


*Advancing Peace
and Security in an
Unstable World*



25 years mediating for peace

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The more complex landscape of conflict has meant that HD has adapted its strategy to become more agile and able to operate simultaneously at multiple levels.

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Executive Director's Foreword

Dear friends,

2024 was one of the worst years in living memory in terms of increased levels of violent conflict and the numbers of people affected.

Wars raged unabated in **Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine and Gaza**. Efforts to mediate an end to the fighting were mostly unsuccessful.

By the end of the year more than 300 million people needed urgent humanitarian support. That's almost one in every thirty people on the planet.

As wars and rising tensions raged unabated, disruptive governments and failing states threatened to derail international cooperation and hindered the pursuit of peace. The international systems and frameworks for providing aid and relief for these conflict zones were not just struggling to meet demand, but also finding funding and political support hard to sustain.

We also faced unprecedented threats to global security posed by unbridled new technologies, accelerating climate change, mass migration and public health challenges.

As a result, HD has never been busier.

As formal diplomacy struggled to address these challenges, HD worked between and beyond formal structures, utilising our channels to the highest levels of leadership around the world, and networks with a range of states and hard-to-reach groups, to discreetly connect actors and manage their fraught relationships.

Across central Africa and the Sahel, our teams mobilised to support fragile interventions and

make up for the absence of effective governance by mediating local agreements to manage conflict, often accentuated by the effects of climate change; in the Middle East, we quietly ran back channels to minimise levels of escalation and support formal mediation efforts; we continued to shuttle ideas at high levels in support of safe passage for grain shipments through the Black Sea and to help prepare the ground for an end to the war in Ukraine.

HD also saw longer-term investments bear fruit. In **Syria**, where HD has been discreetly working on the ground for a decade, the fall of the Assad regime saw the emergence of new leadership that HD was well-placed to support and advise.

The more complex conflict landscape has seen HD adapt its strategic approaches to be even more agile and to operate simultaneously at multiple levels, engaging at once with local commanders on the ground as well as policymakers in Washington DC, Moscow, Beijing and beyond.

At the same time, HD has honed skills to address new thematic areas of conflict, from AI safety to climate change security. Today's conflicts are shaped by new technologies. From cyberattacks that disrupt adversaries' systems, to the selection of military targets through AI tools, or the incitement of violence through disinformation networks, the nature of warfare is evolving.

The applications of these technologies are outpacing diplomatic responses, making them hard to monitor and control. Using tools of dialogue and mediation, HD has helped to address conflict in the digital age in over 30 countries relating to issues of social media and disinformation, cyber operations, artificial intelligence, and outer space security.

Back on the ground, HD facilitated access to life-saving humanitarian supplies and vaccines in high-risk countries like **Afghanistan** and **Syria**. We have worked to address conflicts exacerbated by the effects of climate change to increase the resilience of communities in contexts as diverse as the **Sahel**, **Iraq** and the **South China Sea**.

Amid this spectacular increase in demand for HD's facilitation skills and services, we celebrated our 25th anniversary. Proud as we are of our track record, the next few years will be challenging.

By the close of 2024, political change in the United States presented new risks to global peace and security, and new threats of the use of force. At the same time, the rules and mechanisms of the multilateral system put in place in the aftermath of World War II have never been so weak or less able to fulfil their purpose as set out in the UN Charter "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

I can assure you that in the face of these challenges, HD will play its part in the quest to end war and violence where we find it, and to lower the risk of future conflict. It will be a struggle, and one well worth the effort.

Amid all our successes and setbacks, we constantly think of our colleague Laurent Vinatier who we hope will soon be reunited with his family, friends and colleagues.

Thank you all for your support and confidence,

David Harland
Executive Director



25 years of ongoing impact

Powered by our long-term engagement, deep-rooted networks, and quiet perseverance, HD has delivered a 25-year record of results by engaging all parties in the pursuit of peace.

→ **100**

peace agreements facilitated worldwide since 2011

→ **300+**

community level conflicts resolved each year since 2021

Key achievements since 1999



Helped avert a global food crisis by conceiving and supporting the Black Sea Grain Initiative amid an active war.



Worked with the UN Envoy to mediate the Libya ceasefire agreement of August 2020 and supported Libyan efforts to develop an inclusive roadmap for political transition.



Helped bring an end to a brutal conflict that claimed nearly 600,000 lives through supporting the lead mediator of the Ethiopia-Tigray peace agreement in 2022.



Creating islands of peace across the Sahel since 2016 through local mediation efforts that enabled the voluntary return of at least 90,000 displaced people.



Closed a chapter on over six decades of violence by discreetly supporting the demobilisation of the Basque group ETA.



Helping reduce the risk of conflict escalation in the South China Sea by facilitating informal dialogues and improving cooperation between coastguards since 2015.

In 2024, HD recorded 74 meaningful results globally.

These included 16 local level peace agreements and 12 agreements to reduce violence or facilitate humanitarian access.



As outlined in the organisation's [Global Strategy 2024-2027](#), HD values and records interim and final results along the pathway to peace. These achievements stem from HD's peacemaking efforts within specific geographic contexts, as well as the organisation's expertise on key global issues that affect conflict dynamics.

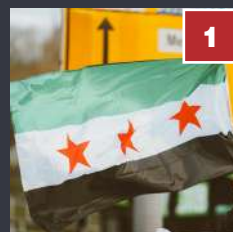


HD's global reach

In 2024, HD had **65 active projects** that related to **67 countries** around the globe.

Throughout the year, HD remained focused on results-driven peacemaking – building platforms for interstate cooperation, engaging with all parties in conflict-affected states, and forging agreements to end violence between local communities.

Highlights from HD's achievements in 2024 included:



1

Enabled access for the inspection of Syrian chemical weapons and established a direct channel with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs.



2

Extended truces between armed gangs in Colombia to keep homicides at their lowest levels since 2016.



3

Created a regional platform on cyber threats consisting of 11 Middle East countries.



4

Supported civilian protection in Sudan

and prepared for inclusive future negotiations by working with armed groups, political actors and civil society.



5

Facilitated talks between China and the US on maritime crisis management and reframing bilateral ties.



6

Mediated 16 local peace deals

in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger that reduced violence and improved livelihoods.



7

Facilitated the delivery of aid to hard-to-reach conflict-affected communities in Myanmar's border areas.

Over the past five years, HD's efforts have covered at least **70% of the world's most violent conflicts***

* Defined as 'wars' or 'limited wars' by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research.

