



WAPSeD
WEST AFRICA PEACE
AND SECURITY DIALOGUE

From WAPSeD 2025 to WAPSeD 2027: Thinking Through West Africa's Peace and Security Architecture in a Changing Global and Regional Order

Keynote Address Delivered by:

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About the WAPSeD Initiative:

The West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD) is an initiative of the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE) aimed at strengthening collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action among peace and security actors across West Africa and its coastal states.

West Africa continues to experience complex and interconnected peace and security challenges, including violent extremism, unconstitutional changes of government, democratic governance crises, farmer-herder conflicts, transnational organised crime, poverty, youth unemployment and other forms of insecurity. These challenges have increasingly demonstrated that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through isolated national responses alone. They require locally grounded solutions, stronger regional cooperation, inclusive governance and meaningful partnerships among governments, civil society, communities and international actors.

It was against this backdrop that Building Blocks for Peace Foundation designed the West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue Initiative (known as WAPSeD). Created in 2024, it provides a platform for policymakers, civil society organisations, researchers, security practitioners, youth, media professionals, and other stakeholders to engage on emerging security challenges, including terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, drug trafficking, technology-enabled threats, and disinformation. Through regional dialogues, policy analysis, capacity-building trainings, learning exchanges, and policy engagement, WAPSeD seeks to promote evidence-based decision-making, strengthen strategic partnerships, improve regional cooperation, and translate discussions into practical interventions.

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1. Introduction

I am delighted that you all left the important work you do in your different spaces and locations to travel to Abuja for this Two-Day Review and Strategic Meeting on the West Africa Peace and Security Landscape and the Roadmap to the West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue 2027.

You will recall that the second edition of this dialogue, held in Abuja in November 2025, drew participants from across West Africa, including several of you in this room.

I am sure you have had the opportunity to read and digest the policy report on that meeting titled “Reimagining Peace and Security in West Africa: Local Solutions, Regional Solidarity, and Global Partnerships.”

I am delighted to give this opening keynote address on ‘From WAPSeD 2025 to WAPSeD 2027: Thinking Through West Africa's Peace and Security Architecture in a Changing Global and Regional Order’ precisely because it urges us to most objectively appraise and confront the realities of a changing region and world; and that by doing so, find context-based solutions that respond to short-term exigencies as well as long-term security needs of West Africa.

It would be remiss of me not to reiterate that many of its salient thrusts and conclusions drawn in 2025, especially around the need for us to mobilise collective efforts to design and take ownership of local peace and security solutions across different levels, are still relevant and acutely important.

For instance, the 2025 convening specifically drew attention to our region’s festering governance and leadership crises; the escalation of violent extremism along with other forms of violence such as armed banditry, insurgency and resource conflicts; weak regional coordination and external interference; steep decline of and recourse to traditional and local peace mechanisms; what seems to be a deliberate exclusion of two critical demographic groups, women and youth, from formal decision-making.

You will agree, in the light of all the above, that West Africa's peace and security architecture requires fundamental rethinking in view of the region's increasingly complex and interconnected security environment. **A useful starting point for thinking through West Africa's peace and security architecture is therefore to move beyond the assumption that ECOWAS constitutes the natural or permanent institutional ‘centre of gravity’ of regional security governance.**

Rather than designing one uniform security response for all of West Africa, perhaps it is high time security governance is differentiated according to the geographical reach and character of particular threats. This is not a new proposition; indeed, it is consistent with Buzan and Wæver's argument in 2003 that security interdependence is geographically structured.

In view of the region's overlapping security spaces and trajectories- in the Mano River area, the Lake Chad Basin, and the Central Sahel-, based on the decentralisation argument, it may be more expedient to no longer treat West Africa as a single and homogeneous security complex, given that the geography of insecurity does not always correspond to the territorial or institutional boundaries of regional organisations. This would imply a differentiated architecture in which the appropriate institutional response depends on whether the problem is located in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Mano River area, coastal West Africa or across several of these spaces simultaneously.

2. My approach

My approach in this keynote address is three-fold:

1. To revisit the whole notion of peace and security in the regional-global context;
2. To interrogate some of the constitutive elements of a changing regional and global order today;
3. To appraise the role of different actors (domestic and international) as we re-imagine the region of our dreams.

