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# Bridging the Gap between Human Rights and Peace: An Analysis of NGOs and the United Nations Human Rights Council

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Bridging the Gap between Human Rights and Peace: An Analysis of NGOs and the United Nations  
Human Rights Council<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Human rights and peace, while intricately linked in recent literature on conflict transformation and peacebuilding, have often been viewed as discrete, even competing, fields of study, with separate academic journals, disciplinary foci, and audiences. The policy and practitioner communities have often viewed human rights and conflict resolution as contradictory in the wake of conflict, as the demand for justice and accountability regarding human rights violations may prevent armed actors from joining the negotiation table or signing a peace agreement. Peace and conflict studies have increasingly turned to the concepts of “conflict transformation” and “peacebuilding” both of which integrate human rights; this paper explores whether a similar shift has occurred in human rights scholarship and practice. This paper analyzes and compares the extent to which NGOs recently affiliated with the Human Rights Council also include a concern for peace in their mission and activities. The authors conduct a content analysis of 237 organizational websites, supplemented with nine in-depth interviews, to explore the connections between human rights and peace in these organizations. The authors find that organizational characteristics, such as being religiously affiliated or located outside the West, influence group orientation toward human rights and peace.

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The concepts of human rights and peace are increasingly linked in the study and practice of international relations, particularly in the subfield of international peace and conflict resolution. While the concept of human rights has been incorporated into the study and practice of peacebuilding as well as into international peacekeeping operations, we find significant variance and inconsistency when studying how the concept of peace is discussed within the field of human rights. As Sharp (2013: 195) notes, the “increasingly shared space between transitional justice and post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives has sparked new interest among both scholars and policymakers in sounding out potential connections between both fields.” This article begins to explore factors contributing to the varying degrees of association between peace and human rights found in human rights organizations. Specifically, we focus on three key factors that, based on the existing literature, may influence how different human rights groups connect human rights and peace: whether the organization is secular or religious, whether the organization has its origins in the West or outside the West, and whether the organization is a women’s organization (either focused on women’s rights or comprised primarily of women focused on rights).

We begin with the general question of whether human rights groups are discussing peace as part of their human rights work. In order to capture a cross-section of groups working on issues of human rights around the world, and particularly those related to international policy, the study considers nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. We specifically focus our analysis on NGOs for a variety of reasons. First, NGOs have proliferated in global politics over the past several decades and are increasingly informing and participating in international policy making. For example, in 1946 there were only 41 NGOs holding consultative status with the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). By 1992, more than 700 organizations had attained this status and, currently, there are more than 4000 NGOs with this

privilege (UN Working with ECOSOC). Second, NGOs have large impacts on the fields of human rights and peace. In fact, 280 NGOs attended the 27th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council in September 2014 (UNHRC 2014: 156-160). NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are known throughout the world as key players in the human rights field, and donors give hundreds of millions of dollars each year to NGOs for human-rights promotion efforts (Kindornay and Carpenter 2012: 484-85). Given the increasingly central nature of NGOs to international policy making, and their strong role in promoting human rights, we believe that focusing on NGOs is a promising first step in analyzing how the concepts of human rights and peace may be connected. Further, a focus on NGOs allows for a comparison not only of theoretical connections between human rights and peace but also how these concepts are connected in practice.

### **Literature Review**

On the surface, it seems clear that human rights and peace are interrelated concepts. At a basic level, scholars note, war can lead to violations of human rights and gross violations of human rights can lead to war (Isakovic 2001). The foundations of the international human rights system are rooted in the experiences of World War II; the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was created in part due to the belief that human rights violations will threaten world peace (McGuinness 2011) Even as the two terms are inherently connected, in practice the concepts are often treated as conflictual. Human rights and peace are often framed as contradictory objectives in the study of transitional justice and peacemaking, although this assumption has been challenged by scholars and practitioners. While there is little consensus on the relationship between human rights and peace, it is clear that the two are often pitted against one another, particularly when the promotion of human rights becomes highly associated with justice, creating a “peace versus justice” debate. In this paper, we argue that human rights and peace

are inextricably linked, and that human rights organizations need to increasingly consider how “peace” as a concept might more effectively be incorporated into their human rights work.