Inter-state engagement

HD has responded to the resurgence of conflict between states by expanding its inter-state engagements. Many of these efforts are not public given their politically sensitive nature.

→ US and Asia

Tensions between the **United States** and **China** have risen alarmingly in recent years, underscoring the strategic significance of dialogue channels that HD facilitated in 2024, covering bilateral, regional and multilateral challenges between the two great powers. Given the fractious relations between the two countries during the first Trump administration, HD's activities in 2024 included running a workshop with Chinese and mainly Republican US experts to explore parameters for possible bilateral cooperation in a second Trump term.

HD also convened a dialogue between US and Chinese experts to discuss approaches to nuclear risk reduction and maritime security. The dialogue focused on the risks of unintended escalation resulting from deployments of unmanned naval vessels. Following China's emerging role in Middle East diplomacy, HD established a platform to improve the understanding of both countries' approaches to regional conflicts. We brought US and Chinese experts together in Abu Dhabi to explore scope for common approaches to a number of the region's security issues.

Arms control, nuclear risks, global strategic stability and unintended risks of the use of AI enabled systems for international security (e.g. in the maritime domain) also featured in **China-Europe dialogues** organised by HD to counter the growing risks of misunderstanding emanating from a lack of engagement on these issues. In 2024, HD's dialogues — convened in a number of places including Abu Dhabi, Istanbul and Beijing — focused on scenario building, development of research papers, and bringing in expertise to provide practical solutions to challenges and real-life impact for both China and Europe.



Northeast Asia's security landscape is undergoing profound shifts as **North Korea's** growing military collaboration with Russia, particularly in Ukraine, aligns with South Korea's reassessment of its defence posture, threatening regional stability and global non-proliferation frameworks. In response, HD convened three meetings involving major countries to develop new frameworks for multilateral security cooperation. These efforts, while maintaining engagement with both South Korea and Japan, are designed to address security concerns and curb nuclear ambitions, preventing a broader move toward nuclearisation in Northeast Asia.

HD also worked with the **Greater Mekong Region** states (China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) to curb tensions over resource management caused by extreme climate events, including drought and severe flooding. HD facilitated and co-hosted regional experts' dialogues in Cambodia and Laos focusing on transboundary water management, producing a roadmap with immediate steps and implementation plans intended to prevent transboundary conflict over water resources exacerbated by climate change.

→ Middle East and North Africa

HD is well-placed to help reduce tensions and prevent conflict escalation within and beyond the MENA region. The organisation's country-focused teams across the region operated in many ways throughout 2024 in support of international efforts to prevent regional escalation of the fighting in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

→ Europe, Western Balkans and South Caucasus

As the **Russia-Ukraine** war headed towards its third year, HD continued to shuttle between the major stakeholders to build communication and trust. Following its vital backroom role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative of 2022, HD was in contact with all parties on various thematic issues, including laying the foundations for a wider freedom of navigation agreement that came close to signature and would have helped to secure increased supplies to global markets.

As a range of other countries have taken interest in how to end the Ukraine war, including Brazil and India, HD convened a meeting between experts from the US and Europe with **China, India, Brazil and Türkiye** to clarify positions and foster creative ideas on approaches to ending the war.

The **Western Balkans** faced a slowly deteriorating political environment, as efforts to strengthen a common vision of political community stalled. **Serbia** has been witnessing growing civil unrest against corruption and creeping authoritarianism. The government of **Kosovo** has increased uncertainty in the Serb community with its closures of Belgrade-run parallel institutions. Internal political and national cleavages in **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)**, **Montenegro** and **North Macedonia** are growing.

In 2024, HD initiated **environmental dialogues** by developing a multi-ethnic coalition aimed at strengthening environmental protection in Kosovo. We explored bottom-up solutions employing tools such as social audits on environmental issues. HD also initiated a program to explore ways of integrating the Western Balkan Six (**Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia**) more fully into European security institutions. We continued organising dialogue meetings that helped to build bridges and explore options to de-escalate tensions between the Kosovo government and Serb community and among all parties in Kosovo.

Armenia and Azerbaijan made quiet behind-the-scenes progress towards a peace deal to settle the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, but Baku's demand that Armenia change its constitution and delete any reference to the disputed region has been the stumbling block in achieving the deal. As a result, while HD facilitated consultations aimed at lowering damaging rhetoric, it also pivoted to work with the two countries' neighbours to foster a more stable regional environment in the South Caucasus.



Maritime security dialogue

HD's portfolio of work to safeguard maritime security continues to grow. Tensions escalated in the **South China Sea** in 2024, particularly between China and the Philippines, as their coastguards and naval vessels clashed over control of two shoals. HD worked closely with Malaysia, China, and littoral states in the South China Sea to prepare the ground for a quiet track-1 coastguard dialogue under the ASEAN-China framework on improving inter-agency communications at sea.

In parallel to escalating tensions between coastguards, dwindling fish stocks are pushing fishing fleets further into disputed waters and contribute to risks of violent confrontation in the region. HD ran a workshop on marine environmental protection hosted by Thailand, also held under the ASEAN-China framework, attended by ASEAN members and China. Key states lent support to HD's landmark Common Fisheries Resource Analysis, adding fresh momentum to regional science-based cooperation.

Further West in the Bay of Bengal, HD facilitated cooperation on marine resource management between littoral states as a way of tackling broader and fast escalating security challenges. HD hosted an annual dialogue for officials and marine experts of the seven states on maritime crisis and marine resource management (see below).

HD also organised an Indian Ocean Security Conclave in Delhi that tackled the wider issue of security for shipping lanes and undersea infrastructure and dealing with maritime disasters.

Meanwhile, efforts got underway to explore maritime security dialogue in the Northwest Indian Ocean working with Oman.

Multi-level engagement

HD operates across the globe to address conflict at multiple levels. This section focuses on our key results engaging with conflict parties and stakeholders within specific contexts at local, subnational and national levels.

→ Middle East and North Africa

Eight days in December 2024 toppled **Syria's** regime led by Bashar al Assad. For most of the year, drawing on a unique network of contacts among all parties, HD worked to improve international humanitarian access issues in northwest Syria with Turkish-backed resistance groups, and to de-escalate tensions with Kurdish forces in the northeast. After the fall of the Assad regime in December, HD facilitated international contacts with the new interlocutors and focused efforts on averting violence between religious minorities and local groups. Specifically, HD:

- Facilitated the opening of a crossing point between Kurdish- and government-controlled areas providing civilians with access to schools and medical care.
- Helped reduce clashes between Turkey and Syrian Kurdish forces.
- Helped address the lingering issue of thousands of detainees being held in the Kurdish-run Al Hol detention camp by negotiating the release of 200 families. In cooperation with the US Bureau of Counter Terrorism HD convened a meeting with representatives of 13 countries on the complex political and logistical challenges of repatriating them.
- Also in Northwest Syria, HD leveraged contacts with de facto authorities in Idlib to tackle obstacles to international aid deliveries.