Let's start from the most basic premise: that notions of "peace" and "security" are often used interchangeably but do not mean the same thing. They are inextricably linked but differ in meaning, usage and contexts. Both also share a certain degree of ideals, which explains the arguments in favour of relative peace or relative security across time and space.

One way to understand peace is to understand what it is not, and peace, among other things, is not the absence of conflict. Though desirable in its ideal state, peace is generally regarded as a contested and largely aspirational concept. In its holistic form, the peace and security desired by humankind do not significantly vary, but elements of peace and security enjoy varying priorities across regions and countries.

In most active conflict situations, peace is either made (through mediation, negotiation), kept or enforced (military interventions), and in post-conflict instances, approaches to peace are long-term, requiring stakeholders to build, nurture and sustain.

In recent decades, there has been increasing de-emphasis on security as implying physical or border protection to an emphasis on human security, which means access to basic human needs and protection of basic rights. The transition from a military-focused security to security defined in terms of economic, climate, cultural, social, and gender factors remains relevant to the ideas shaping the governance of the security sector, at least in theory. In fact, it suggests a convergence or shared understanding of what security is between governments and the people.

One of the resulting effects of this transition from military to human-centred security is the emergence of key institutions and initiatives designed to put human needs on the front burner of reimagining security at regional and global levels. Today, the security landscape has become a democratised space where a variety of actors converge to shape the discourse and outcomes of interventions by the state.

One may be tempted to ask: what has the emphasis on human security delivered to Africa and West Africans specifically? Does it matter now that threats to physical security have risen significantly while socio-economic conditions for the vast majority of citizens remain poor in the region? Of course it does; the persistent inability of governments to improve human security conditions for the region's estimated 480 million citizens, slightly less than 6% of the total world population, is a major factor driving organised violence and instability.

Thus, by omission or by design, emphasis on human security has not translated into a decline in incidences of violence or armed conflicts because it is never merely about the emphasis but about what is actually done. At the most basic conceptual level, therefore, peace and security would mean the ability and capacity of humans and society to function, pursue their legitimate aspirations without domestic/institutional or external constraints; to be able to enjoy protection of fundamental rights, to engage in the pursuit of livelihoods and have access to food, a safe environment, jobs and opportunities to enjoy a decent life; to live in conditions where people are confident of the future.

3.Key changes in the global order

It is undeniable that the global and regional order is changing quite rapidly, and irreversibly. These changes have reverberating effects; sometimes, challenging the normative framework under which the post-Cold War world order emerged and survived the past three decades.

For brevity, I will only whet your appetite and set the tone for a robust conversation by identifying only those that I consider to be the most germane.

a.Advent of the Trump Administration, crisis of American 'hegemony' and the 'new wave' of democratic disorder. One of the most remarkable and unsettling characteristics of the present global order is that the once self-appointed and "acknowledged" global policeman, America, has, under Donald Trump, turned rogue and become the biggest offender. Today, no rules are sacrosanct, as Washington acts unilaterally- and with impunity- in its relations with its hitherto close allies. Under Donald Trump, it would seem that there are no special relationships anymore, putting a lot of tension into the international system. This is much vividly demonstrated in its brand of "transactional diplomacy"- as evident in arbitrary tariffs designed to make other leaders or governments to buckle under American pressure.

b. There has also been a significant digression in and **erosion of democratic values and ethos over the last decade globally**, following America's own subversion of its core principles since the Trump Administration. No wonder that democratic institutions are now being challenged to the point that many disillusioned citizens are embracing far-right extremist groups in Germany, Italy, Hungary, the US and a host of others.

c. **Multilateralism in distress** (the UN- 81st GA controversies, etc): **Post-WWII multilateralism is receding so rapidly, and at an unprecedented pace, paradoxically championed by the most powerful and influential country in the world**, the United States, and led by an incredibly maverick leader, President Trump, who has withdrawn his country from some key multilateral bodies; going as far as advocating for the scrapping of the ICC in The Hague.

d. Recent developments have clearly shown that **existing peace and security architecture at the global and regional levels are not immune to the effect of receding leadership**. With dwindling financing of UN activities thanks to the abdication of leadership responsibilities and prioritisation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, UN interventions in Africa have been significantly reduced. Although historically, the UN has preferred to support regional institutions in addressing neighbourhood threats to peace and security, beyond moral and technical aid, that support has weakened considerably in recent years. With no permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, there is little leverage that Africa could muster as a whole to get the world behind it in very critical times. Yet, one must acknowledge the interventions of UN agencies supporting local solutions to local problems.

