

Mitigating War, Pursuing Peace

Annual Report 2025





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Foreword



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War increased in 2025; there were more wars, and those wars were more intense, and they were fought in new ways. The work of mediation to prevent and resolve war also saw significant changes.

HD's main goal in 2025 was to adapt to the new contours of war and peace, to be able to play our part in holding back a growing tide of violence. We were mostly able to do that, but there is much more to do.

The rules-based system that provided some structure to international relations for over 80 years came under further stress in 2025. Those rules, including the prohibition on the use of force except in self-defense, were flouted more than ever before. The whole framework for managing violence in the international system – when force is legitimate, how force can be used, what remedies are available to the victims of aggression – was significantly degraded. The institutions set up to help oversee and implement these rules, led by the United Nations, were further sidelined and de-funded.

As the frameworks for managing violence have been weakened, war has increased. There were over 60 wars being fought in 2025 involving at least one state party. This was the highest number since serious

record-keeping began almost half a century ago. The number of refugees on the move from war zones also increased dramatically. Civilians, more than being the incidental victims of war, were often the main targets of violence. This was true in a range of otherwise unrelated conflicts including Gaza, Sudan and Myanmar.

Mediation, as one of the mechanisms for managing armed conflict, struggled to keep up with this deteriorating environment. The weakening of the United Nations as the main instrument for the management of peace and security in the world led to the further marginalisation of the UN's mediation efforts. As the UN's efforts have come under more strain in recent years, a number of countries, usually smaller and globally minded, have expanded their efforts: Norway, Switzerland, Qatar, Oman and others. HD has for many

years sought to support both sets of mediation actors. During 2025, however, these actors were somewhat eclipsed by the dramatic entry into the mediation space of the great powers, led by the United States.

The US President said that he would be the 'Peace President', posting a list of eight wars he had 'fixed'. There was an element of fiction in the list – it would be generous to say that Iran was 'fixed' in 2025 – but it was undeniable that something important was happening. From India and Pakistan to Thailand and Cambodia, President Trump was tireless in using the influence of the United States to try to curtail conflict, and he deployed a range of economic carrots and sticks as never before. Towards the end of 2025, President Trump set up the Board of Peace, officially inaugurated in January 2026 which arrogated to itself key peacemaking roles. In a much more low-key way, China also took a step into the mediation fray with the establishment of a treaty-based body, the International Organization for Mediation.

During these tumultuous events, HD faced a double challenge: one related to existing work, one related to new work with new partners.

First, HD had to keep its existing mediation work going in a new and turbulent context: new ways of fighting, new alliances and alignments, changing patterns of funding mediation. This was often not easy, as wars tend to be most amenable to mediation when they are stuck – that is, when they arrive at a 'mutually-hurting stalemate'. When everything is in flux, the parties to conflict look for outcomes that don't involve the painful compromise of a negotiated settlement. Despite these challenges, much of this work – from Syria to the Sahel to Southeast Asia – moved forward.

Second, HD had to develop work specifically adapted to the new conflicts, the new modes of warfare and the new patterns of mediation and deal-making. To some extent, HD was well positioned to the new environment.

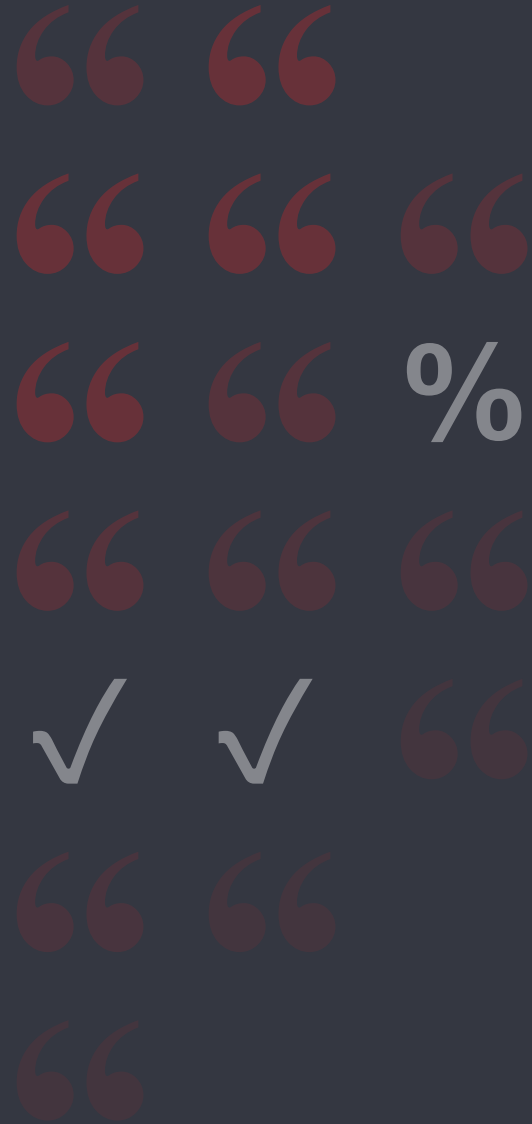
We have long sought to develop relationships with 'hard-to-reach' actors, and offering high-fidelity back-channels to such actors has been one of our mainstays. This work has been expanding for several years and grew further in 2025. We also had something of a headstart in dealing with maritime security, the vicious circle of crime and war, cyber warfare, and AI in military systems. And we made a concerted effort to engage the newly prominent mediation initiatives of the US, China and others, without moving away from the UN or the more traditional mediation partners.

All this presented us with a range of challenges not always visible from the outside. In such a polarised and volatile world, for example, our people were even more exposed to security risks. Our colleague Laurent Vinatier had been arrested in Moscow in the summer of 2024 and spent the whole of 2025 in prison in Russia, being released in the first weeks of 2026.

The international system, and particularly those parts of the system aimed at managing armed conflict, underwent rapid and far-reaching change in 2025, mostly for the worse. HD was able to adapt to some of these changes, and to play a positive role in mitigating the violence. This was reflected in our results and in our finances, as the following pages show. But those changes continue and are growing at the time of writing, and the work of adaption will have to continue.

Despite the growing risks, the need for HD and other principled private mediators has never been greater. We are committed to building on the changes begun in 2025 to ensure that private mediation can play its role in an increasingly violent and ungoverned world.

David Harland
Executive Director



Throughout 2025, HD ran 64 active projects in over 40 countries and across eight operational directorates.

60-70

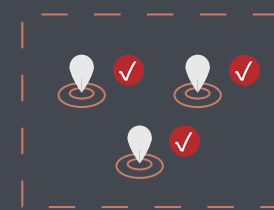
projects each year since 2020

HD's projects by level in 2025



33%

of HD projects focused on inter-state mediation



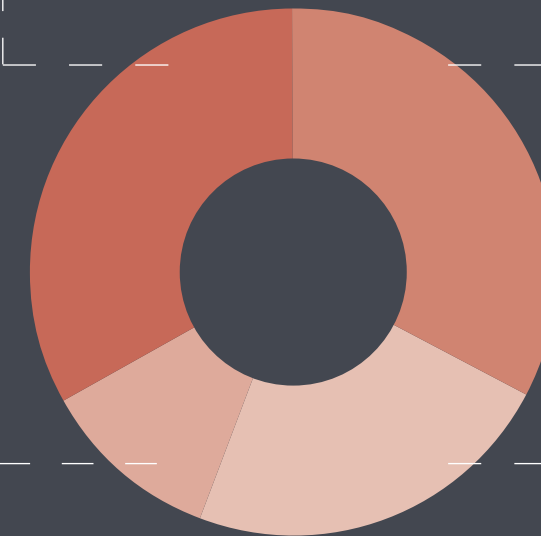
33%

of HD projects prioritised intra-state & multi-level engagements



11%

of HD projects focused on local-level mediation & dialogue



23%

of HD projects prioritised thematic engagements

HD's global reach
in 2025

HD's progress in 2025

HD's global presence yielded concrete results at all levels – from local to national and inter-state.

