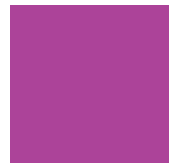




**PeaceRep**  
Peace and Conflict  
Resolution Evidence  
Platform



# **Time to Make a Change: Reimagining Peace Processes in a Fragmented World**

Summary and Reflections on the PeaceRep Final Conference

Liora Berg, Ava Byrne, Nicholas de Carvalho, Zoe Guidino, Samvit Nagpal, Leah Rose



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



**PeaceRep**  
Peace and Conflict  
Resolution Evidence  
Platform



University of  
St Andrews

## The Future Voices Series

The Future Voices Series supports the publication of innovative research by emerging scholars. The series cuts across regions and themes while drawing on work relevant to academics and policymakers engaged in peace and security. Authors are drawn from exceptional students in PeaceRep courses. The research is unfunded but reviewed and mentored by PeaceRep staff, who provide guidance to support the development of high-quality, policy-relevant scholarship.

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform  
School of Law, Old College, The University of Edinburgh  
South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL  
Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566  
Fax. +44 (0)131 650 2005  
E-mail: [peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk)  
Website: [PeaceRep.org](http://PeaceRep.org)  
LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/)

### About the authors:

Liora Berg is a 2nd year student in Philosophy at the University of St Andrews.

Ava Byrne is a 3rd year student in International Relations and Modern Languages (German and Russian) at the University of St Andrews.

Nicholas de Carvalho is a 2nd year student in Ancient History and International Relations at the University of St Andrews.

Zoe Guidino is a 4th year student in Psychology at the University of St Andrews.

Samvit Nagpal is a 4th year student in Computer Science Relations at the University of St. Andrews.

Leah Rose is a 2nd year student in International Relations and Psychology at the University of St. Andrews.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
-----------------	----------

---

Panel: New Perspectives on Contemporary Conflicts and Peace Processes

<b>PeaceRep Concepts in Practice: Understanding Contemporary Conflict and Mediation</b>	<b>2</b>
---	----------

---

Panel: Multimmediation and Fragmentation: Research and Impact

<b>The PeaceRep Approach: Collaboration Between Research and Practice</b>	<b>5</b>
---	----------

---

Panel: Mediation Futures and PeaceTech

<b>How Technology is Supporting Mediation Efforts</b>	<b>8</b>
---	----------

---

Panel: Ukraine

<b>Negotiation Without Peace: Rethinking Diplomacy through the Russo-Ukraine Conflict</b>	<b>11</b>
---	-----------

---

Panel: Syria

<b>Breaking the Cycle: Barriers in Syria's Post-Assad Path to Peace</b>	<b>14</b>
---	-----------

---

Panel: Sudan and South Sudan

<b>Rethinking Peace in Sudan and South Sudan: Civic Engagement and the Challenges of Peacebuilding</b>	<b>17</b>
--	-----------

---

## Foreword

The PeaceRep Final Conference *Time to Make a Change: Reimagining Peace Processes in a Fragmented World*, hosted by the University of Edinburgh on 12 March 2026, brought together research institutions, non-governmental organisations, and local research teams partnering in the consortium. It offered space for a collective reflection on the conceptual, methodological, and empirical innovations the consortium has introduced over its life cycle; and how these have shaped thinking and practice.

Most consortium partners are universities, where academic staff integrate our ongoing research on peace processes, mediation, and transitions into our teaching. At the University of St Andrews, we run an innovative Vertically Integrated Project (VIP) *PeaceHub: Global Mediation Database*. VIPs actively involve students in research projects led by an academic supervisor and bring together a mixed team of students from any level of study (hence the 'vertical' aspect). Students join from across the arts and sciences, bringing diverse backgrounds and skillsets. In the PeaceHub VIP, students work in small groups researching individual conflicts and learning methodological and technical skills to contribute to the Mediation Event and Negotiators Database (MEND). Through cross-disciplinary work in small groups and collaboration with PeaceRep researchers and data engineers, the module fosters an interdisciplinary environment that strengthens knowledge exchange and builds student skills in data analysis, rapid reading, visualisation, presentation, reflection, and most importantly – teamwork.