Notably, **a disruptive form of leadership has taken centre stage in the arena of international politics and international economic relations at the global level**. While some see it as a leadership vacuum, I consider it a deliberate effort to rewrite the principles that have, though imperfectly, governed the relations and cooperative actions of nation-states, especially within institutions like the United Nations. From the lens of the UN, the world is more polarised today, even among member states with a long history of working together.

Today's leadership is drifting more towards de-globalisation; a world where transactional, self-interest and zero-sum game replace collaborative and cooperative partnerships; a world where the principles of the UN are trampled upon without consequences; a world where might makes right and countries are denied fair trade and even punished with the imposition of heavy tariffs. This international order is more challenging for developing regions like West Africa and, by extension, the continent of Africa. De-globalisation is a threat to integration everywhere.

Besides the fact that Africa is not represented on the UN Security Council permanent seat, **it is difficult for any African country to speak for all other 55 countries and even more difficult, it appears, to articulate what the African agenda is**. The fact that the UN suffers from this disruptive influence and Africa has no seat at the table that matters the most further compounds the continent's situation as demonstrated in the recently concluded UN Summit last week. It is difficult to maximize the potentials of the UN to address the multiple security challenges facing Africa and West Africa in particular without a permanent UNSC voice.

e. Revolving door of Western powers in and out of West Africa (France, US out, Russia in) side-by-side with the growing influence of medium powers in the region. Medium powers are also challenging the hegemonic dominance of established great powers (Ukraine-Russia, Taiwan-China, Iran-USA, etc). How conflicts in Eurasia, the South China Sea and the Middle East are redefining regional and global order.

f. Bolder footprints of private military contractors in West Africa (e.g. Wagner Group/Africa Corps, and Ukraine in the Sahel) are dramatically altering regional geopolitics, eroding regional (multilateral) initiatives, and becoming a source of friction between West African governments and key Western powers.

g. Drastic and unprecedented change to the global aid regime. Aid cuts from the North to the South have serious impacts on the ability of many governments and NGOs to respond to critical health, environmental, social, and economic needs, all of which have security implications. A good number of countries in West Africa depend significantly on aid to support vulnerable citizens. In the absence or continuing flow of aid, the capacity of already overwhelmed countries to provide assistance and protection to people at risk is stretched to its very limit, leaving opportunities for armed groups to exploit.

h. AI and the evolving global ‘disorder’: The characterisation of the current global and regional order will be incomplete without highlighting the penetrating force of Artificial Intelligence. The intrusive capacity of AI and all its accompanying digital push is defining our world faster than is realised, especially in this part of the globe. The widespread usage and accessibility of AI have the potential to shape global and regional security landscapes, and some regions and countries are less prepared than others. Yet, this is not just about preparation, as countries at the forefront of AI are increasingly wary of its power and the potential risks it poses to humanity. For all its good and positive advancement, the embedded danger is not yet well understood by many or taken seriously by most governments.

i. We must therefore not only focus on what AI can do to minimize insecurity and enhance peace but also on the possibility of it being deployed by rogue groups to destabilise states and commit unprecedented atrocities. Additional concern over digital security is worthy of note. As nations digitise their entire systems, without commensurate digital security architecture, they become easy targets of unscrupulous groups. In many environments in West Africa already infested with numerous armed groups and violent activities, the potentials of AI, both for good and for bad, cannot be treated as mere academic debate but as national security priority to ensure that AI is harnessed for positive development only.