Much of HD's consequential work in 2025 necessarily remained out of view.

In several contexts, we discreetly supported parties to address long-running conflicts that have had significant consequences, thousands of lives lost and millions displaced. HD also channelled messages between warring parties, identifying practical actions that all sides could agree on.

These efforts reflected a broader reality: as geopolitical tensions increased, meaningful peacemaking increasingly happened away from public scrutiny. Much of this work was also preventive. HD supported past or future conflict parties to build mechanisms that stop conflict from escalating or (re)occurring. HD also remained well placed to directly facilitate peace agreements and conflict management settlements at local and community levels.

HD's portfolio adapted to meet emerging needs.

In 2025, the organisation launched 4 new scoping studies and approved 2 new projects.

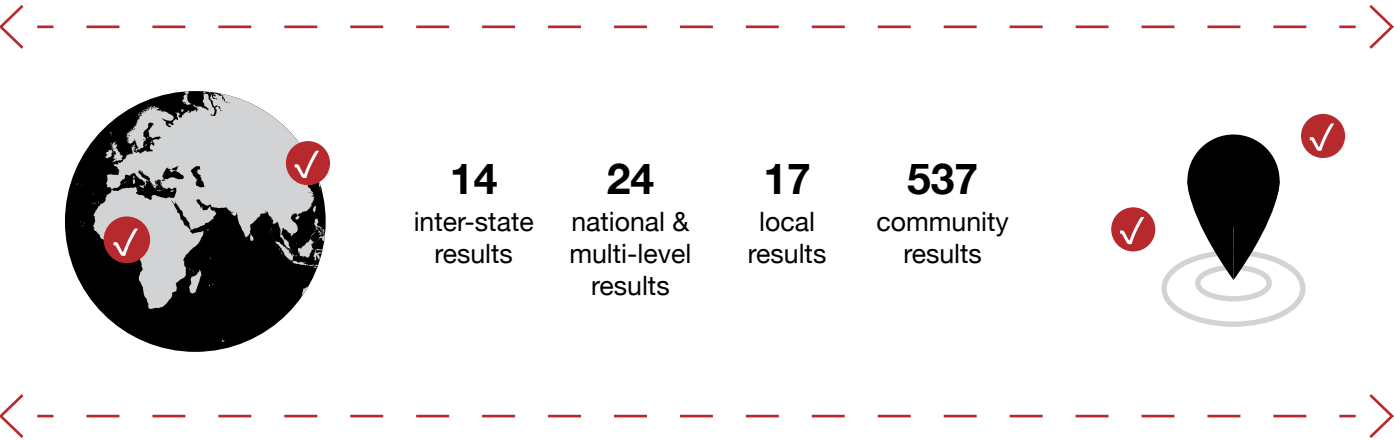
In 2025, HD recorded 55 valuable results globally.

These included:

- > 11 peace agreements and conflict management settlements at multiple levels: 1 inter-state agreement, 1 agreement at a national level, and 9 local-level peace agreements.
- > 9 agreements to support violence reduction and/or humanitarian access between or within states.



In numbers, our interim and final results along the path to peace featured:



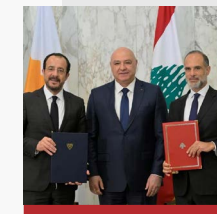
HD's highlights in 2025

As Russia's war with **Ukraine** entered its fourth year, HD worked with the UN, Türkiye, and other key stakeholders on a Black Sea freedom of navigation deal and helped to shape the 30-day infrastructure and maritime ceasefire.

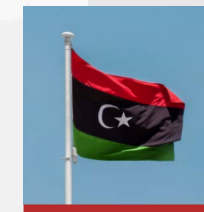


Southern factions of **Senegal's** Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques pour la Casamance (MFDC) signed an interim commitment to lay down arms, giving momentum to HD-supported negotiations to end Africa's oldest insurgency.

HD supported negotiations that resulted in an agreement to delineate the maritime border between **Lebanon** and **Cyprus**, ending a two decades-old stand-off and opening access to key natural resources.



HD facilitated a charter of digital ethics in **Libya** between heads of media organisations, journalists and influencers, to avoid disinformation, hate speech and harassment, particularly targeted at women.



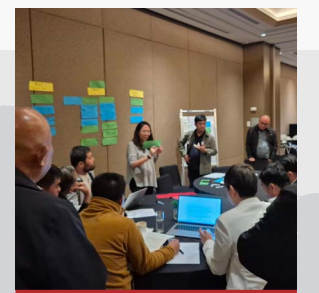
Armed gangs in **Colombia's** Quibdó city agreed to a permanent cessation of hostilities drawn up with HD support, reducing violent deaths in the city known for its high murder rate. HD received an official mandate to facilitate dialogues between three Colombian cities and criminal armed groups building on its multi-year support.

HD facilitated nine new local community agreements – many on natural resource management issues - in **Mali, Niger** and **Burkina Faso**, while its mediator networks independently resolved more than 519 conflicts across the Sahel.



In the **Central African Republic**, HD negotiated access agreements with commanders of multiple armed groups, enabling polio and measles vaccination campaigns to reach over 500,000 children.

Mediators supported by HD in the **Philippines'** Bangsamoro region resolved multiple clan conflicts, strengthening community resilience to violence and helping to keep alive the fragile national comprehensive peace agreement.



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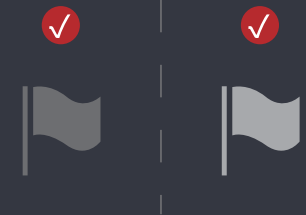
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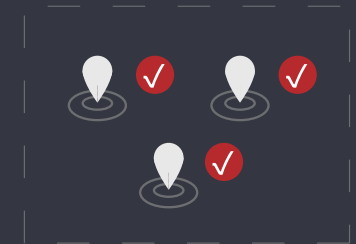
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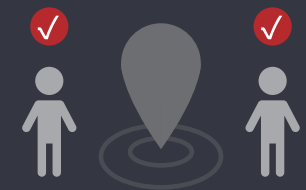
Inter-state



National



Local



Thematic



Results
by level of engagement



Mediating between states

HD's diverse and increasingly interconnected portfolio reflects the growing global trend towards increased war and tensions between states, alongside the need for mediators to continue tackling protracted national, local and community-based conflicts, often affected by international realities.

HD's inter-state engagements can help to fill gaps in international diplomacy by establishing and maintaining discreet communication channels between state actors. HD also convenes a range of regional and expert dialogues to help prevent and mitigate conflict between states.

Much of this progress is not HD's alone, but we have captured where HD played a significant role. Where progress is left out entirely, it must either remain confidential to give a process the best chance of success or because the context is too volatile.