The PeaceRep Final Conference provided a valuable opportunity to connect VIP students with the wider PeaceRep community. Students participated in all the sessions, interacted with PeaceRep researchers, took notes, and prepared written summaries on the panels, which were circulated and reviewed by panel organisers and VIP supervisors. We also invited them to offer brief reflections on memorable moments from the conference to accompany the panel summaries.

What follows are their summaries and reflections.

For further reading on the conference themes, visit the PeaceRep website at [www.peacerep.org](http://www.peacerep.org) to browse publications, key findings from thematic and geographic areas of research, and PeaceTech data and digital tools.

**Mateja Peter**

*VIP Supervisor and PeaceRep Co-Investigator*

<https://peacerep.org>

## PeaceRep Concepts in Practice: Understanding Contemporary Conflict and Mediation

### Panel: New Perspectives on Contemporary Conflicts and Peace Processes

*By Zoe Gudino, 4th year student in Psychology.*

Moderated by Professor Louise Mallinder, this discussion brought together leading figures in the field, Professor Mary Kaldor, Professor Alex de Waal and Dr Rurik Marsden, to explore how contemporary conflicts are shaped by competing power logics. Throughout the conference, a central concern was how peace can be built in increasingly complex and fragmented contexts. This discussion addressed that question by examining how international law, political economy and civiness interact in shaping conflict and mediation, highlighting the importance of PeaceRep's work in bridging research and practice.

An important theme was the fragmentation of conflict and peace processes. Kaldor argued that international law is increasingly fractured, with competing models shaping how conflicts are addressed. One example is the "war on terror" framework, which has expanded interpretations of self-defence and normalised targeted killings of individuals. This exists alongside both geopolitical approaches and a human rights and international law model. Marsden's reflections on working in the UK Embassy in Myanmar illustrated how this fragmentation plays out in practice, describing a political landscape shaped by competing narratives of legitimacy, overlapping peace initiatives, debates about new constitutional arrangements, and competition over natural and criminal resources.

From this, the discussion then turned to civiness as an alternative logic of organisation. Kaldor described civiness as the ways in which people in conflict settings support one another and organise collectively to survive. PeaceRep's approach emphasises working with local researchers as partners, recognising their unique knowledge of the conflict. In many cases, communities act as first responders, teachers and organisers, creating forms of cooperation and producing knowledge that helps people endure difficult conditions. Marsden's discussion of Myanmar showed how this can also lead to new forms of local governance and cooperation, as groups join together in new ways to respond to local challenges.

He also reflected on how the PeaceRep Myanmar team shaped many of these processes, and how concepts developed through research came to life in practice, for example through seminars that brought together international and local actors to consider how civiness can be supported in fragmented conditions.

However, de Waal also highlighted the constraints placed on civiness by the political marketplace. His concept of the political marketplace shows how political power can function as a commodity, traded through financial incentives, patronage networks and bargaining. Drawing on the Darfur conflict, he explained how negotiations were shaped by calculations about the “price of politics,” arguing that this helps explain how actors behave in conflict settings. This system has become increasingly entrenched through the hyperaccumulation of financial assets, the weakening of public budgets and intensified competition over monetised political power. De Waal used Sudan as an example where civic mobilisation contributed to a non-violent uprising but could not break the structure of the political marketplace. As he noted, the normative societal power of civiness runs up against harsh economic and financial realities.

The Q&A highlighted how global financial systems reinforce political marketplaces, how technology can both enable coordination and spread disinformation, and how civil society actors remain central to mediation and governance.

Overall, this discussion effectively set the tone for the conference, bringing out key themes that were echoed in later sessions, particularly the importance of political economy, fragmentation and local forms of organisation in shaping conflict. In doing so, it underscored the value of PeaceRep’s approach, combining empirical research, local engagement and technological innovation, in developing more grounded and realistic understandings of peacebuilding in complex environments.

For further reading on the conference themes, visit the PeaceRep website to browse publications, key findings from thematic and geographic areas of research, and PeaceTech data and digital tools.

