



Children's Perspectives on Peace

“When there is war, everyone is affected and if children can be part of war, so why can’t they be part of peacebuilding process?”

– Leshan (boy, aged 13).

Recognizing that children are active participants in their worlds, including children’s perspectives in peace negotiations is not an act of charity; it is a strategic approach that reduces the likelihood of future cycles of conflict by addressing the needs and perspectives of those most affected.

Children’s participation helps build the foundations of future stability, as the conditions for lasting peace depend on involving those who will inherit the outcomes of these processes.

In this special feature, young peacebuilders who participated at the Dallaire Institute’s *Global Conference on Advancing Children’s Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles* in Nairobi in November 2025 share their perspectives on the role of children in peacebuilding and peace processes.





Children are Actors of Peace

Children are asking to be recognized as contributors with insight and agency, not as symbolic participants. They do not see themselves as merely preparing for a future peace; they understand that they are already shaping peace within their families, schools, and communities.

“... excluding children from peace processes makes the process incomplete. Children are not just victims; they are also actors of peace. This conference helped me understand my role as a young peacebuilder and why my voice matters”

– Juliet (girl, aged 17)

“When children are given a platform, they can contribute meaningfully to peace processes. We should not underestimate children just because of their age”

– Abigael (girl, aged 11)

Challenging Adult-Centric Peace Processes

Children emphasized that the quality of their participation is largely shaped by adult attitudes and systems. Where adults create safe, respectful, and well-facilitated spaces, children engage thoughtfully and responsibly; where participation is rushed, tokenistic, or overly controlled, children feel silenced or undervalued.

Creating safe and meaningful opportunities for children to be heard can reaffirm their roles as peace actors within their communities.

“Barriers such as age, fear, and adult perceptions prevent children from participating fully. We must create opportunities for children to engage, speak, and be heard. Supporting children builds confidence and strengthens peacebuilding efforts in communities”

– Meshack (boy, aged 14)





Peace Means Healing

The children reflected that peace is not limited to the absence of violence. For them, peace also involves healing, emotional expression, and psychosocial wellbeing. They noted that suppressing emotions due to social or community norms can lead to trauma and mental health challenges. Sustainable peace processes must therefore integrate psychosocial dimensions, particularly for children.

“I also learnt that peace is not just about stopping violence but also about healing. Healing involves listening to emotions and allowing people, including children, to express what they feel”

– Juliet (girl, aged 17)

“If we don’t let out our emotions, it can lead us into traumas, mental health and even madness”

– Leshan (boy, aged 13)

A POEM FOR PEACE

Sometimes it feels small, like a quiet breath.

It is the whisper of morning light.

Soft as a dove taking a gentle flight,

And when I finally notice it, it wraps around me softly like a warm hug I didn't even ask for.

It's the calm that settles a restless mind

It is the song that rivers sing as they flow

A tender of hope in everything, chooses love instead of fear

And when I finally notice it, it wraps around me softly like a warm hug I didn't even ask for.

If it was everywhere, no blood could have been shed.

No war and violence could be experienced.

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A poem by Leshan Kwanzu

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In Conclusion

Children have a fundamental right to participate in shaping decisions that affect their lives. When children are engaged in peacebuilding and peace processes, they gain opportunities to grow, develop, and learn skills essential for social and emotional wellbeing. This contributes to stronger human capital in post-conflict societies, as participation fosters resilience, agency, and long-term capacity for constructive civic engagement.

Across conflict affected regions, children and youth are not passive recipients of assistance. They often act as advocates for justice and bring vital lived experience and insight into peace efforts. Despite this, they have historically been treated as observers rather than contributors. Changing this requires creativity, courage, and a commitment to forms of engagement that recognize and value their lived experience. When children are empowered to help shape solutions, they reinforce the principle that peacebuilding is a shared responsibility and express a clear desire to participate in creating a different future.

“From the conference, I learnt that inclusion is important because children are part of the community and they experience the impact of conflict directly. Children should not be left behind when it comes to peacebuilding”

– Abigael (girl, aged 11)



The Case for a Children, Peace, and Security Agenda

The Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security and Re-Imagining New Communities are advocating for an urgent reframe on how children’s participation and protection in global peace and security are conceived of and understood. Recognizing that children are active participants in their worlds, there is a need to center the agency, perspectives, and participation of children as integral to disrupting cycles of violence and achieving sustainable peace and security.

“As both potential victims of and participants in armed conflict, children must meaningfully participate in peacebuilding. Therefore, any serious attempt to strengthen and advance the human rights and peacebuilding nexus will require the prioritization of the protection of the rights and participation of children”

– Shelly Whitman and Madeline Zutt, Why Canada Needs to Promote a Children, Peace, and Security Agenda

Despite the existence of a Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate and a Violence Against Children (VAC) mandate at the United Nations, children currently lack an Agenda that seeks to prevent violations of their rights while promoting their active participation in building peace and security in our world.

Drawing on the concept of the child as a “citizen in waiting” (Barbara Arneil, 2002), and recognizing that even very young children are active participants in their communities, the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security and Re-Imagining New Communities are calling for the adoption of a Children, Peace, and Security agenda at the UN and for the perspectives of children to be heard and prioritized in peace and security agreements that directly impact them.

This excerpt was co-created by the Dallaire Institute and Re-Imagining New Communities. Re-Imagining New Communities participated in the *Global Conference on Advancing Children’s Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles* as a practitioner organization grounded in community-level peacebuilding and child-led action. Through its Children Led Community Peace Labs (CLCP-Labs), the organization shared a tested model for safely engaging children as peace actors within schools, faith institutions, and community level.

We respectfully acknowledge the contributions of young peacebuilders - Meshack Otieno (aged 14), Juliet Ayiera (aged 17), Abigael Wairimu (aged 11), and Leshan Kwanzu (aged 13).

The Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security is an international organization working to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and violence and to transform cycles of violence.

Re-Imagining New Communities is an award winning, inclusive and values-driven peacebuilding organization where every story, voice and child shape a peaceful tomorrow.