> Middle East

In November 2025, after nearly two decades without a clearly defined maritime border between **Cyprus** and **Lebanon**, the parties signed an agreement to delineate their maritime border. This followed a historic decision by the Lebanese government in October to unanimously approve and ratify a 2007 agreement. The absence of a delineated border had deprived both countries of the legal certainty needed for oil and gas exploitation, undermining mutual trust and weakening stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. The election of a new Lebanese President in January 2025 provided fresh momentum to tackle the problem. HD was uniquely placed to provide legal expertise and strengthen the capacity of Lebanese institutions to formulate a viable negotiation strategy. HD accompanied the Lebanese negotiation team for discussions with their Cypriot counterparts and in domestic consultations. As a trusted and impartial actor, HD was vital to securing buy-in ahead of the agreement.



Actors sign the Lebanon-Cyprus maritime delineation agreement - © EPA2025

> Africa

Rising tensions between **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**, especially in Tigray, lengthened the list of security challenges for authorities already facing large-scale insurgency in Amhara, and persistent conflict in Oromia – Ethiopia's largest region. HD, which contributed to the 2022 Pretoria agreement that previously ended the war in Tigray, engaged key actors with proposals aimed at preventing renewed hostilities. After facilitating talks in Oromia in 2023, HD continued its high-level engagement with government forces and Oromia Liberation Army to bring the parties back to the table and worked with local actors, including civil society, to facilitate multi-level dialogue to push for a broader political settlement. HD also engaged with contacts in country and the diaspora to map the conflict in Amhara and explore entry points.

In the eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, HD supported various peace initiatives since the resumption of hostilities between Rwanda and DRC in December 2024. This included the French ceasefire proposal followed by the Doha Framework of November and Washington Peace Agreement signed in December 2025 by the Presidents of both countries. HD also advised DRC religious leaders as they put forward an initiative for national dialogue and several of the mediators of the African Union. In coordination with all parties and stakeholders of the conflict, HD actively advised the European Union to support the stabilisation and development of the Great Lakes region.

> Eurasia

As **Russia's** war on **Ukraine** moved into its fourth year, HD shuttled intensively between relevant capitals in 2025 exploring constructive approaches to a cessation of hostilities and a political settlement. It facilitated communications between US and Ukrainian delegations after the stormy Trump-Zelensky Oval office meeting in February, providing advice on starting a political process. Drawing on its past involvement with the Black Sea Grain Initiative, HD worked with the UN, Türkiye, and other key stakeholders on a Black Sea freedom of navigation deal that contributed to global food security and supply chains and helped to shape the 30-day infrastructure ceasefire in March, including launching consultations in Ukraine to explore preparations for 'the Day After' – the critical first 12-months after the guns fall silent.

Central Asian states' dependency on Russia is lessening in the wake of the Ukraine war, opening new possibilities for cooperation, trade, and for tackling sources of instability posed by border disputes and transboundary water management issues. Tajikistan and **Kyrgyzstan** showed the possibilities with an agreement in 2025 ending long-running border demarcation disputes which HD helped implement.

In the South Caucasus, HD convened dialogue to support the de-escalation of tensions between **Azerbaijani**, **Armenian**, **Georgian** and **Turkish** experts on regional connectivity in the South Caucasus. HD pursued stabilisation in the **Western Balkans** in the face of resurgent populist and hardline nationalist movements across much of the region. Massive anti-government demonstrations by a combination of student and hardline nationalist groups in **Serbia** left the government little opportunity to pursue normalising relations with **Kosovo** but HD provided space for officials to discuss the issues.

> Asia

In 2025, with tensions in the **South China Sea** remaining high, HD used its decade-long engagement in the area and strong network of interlocutors to support the Chair of the 11-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations in running the ASEAN-China Workshop on Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies Cooperation. This provided a valuable platform for dialogue between respective coastguards. Fisheries scientists from the littoral states also jointly published analysis on shared tuna stocks, a rare instance of practical maritime cooperation amid frequent reports of clashes. Maritime security and shared marine resource management were also key issues in HD's dialogues to advance cooperation in the **Bay of Bengal**, where the HD-initiated guiding principles for maritime law enforcement agencies were accepted by regional states. Formal adoption of the agreement is likely in 2026.

HD worked with the six riparian countries of the **Greater Mekong Region** to address shared transboundary climate risks affecting peace and security. In 2025, it convened a six-country regional dialogue co-hosted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' thinktank, the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. The dialogue advanced practical alignment on emerging climate-conflict risks and disaster response frameworks, linking traditional security concerns with environmental pressures beyond the scope of existing regional platforms. It also marked HD's first focused engagement on the Mekong in **Vietnam** during a period of domestic political transition, helping establish a foundation for continued collaboration.

To strengthen preventive diplomacy and shape responsible military AI norms in the region, HD convened the first bilateral expert-level dialogue between the **Republic of Korea** and **Japan** on military AI governance. This broke down silos, bringing together defence, legal, and technology specialists, and addressed escalation risks and confidence-building measures.

Leveraging its mediation expertise, HD has facilitated discussions between states and the international conflict mediation community to enhance mutual understanding of conflict resolution, explore routes to cooperation on ongoing conflicts and prevent future tension escalation. In 2025, HD conducted outreach and provided capacity building to the **Chinese** government-affiliated institution on mediation, the International Mediation Organisation (IOMed) based in Hong Kong, and provided mediation training and technical support to the government of **Indonesia**.



Men prepare fishing nets along the Mekong River - © EPA2025

HD's engagement with China & the world

China is an important player not only in peace in the Asia region, but also in global stability. HD initiated its first project in China in 2008 and has expanded its work to various tracks ever since. HD's China Programme aims to promote frank dialogue, build mutual cooperation, and identify solutions towards conflict prevention and the peaceful resolution of disputes between China and relevant countries. It also aims to identify common ground between China and other parts of the world where joint efforts in promoting international peace and stability are possible. In 2025, HD engaged in different ways, including working with HD's Asia region portfolio as a whole.

China-US

Despite simmering hostilities between the two nations, HD convenes experts from China and the US to conduct in-depth discussions and explore practical solutions to key topics that impact bilateral relations and international security. In 2025, HD convened an in-person workshop in Beijing on maritime security focusing on maritime flashpoints and the risks of a security flare-up posed by a collision on the high seas. HD also addressed the risks associated with the escalating military rivalry between the two countries, underscoring the significance of HD-facilitated channels of contact. A specific workshop assessed current dynamics and future developments in the bilateral relationships, exploring where the contours of potential agreement

might lie. Separately, HD explored the weaponisation of economic interdependences and trade, including in rare earths and critical minerals, and the risks associated with their use. On rising nuclear risks, HD facilitated quiet shuttling of ideas in preparation for upcoming bilateral summits in 2026.

China-Europe

HD facilitated a series of expert dialogues to support China-Europe relations. These discussions address respective concerns and common interests of China and Europe in the context of a rapidly evolving landscape, including shared concern over nuclear arms control and proliferation risks, and the war in Iran. In 2025, transatlantic tensions added impetus to a series of meetings held in Beijing, The Hague and Berlin that addressed the deterioration in global strategic stability, built joint analysis on nuclear escalation and de-escalation pathways, and mapped potential avenues for nuclear risk reduction and cooperation.



✓ Dialogue within states

Despite the rise in warfare between states, most conflicts globally are still internationalised civil wars. Dialogue at multiple levels can help reach agreements within country-specific contexts that recognise relevant regional and international interests. In 2025, HD mediators around the world faced increasingly complex operating environments while working to address longstanding conflicts within states.