[www.peacerep.org](http://www.peacerep.org)

## Zoe on the Conference

One idea that stayed with me from the conference was the discussion of humility as one of the core values of the United Nations. Although it's a simple concept, I think it carries important and powerful implications for practice and research. In practice, it is important to question the assumptions that international actors may bring with them and recognize that centralized approaches to peacemaking may not always be the most appropriate or effective. Conflicts often involve complicated actors, fragmented authority and deeply embedded local dynamics that external mediators may struggle to fully understand. In this context, humility is not only a moral value, but also a practical method to facing complex conflict scenarios. It encourages external actors to recognize the limits of their own perspective and engage with the knowledge of local actors. But it also made me reflect on research practices. My team is researching instances of mediation involving international actors in South Sudan, which will feed into the MEND database. While this is clearly important for understanding the external landscape, the discussion at the conference reminded me that these efforts represent only one part of a much broader mediation landscape. This is important to keep in mind because it raises questions about what story our research is telling and which patterns might remain less visible as a result. In other words, it encourages me to approach our own work with humility by recognizing the limits of what our data can capture and remaining aware that our coding and analysis could shape how peacebuilding processes in South Sudan are being understood.

## The PeaceRep Approach: Collaboration Between Research and Practice

### Panel: Multimediation and Fragmentation: Research and Impact

*By Nicholas de Carvalho, 2nd year student in Ancient History and International Relations.*

The panel on Multimediation and Fragmentation, moderated by Dr Mateja Peter and featuring Laura Wise, Dr Kimana Zulueta-Fülscher, and Majida Rasul, reflected on PeaceRep's work on developing and distributing peace data to peace practitioners. The main themes of that panel include the purpose and nature of the databases developed by PeaceRep, and their policy applications.

The panel began with a conversation on the development of peace data. Wise reflected on her work creating data regarding peace agreements. She noted that a 2010 UN Secretary-General's report stated that the inclusion and implementation of these women- and gender-related provisions were patchy. This shortcoming has real-life consequences for post-conflict institutions; thus, she has been working on the PA-X Gender Database as part of PeaceRep, creating data on women- or gender-related provisions in peace agreements to evaluate the effect of peace agreements on gender. Zulueta-Fülscher also discussed her work on creating databases and research on Myanmar. She has, with PeaceRep, developed a database on constitution-making with over 200 variables to answer the question of how to make constitutions more inclusive.

When asked how to make peace data more accessible to locals and peace practitioners, the panelists highlighted ways to make data free and accessible, including, but not limited to, creating low-tech versions, reducing bandwidth requirements, and removing paywalls. Both speakers also touched on their work collaborating with peace practitioners. Wise discussed how, through PeaceRep, she has also worked with policymakers. The team she is on has been collaborating with UN Women, with their data featured in the UN Secretary-General's reports. Additionally, PeaceRep researchers have participated in workshops and conferences hosted by the Women's League of Burma, a political organisation focused on federalism and feminism, drawing on PeaceRep findings to contribute to peace dialogues in Myanmar.

Zulueta-Fülscher discussed her experience advising constitution writers in Myanmar. After the 2021 coup, many ethnic organisations have expanded their territorial reach. This has led to criticism of a lack of transparency and accountability, as well as double taxation from overlapping jurisdictions; thus, constant adaptation in governance is the norm in Myanmar. As part of this adaptation, local organisations in Myanmar have used the constitution database to make governance more inclusive. She hopes that these small steps toward more inclusive constitutions and governance will improve society.

Rasul, a peace practitioner, discussed using PeaceRep research in South Sudan amidst UN budget cuts. She explained how access to this research helps practitioners' step back and assess approaches to peace, especially as expectations for multilateral solutions are reduced. PeaceRep resources provide relevant data and language, enabling practitioners like Rasul to reassess and strengthen their strategies on the ground and better respond to ongoing peace challenges.

The panel ended with a note that there must always be dialogue with practitioners when creating data, to ensure the data produced is useful. Indeed, this panel has revealed the interconnected nature of peace processes and initiatives with peace research, as seen through PeaceRep. Peace researchers, including those on this panel, generate the data and theoretical frameworks that enable peace practitioners to contextualise and inform their work. For these researchers to fully understand practitioners' needs, they must be in dialogue with one another. PeaceRep is therefore supporting both peace researchers and practitioners through its approach.

