

## 2. Armed conflicts and peace processes

### Overview

*In 2017, armed conflicts were active in at least 22 states and many involved multiple non-state armed groups and external actors. Likewise, peace processes are complex and multifaceted, but in 2017 there were few visible examples of successful peacebuilding interventions in the main armed conflicts discussed in this chapter. The resulting human costs fell primarily on civilian populations.*

*In the first 11 months of 2017 the number of civilian deaths caused by explosive weapons was 42 per cent higher than in 2016, at more than 15 000 people, mostly in cities. The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide at the start of 2017 was over 65 million, and it seems likely that these record numbers continued during the year, especially in the light of a new displacement crisis in Myanmar and protracted displacement crises in other places such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Armed conflicts also contributed to increased food insecurity in 2017, with seven countries—Yemen, South Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Afghanistan and Somalia—recording crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity in at least a quarter of their people.*

*In the Americas, there were positive signs that the ongoing peace process in Colombia might soon bring the only active armed conflict in the Western hemisphere to a close (see section II). However, in several countries in Central and South America (including El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay) the levels of political and criminal violence remained high. Indeed, cities in the Americas are some of the world's most dangerous and there is an escalating crisis of forced displacement.*

*Five countries in Asia and Oceania were involved in active armed conflicts in 2017: Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines (see section III). In Myanmar the forced displacement of the Rohingya caused spillover effects in Bangladesh, while in other places, such as the Philippines, state security forces committed widespread violence with impunity. In Afghanistan and the Philippines, the Islamic State group is a growing threat, while other parts of Asia and Oceania continued to be affected by instability from a variety of causes. Most notably, tensions are rising in North East Asia, chiefly due to the nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programmes of North Korea. On a more positive note, ongoing peace processes in Nepal and Sri Lanka contributed to growing stability in those two countries.*

*Two armed conflicts were active in Europe in 2017: in Nagorno-Karabakh (involving Armenia and Azerbaijan) and in Ukraine (see section IV). At the*

same time, unresolved conflicts in Cyprus, Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Moldova (Trans-Dniester) and Kosovo, although inactive, seemed as intractable as ever. In the background, tensions remained heightened between Russia and the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West in general, and there were allegations of Russian interference in Western domestic politics. European states also continued to prioritize combating terrorism.

There were seven active armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa in 2017: in Egypt, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Yemen (see section V). Many of these conflicts are interconnected and involve regional and international powers as well as numerous substate actors. Key regional developments included the continuing fallout from the Arab Spring; the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia; and the territorial losses of the Islamic State. Iraq has the daunting tasks of reconstruction in the areas once held by the Islamic State—especially in Mosul, which suffered widespread destruction—and achieving genuine political reconciliation between and within the Kurdish, Shia Arab and Sunni Arab communities. The complex war in Syria involving regional and international powers has led to the displacement of half the population—over 5.4 million refugees and over 6.1 million internally displaced persons—and has left 6.5 million people with acute food insecurity and a further 4 million at risk of the same. Neither the United Nations-mediated peace talks nor the parallel Astana negotiations made much progress. In Yemen the Saudi Arabian-led coalition maintained its partial blockade of Houthi-controlled territories with devastating humanitarian consequences: at least 17 million people, or 60 per cent of the population, faced acute food insecurity.

There were seven active armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa: in CAR, the DRC, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan (see section VI). In addition, a number of other countries experienced post-war conflict and tension or were flashpoints for potential armed conflict, including Burundi, Cameroon, the Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Two broad developments can be identified in sub-Saharan Africa. First, many conflicts overlap across states and regions as a result of transnational activities of violent Islamist groups, other armed groups and criminal networks. In many countries, and especially those in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, these overlapping conflicts are linked to extreme poverty, instability, economic fragility and low resilience. Second, there also appears to be a growing internationalization of counter-terrorism activities in sub-Saharan Africa, led primarily by two external state actors—France and the United States.