> Asia

Four years after the military coup, **Myanmar** remains convulsed by conflict that has inflicted heavy civilian casualties, displaced some 3.5 million people, and increased a breeding space for transnational criminal enterprise. A major earthquake in 2025 deepened the country's misery. End-of-year elections of questionable legitimacy brought no relief and a five-point plan to address the Myanmar conflict adopted by ASEAN has seen limited progress. HD impartially maintained contact with key stakeholders of the country and in the region, keeping up informal dialogues that explore openings to lower tensions and violence, including with ASEAN's special envoys.

The fragile decade-old Bangsamoro peace agreement in the **Philippines'** Mindanao region hit new snags in 2025, reinforcing the importance of HD's multi-level engagement with key stakeholders to stop it from unravelling and avert an escalation of violence. Problems stemming from a deteriorating relationship between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) included the latter's temporary withdrawal from implementing key components of the peace agreement. Regional elections,

postponed thrice already, are finally scheduled in September 2026 but conflict continues to persist in many areas. HD provided technical advice to the government and the MILF to identify steps to keep the peace process moving forward, including task forces working on transitional justice and transformation of MILF camps.

> Eurasia

For decades, **Moldova** and **Transnistria** have been unable to come to an agreement at reintegration. However, the war in Ukraine and Moldova's aspirations to join the European Union have raised tensions as well as the stakes. HD has been quietly working to help find a path forward to reduce tensions and eventually a solution to secure critical peace in this fragile corner of Europe.



A monk walks past a sculpture of Buddha in a damaged temple following an earthquake in Mandalay, Myanmar - © EPA2025



A person passes an anti-Israel mural sprayed on a wall, depicting a Houthi fighter stopping an Israeli ship off the coast of Yemen, in Sana'a, Yemen - © EPA2025

> Middle East & North Africa

Iraq's Shia-led government avoided being drawn directly into regional hostilities in 2025. It focused on consolidating civilian rule and delivering socio-economic development. HD built relations between authorities in Baghdad and the provinces to restore a less militarised government in areas previously taken over by ISIS. It convened provincial-level dialogues between Baghdad officials and tribal leaders to address local grievances and assist the safe return of displaced families in western Iraq to reduce the likelihood of an ISIS recovery. HD also set up deconfliction mechanisms in northern Iraq supporting dialogue between the Kurdish Regional Government, Shia militias and Turkish authorities to lower tensions and bring an end to incursions targeting supporters of Türkiye's Kurdish opposition.

Fifteen years after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, **Libya** remains divided between two rival governments and rocked by repeated eruptions of political violence. After armed clashes in the first half of the year, HD's contacts with the Government of National Unity and armed groups helped to de-escalate tensions and avert a collapse of the formal 2020 ceasefire agreement that HD helped to deliver. HD maintained a dialogue with key national institutions, making space for informal agreements. It advised the UN mission and facilitated contacts with hard-to-reach political actors. HD delivered a rare success by gaining support from heads of media organisations, prominent journalists and influencers for a charter on digital ethics – committing them to avoid disinformation, hate speech and harassment, with a specific clause on protecting women.

Long-running conflict between **Yemen's** Ansar Allah (Houthi) forces in the north and the internationally recognised government in the south largely stagnated in 2025. Against this backdrop, Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping continued to draw international attention. HD worked at multiple levels to help address sporadic flare-ups in fighting and maintain space for dialogue. HD sustained its longstanding channels with leaders of the warring parties, engaged hard-to-reach actors, and mediated several local flashpoints. HD also convened a series of high-level meetings in Geneva, Oslo and Muscat to discuss interim arrangements to help the transition towards stabilisation and longer-term political arrangements.

> Africa

HD facilitated talks between the government of **Senegal** and the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), continuing progress towards an agreement to end Africa's oldest insurgency. Rebel leader César Atoute Badiate's faction and the Government of Senegal remained in talks on the surrender of arms and, facilitated by HD, agreed to security arrangements including the positioning of troops and clearance of anti-personnel mines to allow the return of displaced villagers. HD's training sessions with MFDC members helped them to prepare a roadmap for the surrender of weapons. It also arranged dialogues for communities and returnees to avoid disputes over land and resource use.

Rising violence in **Nigeria** caught the attention of the White House in 2025 as Africa's most populous country grappled with complex intersecting conflicts between climate-affected farmers and herders, surging banditry, and infiltration by jihadist insurgents. Although the Middle Belt states bear the brunt of herder-farmer violence, HD's many years of experience in the region meant it could support the de-escalation of a security crisis in Benue State that followed the killing of more than 100 people in Yelwata in an attack by criminal armed herders. To mitigate the risk of counterattacks, HD engaged its channels to key political, religious, and traditional leaders, helping to curb inflammatory public statements and promote positive messaging for peaceful coexistence among local communities.

Civil war in **Sudan** intensified and spread in 2025 despite a roadmap agreed by the Quad - US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE - in September. Subsequent international efforts were unsuccessful in reaching a humanitarian truce with the principal belligerents. HD and other organisations continued to work with groups to formulate proposals for a peace process, address questions related to the endgame for the war, and propose a

framework for transition, recognising that a bargain between the main combatant forces may result in a ceasefire but no durable peace. A series of dialogues convened by HD with political parties, civil society and armed groups separate from the main belligerents resulted in a declaration of principles and peace roadmap.

South Sudan has lurched perilously close to a resumption of a large-scale civil war since the arrest of Vice President Riak Machar in March 2025, with thousands fleeing Sudan. HD convened multi-participant technical dialogue on humanitarian issues in Juba and the sixth High-Level Dialogue 25 in Nairobi to discuss the evolving security environment and barriers to aid delivery and assistance.

Geopolitical shifts in the Horn of Africa provided an unsettling backdrop to political tensions in **Somalia**, where federal government plans to shift from indirect, clan-based elections to direct elections in 2026 faced stiff resistance from member states. HD kept communications open between key political actors through discreet consultations and informal dialogues at federal, state and community levels, averting the risk of disputes flaring up into violence.



HD facilitates an agreement signing in Senegal - © HD

✓ Local peacemaking

Over the years, HD has demonstrated its ability to reduce violence by empowering local mediators in diverse contexts. In 2025, HD continued to help communities build their resilience and create 'islands of stability' through local-level peacemaking efforts.



The formation of the National Advisory Council of Mediation in Bangui, Mali - © HD

> Africa

In 2025, HD initiated 36 processes of mediation across the Sahel. HD established 20 new networks of agropastoral mediators in **Chad** and **Central African Republic** and two new networks in **Burkina Faso**, increasing the total number of HD-implemented networks to 114 since 2015. HD prioritised the inclusion of women and young leaders in the networks which independently resolved more than 519 conflicts, many of which focused on competition for natural resources in 2025.

HD pursued a separate track developing dialogues between national authorities and local communities in **Burkina Faso** as part of a programme of bottom-up agropastoral reform. A cross-border

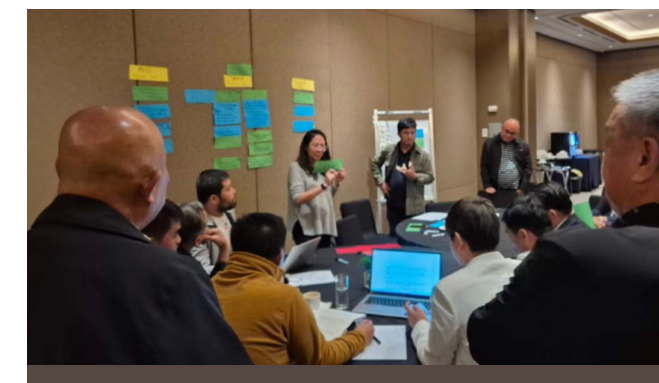
meeting on transhumance issues between communities in Burkina Faso and Ghana resulted in agreement on a roadmap for cooperation and the establishment of a monitoring committee to oversee its implementation, also opening new channels of communication with Ghanaian authorities.