## Nicholas on the Conference

Professor Mary Kaldor, in her opening keynote, discussed the gradual disempowerment of individuals during this critical juncture of human history. Despite this disempowerment of the individual, she believes that there can be a shift of ontology from national security to human security and that PeaceRep is part of creating this future. This line of thought remained with me because it reflects some of my discontent with my study of International Relations. By approaching the study of security with the individual as an ontological focus, we can better understand both the gradual disempowerment of the individual and how to counteract this disempowerment. Kaldor proposed protecting local politics and democracy, but how we do so depends on studying domestic politics and the individuals who engage in local politics, not the state.

# How Technology is Supporting Mediation Efforts

## Panel: Mediation Futures and PeaceTech

*By Samvit Nagpal, 4th year student in Computer Science.*

The panel on PeaceTech, moderated by Dr Sanja Badanjak and featuring Caleb Gichuhi (BuildUP) and three PeaceRep researchers Dr Elisa D'Amico, Niamh Henry and Adam Farquhar, reflected on the underlying role of technology in promoting the advancement of mediation. The panellists opened by discussing their respective fields of expertise, ranging from the use of technology for mediation in Africa to the introduction of Large Language Models (LLMs) for data collection and input. These panellists have handled PeaceRep data across multiple countries, and are involved with the whole data pipeline – from collection to visualisation.

There have been three key trends in the use of technology for mediation in Africa. Firstly, after 2007, SMS usage surged, allowing for better early-warning systems and crowdsourcing of information, helping direct responders to crisis zones in a more efficient manner. Secondly, from 2013, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, social media took over from SMS. This allowed better photographic documentation of events, as well as enabling more coordinated organisation of events, at the cost of greater cross-platform fragmentation of information. The teams built dashboards to track population sentiment using free APIs from social media apps, making it easy to construct a unified narrative. Thirdly, over time, more disinformation began to spread, both human and AI-generated, and APIs became locked behind paywalls. Social media thus became a better gauge of propaganda than genuine sentiment, prompting a shift towards open-source webscrapers for data gathering. Tools such as Phoenix have been developed based on apps such as WhatsApp to enable accurate surveying. Participants receive aggregated data and insights as a way of returning data to communities in a findable and interrogable manner. The results of these tools are used to inform mediation discussions with accurate reflections of the wishes of locals, ensuring that policies align with the needs of the people most affected by them.

As a newer development, LLMs and Machine Learning (ML) tools are increasingly being used to help unify data across sources, as well as extract and deduplicate search results. PeaceRep has been on the forefront of these developments and how they can be used to analyse peace agreements and track mediation. Fears around black-box hallucinations are encouraging teams to only use LLMs for query construction rather than summary generation, as LLMs are very effective at rapidly parsing lengthy PDFs. In the future, they may be used to search for non-newsworthy events such as closed-door meetings, and analyse far more articles than is currently feasible. However, LLM usage is moderated by concerns about environmental and economic sustainability, encouraging a move towards local models and human translators to preserve local nuance. Incorporating user feedback will also be crucial to navigate data privacy and ethics concerns. Automating data entry and collection processes will also help balance the competing demands of rapidly-updating short-term data requested by policymakers and detailed long-dated time series data favoured by academics. PeaceRep datasets such as PA-X and MEND now incorporate both types of data to facilitate as many research goals as possible.

As a computer scientist, the discussion of teams with diverse backgrounds resonated with me. It is advisable for collaborators to have a modicum of knowledge about all tasks, and to have different perspectives to ensure that assumptions are challenged and that constraints on resources and technical feasibility can be effectively balanced against the goals of different stakeholders. Effective communication is vital here, especially between technical and domain experts, to ensure that the visualisations produced are timely, feasible, and expressive, and provide insights that are of genuine value both to researchers and to locals. For example, in the Syria panel, it was highlighted that the complexity of interpersonal interactions makes predicting policies difficult – illustrative visualisations of actor networks can help researchers cut through this complexity.

## **Samvit on the Conference**

I enjoyed hearing from the panellists about the importance of data cleaning and validation, as this is a crucial part of the data analysis process that frequently goes unappreciated. Coming from a computer science background, this resonated with me since I too have spent many hours during data science projects first ensuring the underlying data is robust. Good communication and mixed teams are vital to this process, as domain experts may not have the technical skills to manipulate the data source in the desired way, while technical experts may not have the nuanced contextual understanding to know which data to preserve and which to remove. There is always an inherent trade-off between removing data to improve accuracy and ensuring sufficient data is retained for meaningful insights to be derived. Without this, insights can be incomplete or at worst actively misleading.