### *Conceptions of ‘Human Rights’*

Before moving forward, it is important to understand how human rights and peace are defined. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, includes a variety of rights, including political and civil rights, as well as social, economic, and cultural rights. However, international actors differ in their conceptual approaches to human rights - including which “rights” are universal. In this regard, three separate generations of human rights have been identified (Wellman 2000). First-generation human rights are political and civil rights, the most basic of which would be life, liberty and security, but also freedom of religion, opinion, expression, assembly and association. Such rights are often considered “negative rights,” as they express rights that governments should not infringe upon (i.e. they restrict government behavior). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force in March 1976 (UN Treaties 2015: Chapter IV.3). While 168 states are party to the treaty, many signatories have been known to violate the political and civil rights of their citizens. For example, 12 of the 16 countries labeled by Freedom House as the “Worst of the Worst” most repressive societies for 2011 are party to this treaty: Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Chad, Laos, and Libya (Freedom House 2012).

Second-generation human rights include socio-economic rights, such as the right to education, the right to work, and the right to housing. These are often called “positive rights” because they suggest actions governments should be required to do. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entered into force in 1976 and has been ratified by 164 states (UN Treaties 2015: Chapter IV.4). These rights remain controversial, however, as their Cold War context and association with

socialism by countries like the United States has prevented their full acceptance. However, one author notes that a focus on these rights provides “strong incentive to reduce the glaring economic inequalities of our world” (Johnston 2014: 912); consequently, we expect to see a greater commitment to some of these rights by groups outside the West.

Third-generation human rights are commonly referred to as “solidarity rights.” These rights are the most controversial of the three generations of rights and include rights that are claimed by groups of people, rather than individual rights. Examples of third generation rights include the right to development, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to peace. Due to their more controversial nature, third-generation rights have not been as fully incorporated into international law. Initially, these rights gained their greatest purchase among developing countries. For example, the “right to development” first appeared in 1981, in Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR 2005: Article 22). However, the larger international community has begun to recognize some of these rights. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) linked human rights with issues such as democracy and development. The VDPA reaffirmed the right to development, but also considered women’s rights, the rights of children, indigenous rights, and the rights of the disabled (OCHCR 1993). Furthermore, scholars have noted the increasingly “rights-based approach” to the study of development (Kindornay, Ron, and Carpenter 2012).

More recently, we see attempts to quantify and categorize human rights in an attempt to better identify the causes and consequences of human rights violations. For example, the CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli, Richards, and Clay 2014) includes indices for Physical Integrity Rights and Empowerment Rights. Physical integrity rights are those that focus on bodily harm and death (see Cingranelli and Richards 1999 for more details). Empowerment rights, however, are broader; the Empowerment Rights Index includes measures of foreign movement, domestic movement, freedom of

speech, freedom of assembly and association, workers' rights, electoral self-determination, and freedom of religion. Gender is increasingly a central focus of human rights and development work; the CIRI Human Rights Dataset includes specific measures for Women's Economic Rights, Women's Political Rights, and Women's Social Rights.

### *Conceptions of 'Peace'*

There are a variety of approaches to conceptualizing "peace" and space does not allow a full discussion here. However, we do wish to distinguish two types of peace: negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace is simply the absence of violence, or more specifically, the absence of war. During a violent conflict, negative peace, stopping the violence, is likely the immediate goal. However, as Galtung (1964, 1969) argues, violence includes more than direct, physical violence, and consequently, a society might achieve peace in the negative sense without necessarily being peaceful due to what he calls structural and cultural violence. Galtung asserts that structural violence is built into systems of inequality, manifested in unjust and unrepresentative social structures that prevent people from reaching their full potential (Galtung 1969). Because such conditions can (and do) exist in places without manifest, physical violence, and can contribute to the eruption of armed conflict, Galtung argues that scholars and policy makers should pay attention to both forms of violence. He suggests the term "positive peace" to refer to the absence of structural violence and the presence of social justice (Galtung 1969). Thus, we can see that conceptions of peace can be defined in a very narrow way as the absence of physical violence or war, or can be more broadly understood.