HD also created or expanded 14 networks with more than 300 agropastoral mediators in **Chad**, where livestock supports around 40% of the population and violent confrontation between farmers and herders has soared in the past two years. Clashes around Mandakao, close to the border with Cameroon, resulted in 47 deaths in the first half of 2025. Local mediators in Chad resolved more than 200 disputes in 2025, including 75 disputes settled by or with the involvement of women.

In **Sudan** and **South Sudan**, HD engaged with a wide range of community and civil society actors – including clan elders, religious leaders, business actors, women leaders, youth representatives - to build community capacity for peaceful dispute resolution.

> Asia

In the **Philippines**, HD continued its longstanding efforts to support local partners in Sulu, Maguindanao and Lanao who settled over a dozen community-level disputes in 2025. By avoiding violent escalation of tensions between clans, local mediators are contributing to the broader Bangsamoro peace process.



HD and Conciliation Resources facilitate talks to advance peace agreement implementation. Philippines - © HD



Global & thematic engagements

HD pursues global and thematic engagements based on trends that persist across its operations and the ever-changing field of mediation.

Although HD prides itself on its decentralised and locally embedded ways of working, the organisation's cross-regional and 'thematic' approaches are growing as peacemaking increasingly requires collaboration among actors in different contexts grappling with similar tensions and issues. This includes digital warfare, climate and environmental change driven conflict, and organised criminal networks that impact conflict across borders.

HD uses a **gender-responsive and inclusive approach** across its global operations, despite increasingly transactional politics that make it harder for women and minorities to participate in political processes. In 2025, HD's Gender and Inclusion team provided support to 32 projects, more than half of HD's operations. This included strengthening networks of women mediators tackling agro-pastoral conflicts in the Sahel, and Nigeria's Middle Belt States. It also promoted the participation of women and young people in Sudan's discussions on post war security arrangements. HD experts supported staff with gender-sensitive conflict analysis, advice, capacity building workshops and peacemaking activities in **Colombia**, **Ethiopia** and **Indonesia**, and brought staff together for a global gender and inclusion workshop to share best practice and common approaches for success.

> Digital conflict

– Social media

As increasingly widespread and sophisticated use and abuse of social media by domestic and foreign actors continued to fuel conflict and undermine peace efforts in 2025, HD focused on three main areas of work. In Europe, the Middle East and Asia it engaged with political parties and influential figures to promote good conduct standards and curb abuse as exemplified by agreements added in **Libya** and **Kosovo**. HD also worked with key social media platforms to strengthen protections and moderate content, briefing them on threats in **Haiti**, **Syria** and **Ukraine**. It provided technical advice and training for mediators, diplomats and civil society actors on the harm to peace processes from social media abuse.

– Cyber

Lessons from the wars in **Ukraine** and the **Middle East** along with wider geopolitical tensions and targeting of critical infrastructure gave impetus to states' interest in cyber confidence-building measures and mechanisms to mitigate the risks. To complement formal diplomatic initiatives, HD worked on developing crisis communication channels between states and identify avenues for restraint – in Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia. In talks facilitated by HD, senior cyber experts from **China** and **India** set up a study group that produced recommendations now under higher level review on developing cybersecurity cooperation. HD also facilitated a regional inter-state dialogue that produced agreement by participating states on a framework for protecting critical infrastructure, agreeing to guidelines for national assessments to protect Global Navigation Satellite Systems.

– A.I. & outer space

The rapid pace of change in A.I. technologies has aroused concern, particularly when it comes to military applications. Military and foreign ministry officials of 12 state leaders, including representation from the **Gulf**, **Asia**, **Europe** and **Latin America** took part in the second Structured Dialogue on military A.I. and International Security convened by HD in Geneva in September 2025. The cross-regional dialogue focused on risks of escalation posed by AI-based decision support systems. Issues considered in this meeting also fed into regional discussions, including consideration of AI in the China-Europe dialogue. HD also consulted key state actors in outer space in 2025, launching a separate programme to tackle issues of growing risks of unintended incidents, misunderstandings and miscalculations in outer space.

> Humanitarian mediation

HD has become a valued partner of humanitarian organisations by mediating access for life-saving relief to civilians trapped in violent conflict. Through its contacts with armed groups, community elders, religious leaders and other local intermediaries, in 2025 HD assisted deliveries of vaccines to **Afghanistan**, **Somalia** and **the Central African Republic**. Health teams were able to reach areas of **Nigeria** that had been inaccessible for many years and for the first time undertake vaccinations in high-risk localities in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. HD continued to work closely with international organisations on the risks, obstacles and approaches to getting aid into embattled communities of **South Sudan** and mediated space for cross-border aid deliveries to civilians in **Myanmar**.

Asia Humanitarian Access Programme

HD's **Asia Humanitarian Access Programme** was founded during the COVID-19 pandemic to enable more coherent responses to displacement, health access, and cross-border humanitarian needs during the crisis and its aftermath along the **Thailand-Myanmar** border. In the face of sharp cuts in internationally-funded humanitarian assistance for displaced people from Myanmar in Thailand in 2025, HD worked with partners to design a multi-stakeholder dialogue process, convening key government ministries, civil society organisations, and media to consider how to address the sudden humanitarian needs and to mitigate the conflict-induced cross-border challenges in a systematic way. This shaped a consensus among stakeholders and produced concrete proposals that were then adopted as government policies and help to balance humanitarian protection, national security, and long-term economic development needs in the border region.



Internally displaced people from Myanmar fled across the Salween river to Thailand - © Prachatai.com

> Environmental & climate-related peacemaking

While climate change is a prominent driver of violent conflict, it often receives scant attention in peace processes and agreements. HD works to connect science, politics and conflict resolution by using its strong relations with conflict parties and partners from the environment and climate sector to inform mediation practice. In 2025, HD's dedicated environmental peacemaking unit advised projects dealing with sensitive transborder issues in the **Greater Mekong Region** and marine resource management critical to regional security in the **Bay of Bengal**, as well as transboundary water pollution driven by armed conflict.

In addition, HD has developed partnerships with international conservation organisations working in **Chad** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. HD's experience shaped discussions at the Berlin Climate and Security Conference and provided a basis for training delivered to policymakers, including the Swiss Foreign Ministry, Germany's Centre for International Peace Operations and the Austrian Centre for Peace.

> Organised crime & illicit economies

Illicit economies are increasingly intertwined with conflict, politics and systems of governance worldwide. Across parts of Africa, competition over gold, minerals, arms and migrant smuggling routes is helping to fuel violence and entrench the power of armed actors. In Asia, transnational scam-centre networks are shaping political relationships and conflict dynamics. In the Balkans, hazardous waste smuggling and illegal landfills are emerging as drivers of corruption, instability and environmental insecurity. Yet peacemaking efforts have often struggled to engage these issues, in part because of the possible security and legal risks involved. However, peace efforts that ignore or do not address organised crime can be undermined.

HD has developed practical responses to this challenge. For example, working with a mandate from the **Colombian** government in 2025, HD helped foster a permanent cessation of hostilities between gangs in Quibdó in March, reducing violence and crime-related harms. It also supported the launch of a National Civil Society Board for Urban Peace in Medellín in June. Additionally, experts within HD's OCPM team advised HD operations in **Ukraine, West Africa, Southeast Asia, Central Asia** and the **Western Balkans** relating to the intersection of crime and conflict.