# Negotiation Without Peace: Rethinking Diplomacy through the Russo-Ukraine Conflict

## Panel: Ukraine

*By Ava Byrne, 3rd year student in International Relations and Modern Languages (German and Russian).*

The session on Ukraine brought together four PeaceRep researchers: Professor Mary Kaldor, Roksolana Nesterenko, and Dr Cindy Wittke, chaired by Dr Luke Cooper, to examine the contributions of PeaceRep work to challenges of peace negotiations, the role of civil society, and the geopolitical implications of the war. It centred on a key question: what can negotiations achieve in a fragmented global order, particularly when they fail to protect civilians?

A central theme was the paradox of negotiation in the context of an intensifying war. As Cooper noted, 2025 was a year of renewed negotiation efforts but simultaneously the deadliest for civilians since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. This leads to a fundamental concern that negotiations which do not improve human security risk losing their purpose. Rather than serving as neutral tools for peace, negotiations instead function as sites of power where authoritarian actors, in this case Russia, can codify their demands into agreements.

Wittke expanded on this by analysing the legacy of the Minsk Agreements; whilst often framed as stabilising mechanisms, the agreements had embedded structural flaws. In negotiations, Russia positioned itself not as a belligerent but as a mediator, allowing it to shape the terms of the conflict whilst avoiding accountability. This resulted in the conflict being 'frozen' in Russia's favour, with tensions remaining unresolved but escalation not impeded. Some policymakers argue that the agreements 'bought time' for Ukraine to strengthen, but the panel challenged this view, suggesting the agreements created legal and political restrictions for Ukraine, limiting their room to manoeuvre, whilst simultaneously giving Russia time to consolidate their control of occupied territories. A key takeaway from the panel was the capacity for negotiations to function as an extension of warfare rather than as a pathway to peace. Russia's long-term strategy can be characterised as curated instability, where they maintain unresolved conflicts to preserve their influence in the post-Soviet space.

At the same time, the panel emphasised the importance of shifting focus away from high-level geopolitics to the 'human dimension' of conflict, with Kaldor arguing that negotiations should prioritise improving lives rather than narrowly focusing on borders and sovereignty. Initiatives such as civilian exchanges and humanitarian agreements were highlighted as realistic and impactful opportunities for progress. Nesterenko's local research grounded these discussions with their immediate impact on communities, highlighting how even high-level decisions are ultimately implemented by local actors. She highlighted how, in this way, civil society has become central to Ukraine's resilience and therefore the conflict itself. This is, however, not without strain: communities face tensions between internally displaced persons and local residents, disputes over resource distribution, and divisions along religious lines, for example. Regardless, Nesterenko showed how capturing lived experience allows for a nuanced understanding of conflicts on the ground, beyond high-level diplomatic or academic narratives, which is central to PeaceRep methodology.

The panel also addressed the role of external actors, particularly the European Union's slow adaptation and knowledge production when compared with Ukraine's evolved understanding of Russian 'belligerent' tactics. There was a strong call for the EU to move beyond its narrow focus on defence and finance towards investment in human security and local initiatives.

In conclusion, the panel suggested that a sustainable peace in Ukraine is unlikely to emerge from traditional agreements; instead, future efforts should look to incremental, issue-specific negotiations and strengthened civil society engagement for inspiration. As several speakers noted, Ukraine is a 'laboratory' for new forms of peace-making, with both solutions and failures applicable across the post-Soviet space and beyond.

## **Ava on the Conference**

I particularly enjoyed insights by local researchers, whose contributions grounded the sessions in lived experience of individuals. The juxtaposition of what is sometimes a distanced academic vocabulary and insights of local researchers on the reality of lives irreversibly changed caused me to reflect more broadly on how language shapes our understanding of conflicts and whose experiences are centred or obscured in this. It is easy to see how language, even if intended as a metaphor, could feel uncomfortable or alienating to those experiencing the direct consequences of the conflict firsthand. These insights by local researchers and the year-long discussions we had in class made clear to me that language – whether in the metaphors we use or in formal classifications such as the terminology of terrorism – shapes not only mediation practices but also whose experiences are centred, and whose are pushed to the margins.