4. West Africa: The Unscrambling of a Regional Order?

A. The Recession of Democratic Values in West Africa: The wave of democracy in the 1990s has now been supplanted by a wave of unconstitutional changes of government, making it the region with the most recorded setbacks in democratic rule both qualitatively and quantitatively over the last decade.

B. The emergence of AES as a parallel bloc to ECOWAS: This is the biggest example of threats to regional integration and, by extension, regional peace and security. The ECOWAS project aimed at fostering a community of governments and peoples wedged together by common democratic values faces arguably its biggest challenge yet. In essence, every other objective of ECOWAS, including border cooperation, security alliance, intelligence sharing, cross-border trade, etc. rest primarily on the community's shared democratic identity, without which joint decisions and actions are limited and, where possible, mired in mutual suspicion.

C. The geopolitical significance of a fragmented regional order: The fallout between ECOWAS and AES has potentially altered geopolitical relations and calculations for external actors, particularly great powers, namely France, Russia, and the United States. New security partnerships, alignment and realignment of external power interests and relations with individual states, on the one hand, and the two blocs on the other, will play an important role in shaping the future of peace and security in the region, especially in the Sahel. Where competing interests clash, as they often do, the region can silently and gradually lay the foundation for a Congo scenario. Where each holds on to its stronghold, maintaining a fragile status quo, they are likely to exercise influence that would discourage the seceding states from returning to the ECOWAS fold.

D. Weakening Regional Leadership: The plethora of region-wide crises and the 'crisis of disintegration' also points in the direction of a weak regional leadership and the inability to exercise influence and assert authoritative goodwill stemming first from the failure to resolve the Unconstitutional Changes of Government cases and now from the growing presence of great powers in the region. This has long-term implications for the region's peace and stability.

E. Many countries in the region have yet to recover fully from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and have had to simultaneously deal with: a mass of displaced persons, most of whom are food- and water-insecure; environmentally induced disasters leading to poor harvests, farmer-herder clashes, violent civil disobedience, and different forms of organised crime.

F. A New Market for Drugs driving violence and insecurity: Drug-induced criminality now rampant across West Africa; and UNODC reports over the past years have drawn crucial attention to the menace.

5. What should setting a new Agenda for Peace in West Africa look like?

In setting a new agenda for peace and security in West Africa, therefore, emphasis should be on functional and flexible regionalism rather than fixation on maintaining a pan-regional single security mechanism for the entire region. In other words, West African states and regional organisations should develop overlapping arrangements that correspond to specific security challenges.

Such an approach does not necessarily make ECOWAS irrelevant. Rather, it recognises that ECOWAS should operate alongside other institutions and mechanisms, including the African Union (AU), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the MNJTF and, increasingly, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The objective should be complementarity rather than institutional competition.

The changing regional environment following the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS further demonstrates the necessity of such flexibility. The emergence of the AES is particularly significant because it introduces another institutional and political configuration into the regional security environment. Instead of interpreting this development exclusively as a crisis of ECOWAS, it can also be examined as evidence of the increasingly polycentric character of West African security governance.

Ultimately, the central question should no longer be simply how ECOWAS can preserve its traditional position at the centre of West African security governance. Rather, the more productive question is how the AU, ECOWAS, AES, LCBC, national governments and local peacebuilding actors can construct a coordinated, flexible and complementary security system capable of responding to the different and overlapping security complexes that characterise contemporary West Africa in a timely and expeditious manner.

Such an architecture would not require the disappearance of ECOWAS or the creation of a single replacement institution. Instead, it would recognise that West Africa's security landscape is increasingly polycentric and that effective governance requires institutional arrangements to correspond more closely with the geography of threats, the diversity of security actors and the lived realities of affected communities. In this sense, **the future of West Africa's peace and security architecture may depend less on restoring a single institutional centre than on building regional solidarity through coordinated polycentric governance. Such an architecture would combine the AU's continental framework, regional and subregional security mechanisms, national institutional capacity, and locally rooted peacebuilding systems.**

At the continental level, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) remains a robust framework but it is also fraught with implementation challenges. Like the UN, the AU mostly provide support to the RECs in moments of crisis except in a few cases where it intervened and the result has been mixed. There is also the lack of resources to actualize the many provisions of the APSA.