Organised crime: addressing the hidden drivers of conflict

In 2025, transnational organised crime is estimated to have generated more than USD 2 trillion globally. From the opium fields of Myanmar to drug trafficking corridors in Latin America, conflict zones have become attractive destinations for criminal networks due to weak law enforcement, porous borders, and the fact that conflict parties are in constant need of money and weapons. The result is often a political-economic ecosystem where, for example, criminal syndicates, brokers, tech intermediaries, and officials align in exchange for a share of the profits.

This merger of crime and politics has significant implications for HD's work. Firstly, it reinforces the logic of the "profitable stalemate." For those profiting from protection and illicit rents, prolonged uncertainty is often more attractive than outright war or genuine peace. Secondly, it undermines peace processes. Traditional negotiations focus on ideology or power-sharing, frequently overlooking the illicit economies and protection arrangements central to the interests of armed actors. When these underlying incentives remain untouched, violence returns in new forms. Finally, it fragments state authority. Power shifts from formal institutions to informal, transactional relationships of influence which can be exceedingly difficult to identify.

To remain effective in this changing landscape, mediators must adapt their tools. This includes analysing who profits from instability, who provides protection, and who guarantees impunity. It also includes expanding beyond comfort zones into the intersection of illicit economies and

conflict. Recognising criminal interests as an hidden organising principle behind conflict is essential to understanding why wars persist and effectively addressing all the drivers of instability.

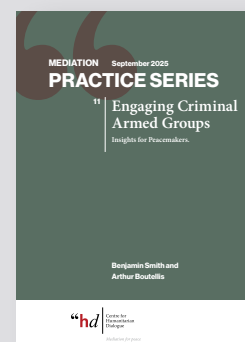
2025 saw HD stepping up its work in this field, launching a flagship publication on Engaging Criminal Armed Actors and implementing a range of relevant projects. In Colombia, for example, an HD-supported permanent cessation of hostilities between rival gangs locked in reductions in violent deaths in the city of Quibdó. Looking ahead, HD plans to deepen its engagement in this space: as organised crime becomes an increasingly powerful driver of conflict, understanding and addressing its influence will be central to building durable pathways to peace.



Gang representatives brief community members on the peace process - © HD



Download the latest edition of the *Mediation Practice Series: Engaging Criminal Armed Groups*

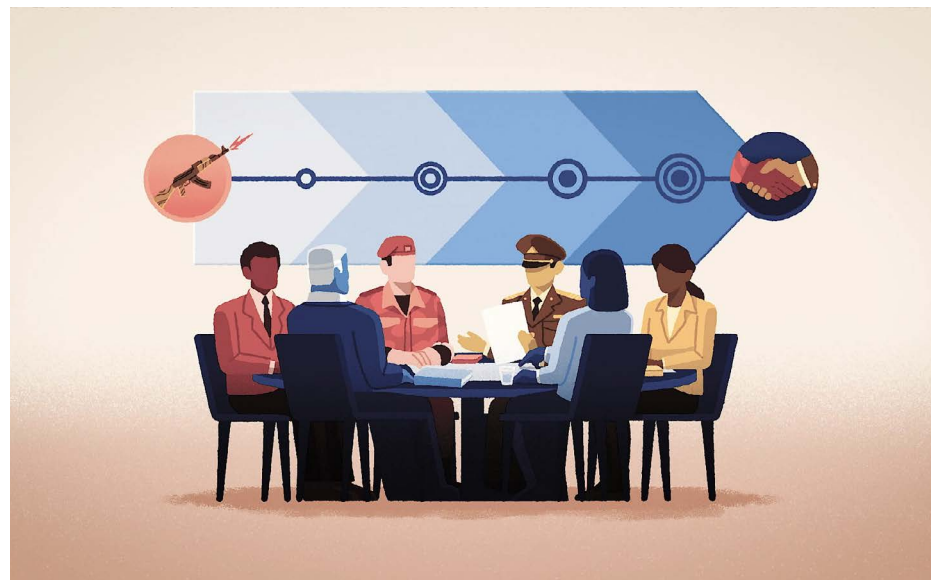


> Ceasefires & security arrangements

Given high-intensity conflicts in **Ukraine** and **Sudan**, continuing instability and rising inter-state tensions in the **Middle East**, ceasefires remained at the centre of international peacemaking efforts throughout 2025. HD's dedicated ceasefire support team responded to the heightened demand for ceasefire expertise in two ways. First, HD delivered technical advice and support to a range of conflict stakeholders, including HD teams, conflict parties and other third parties seeking to reduce or stop the use of armed violence. Second, HD developed analysis, guidance and training on ceasefires and related security arrangements for the same groups, including a focus on technical

aspects, managing conflict frontlines and addressing civilian needs. In 2025, these activities related to **Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Senegal, Syria, Sudan, Thailand–Cambodia, Ukraine** and **Yemen**.

HD helped to drive best practice in the field by releasing a series of videos on ceasefire mediation together with CSS ETH Zurich. The videos provide an overview of different types of ceasefires, how they interact with political negotiations and security transitions, and cover issues of monitoring and implementation.



Explore the *Understanding Ceasefires and the Security Transition* course designed for policymakers, conflict parties, mediators, and peacebuilders.

Mediation Support

HD's Mediation Support and Policy Directorate, MESU, works with operational teams to strengthen the overall effectiveness and strategic coherence of their efforts. By applying HD's sector-leading approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) at all levels across the organisation, MESU helps to ensure sound decision-making and value-for-money. It does so in innovative and adaptive ways, responding to the changing nature of conflicts. MESU provides strategic insights to senior management, as well as technical advice and expertise to HD operations through its thematic hub. It develops specific guidance and delivers mediation training for staff, conflict parties and key partners.

In 2025, MESU delivered technical support and process design advice to confidential operations and HD projects in some of the most challenging contexts, including **Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Moldova, Ethiopia** and **Somalia**.

To help equip HD's mediators – as well as foster a coherent, global HD identity – MESU **trained over 100 HD staff in 2025** to build both core mediation skills and specific areas of expertise. This included its advanced, in-person course in Applied Mediation, as well as online training on Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Peacemaking, and HD's Adaptive MEL approach. It also provided **MEL support to over 40 per cent of HD projects**, ranging from new initiatives to some of HD's longest running projects. MESU facilitated peer reviews of confidential projects in the **Middle East and Asia**, along with public projects in **Burkina Faso** and the **Philippines**.

HD continued to inform best practice across the mediation sector by releasing new publications in 2025, including a [mediation practice paper on engaging criminal armed groups](#) that sets out an approach to reduce violence and mitigate crime-related harms.



Participants at HD-hosted donor-practitioner roundtable on MEL for peacemaking in 2025 - © HD

Oslo Forum

More than **140 participants from 52 countries** attended the 2025 Oslo Forum, a discreet retreat co-hosted with Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Forum started in 2003 and has now become a signature event for mediators, state policymakers and diplomats. Thirty countries sent senior government officials, making up a third of total participants who took part in critical reflections on contemporary conflicts, including in **Ukraine** and **Sudan**. The forum's 18 sessions provided a venue for frank discussion of the trends in geopolitics and the most sensitive issues for mediation.

In 2025 HD – together with the Norwegian and Omani ministries of foreign affairs – held a retreat in **Muscat** to discuss current conflicts and mediation practice in the Middle East, attended by more than 70 participants including senior government officials and mediators.