## Breaking the Cycle: Barriers in Syria's Post-Assad Path to Peace

### Panel: Syria

*By Liora Berg, 2nd year student in Philosophy.*

The Panel on Syria led by Zaki Mehchy and Dr Juline Beaujouan assessed the challenges of Syria's transition to identify actionable recommendations for progressing its peace-process. While the 2024 fall of the Assad regime marked a moment of optimism, several impediments have since left them in a continued state of crisis. To contextualise these complications, the panel explored Syria's current state through the lenses of politics, security, economics, and social dynamics.

Politically, Syria is plagued by extreme centralisation of power. The interim president maintains widespread control not only from his position, but as a key influence over the appointment of other government officials. This not only contributes to corruption but worsens the lack of transparency and deep mistrust in government. A key issue highlighted was how external actors complicate reform in this area, often prioritising short-term stability over long-term reform to avoid power vacuums. This lack of pressure from external actors when it comes to demanding institutional reform is a great impediment to Syria's path toward democracy.

In terms of security, military and police corruption has deepened distrust. Several violent incidents have taken place, specifically against minority groups. Mediation efforts to address this problem are complicated by the multiplicity of armed groups operating in the region. Their unique interests and loyalties create a lack of cohesion that complicates mediation strategy. Further, some external actors are deterred from engaging in dialogue with classified terrorist organisations.

Economically, the conflict has resulted in great devastation to Syria's GDP, with an estimated opportunity cost of 750 billion dollars, and 90% of the population left living below the poverty line. Structural weaknesses such as reliance on foreign investments, trade deficits, and reliance on rent-seeking sectors, have worsened inequality, growth, and credibility.

The effect of wartime violence and displacement was stressed as a large influence on Syria's social landscape and reform process. With widespread loss, destruction, and displacement, there is a great sense of insecurity and scepticism among the population. While civil society efforts have helped, particularly since the fall of the Assad, exclusion from government processes has made it difficult for them to get more involved. As this conversation unfolded, an important point was made about recognising the impact felt from the previous 50 years of Assad governance. Not only is there trauma to address on a social level, but establishing democracy amongst a population that has mostly known authoritarian rule is a hefty task. Turning toward practical recommendations, responses emphasised long-term stability and reliable data gathering. Improved mapping of the informal groups involved in mediation was suggested as a better way to understand the undocumented conversations taking place. Promoting civic engagement, town-hall discussion, and trust-building exercises was also stressed. Including younger generations was emphasised as a key part of achieving lasting change given their greater stake in Syria's future and potential to reverse the cycle of corruption and violence.

Despite the many challenges that face Syria's transition, the discussion ended on a positive note. Recently, over 80 detainees have been released, hospitals have reopened, and 4.5 million children have returned to school. The conversation emphasised that for continued improvement, attention toward longevity is key. Structural reform to address the deep-rooted corruption within the political, economic, social, and security sectors is necessary for reversing feelings of distrust. While this is a daunting task, the panel emphasised productive dialogue – such as the gathering of scholars and politicians to have conversations like this one – as the key to furthering Syria's path to peace.

## **Liora on the Conference**

I found myself most interested in the conceptual questions that emerged in discussions of war and conflict resolution. Throughout the day, a recurring theme was the prioritisation of immediate solutions over more complicated, but more sustainable, reform, as a key challenge to peace-building efforts. This got me thinking about how natural human inclinations, such as the desire for short-term relief despite awareness of long-term negative impacts, impact mediation processes. Leaving the conference thinking about the moral, strategic, and legal questions raised led me to think about how I might be able to further explore the philosophical angle of these issues.

