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Peace and Human
Rights Division
Switzerland
promotes peace and
prevents conflict



Further information:
www.dfae.admin.ch

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Peace and Human Rights Division PHRD

The Peace and Human Rights Division

advocates **peace, respect for human rights** and the **protection of the individual**: it aims to resolve conflicts by peaceful means, protect the civilian population during and after conflicts, crises and natural disasters and support states with the observance of human rights. The division has a constitutional and legal mandate to achieve these goals. This commitment is Switzerland's best interests.

But why Switzerland?

- ▷ Switzerland has **experience** in dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity.
- ▷ Its **democratic system** is based on the **proximity to its citizens**, the **inclusion of all members of society** and the **rule of law**.
- ▷ Switzerland also has **no colonial history**.

All of these attributes make the Peace and Human Rights Division a credible partner.

How does the Peace and Human Rights Division work?

- ▷ **Expertise and diplomacy**: The PHRD's activities relies on Swiss expertise and achieves its full impact when combined with the instruments of diplomacy. It is enhanced by partnerships with international organisations, civil society and the private sector and by the targeted deployment of experts.
- ▷ **Local action, global impact**: The PHRD's bilateral activities help people on the ground develop their own viable solutions. These activities are conducted in close coordination with the international community and go hand in hand with Switzerland's multilateral engagement and diplomatic initiatives.
- ▷ **Inclusive**: The PHRD seeks to involve all parties in conflict resolution, paving the way for viable and lasting solutions. It pays particular attention to equal participation of women and men.
- ▷ **Reliable and responsive**: Conflicts and crises are difficult to predict. The Peace and Human Rights Division must be able to respond swiftly to challenges and opportunities alike. At the same time, it relies on the acceptance of all parties to the conflict. This access is often the product of many years of groundwork.

Why are conflict prevention and peacebuilding so important to Switzerland?

- ▷ In the **interests** of its **own security and prosperity**, Switzerland is dependent on a stable international order and peaceful coexistence.
- ▷ As well as causing suffering and instability, **the economic costs of war are also very high**.
- ▷ Up to **80% of war victims are women, men and children not involved in combat operations**. Some 65 million people worldwide have been displaced, two-thirds of whom within their own country.
- ▷ The federal government annually spends **CHF 10** per capita on **diplomatic conflict prevention and peacebuilding**.



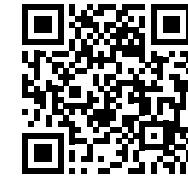
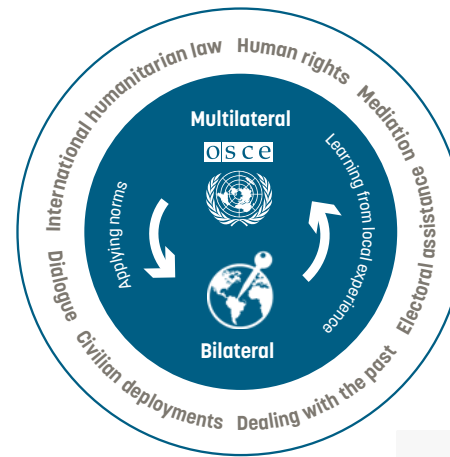
Facilitating and sustaining peace

The Peace and Human Rights Division brings the various parties to the conflict to the table, supports them as an impartial mediator and provides specialist expertise. In view of its history, expertise and political system, Switzerland is well placed to conduct peace negotiations, and supports negotiating parties and the mediation efforts of third parties. In recent years, the PHRD has prepared and accompanied around 17 peace processes.

The **Syria conflict** has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians since 2011. Over 12 million people have been displaced. According to the Federal Council's MENA Strategy 2021-2024, the PHRD is working on three levels to resolve the Syria conflict. In cooperation with the UN Special Envoy, it supports the peace process in Geneva. The PHRD supports efforts to **document war crimes and serious human rights violations**. Finally, the PHRD works with the ICRC and affected families to clarify the fate of the 100,000 to 200,000 missing persons in Syria.

«During my mandate, Switzerland and the Peace and Human Rights Division have been a reliable key partner for my mission. Through our close-knit cooperation on civil society inclusion – to name just one example – we have enabled all segments of the Syrian society to have a voice when it comes to the future of Syria (...) It requires the trust of Syrians and a sensibility for inclusion and public participation that Switzerland perfectly embodies.»

Staffan de Mistura, former UN Special Envoy for Syria



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Human rights – the basis for peace, security and prosperity

- ▷ Protecting human rights is very much in Switzerland's interests as there can be no peace, security or prosperity where human rights are violated.
- ▷ The PHRD promotes the protection of and respect for the human rights of every individual as a means of preventing violence and conflict as well as peacebuilding and dealing with the past.
- ▷ In addition to multilateral organisations, such as the UN and the OSCE, non-state actors – whether non-governmental organisations (NGOs), human rights defenders or transnational companies – are also playing an increasingly important role.
- ▷ This is why the Peace and Human Rights Division also aims to foster dialogue between the private sector, NGOs and academic institutions with a view to increasing the economy's contribution to respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.



The secondment of civilian staff – Swiss expertise in policing is much in demand

- ▷ Switzerland regularly **second** police officers for assignments in UN missions in Africa and in OSCE missions.
- ▷ To provide international organisations with this specific expertise, the Peace and Human Rights Division **works closely with cantonal and city police forces**, which in turn benefit from the experience gained.

People in situations of conflict and displacement need protection

The provision of medical care in conflicts, including for military opponents, is one of the key principles of international humanitarian law. Some counter-terrorism measures criminalise the provision of medical aid as support of terrorism.

- ▷ The PHRD develops fact-based solutions with states, humanitarian organisations and actors involved in the fight against terrorism.

Anti-personnel mines do not discriminate between combatants and civilians. Thousands of people fall victim to this weapon each year – state ammunition supplies sometimes also fall into the hands of armed groups or explode in populated areas.

- ▷ The PHRD works to ensure compliance with the ban on anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, the clearance of explosive war remnants and the safe handling of ammunition stockpiles.

The Peace and Human Rights Division is involved in the fight against human trafficking. In multilateral organisations, the Peace and Human Rights Division supports the development of the political and legal bases for combating human trafficking successfully.

- ▷ Switzerland accompanied the last two presidential elections in Nigeria by supporting the National Peace Committee, which brings together respected personalities and led to a reduction in electoral violence.

Prevention of violence

Switzerland promotes **democratic processes**. It also endeavours to combat the political, social and economic **causes of violent extremism**. In addition, Switzerland is involved in various political **processes aimed at dealing with the past**, including in Kosovo and Zimbabwe.

Democracy and elections

Switzerland has a long tradition of supporting democratic processes. In 2019, Switzerland celebrated 30 years of Swiss involvement in international election monitoring. Since 1989, Switzerland has sent more than 2000 experts to round 300 election monitoring missions carried out by the UN, OSCE, EU, OAS as well as other organisations. The commitment to the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association is also of central importance to Switzerland. These fundamental freedoms form the basis for functioning democracies.

- ▷ Switzerland accompanied the last presidential elections in Nigeria by supporting the National Peace Committee. This body, composed of respected personalities, contributed to a decrease in electoral violence.