➤ Mediator's Studio podcast

HD shared the views of participants in the Oslo Forum with a wider audience through the Oslo Forum 2025 Report: Mediation in a Changing World and seven new episodes of its podcast, The Mediator's Studio. The guests in these sessions included Kenya's former president, Uhuru Kenyatta; Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen; and former South Korean Foreign Minister Kyung-wha Kang. The podcasts have been downloaded by listeners in over 180 countries during the past seven seasons.



Scan the QR code to listen to *The Mediators Studio Podcast*.

HD in the media

Though HD maintains a low public profile to give the discreet processes we are involved in the greatest chance of success, some HD voices were present in the media last year.

These included:

- “There are now more wars than ever in the world, but more conflicts are on the negotiating table, and some are moving forward,” David Harland was quoted in BBC Chief International Correspondent Lyse Doucet's piece on the fragile, urgent, and hopeful landscape of global peacemaking.
- An article co-authored by HD's Abel Abate D. and published in Foreign Policy, highlighted the growing tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea as shifting dynamics in Tigray unsettle the fragile postwar balance in the Horn of Africa.
- HD's Senior Advisor Michael Vatikiotis published a piece in the South China Morning Post on how old institutional frameworks, once guardians of global order, are being bypassed in favour of personalised, interest-laden deals and ad-hoc partnerships
- HD's ceasefires and security arrangements expert, Govinda Clayton wrote a compelling piece on ceasefires for The New Humanitarian, arguing that ceasefires should be part of a longer process aimed at achieving durable peace, not the endgame.
- “At least Ukraine and Russia are talking to each other again. That's progress.” In an interview with German prominent national newspaper Die Zeit, HD's Eurasia Director David Gorman unpacked the complex dynamics behind the conflict and explains why ceasefires and dialogue must be anchored in long-term strategy and not in wishful diplomacy. English version here.
- David Harland wrote about the rise of war globally and why we need to tackle it in new ways in The New Humanitarian.



The Risk of a New Ethiopian-Eritrean War Is Growing - © ForeignPolicy

Board governance

HD's board

HD is supervised by an independent Board that sets the mission and general policy of the non-profit foundation and provides oversight of its programmes. The Board meets three times a year with three working committees meeting that include:

- > an Operations Committee assisting the Board to fulfil its supervisory responsibilities related to HD's conduct of its operations
- > an Audit and Risk Committee responsible for overseeing the financial integrity, risk management, and internal control systems;
- > a Nomination, Remuneration & Safeguarding Committee established to support the Board in its responsibilities regarding Board composition, leadership appointments, remuneration policy, safeguarding standards.

In 2025, HD strengthened its Board with the appointment of Christian Mumenthaler, Marc Hermant, and Frédéric Vallat, while the second half of the year saw the departures of Kyung-wha Kang, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, reflecting the conclusion of their terms or transitions to other appointments.

HD's board in 2025 comprised of:



Dr. Joanne Liu
Chair of the Board



Amb. Markus Ederer
Vice Chair
of the Board



**Ms. Andrienne
d'Arenberg**



**Prof. Dewi
Fortuna Anwar**



**H.E. Dr. Mohamed
Ibn Chambas**



**Amb. Karl
Eikenberry**



**Ms. Ine Eriksen
Søreide**



**Mr. André
Hoffmann**



**Mr. Nobukatsu
Kanehara**



**Ms. Kyung-wha
Kang**



Mr. Frédéric Vallat



**Ms. Margot
Wallström**



Mr. Marc Hermant



**Mr. Christian
Mumenthaler**



**Amb. Pierre
Vimont**
Hon. Board member

Financials



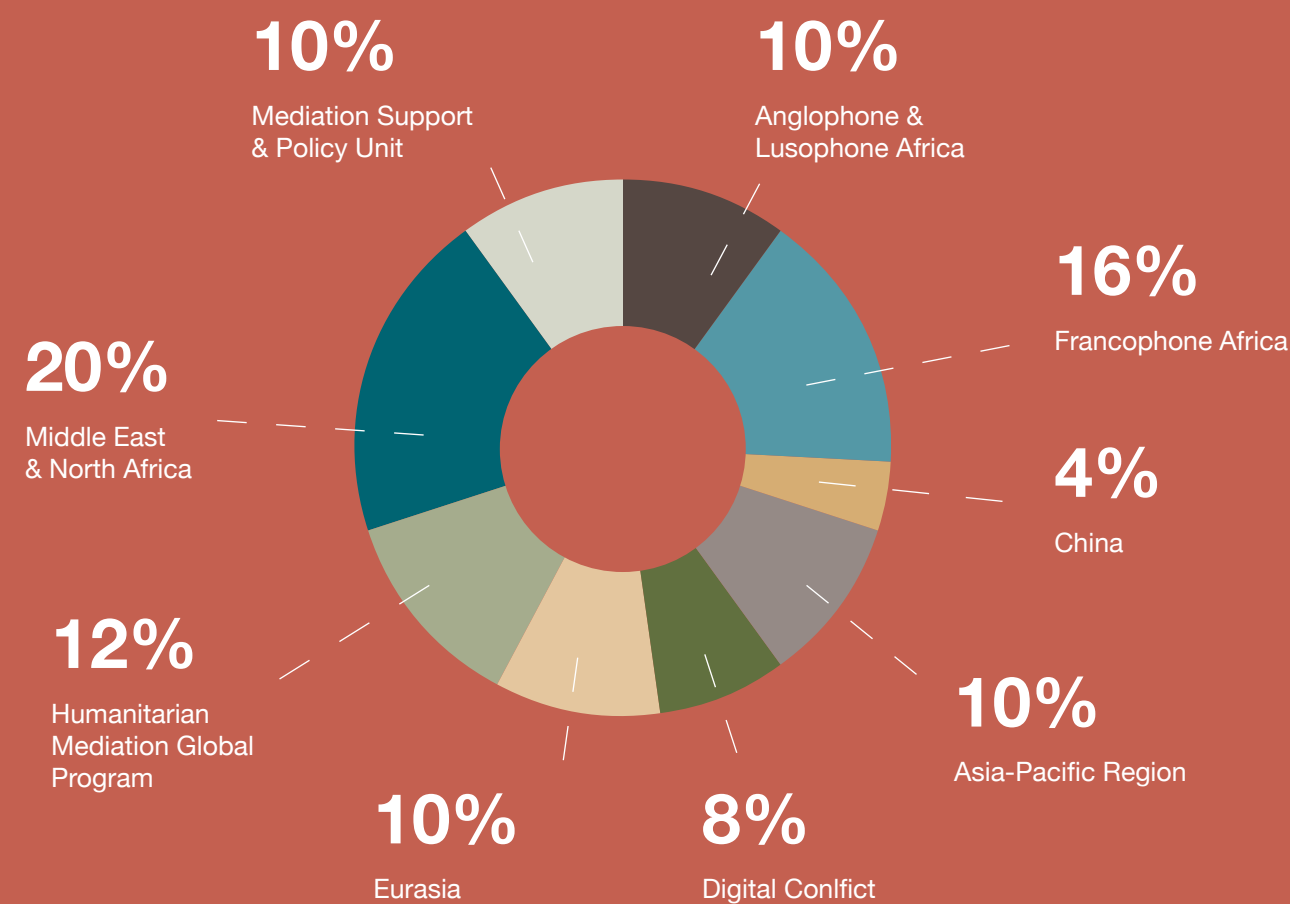
> 2025 Income

2025 was a challenging year as anticipated. Despite the external environment, HD achieved a positive operating result before net currency exchange impacts. The year closed with HD's reserves and liquid assets in a strong position.

