

# Why Do We Need Creative Approaches to Peacebuilding?

## **The Challenges of Building Peace**

Peacebuilding scholars and practitioners increasingly recognize that sustainable peace requires more than cognitive, rational engagement. In the conflicts that plague our world today, violence too often insinuates itself into the psyches and spirits, the bodies and souls of children and adults. These conflicts are not amenable to transformation through rational processes alone. They require modes of expression that embrace paradox and give voice to thoughts and feelings that defy words. Cultural work and the arts offer resources for waging conflicts nonviolently, transforming relationships in the aftermath of violence and building the capacities required for peace.

## **The Contributions of Arts and Culture**

In conflict regions throughout the world, artists and cultural workers are creating works and facilitating processes that foster the capacities required for peace: receptivity, creativity, imagination, compassion, and the ability to embrace paradox. In times of destruction and war, artists assert the power of creativity and counteract the demonization of the enemy. They bear witness to suffering and draw the world's attention to those whose rights have been abused.

In the aftermath of violence, cultural workers adapt traditional rituals to help communities grieve losses. Musicians create opportunities for wordless collaborations across differences, and visual artists construct physical spaces where the histories and cultures of opposing groups can be validated and shared. Improvisational theater helps people from communities in conflict develop more nuanced understandings of their own and each other's narratives. These are just a very few examples of the many ways in which artists and cultural workers contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

## **The Role of Peacebuilding and the Arts**

Although artists and cultural workers are already having an impact in many conflict regions throughout the world, there is little recognition for their work among policy makers, funders and peacebuilding practitioners working through other approaches. Our inquiry is designed to help artists document what they are doing, reflect on their practice, grapple with the dilemmas facing them, make their learning accessible to others, and network with peacebuilders working through more conventional modes of mediation and diplomacy. Through conferences, symposia and publications, we are bringing attention to this area of work, adding to its legitimacy.