In **Iraq**, HD worked on improving the integration of returnee Iraqis from Northeast Syria. Working in so-called liberated areas since 2016, HD engaged with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to address the grievances of local communities

© Ahmed Akacha / Pexels / Damascus, Syria



HD in Syria

HD has been operating in Syria since the start of the conflict, with a team structured according to the various phases of the prolonged civil war. After the 2020 Astana Agreement, HD was uniquely positioned to support its implementation, being one of the few international actors with access to all parts of the country. This was mainly due to its principled approach (engaging with all relevant parties, maintaining neutrality and independence) and the privileged network built by the team over the years. As a result, HD has been able to establish impartial relationships and channels of dialogue with all relevant parties to the conflict, facilitating key discussions aimed at de-escalating tensions at both local and regional levels, enhancing the population's coping mechanisms, and enabling access to life-saving humanitarian aid.

resisting the return of families displaced by ISIS, reviewing compensation claims for loss of property and restoring civilian administration in areas largely controlled by security services or Shi'a militias hostile to so-called "ISIS families." With almost 100,000 compensation cases to be resolved, the meetings led to some practical measures as well as the Prime Minister's decision to help solve the issues. HD briefed international and regional stakeholders such as the UN, the EU, the US, Turkey and Jordan on its operations and developments, and set up deconfliction mechanisms in northern Iraq to address Turkish incursions targeting areas harbouring Kurdish militants.

Over the course of HD's field work in Anbar, Iraq, the team discovered a caseload of over 200 local Sunni women who had been captured, imprisoned and abused by ISIS, with resulting trauma, ostracization and poverty. However, their plight was unknown to the government and NGOs. HD took their cases to the Iraqi government as well as relevant international organisations in order to obtain assistance and protection for them, organising a round of dialogue between women activists from Anbar and the PMO. The activists were able to relay key challenges faced by returnee women and activists, and discuss how their ongoing psychological, social, health, legal and economic needs could be addressed. In response, the PMO provided the women with security connections to allow them to address their grievances under the protection of the State. HD also informed local authorities of cultural barriers faced by women in Ramadi that prevented them from engaging with community policing structures, which led to 30 local women being trained on community policing.

HD remained active on the national and regional dimensions of the crisis enveloping **Lebanon**. As the war between Hezbollah and Israel reached its peak in October destroying dozens of villages in the South and displacing more than one million people, HD facilitated a high-level and in-person exchange between the Lebanese minister in charge of the humanitarian crisis and the principal international humanitarian agencies to ease the international response.

In 2024, **Yemen** witnessed a paradoxical dynamic: deeper entanglement in regional conflicts, combined with a broader stalled peace process despite a sustained yet fragile internal ceasefire. The military escalation in the Red Sea and the disruption of international shipping lanes diverted regional and international strategic approaches towards issues of maritime security. This shift risks privileging transactional short-term deals over sustainable conflict resolution in the Red Sea – an outcome that underscores the necessity of reasserting Yemen's internal political process as a cornerstone of lasting regional stability.

In this context, HD's support to the official peace process in Yemen became more critical. HD maintains well established connections with all Yemeni conflict parties and influential regional and international stakeholders to open and maintain channels of dialogue in support of de-escalation and informed diplomatic efforts.

Political deadlock and consequent sporadic clashes in 2024 highlighted the fragility of Libya and its institutional fragmentation. Key national institutions remained either paralysed or contested, while the expanding presence of Russian-affiliated forces and entrenched trafficking networks further destabilising the landscape. Building on its work to broker a ceasefire in 2020 and ongoing support to the political process, HD continued its engagement throughout 2024 by convening a number of high-level meetings focused on defining entry points for de-escalation and developing acceptable proposals for long term institutional stabilisation. It facilitated dialogues with political and civil society actors on national reconciliation and opened channels with actors affiliated with foreign armed groups in the South to reduce the risk of further escalation. HD also contributed to an agreement between leading political and economic stakeholders advocating for financial governance reforms and proposing solutions to mitigate a crisis with Libya's central bank. Separately, HD facilitated a meeting resulting in a statement from former regime officials underscoring their commitment to the political process.



© EPA / Sanaa, Yemen

→ Africa

The civil war that has turned **Sudan** into the world's worst humanitarian crisis raged unchecked by the mediation efforts of the United States, the African Union and regional powers, some of whom simultaneously poured in weapons helping to fuel the conflagration. HD provided technical support to mediation efforts, helping to get the viewpoints and concerns of civilian groups with whom it has engaged into diplomatic deliberations.

HD focused particularly on creating common ground among a broad range of civilian groups who may be influential in shaping Sudan's post-war future. Its consultations with political parties, armed groups, community leaders, professional associations and civil society organisations, including women and youth groups produced a declaration of principles for transitional justice to be taken into account in any ceasefire. HD has also worked with Sudanese women's groups to enhance their meaningful participation in Sudan's multi-level peace processes and advocate for an equitable, peaceful and inclusive society.

HD's extensive interaction and technical advice to a few armed groups helped to keep a powerful one of these out of active hostilities in Darfur. A Darfur -Darfur dialogue was established last year, providing a dialogue platform that brings together armed groups, native administration, and civil society, to support de-escalation and local peace initiatives in Darfur.

HD convened a series of dialogues with political actors and armed groups who agreed to form a

new platform to develop common positions on critical issues of security sector reform and a new vision for sustainable peace.

South Sudan's fragile economy and peace struggled with an influx of 800,000 people fleeing the civil war in its northern neighbour and the disruption to crucial oil exports. Humanitarian aid became the country's biggest source of revenue and HD staged a fifth round of the high-level dialogue held annually in Dar es Salaam with officials and international aid organisations to discuss challenges to aid delivery and solutions. Participants committed for the first time to the free movement of goods and security for aid agency staff.

Conflict subsided in **Ethiopia's** Tigray region in 2024 but continued in the country's biggest and most populous regions of Amhara and Oromia. HD maintained high level contacts between the government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and worked with the Oromia regional parliament and local partners, engaging extensively with civil society and women's groups to build political momentum for peace.