### *Human Rights and Peace*

Many scholars have discussed the intrinsic relationship between human rights and peace, with one author noting that "there is no short cut to peace without human rights" (Hoole 2009, p.136), and another stating that "there cannot be a real peace in a society in which human rights and the fundamental

freedoms are mass-violated” (Lopatka 1980:364). The above discussion of human rights and peace begins to identify connections between the concepts. Physical integrity human rights, for example, appear to be associated with negative peace, since these rights are directly related to physical violence. Some political and civil rights, such as electoral self-determination, might also be associated with negative peace, but others begin to move into the realm of positive peace. Economic and social rights and “empowerment” rights, for instance, fall under a broader understanding of peace that looks toward greater equality.

The one area that seems to provide the greatest gulf between those focusing on “peace” and those focusing on “human rights” is the settlement phase of conflict; scholars point to a disconnect, or even tension, between peace negotiators and human rights advocates (Hannum 2006). On the one side of the debate are those that prioritize human rights, which is often equated to judicial prosecution for war criminals. They argue that prosecuting abusers of human rights is important and creates a deterrent to future violations of rights; as such, justice mechanisms should be incorporated into any type of post-conflict peace agreement. Many such groups are specifically concerned with physical integrity rights and move to hold human rights violators accountable through tribunals or human rights commissions (Anonymous 1996; Gaer 1997; O’Flaherty 2004). The International Criminal Court (ICC), investigates and tries only the gravest crimes, such as genocide or crimes against humanity. This is a fairly narrow, and negative, view of human rights, which also may reflect a narrow, and negative, view of peace.

On the other side of the debate are those that argue that efforts to prosecute human rights violators will make it more difficult to reach a peace agreement; that conflict parties will not come to the negotiation table if there is the threat of international criminal prosecutions, and thus a focus on justice will impede peace settlements and ultimately lead to greater conflict and human rights violations (Akhavan 2009; Williams 2014: 135). Armstrong (2014: 590) notes that the ICC’s decision to investigate the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army “was considered a direct threat to local peace

efforts.” Again, this view is largely focused on negative peace - as the peace agreement itself is primarily meant to end armed conflict. Despite the apparent challenge of reconciling these two viewpoints, there is also space for agreement, particularly when groups begin to more clearly define human rights and peace and conceptualize them more broadly.

For example, Saliternik promotes the “justice” side of this debate by arguing that peace agreements have the potential to undermine the principles of justice and human rights norms, since agreements might lead to more oppressive regimes, generate additional human rights abuses, or fail to deal with issues such as “representation deficits” and “biased or corrupt decision making” (Saliternik 2015: 181-182). The author pits “peace” against “justice” - but how “justice” and “peace” are conceptualized is very important for this discussion. While some authors consider “justice” in purely legal terms, Saliternik includes references to social justice principles, including ideas of equality and reconciliation (2015). Often when authors in this debate discuss “peace”, they are really mean peace agreements, and thus, negative peace. Their critiques concerning peace agreements suggest that they might perpetuate structural violence - and thus would not be promote positive peace. In essence, Saliternik generally agrees with the argument of many peace scholars, that both negative and positive peace are important (2015). However, this particular article seems to critique the “peace” approach to post-conflict agreements, thereby suggesting that the two sides of the peace vs. justice debate may not be communicating effectively with one another, and may be disconnected from the broader scholarship on the topic.