When considered along with instruments such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), it is clear that the economic well-being of Africans has not improved, nor have the governance records of most countries, as envisioned by the proponents of the two initiatives. The lack of success in these critical areas continues to create fertile grounds for destabilisation and insecurity.

Permit me to quickly add that all is not doom and gloom. It is not every change in the world or in West Africa that is a source of worry. In any case, challenging times as we have today call for new ideas to solve new problems.

In the face of regional fragmentation, the imperative to increase and intensify cross-border cooperation cannot be ignored. ECOWAS-AES Rapprochement: How, for instance, can ECOWAS and AES states work together (e.g. Ghana has already signed a defence pact with Burkina Faso; perhaps showing that multilateralism is being replaced by bilateral relationships). Can the new President of ECOWAS, himself a retired military general, leverage his military background to secure a midpoint for security cooperation?

Homegrown investment in arms production (Terra is already expanding to Ghana) is critical. Investing in domestic arms and defence manufacturing to strengthen self-reliance, reduce dependence on foreign suppliers, create jobs, and build local technical expertise. This includes supporting indigenous defence companies through funding, technology transfer, research and development, and strategic partnerships to produce military equipment and security technologies locally. Terra's expansion into Ghana could serve as a model for extending indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities across West Africa, strengthening regional security cooperation, and developing a more resilient African defence industry.

ECOWAS Reform: While ECOWAS talks about ongoing reforms, I believe more reforms are needed, and ongoing reforms (on democratic governance, free trade, common currency) need to be fast-tracked.

More importantly, there is a need to rethink global partnership on security but also on trade and other cooperative engagement that could create opportunities for the growing population of young men and women in the region.

There are several good example of how nations are reacting to a disruptive global order (e.g. EU's extension of strategic partnership to Canada in the face of uncertainties around the trans-Atlantic relations and between the US and Canada). Any partnership that can serve the region's interest in the short, medium or long-term should be considered. However, partnership with opaque terms and conditions or such as may be forced upon a government by another with the potential of a resource conflict that may turn a country in West Africa into another Congo should be dispensed with. Nigeria recently signed a USD700 billion agreement with the US on mining operations in the former with little or nothing known about the details as of today.

Also, the campaign to expand the UNSC to include African representatives with full power should be reinvigorated. As observed by His Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama of Ghana in his UNGA address on 24th September 2026, ‘security council reform is not a favour to Africa; it is an imperative for the legitimacy, credibility, and survival of the United Nations’. Membership of the UNSC can offer Africa important leverage in shaping peace and security on the continent.

a.I like to state that the existence of two blocs of nations in the region has not completely foreclosed cooperation across transnational borders, especially on some critical issues such as security and trade. The ultimate desire will be for the exited countries to return to the ECOWAS fold; but in the meantime, opportunities for cooperation, especially collaboration against threats to security, should be permanently explored.

b.Let me also add that ECOWAS has a duty of care to play a more robust role as a watchdog in elections in member states without interfering, thereby ensuring that the quality of leadership at the national level has a strong positive bearing on leadership at the regional level. Together with CSOs, youth participation in elections should be further encouraged.

c.ECOWAS, NGOs, and CSOs should encourage governments to invest in AI and in infrastructure to mitigate its negative effects. The integration of AI into ECOWAS early warning systems, Election monitoring exercises, among others, while ensuring digital privacy, can help improve the credibility of outcomes, allowing for timely mobilisation of resources and action. Ultimately, the fundamental question is how do we engage technology to (1) expose the opportunities that address those root causes of conflict (2) position the region to have better and proactive preparedness.

d.CSOs must be unrelenting in championing the inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, minorities and indigenous communities in governance, but specifically in peacebuilding initiatives, mediation, peace education and in the design and implementation of sustainable peace and security interventions in West Africa.

6.Concluding Thoughts

Finally, the value of yesterday, today and tomorrow’s dialogue and the implication for regional peace cannot be overemphasised because dialogue not only prompts us to find solutions, it creates avenues for networking, allowing us to work collaboratively rather than in silos. It helps us amplify the issues of peace, security and development, and map trends in conflict and actors in the peace and security space. It also helps us appraise the work that we do almost in a peer review manner, with the goal of adding value to one another but more importantly, to the region we so dearly care about.

