The criminal element also plays an important role in the success or failure of peacemaking initiatives.

In many areas where HD works, organised crime is entrenched in conflict economies or in illicit partnerships between armed groups and government officials.

HD, the only international mediation organisation working on the issue, is

consulting experts from various disciplines to develop guidance for mediators on how organised crime affects peace processes and how to respond.

In 2023, HD held workshops on strengthening peacemaking to deal with criminal agendas in Colombia and Thailand and piloted projects in three conflict areas.

The organised crime team also advises various HD regions in their work.



The HD Board

An independent Board governs HD, a non-profit foundation, with responsibility for our strategic direction and the oversight and approval of our budget and annual programme of work. Members sit on a voluntary, unpaid and private basis.

As HD evolves in a world of shifting conflicts, our Board is starting a new journey with the retirement of **Ambassador Pierre Vimont** as Chair and the election of global health leader **Dr Joanne Liu** as his successor.

Liu – a Canadian medical doctor, humanitarian actor in fragile areas and former International President of Médecins Sans Frontières – joined HD’s Board in 2019.

The handover from Vimont to Liu in early 2024 coincides with several other Board members ending their terms and new ones starting.

Vimont, a Senior Associate at Carnegie Europe and former Executive Secretary-General of the European External Action Service with an extensive career in the French diplomatic service, joined the Board in 2015. He served as Chair in 2016 to 2019 and again from late 2021.

“Pierre’s contribution to diplomacy and peace – and to the success of HD – cannot be overstated. We will miss his perspective and wise, creative counsel on the Board but we look forward to working together in other ways to deliver valuable peacemaking results in this tense and turbulent world,” said David Harland, HD’s Executive Director since 2011.

“We welcome Joanne in her new role, building on her expertise in multidimensional conflict and complex humanitarian situations that she already brings to the Board. Her leadership will guide us as HD evolves alongside growing risks of inter-state conflict and threats ranging from climate change to social media and artificial intelligence.”



The Board changes include two members leaving after nine years each – Sarah Cliffe, Director of the Center on International Cooperation at the University of New York, and Ameerah Haq, a senior UN official with nearly 40 years of experience.

Joining the Board are Nobukatsu Kanehara, Executive Director of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and a former Japanese diplomat, and Kyung-wha Kang, Distinguished Professor at the Institute for Global Engagement and Empowerment at Yonsei University and South Korea’s first female Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Learn more about the HD Board and its members here:



Investing in peace

With income from contributions of 50 million Swiss francs, HD delivers results in the world’s toughest conflicts and complex geopolitical spaces.

As a trusted actor in international diplomacy, HD is funded by various governments and private donors who see the value of our mediation model built on independence, impartiality, discretion and innovation.

In keeping with the substantial and lasting investment needed to make peace, HD is expanding the scope of our fundraising.

Targeted funding, the bulk of our donor support, allows HD to run a global and diverse portfolio of projects covering most of the world’s violent and complex conflicts.

HD also welcomes more flexible funding to help safeguard our independence, drive innovation and keep us agile in responding to new conflicts and opportunities.

HD is an international body with headquarters in Switzerland. As a non-profit organisation,

we update donors regularly and file audited financial results.

For private donors, the HD Peace Fund pools resources to focus on pressing issues and support innovation in peacemaking.

For a regional focus, the HD Asia Peace Fund is a donation platform for people from all walks of life to support peace in the region.

HD is grateful to everyone contributing to our work since 1999.

We thank the City of Geneva for providing Villa Plantamour as HD’s headquarters to lead our global peacemaking efforts.

We welcome interest in supporting HD’s work to reduce the suffering of war, secure lasting peace and build a better future.

<i>Summary Balance Sheet</i> <small>(In thousands of CHF)</small>	2023	2022
Total assets	40 118	44 431
Total liabilities	33 221	38 342
Foundation capital and funds	6 896	6 089
Total liabilities, capital and funds	40 118	44 431

<i>Summary Income Statement</i> <small>(In thousands of CHF)</small>	2023	2022
Total income	50 241	48 028
Total expenses	(49 055)	(48 132)
Net financial expenses	(745)	(822)
Net result	440	(926)

Note 1: As of January 2022, HD adopted Swiss GAAP FER accounting standards. Implementation required a one-time increase in HD’s reserve of 942,000 CHF, drawn from 2022 expenditures, thus increasing them by the same amount and giving the 2022 negative 926,000 CHF result.

Note 2: The summary financial statements are derived from the Foundation’s audited accounts.