Ethiopia's agreement with Somaliland for access to the sea in return for recognition was a major preoccupation for the federal government of **Somalia** which condemned the agreement. HD continued to support efforts by Türkiye and Norway to promote ties between Mogadishu and Hargeisa and convened several tripartite meetings designed to promote reconciliation and cooperation.

© EPA / North Darfur, Sudan



© Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2024 / Niger



Central African Republic (CAR) prepared for a series of elections planned for 2025 with no sign of adherence by the main armed groups to the two landmark agreements they signed in 2019 and 2021, designed to restore political stability. HD met representatives of the major armed groups affiliated with the Coalition of Patriots for Change in 2024 to bring their terms for returning to these agreements to the government, but splits and fluctuations in the group's leadership prevented meaningful outcomes. HD helped the National Mediation Council to set up and train networks of mediators to be deployed to CAR's six regions during elections. In addition, HD opened a constructive dialogue between the government and the political opposition around the electoral process, to prevent its boycott in CAR and to build an inclusive process. HD also set up a contact group comprised of diplomats and international organisations to share analysis and coordinate interaction with key political actors.

HD started building a programme to extend networks of agro-pastoral mediators on transhumance routes along the borders of **Central African Republic, Chad and Cameroon** to facilitate seasonal movement of livestock, an important part of the region's economies. Civil war in Sudan along with security crises in northern Nigeria and armed conflict in CAR have severely disrupted a traditional movement of livestock. The mediator networks will manage and prevent conflicts over livestock movements and access to resources, taking account of conservation measures put in place to protect national parks. Based on its extensive

local experience, HD plans to **facilitate dialogues at local, cross-border and national levels** to strengthen the governance of movement, leading to a high-level sub-regional dialogue between the three states.

Insecurity has escalated to chronic levels in the border areas of **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, all of which experienced coups in recent years by military leaders citing failures to deal with jihadist threats. Increased clashes between state forces and armed groups together with problems of corruption, banditry, and organised crime have prompted a lot of communities to form militias, fomenting more violence and the displacement of villagers. At the request of the three governments, HD is helping local communities to mitigate the impact of conflict between state and armed groups and mediate local community conflicts. One of four agreements in Niger ended a long-running conflict between two communities. HD facilitated three agreements in Burkina Faso enabling the peaceful return of displaced people to their homes, and nine in Mali which provided for the cohabitation of local communities and people displaced by violence. In Mali, HD worked with networks of religious leaders in the north and centre to solve local conflicts and counter hate speech.

→ Eurasia

For **Moldova**, situated between Ukraine and Russia, EU accession talks begun at the end of 2023 were sure to ratchet up tensions with the pro-Russia breakaway Transnistria region, forcing difficult reforms of trading rules and environmental protections. Moldova remained at risk of being drawn deeper into this confrontation, as tensions with the Transnistria region threatened to escalate throughout the year.

In 2024, HD shuttled between the two sides keeping alive informal exchanges that identified issues of concern and suggesting ways to peacefully resolve them. HD convened meetings of the relevant actors inside and outside Moldova covering sensitive issues including customs changes affecting Transnistria and preparations for the impact of a cut-off of Russian gas deliveries.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, HD convened senior stakeholders to explore how to address a frozen conflict. We also started to explore opportunities for dialogue-based solutions to the spread of disinformation about the topic of normalising relations between Kosovo and Serbia by meeting prominent media, CSOs and regulatory figures.

→ Asia

The civil war in **Myanmar** has displaced nearly four million people and left close to 20 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Four years after the military coup, the regime aims to hold elections, despite controlling less than a third of the country and having lost the entire border with Bangladesh to the Arakan Army. HD maintains contact with all parties to the conflict and regional stakeholders, creating space for discreet dialogue to de-escalate the violence.

HD continues to focus on keeping open channels of communication between key actors inside the country and regional stakeholders. HD also supports and facilitates the efforts of ASEAN to address the crisis in Myanmar. In addition, it continues to engage with different stakeholders and humanitarian organisations to enable the distribution of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected communities in Myanmar's border areas.

HD's multi-level engagements in **Thailand** seek to mitigate risks of further polarisation between the ruling establishment and a younger pro-reform generation. Through its Friends of Thailand platform, HD facilitated dialogue between diverse

political, security sector and business stakeholders to build consensus on the constitutional reform process. Acting at the request of senior parliamentarians, our team provided a safe space for dialogue and technical input on a referendum process and received approval for a digital platform to receive public feedback on a constitutional reform. We worked with civil society on strengthening the inclusion of women in the consultation process and regularly briefed social media platforms, including Meta and TikTok, providing early warnings on harmful behaviours that risked escalation of conflicts, and which required their attention.

An uptick in violence on the **Philippines'** southern island of Mindanao exposed some of the challenges faced by government and Muslim leaders to sustain the 10-year-old Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) that ended decades of violent conflict. Still, the CAB continued to hold in 2024, which saw some progress in implementing parts of a peace deal that is important to wider regional stability. HD continued to support consensus-building towards the transformation of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) camps into self-sustaining communities and provided training to former combatants to enable their constructive participation in civilian life.

HD supported community dialogues that widened the participation of women, civil society and youth in discussions influencing local authority decisions, and organised the first ever Bangsamoro Mediators' Forum, which gathered local mediators from across the autonomous region. The Forum helped build a community of practice among local mediators, contributing to the sustainability of the essential work of these peacemakers in making their own communities resilient against violent conflict. HD remained a member of the International Contact Group, holding meetings with peace panels set up by the government and MILF, and identifying ongoing challenges to the peace process that require action.



Signature of CAB in 2014, Manila, the Philippines

Reducing tensions and building cooperation in the Bay of Bengal



The **Bay of Bengal**, with a quarter of humanity living in countries that border its sea, is one of the world's most significant yet vulnerable marine ecosystems. Fisheries are central to livelihoods in the Bay of Bengal, sustaining millions of people who depend on its waters for their income and food security. Despite this, fish stocks are rapidly depleting due to overexploitation, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and climate change. This not only puts communities at direct risk of hunger and loss of work but is also fuelling conflict and competition over resources and contributing to marine environmental degradation, prompting the need for stronger cooperation between the littoral states.

Against this backdrop, HD established the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue in 2021, to foster collaborative solutions for reducing these interstate tensions, developing sustainable frameworks to share marine resources and mitigate against marine environmental degradation. HD has witnessed firsthand the geopolitical challenges and cross-border tensions among the Bay's littoral states. Leveraging our strong networks and convening power, HD capitalised on an opportunity to engage in preventive diplomacy by bringing together key stakeholders to discuss these issues. Our initial consultations with countries including Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand were essential to understand their interests and concerns, before laying the groundwork for establishing constructive regional dialogues on urgent trans-boundary issues.