Many peace scholars see peace settlements not only as a means of ending physical violence, but also as important steps toward positive peace. For example, some have suggested that the very act of coming to the negotiating table “is a step towards recognition of the entitlement of the rights of the citizens” (Kumar 2010: 317-318). Scholars also point to the relationship between human rights and peace

in the establishment of post-war institutions (McGuinness 2011), noting that the mere existence of peacetime institutions intended to provide justice is not the same as building institutions that *promote* human rights (Cooper 2002: 13; Llewellyn 2012: 296). Including human rights provisions in peace agreements provides no guarantee that those provisions will be implemented or enforced (Reuter 2012: 364).and the need to integrate human rights throughout peacekeeping operations and the various components of post-conflict peacebuilding, including DDR (Alston and Eide 1980; Gaer 2003; Waldorf 2013). In each of these examples, we see human rights as an integral part of establishing positive peace. In fact, when human rights are conceptualized to include various political freedoms, economic freedoms and opportunities, and political, economic and social equality, there is a direct correlation to how positive peace is defined. Certainly, the relationship between human rights and peace is more multifaceted than suggested by the “peace versus justice” debate.

The complex relationship between peace and human rights has also been exhibited through the quantitative research. Some authors have found that peacekeeping may have a mixed impact on the promotion of human rights (Woocher 2007; Burgoon et al 2015). Peacekeeping operations can undermine human rights, although those operations that include humanitarian missions tend to reduce human rights violations in the aftermath of violent conflict (Murdie and Davis 2010). Others suggest a standing military force which can be threatened or deployed as a mechanism for deterring genocidal crimes, pointing to the fact that human rights violations can lead to war, even though the success rate of the international community in this regard is limited (Woocher 2007; Anonymous 1996).

There are many practical challenges for linking peace, human rights, and justice due to complexity, internal contradictions, and variation within and between peace and human rights movements (Mertus and Helsing 2006; Kinderman 2009). The differentiation between the concepts by the UN--with human rights defined at the individual level and delegated to the Human Rights Council and peace and

security defined at the state level and under the purview of the Security Council-- also adds to the challenges (Donnelly 2006: 155; Duran 2011; McGuinness 2011). However, we argue that considering human rights and peace in a broader context may help bridge some of these gaps. Viewing human rights activity as a “holistic process” that involves “all sections of society” in working to restore rights that have been restricted due to violent conflict provides a strong framework for better integrating the concepts of human rights and peace (Kumar 2010: 321). In the next section, we look at how different types of NGOs vary in their conceptualization of the relationship between human rights and peace.

### *Religious vs. Secular Approaches to Human Rights*

Conceptual and operational approaches to human rights varies considerably based on whether one views human rights as divine, moral, or legal in nature; the perceived source of human rights also shapes whether or not they are deemed potentially revocable (Isakovic 2001; Berger 2003). Within the field of human rights, faith-based NGOs often have a more holistic or all-encompassing conception of human rights than groups that are strictly secular. NGOs associated with a religious community often view human rights as divinely given, and linked to additional concepts, such as peace and development. The guiding principles of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official international Catholic relief and development agency in the United States, for example, affirms that “created in the image of God, all human life is sacred and possesses a dignity that comes directly from our creation and not from any action of our own.” For CRS, these rights exist regardless of political or social structures. CRS also explicitly links “true justice” and “lasting peace” (CRS Guiding Principles n.d.) and emphasizes “the promotion of peace and justice” as a focal point of their peacebuilding and development work, which includes a concern for upholding the “dignity and equality of the human person” (USIP 2001: 8; Gerstbauer 2009: 854 ). Organizations associated with the historic peace churches, such as the Quakers and Mennonites, identify the inherent connection between conflict resolution, human equality (the basis for human rights),

democracy, and sustainable development (QCEA n.d.; Lampen 2015). The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), for example, views peace and social justice “as one ideal rather than as separate goals” (Dicklitch and Rice 2004: 665). This intertwining of concerns for both peace and human rights is clearly visible in the scholarship of Mennonite and Quaker scholar-practitioners such as Adam Curle (1971, 2000), John Paul Lederach (1997, 2000, 2014), Ron Kraybill (1994, 2000) and Lisa Schirch (2005, 2006).