## Rethinking Peace in Sudan and South Sudan: Civic Engagement and the Challenges of Peacebuilding

### Panel: Sudan and South Sudan

*By Leah Rose, 2nd year student in International Relations and Psychology.*

The Sudan and South Sudan panel featuring Professor Alex de Waal, Dr Jan Pospisil, Raga Makawi, and Dr Matthew Sterling Benson-Strohmayr explored the complex dynamics of peacebuilding in the two nations, highlighting how civic engagement, fiscal systems, and governance intersect in contexts shaped by ongoing conflict and fragile political settlements. Drawing on their work with PeaceRep, the speakers emphasised that peace must be understood as a dynamic process rather than simply the absence of violence. Central to the discussion was the concept of “civicness”, a broader understanding of civil society that captures political responsibility, accountability, and active participation. In this view, citizens are not peripheral observers but key actors whose engagement can shape political decision-making and the direction of peacebuilding efforts.

In South Sudan, nationwide surveys conducted over multiple years by PeaceRep researchers have captured public perspectives on governance, security, and ongoing peace efforts. These insights highlight the issues that matter most to the population – particularly personal safety – and help guide the focus of peacebuilding initiatives. Other panellists discussed different methodologies, especially the concept of “scholarly activism,” where engagement with civic actors informs academic work and research, in turn, supports practical interventions. In Sudan, post-COVID social movements saw young people take to the streets not only to protest but also to participate in debates about the country’s political future, exemplifying a practically engaged facet of scholarly activism. Together, these examples demonstrate that durable peace depends not only on formal political agreements but also on understanding and responding to the priorities of the population through multiple methodologies.

The panel also explored how fiscal systems influence conflict and stability. In both Sudan and South Sudan, taxation and revenue collection often reinforce predatory governance rather than support public goods. Local and national elites use financial structures to consolidate power, maintain patronage networks, and sustain control, while attempts to reform systems – such as digitalising tax collection – can unintentionally reproduce inequalities. Examining peace through a fiscal lens helps explain how formal agreements may entrench extractive political structures and why the benefits of peace are often unevenly distributed. This perspective challenges conventional assumptions about stability and underscores the importance of integrating economic realities into peacebuilding strategies.

Speakers also highlighted tensions within Sudan's current political landscape, particularly exemplified by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who perpetrate ethnic violence even as they claim to defend marginalised communities. Such dynamics illustrate the complexities of negotiating peace when actors' actions do not align with their stated roles or intentions. These internal challenges are compounded by the involvement of external actors. Professor de Waal noted that Sudan's peace process is unfolding within a crowded geopolitical landscape, where mediation efforts backed by the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates reflect competing strategic interests, producing overlapping diplomatic tracks rather than a single coordinated process. This fragmentation shapes how Sudanese actors approach negotiations, as external sponsorship and regional alliances can influence bargaining positions and the broader direction of the peace process.

Ultimately, the panel encouraged a rethinking of peacebuilding that accounts for civic engagement and local realities. Recognising fragmentation as a political reality, rather than an obstacle to be immediately resolved, may allow peacebuilding efforts to prioritise security and structural transformation over rapid agreements. By incorporating geopolitical, historical, and economic insights into political analysis, future interventions may help foster more accountable and inclusive governance, ensuring that peace benefits both the people and the state rather than reinforcing existing inequities.

## Leah on the Conference

I was particularly interested in discussions on the persistent gap between normative commitments to gender inclusion and their implementation in peace agreements. PA-X data provides a concrete mechanism to identify these gaps, distinguishing between rhetorical mentions of women and girls and provisions that explicitly commit to their participation and protection. This prompted me to reconsider the nature of agency in governance contexts. My own research has examined how women in armed movements exercise both leadership-driven and individual-driven agency, reshaping organisational hierarchies and international perceptions. In peace processes, however, agency often operates through institutional channels and knowledge-sharing networks rather than direct participation in armed struggle. For me, these conversations ultimately reaffirmed a core claim of feminist IR theory: gender is not merely an analytical lens applied in order to understand conflict but is constitutive of the negotiations and decision-making that shape both war and its post-conflict restructuring. I was gratified to see this insight reflected in concrete discussions on data.

## About Us

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

Consortium members include: Conciliation Resources, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, Dialectiq, Edinburgh Law School, International IDEA, LSE Conflict and Civicness Research Group, LSE Middle East Centre, Queens University Belfast, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, and the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University.

PeaceRep is funded by UK International Development from the UK government.



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH



**PeaceRep**  
Peace and Conflict  
Resolution Evidence  
Platform



University of  
St Andrews

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform  
[peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk) | <https://peacerep.org>