Financial support to HD in 2025 provided a total income of CHF 46.1 million.

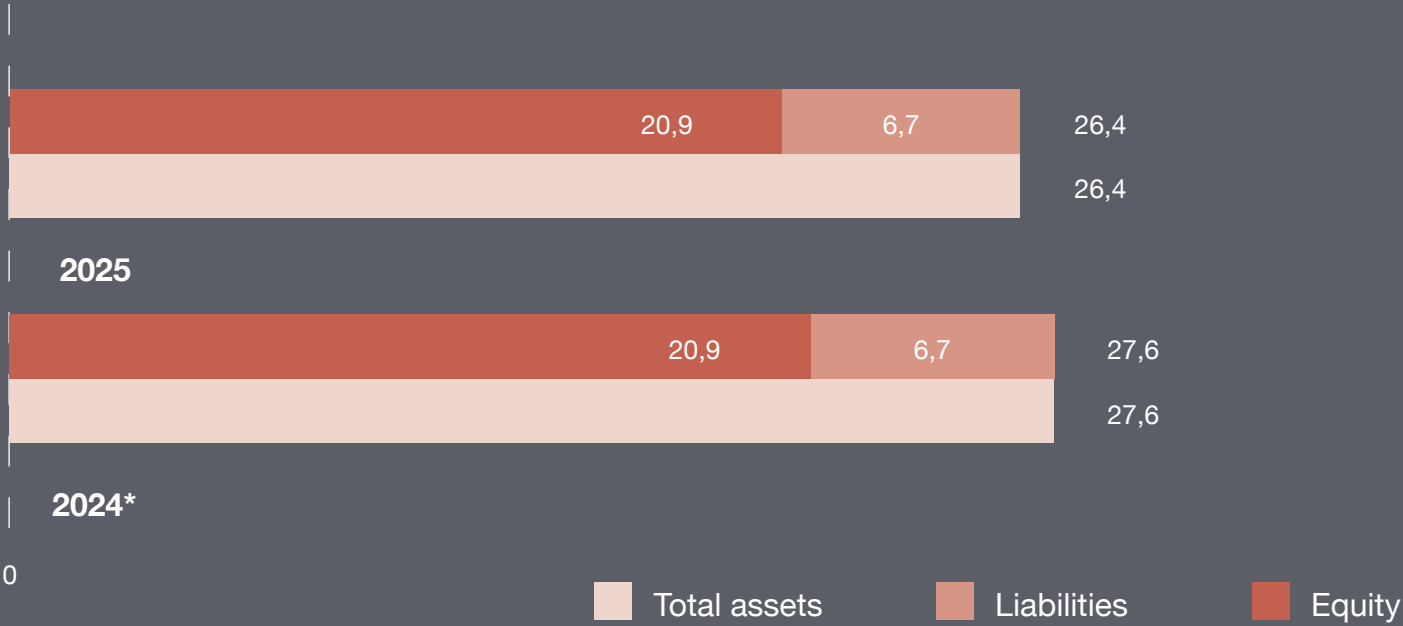
The organisation received core support from Denmark, Luxembourg, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland as part of this total. HD also received significant support from the European Union, Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Australia and various private donors.

> Operational expenditure



> Balance sheet

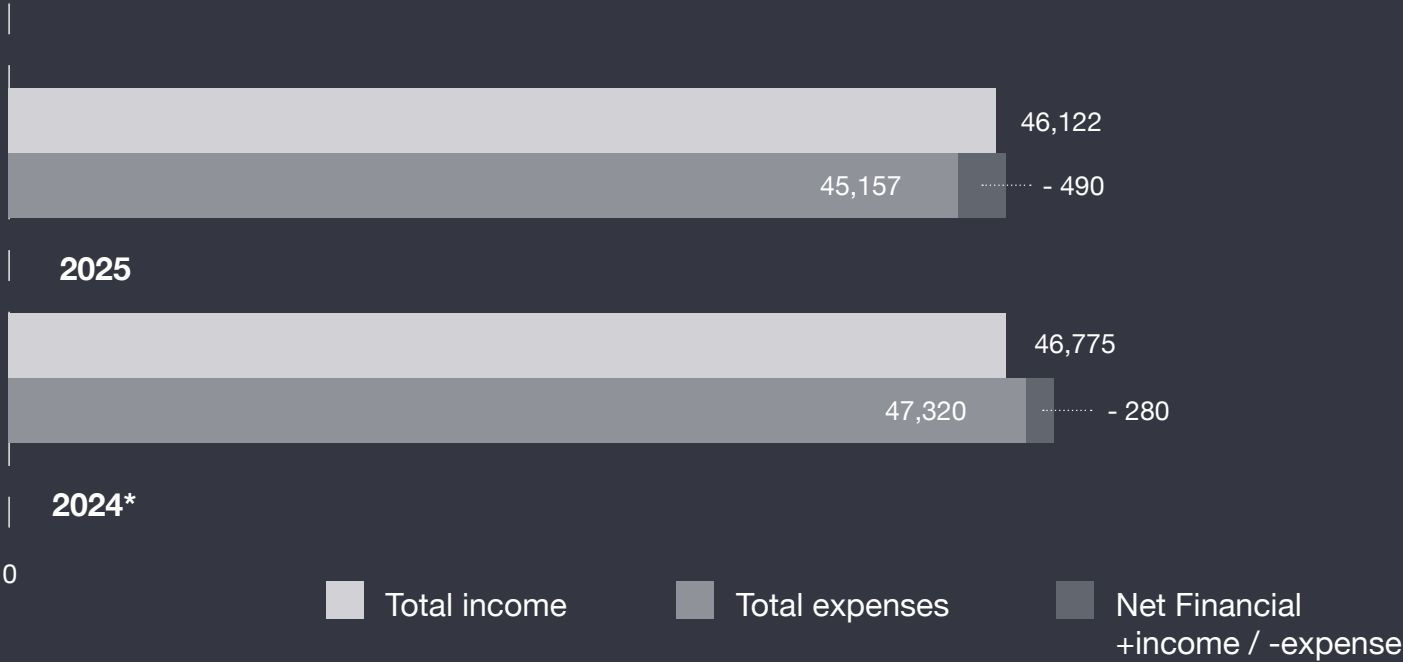
All figures in CHF thousands (000s)



* Following a change in accounting policy, future period donor pledges without pre-funding are recorded off the balance sheet.

> Summary income statement

All figures in CHF thousands (000s)



* Foreign exchange gains and losses on income were reclassified to the net financial income / (expense).

Our thanks

2025 confronted humanity with a sobering reality. Violent conflict reached levels not seen since the Second World War. Over 240,000 people lost their lives. The economic cost of conflict approached \$20 trillion globally. Behind these numbers are communities shattered, futures pulverised, and children robbed of basic protections.

*Within this
fracturing world,
HD's work has never
been more necessary.*



Looking ahead, the conditions that make HD's model essential are only deepening. Geopolitics is growing more transactional. Multilateral institutions are under strain. Peace is harder to broker openly. In this environment, quiet, persistent, trust-based diplomacy is not a niche offering — it is often the only path available.

HD's independence, discretion, and ability to earn trust across deeply divided parties will matter more in 2026 than ever before. The demand for this work will grow. So will HD's resolve to meet it.

We are grateful to our partners and donors. The Board stands behind HD's team, ready for what comes next.

”

Joanne Liu
Board Chair





Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace

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