Other faith traditions also make the linkage between peace and human rights. American Jewish World Service, for example, recognizes that “realizing human rights is the essential first step to building just societies” (AJWS n.d.) and that peace can be advanced “through projects that promote economic and social development” (USIP 2001: 8). Similar to Christianity and Judaism, Islam also emphasizes that all human beings are created in the image of God, and that social empowerment leads to justice and peace (Abu-Nimer 2003; Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2013: 11; 55; Johnston 2014). Furthermore, “justice is the essential component of peace according to the Qur’anic message, therefore it is the responsibility of all Muslims to work towards the establishment of justice for all, including social and economic justice.” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2013: 12). Social and economic justice are particularly central to the teachings of Islam, and solidarity rights, such as development, are consequently emphasized by Muslim scholars and activists, including Tariq Ramadan and Chandra Muzaffar, who view war, the legacy of Western colonialism and global inequality as negatively impacting human rights (Johnston 2014: 916-917). This emphasis on positive rights reflects the tendency of religious NGOs to care for the disenfranchised and believe in the possibility of transformation more than secular NGOs, which tend to be more rights-based and focused on negative rights (Berger 2003).

Secular human rights groups often emphasize political and civil rights, emphasizing “neutrality” and “impartiality” over what some might interpret as religious or cultural relativism (Johnston 2014: 907). While human rights scholars are increasingly taking note of the impact of peace agreements on questions

of human rights and justice (Mertus and Helsing 2006; Saliternik 2015), the two concepts are conceptualized as distinct, rather than intertwined. In the secular arena of large donors and UN peacebuilding efforts, efforts to promote human rights and peace “have historically proceeded on separate tracks” (Sharp 2013: 195). Secular human rights scholarship tends to focus more on the role of human rights NGOs in promoting or ameliorating (armed) conflict or protests, rather than a discussion of “peace” per se (Murdie and Bhasin 2011), or focuses on negative peace between actors; for example, weighing the costs and benefits of human rights prosecution after a civil war (Anonymous 1996; Hayden 2004; Akhavan 2009). In contrast, religious organizations tend to espouse a more holistic view of “peace” that includes addressing systemic injustice and restorative processes of conflict resolution (AFSC 2012; MCC).

#### *Conceptualizing Human Rights in the “West” vs. “Non-West”*

Human rights organizations “are commonly perceived as ‘translators’ of human rights norms in local settings” and human rights can be viewed as a particular “cultural construction” (Orr 2012: 244-45). Consequently, it is not surprising that NGOs in different parts of the world conceptualize human rights differently. The difference is perhaps most evident when one contrasts Non-Western organizations (i.e. in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East) and those in the “West” (i.e. in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia) and their views on human rights and peace, including competing perspectives on the “right to peace,” which explicitly links the fields of peace and human rights. Organizations originating outside of the West tend to emphasize positive dimensions of human rights (i.e., second and third generation rights obliging state and individual action such as provision of social welfare) as well as positive peace (i.e., provision of human rights, social justice) (Peterfi 1979; Alston 1980:328; Lopatka 1980:364; Marks 1980; Duran 2011). Organizations originating in the West, in contrast, tend to focus on

negative rights (i.e. political and civil rights protecting against the state) and negative peace (i.e. absence of war and/or armed conflict) and conceptualize peace and human rights as distinct and separate goals (Marks 1980; Forsythe 1993; Donnelly 2006). Some countries outside of the West claim that the industrialized “Western” countries are morally obligated to atone for past exploitation of much of the rest of the world as a result of colonialism, war, and “predatory” multi-national companies (MNCs) by addressing economic disparities and promoting social justice and development (Alston 1980; Marks 1980; Johnston 2014:915). The UN Common Understanding explicitly linked human rights to development, asserting that after 2003 all UN development activities should promote human rights principles (Kindornay and Carpenter 2012:480). Many faith-based organizations also link the concepts of peace and human rights with development, emphasizing the importance of solidarity with the poor (Hallward 2013; Johnston 2014; Klager 2014).