My thoughts on what the global and regional dynamics I have described above mean for CSOs, in general, and youth CSOs in particular, are as follows:

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1. Far more urgent imperative to focus more on coalition-building (working with the State and, if need be, without the State).
 2. Build new trans-state networks and coalitions, and strengthen existing ones, including with civil society coalitions beyond Africa.
 3. Encourage and amplify difficult conversations that state and inter-state institutions are unable to, by omission or commission, have on regional governance, peace and security.
 4. Put the WAPSeD Initiative at the forefront of amplifying the voice and agency of local communities around governance, peace, security and developmental aspirations.
 5. WAPSeD must take the lead in identifying and harnessing local resources and mechanisms for peace-building.

I want to once again thank you all for coming, and I also wish you fruitful deliberations as we plan for the 2027 edition of the West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD).

Thank you

About Us

WAPSeD Initiative: The West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD) is an initiative of the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE), aimed at strengthening collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action among peace and security actors across West Africa and its coastal states. WAPSeD provides a platform for policymakers, civil society organisations, researchers, security practitioners, youth, and other stakeholders to address emerging challenges, including terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, and disinformation. Through regional dialogues, policy analysis, capacity-building, and strategic partnerships, WAPSeD promotes evidence-based policymaking, regional cooperation, and sustainable approaches to peace and security.

Building Blocks for Peace Foundation: Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation working to prevent violent conflict, strengthen inclusive governance, and promote sustainable peace across Nigeria and West Africa. Founded in 2016 and formally incorporated in 2017, BBFORPEACE was established to address the exclusion of youth and women from decision-making processes while promoting their meaningful participation in peacebuilding, governance, and sustainable development.

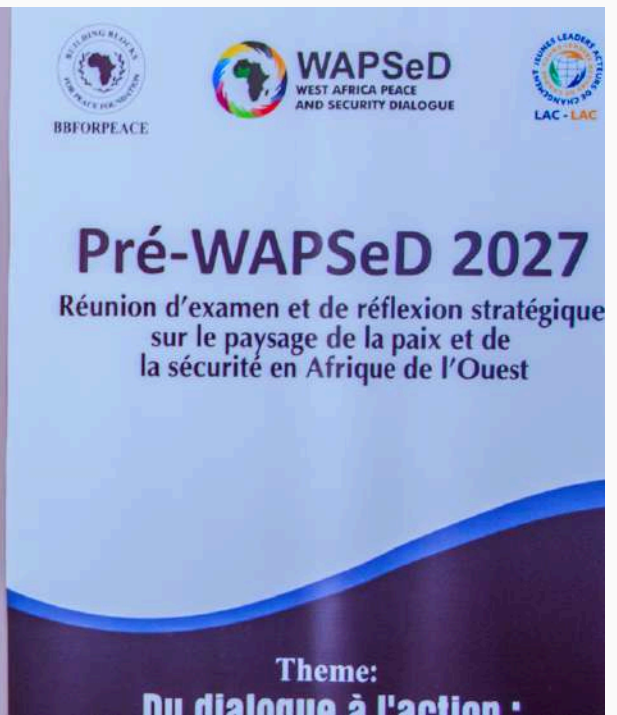
Today, BBFORPEACE occupies a unique niche by bridging grassroots action, policy advocacy, research, and regional networking. The organisation works across the humanitarian-development peace nexus, empowering communities to prevent conflict, strengthen resilience, and build inclusive societies through evidence-based programming, strategic partnerships, and policy engagement.

Vision: A peaceful, just, and inclusive Africa where youth, women, and men lead resilient communities.

Mission: To equip youth, women, and men as peacebuilders to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable peace.

Our Strategic Focus: BBFORPEACE delivers integrated programmes across five strategic thematic areas:

- Youth and Women, Peace and Security,
- Conflict Prevention, Mediation and Peacebuilding,
- Climate and Environmental Security,
- Governance, Civic Participation and Accountability,
- Organisational Sustainability and Partnerships.





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