The breakthrough moment came during a table-top exercise in 2022 that HD conducted in Delhi for maritime law enforcement agencies from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand. During the exercise, all the participants

indicated an interest in developing guidelines or standard operating principles that could reduce tensions between the states.

Under the leadership of the states, this evolved into what is currently called the draft Guiding Principles for the Bay of Bengal that the countries are now in the process of reviewing and adopting. Once done, this agreement will mark an important step in building confidence in the region and addressing unintended escalation and competition over depleting fish reserves. Simultaneously, we have also been able to facilitate successful regional science diplomacy discussions that have resulted in the establishment of regional marine research networks to address some of the cross-border challenges and enhance marine science cooperation.

HD's efforts to enhance regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal relied on inclusive dialogue with multilevel stakeholders, trusted facilitation, seeding pragmatic solutions, and advocating bottom-up policymaking that prioritized long-term cooperation over short-term political disagreements. We have equally made sure to stress shared interests and the humanitarian treatment of fishers, the community most impacted by depleted and degraded marine resources.

By ensuring that all voices were heard and by tapping into a sense of shared responsibility that already existed in the region, HD created an environment where stakeholders could discuss and address complex issues together. This shows that humanitarian diplomacy, when rooted in trust-building and scientific collaboration, can bring about meaningful solutions in even the most complex and climate-vulnerable regional contexts.

Local-level mediation and dialogue

In many fragile contexts, violent conflict arises from disputes over natural resources use, land rights and other intercommunal grievances. HD works to empower local mediators to resolve local-level conflict and reach sustainable agreements.

In the **Sahel**, a region plagued by displacement and community conflict, HD has established networks of almost 2,000 community mediators employing ancestral mediation techniques to resolve and prevent conflicts over moving livestock and competition for access to local resources.

In 2024 these local mediator networks were expanded to **Burkina Faso**. HD identified several areas on which to facilitate mediation, including disputed resources, such as water points and grazing lands. It also organised a series of local meetings to identify how pastoral and farmer communities adapted livestock routes and practices to deal with insecurity and climate change, sharing best practices among mediators and using them to inform dialogues with national authorities.

In **Niger**, HD supported three local mediation processes that produced agreements ending conflicts in farmer-herder disputes and over access to grazing lands. In each case it set up follow-up committees to monitor implementation and ensure their sustainability.

Like other West African coastal states, **Togo** has experienced attacks by jihadist groups operating in Sahel states to the north, stoking instability and aggravating disputes. HD has mediated local disputes but mostly supports local peace committees and community leaders employing traditional mediation techniques to ensure that they own the process. In 2024 it provided advice and support to local authorities,

members of the land affairs commissions and to agro-pastoral mediator networks handling farmer-herder disputes. HD monitored 24 of the 30 land commissions it set up since 2021 and found that they resolved 57 disputes over access to resources and land.

HD's multi-level approach in **the Philippines** includes significant, well-established efforts to mediate clan conflicts. In 2024, HD's longstanding partner in Sulu province, Tumikang Sama-Sama (TSS), mediated 20 clan conflicts, of which eight were settled by the end of the year. In Maguindanao province, HD advised and supported Bangsamoro Mediators Inc. (BMI) to mediate seven conflicts at the clan level. HD has unique access to help de-escalate tensions related to clan feuds in these regions, which supports implementation of the broader Bangsamoro peace process.

Addressing local Sahel conflicts – why it matters

The conflict opposing jihadist insurgents in the three States of the central Sahel, **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, has lasted for over a decade so far, with huge humanitarian consequences. The failure of Western-led counter-insurgency tactics opened the way to a wave of military coups d'Etat in all three countries and swift changes in alliances. Increased military pressure did not tilt the power balance in favour of the States, with the jihadists quickly adapting to the new threat. Similarly to their predecessors, the new authorities have steadily refused to engage in peace talks with the jihadists and are unlikely to do so anytime soon. This status quo, with major cities under the control of armed forces and rural areas disputed over between jihadists, comes at a great cost for local communities. Restricted in their movements by sporadic violence and blockades, and stigmatised along ethnic lines, communities are torn between enemies demanding allegiance.

In the absence of prospects for national peace talks, HD has concentrated its efforts on local mediation aiming at preventing ethnic violence and

Global and thematic engagements

HD's in-depth, conflict-specific knowledge and understanding is complemented by relevant global mediation expertise and thematic programmes. These global engagements address emerging threats and realities that are changing the face of war.

→ Humanitarian mediation

Conflict remained one of the biggest drivers of humanitarian disasters in 2024 and by midyear, UNHCR estimated, had displaced over 123 million people. HD's Humanitarian Mediation Global Programme embodies HD's independence and impartiality by supporting humanitarian and health engagement and service delivery in fragile, conflict-affected states – using its networks and knowledge to engage with armed actors often in hazardous, ungoverned environments beyond the reach of officialdom. This makes HD a valuable partner for humanitarian organisations seeking access to deliver aid supplies for victims of war and natural disasters.

In 2024, HD continued to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative negotiating access for vaccines to parts of **Afghanistan** and **Central African Republic** among others. In **CAR**, HD enabled vaccination campaigns in hard-to-reach localities across 18 districts, which reached more than 1 million people.

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negotiating agreements with all armed actors to preserve their freedom of movement. HD's local mediators facilitated hundreds of local inter-community agreements in recent years using a classic peace dialogue methodology. Each agreement is the product of weeks and sometimes months of talks involving hundreds of villagers as well as traditional, local and provincial authorities. They are made up of reconciliation agreements between communities, including humanitarian provisions allowing for the lifting of restrictions of access to villages, markets, fields and water points, the return of displaced persons and the reopening of basic public services. A permanent monitoring mechanism is then put in place, allowing for the management and prevention of new tensions between communities.

This web of local agreements has created “islands of stability” covering vast regions of the central Sahel, dramatically reduced the cycle of inter-ethnic violence and reinforced local governance. Over three quarters of these agreements have held firm despite the ongoing challenges of the unresolved conflicts.

→ Digital conflict: cyber, social media and AI

HD's Digital Conflict directorate brings governments, non-state actors, experts and individuals together to find ways to prevent digital technologies from exacerbating existing conflicts or causing new ones, mediating conflict in the digital age.