Growing economic inequality is a serious obstacle to human rights solidarity (Flynn 2009), as is resistance to solidarity rights espoused by countries outside the West, particularly those in the Global South. The African Charter for Human and Peoples’ Rights, for example, draws on African humanism, which emphasizes fraternity, reciprocity, and compassion, and includes peace and security, sovereignty over natural resources, development, and a satisfactory environment in their list of rights (Winks 2011:448). Asian human rights NGOs have also affirmed the linkage between human rights and development, emphasizing the importance of empowering and involving local communities and preventing abuses by transnational corporations, as well as affirming the protection of social and cultural rights (Asian NGO Network Statement 2012). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has also affirmed the importance of social and economic rights, in part because many of the OIC member countries are among the poorest in the world (Johnston 2014:915). Some Western organizations started taking a more “rights-based” approach to development in the 1990s, linking human rights (often defined

in civil and political terms) with poverty reduction, it remains unclear whether this reflected merely a terminological change or a more fundamental paradigm shift. The repercussions of this shift require further study, including the extent to which the discourse and practice around human rights and development varies depending on whether an organization is based in the West or outside the West and how human rights are conceptualized in each case. (Kindornay and Carpenter 2012).

### *Women, Human Rights & Peace*

In the study, we include a focus on women's groups for several reasons. First, women "organize *as women* to form women's movements engaged in political activism" and to promote their rights (Kaufman and Williams 2013:5; Curnow 2015), and second, women have a long history of holistic systems thinking undergirding women's social activism in the fields of social justice and peace, and founded international NGOs to promote the cause of a just and peaceful world order starting in the 1880s (Boulding 1995). Women's groups, such as the PeaceWomen Project, "adopts a holistic concept of peace that integrates human security, human rights, conflict resolution, and gender equality" (Chan 2011:522) that extends beyond the "liberal peace" concept articulated by the UN and Western donors. Pioneering peace educator Betty Reardon uses language found in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, including life affirmation, social justice, equality, and inclusivity, in her conception of peace (Reardon 1990:139-40). She asserts that peace is based on the assumption that all people "have the same fundamental human needs, are endowed with full human dignity, are entitled to the full realization of all human rights, and share a common interest in the future of the Earth" (Reardon 1993: 5).

Although the assumption that women are inherently peaceful is problematic and women do also engage in violent political activism (Kaufman and Williams 2013), many scholars, activists, and institutions, including the United Nations, have suggested an affinity between women and peace, as well as a tendency for women to human rights advocates as a means of challenging their own oppression under

patriarchy (Charlesworth 2008). Chan (2011: 524), for example, notes the equation of peace with “the proliferation of feminine values, such as care” and identifies the trend of feminist scholars and activists such as Cynthia Enloe (1989) to focus on the “everyday” activities that contribute to peace, including relationship patterns, power distribution, and the establishment of particular values. Women are often affected by structural violence, which might make them more prone to pursue positive peace (Tickner 1992; Kaufman and Williams 2013).

Many women’s NGOs around the world have used human rights frameworks and language to try to promote women’s rights and gender equality, as well as to advance women’s socioeconomic, domestic, and legal concerns within their respective societies (Tsetsura 2013; Elias 2015; Curnow 2015). However, the broader human rights framework does not always capture the diverse concerns of women at the local level, nor does the legal or rhetorical commitment to human rights necessarily translate action regarding the particular, everyday concerns of women in situations of conflict and oppression (Tsetsura 2013). Studies suggest that women and girls are disproportionately insecure in post-conflict societies, and male-dominated delegations negotiating peace agreements or determining governmental policies are often gender blind (Higate and Henry 2004). A growing field of scholarship on feminism and transitional justice suggests that women should push for a transformation of the peace versus justice debate and “consider economic, social and cultural inequalities in order to end cycles of violence and tackle gender inequality” (O’Rourke 2015:121). Consequently, we anticipate a distinction between how women-only groups conceptualize the relationship between human rights and peace as compared to groups that are mixed gender or men-only.