In 2024, as states around the world increased their cyber capabilities, but with a lack of official cyber diplomatic channels and high risks of cyber incidents, HD convened dialogues between key states in the Middle East, Asia and Eurasia to support the implementation of cyber confidence building measures. This included our **Middle East Cyber Diplomacy Initiative**, where participating states nominated technical and diplomatic focal points for a platform launched to share information and explore themes including the protection of critical infrastructure. HD facilitated a bilateral China-India cyber dialogue which led to the establishment of a joint study group tasked with producing recommendations for cyber confidence building measures.

Mediation support

HD's Mediation Support and Policy directorate (MESU) provides expert advice and support across the organisation to ensure its mediation practice is cutting edge. This includes deployments to operational teams, training for HD mediators, technical expertise on gender and inclusion, and support for monitoring, evaluation and learning. MESU also co-hosts the annual Oslo Forum together with Norway and runs a thematic hub that comprises cross-cutting initiatives on ceasefires, environment, and organised crime.

Highlights in 2024 included MESU technical support to key HD operations in Yemen, Sudan, Moldova, Myanmar, as well as US-China dialogue tracks. MESU led the development of guidelines to promote greater cooperation between HD programmes and facilitated discussions to inform HD's response to increasing inter-state conflict.

HD works to mitigate the risks posed by artificial intelligence for international security. In 2024, this included convening officials from geopolitically diverse states for a dialogue on AI and International Security, focusing on mitigating risks posed by military applications. HD also established a platform for China-Europe dialogues on the impacts of AI on international security, particularly the risks of utilising AI-enabled systems, and convened several rounds between participants. In 2024, HD also ran a series of four regional 'forecasting' exercises in Singapore, Istanbul, Nairobi and Santiago, engaging officials from more than 50 countries, as part of preparations for the second Responsible AI in the Military Domain Summit South Korea.

Tackling the online and offline harms of social media in conflict is a priority for HD's social media and conflict mediation team. HD engaged through country teams with political actors and conflict parties from Ethiopia to Yemen, Ukraine to Moldova to reduce the impact of harmful online narratives and disinformation. HD supported the signing of an agreement on responsible social media use by 39 political parties in Kyrgyzstan ahead of elections and helped its election commission to establish a social media monitoring team to oversee implementation. HD also deepened its dialogue with major social media platforms to mitigate harms to peace processes. It shared insights with them regarding online threats in conflicts such as Sudan, Ukraine and Moldova.

→ Gender and inclusion

Gender-responsive, sensitive and inclusive approaches to mediation and dialogue are incorporated across HD's diverse regional and thematic programmes. For example, in 2024, HD supported women, youth and civil society organisations to prepare for negotiations in **Sudan**; to design inclusive dialogue formats in **Iraq**; to enable the meaningful participation of women at the local level in **Nigeria** and the **Sahel**.

HD's Gender and Inclusion experts work closely with operational teams to identify entry points for inclusion and strengthen the meaningful participation of marginalised groups in peacemaking efforts. In 2024, HD also launched an HD Gender and Inclusion Community of Practice to foster organisational learning, experience-sharing and innovation.

→ Environmental and climate-related peacemaking

Climate change and armed conflict are among the most urgent and complex existential threats of our time. By undermining livelihoods, fostering competition over natural resources, and deepening existing vulnerabilities, the climate crisis exacerbates armed conflict. It makes peace harder to achieve and sustain. Conflict also magnifies the impacts of climate change by destroying ecosystems, weakening institutions, and obstructing climate adaptation. In response, HD has invested in dedicated expertise, adapted its peacemaking practice, and built partnerships with scientific and diplomatic actors.

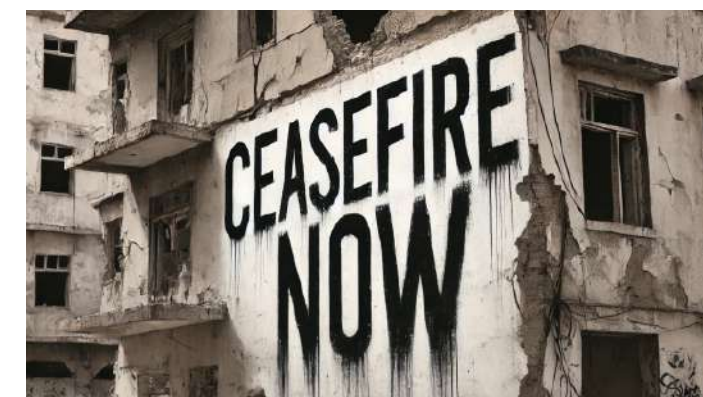
In 2024, HD helped to prevent and resolve environment- and climate-related conflicts in diverse contexts. Our efforts ranged from local-level mediation in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, to inter-state and regional dialogues on the Greater Mekong Region, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea.

HD resolved more than 335 conflicts over competition for access to natural resources in Burkina Faso, Chad and Togo. We facilitated 15 local peace agreements related to the use of disputed grazing lands, water points and farmland across the Sahel. HD facilitated a roadmap to resolve endemic farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt region. Our work also led to the creation of a network for scientific maritime cooperation in Asia.

→ Organised crime

Across the globe, policymakers increasingly feel the impact of organised crime in fuelling conflict, violence, instability or undermining peace. However, these issues and actors have largely eluded formal mediation processes.

In 2024, HD continued to work with experts from a range of disciplines to manage these threats, including by advising on negotiations with urban gangs in **Colombia**, crime-proofing processes in Asia, and developing new tools for peacemakers. We are piloting approaches to dealing with these groups, tackling the influence of illicit operations from banditry, to trafficking, to artisanal gold mining.



Ceasefires: building the foundations of peace

As prospects for comprehensive peace agreements have waned in recent years, high-intensity conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza have underscored the need for ceasefires as a critical first step.

HD therefore created a ceasefire initiative with a team of experienced experts to provide technical support for negotiations about security arrangements. Working closely with our teams on the ground, the team offers tailored technical advice and comparative insights to mediators, conflict parties, and international actors – helping to shape ceasefires that are credible, implementable, and politically viable.

In 2024, HD ceasefire experts supported operational teams and international mediators in Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan.

The team also developed a ceasefire training programme and ran simulation exercises for high-level participants of the Oslo Forum and the Raisina Forum in India.

The need for mediators to work creatively to manage violence and support peace efforts in challenging contemporary contexts is addressed in this HD paper on ceasefire politics.



Oslo Forum 2024

Mediating against all odds

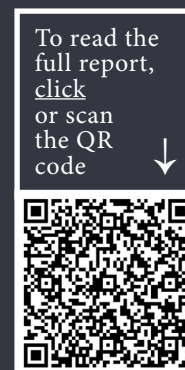
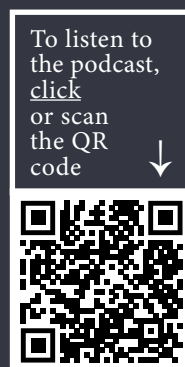
The annual Oslo Forum, co-hosted by HD and Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, remains a cornerstone event for the mediation sector, providing a discreet and informal environment to exchange perspectives, evaluate the changing dynamics of armed conflicts, and explore innovative approaches to their resolution.

The 2024 Forum, opened by Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, brought together over 150 high-level participants from 60 countries – including ministers, diplomats, and conflict experts – to reflect on peace efforts amid escalating global tensions and geopolitical polarisation.

Framed by the theme “Mediation against all odds,” the Forum addressed both specific crises and broader regional dynamics. Context-specific sessions focused on Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, and Haiti, while regional discussions addressed negotiations with criminal groups in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as security and dialogue in the Sahel.

At the Doha Forum in December 2024, the Oslo Forum team hosted a closed-door session on mediation in the Middle East, co-chaired by Norway's Foreign Minister and Qatar's Minister of State. A key focus was on how to preserve space for mediation amid escalating conflicts and shrinking diplomatic opportunities.

Finally, The Mediator's Studio podcast returned for its sixth season in autumn 2024, featuring five episodes recorded at the Oslo Forum. The series offers behind-the-scenes insights from diplomats, mediators, and peacemakers working to end some of today's most violent conflicts.



Organisational governance

HD's Board is the organisation's ultimate governing body.

HD maintains a decentralised organisational structure, with its executive management based at its headquarters in Geneva.

The Board meets every year and has two working committees: an Operations Committee which monitors the execution of HD's programmes and oversees HD's operational risk management; and a Finance and Organisation Committee in charge of assisting the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to oversight of financial integrity risk management and internal control systems.

At the end of 2024, HD's Board was composed of the following members:

- Dr. Joanne Liu – Chair of the Board
- Mr. Armin Slotta – Vice Chair of the Board
- Prof. Dewi Fortuna Anwar
- Ms. Andrienne d'Arenberg
- Amb. Markus Ederer
- Amb. Karl Eikenberry
- Mr. André Hoffmann
- H.E. Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas
- Mr. Nobukatsu Kanehara
- Ms. Kyung-wha Kang
- Ms. Marietje Schaake
- Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide
- Mr. Frédéric Vallat
- Ms. Margot Wallström
- Amb. Pierre Vimont (Hon. Board member)



Joanne Liu
Chair of the Board



Armin Slotta
Vice Chair of the Board



Dewi Fortuna Anwar
Board Member



Andrienne d'Arenberg
Board Member



Markus Ederer
Board Member



Karl Eikenberry
Board Member



André Hoffmann
Board Member



Mohamed Ibn Chambas
Board Member



Nobukatsu Kanehara
Board Member



Kyung-wha Kang
Board Member



Marietje Schaake
Board Member



Ine Eriksen Søreide
Board Member



Frédéric Vallat
Board Member



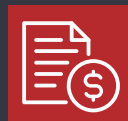
Margot Wallström
Board Member



Pierre Vimont
Honorary Board Member

Financial report

2024 income



Donor support to HD in 2024 provided an income of **CHF 47.2m million**.

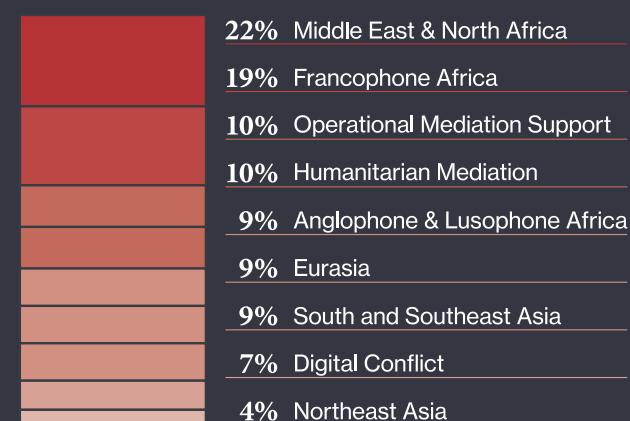


The organisation received un-earmarked support from the governments of *Denmark, Luxembourg, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland* as part of this total.

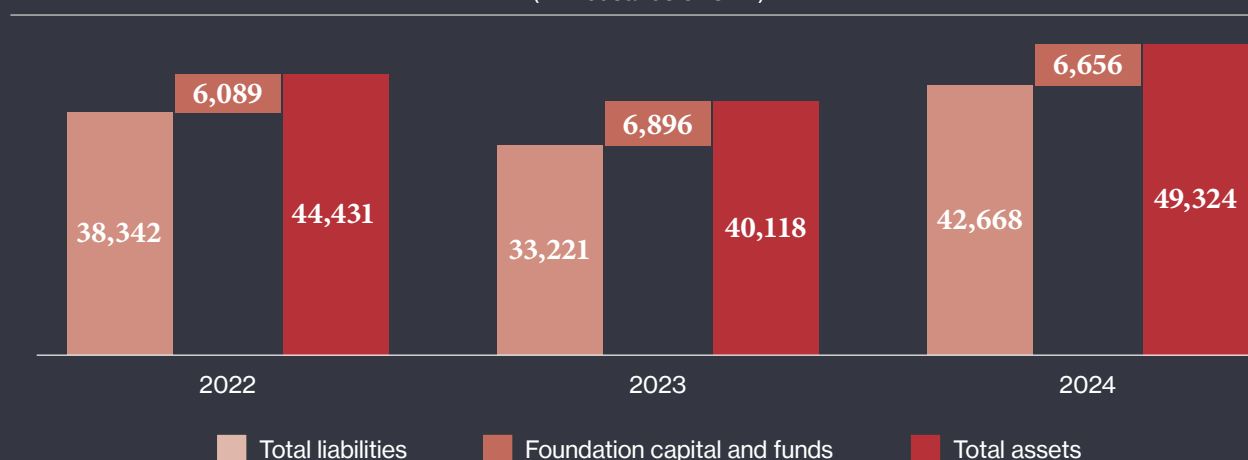
2024 expenditure

HD's operational spending in 2024 is illustrated in the bar chart below.

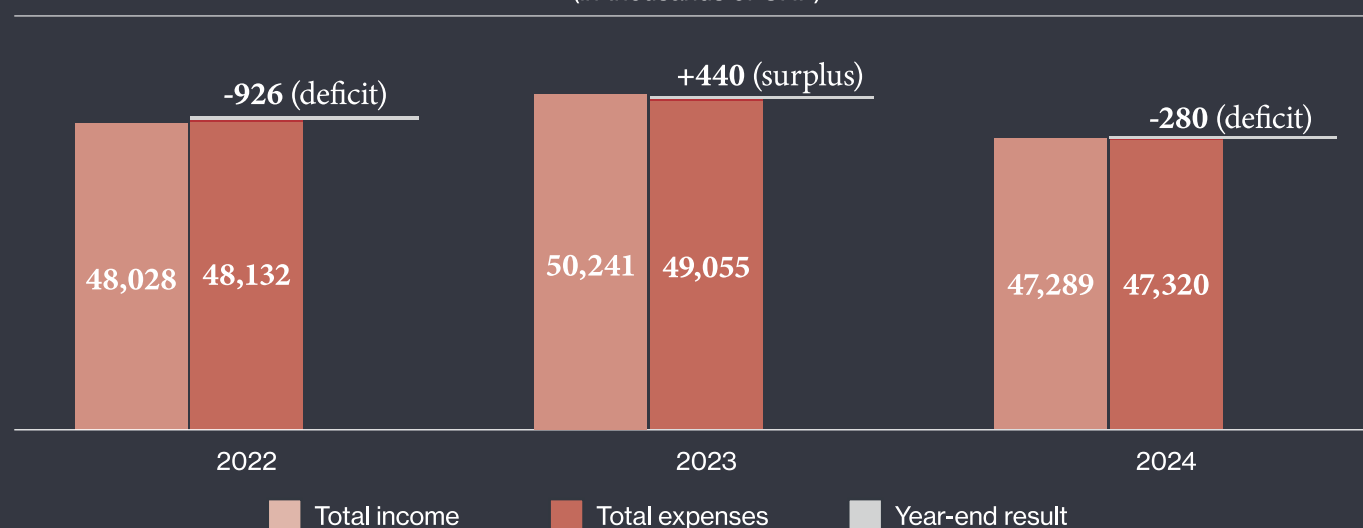
OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURE IN 2024



SUMMARY BALANCE SHEET (in thousands of CHF)



SUMMARY INCOME SHEET (in thousands of CHF)



Investing in flexible peacemaking

In the current global geopolitical crisis and the retreat of the United States as well as reduced European budgets for global humanitarian and development funding, the ability to prevent, mitigate and resolve armed conflicts and violence around the world is under significant strain. Existing peace settlements are fragile, so being able to quickly engage when a situation begins to slide back towards violence is vital and provides value for money. Indeed, according to the IMF, every \$1 spent on conflict prevention saves \$100 on a future conflict.

HD's discreet, agile and flexible approach and success in tackling conflict before it has broken out as well as once it has erupted, to resolve issues between conflict parties and strive for peaceful and humanitarian outcomes is more important than ever. Thanks to our local, national and global reach, the strengths of our networks, expertise, pragmatic approach and twenty-five years of experience, HD can often produce peacemaking results, including violence reduction, establishing backchannels and power-sharing agreements, that others cannot.

What makes this possible is the flexible support we receive from our partners through un-earmarked core funding, allowing HD to be independent and effective in using mediation and dialogue to produce concrete outcomes. HD undertakes assessments of potential new engagements in some high-risk conflict areas and only progresses if we are sure we can add value to a conflict. HD is continually exploring the full range of situations where its engagement might make a difference.

In a context of highly dynamic conflicts, core support allows the organisation to respond rapidly. HD can deploy resources quickly, whether to respond to a crisis or to windows of opportunity in

peace processes, without the delays generated by project application processes.

Un-earmarked support enables HD to adapt, tailor and time its intervention, providing exactly the kind of support that is needed when the moment is ripe – and to scale down or hold back if it is not. It enables HD to maintain access and networks in “frozen” conflicts, and in places where peace has perhaps been formally reached but is still fragile, and the risk of re-emergence of violence is still present.

Core funding enables HD to adapt to the shifting realities of global conflict by developing and piloting new and innovative mediation approaches and tools that helps its teams to develop effective responses to conflict challenges, including pragmatic solutions such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative during a time of active war in Ukraine. It also enables us to utilise new technologies, especially in remote conflict areas to encourage community inclusion, awareness and buy-in.

HD's decentralised model is effective in enabling our global reach, and local, national and international credibility, but it also requires strong support functions to ensure quality, professionalism and accountability across the organisation. Some functions are more efficient to combine across all projects, such as logistics, parts of finance and accounting, communications, IT, compliance, risk management, fundraising and human resources. HD's strong commitment to monitoring, evaluation and learning (see above) ensures that results are identified and documented, and experiences and lessons are gathered and disseminated – all functions that cannot be fully covered through individual project grants.

HD offers its core key donors strategic partnerships in return for their un-earmarked support. This emphasises an exchange of value across HD's entire portfolio and increases the frequency, timing and type of interactions. The close relationship that HD enjoys with its strategic partners brings greater awareness across the donor organisation of HD's expertise and added value, and enables both parties to draw on each other's respective strengths, thus creating more effective responses to fragility and conflict.

To support HD's flexibility and be part of the **HD Peace Fund and International Peace Table**, click here: <https://hdcentre.org/the-hd-peace-fund/>

Looking ahead

2024 was marked by major unrest arising from new conflicts, worsening crises and climate-fuelled disasters with 123 million people forcibly displaced by the end of the year according to UNHCR. This reflects the steady and continued increasing trend of violence against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Conflicts that do not spare civilians and make it unbearable to them to live safely require urgent attention.

There is a serious deterioration in the organisational capacity to address these problems, as polarised politics has undermined and weakened the organisations that helped address crises. In this regard, the mediation work that HD does, varying in great range from addressing local disputes over the trespassing of goats on farmers land in central Africa to considering the need for the governance of AI and outer space, has contributed to alleviate suffering, in addition to bringing a glimmer of hope in this much more unpredictable and unsafe world.

It has been my distinct honour to serve as Chair of HD's Board during such a turbulent time, reminding me that what HD offers and delivers is more needed than ever before. And the Board will relentlessly continue to support the incredible and so crucial work of HD in 2025.


Joanne Liu
Chair of HD's Board

“
*What HD offers
and delivers is
needed now more
than ever before.*
”



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