## **Methods**

The literature discusses the connections between peace and human rights in conceptual terms, but we are also interested in how these ideas are connected in practice and how NGOs specifically

conceptualize these concepts and the relationship between them. We began our study with the UN Human Rights Council because it provides a large sample of NGOs from around the world that are concerned with human rights issues. We surveyed the websites of all 280 organizations recently affiliated with the UN Human Rights Council to determine whether peace was mentioned anywhere in their materials, and if so, how. Affiliated groups were identified as those that were in attendance at the 27<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (September 8-24, 2014). While we recognize that web content varies over time, a temporal comparison is outside the scope of this work; rather, we considered these websites at one point in time - early February 2015. We also conducted nine interviews with organizational representatives based in Geneva in May 2014 which adds contextual and conceptual depth to the quantitative data.

### **Analysis**

In assessing how these organizations conceptualized the relationship between human rights and peace, we first explored whether they specifically discussed human rights and peace on their websites. Of the 280 organizations we researched, 237 had websites or other web presences that allowed us to evaluate their approaches. The majority of the groups, 195 (82%), mention human rights on their website. This is not surprising given that we look at organizations that attend the Human Rights Council meetings. However, it is worth noting that a number of groups that clearly believe their work is connected to human rights do not explicitly use “rights” language on their websites or take an overtly rights-based approach. In fact, 42 total groups, all of which attended the September 2014 session of the Human Rights Council, do not explicitly discuss rights on their websites. Do these organizations have anything in common? Of these 42 groups, 17 are religiously affiliated groups (40% of the subset). This is quite large a percentage, particularly given that only about 25% of the total number of organizations analyzed in this study were religious groups (see below). Thus, it appears that religiously oriented groups may be less likely to

officially frame their work as “human rights” oriented, even though they believe human rights to be an important part of what they do. We will return to the potential implications of this observation later in the analysis.

While, as expected, most groups affiliated with the UN Human Rights Council officially connect themselves to human rights, the same cannot be said of peace. One of the basic questions of this study was whether groups attending the Human Rights Council session considered peace at all. Of the 237 organizations that we evaluated, only 87 mention peace on their website, while another two mention peacebuilding more specifically but not peace more generally. Thus, a total of 89, or 37%, of organizations make a connection to peace. However, of these 89 organizations, 40 merely mention peace on their website, but do not integrate it with the work that they might be doing. In fact, only 49, or 21% of the total organizations we examined, implicitly or explicitly connect human rights and peace. Femmes Afrique Solidarité, for instance, identifies as one of their objectives “fostering, supporting and promoting women's initiatives in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa, and for the respect of their rights” (Femmes Africa Solidarité n.d.). However, for the vast majority of these groups, the connection between peace and human rights is quite limited, and consists largely of the organizations mentioning these two concepts together in the same sentence. Very few organizations provide much of a specific discussion on how they view human rights and peace as being potentially connected, but instead make broad references to the concepts in their mission or vision statement, such as the following from Franciscans International, which seeks “a global community built on Franciscan values, in which the dignity of every person is respected; resources are shared equitably; the environment is sustained; and nations and peoples live in peace” (Franciscans International n.d.).

Although the above statement identifies both peace and human rights as core concerns for Franciscans International, the website does not clarify how the concepts are interrelated, or how the

organization pursues both objectives simultaneously. Instead, peace and human rights are implicitly linked in a list, without discussion of how they intersect. Given the broader content of the website one might conclude that Franciscans International approaches their work through the lens of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (they emphasize the grassroots, extreme poverty, the environment, and social and cultural rights). Another clear linkage of peace and human rights comes from Kohki Abe, the President of Human Rights Now, who states, “Human Rights Now needs to devote a lot of attention and energy to each area of Asia, focusing on common people struggling to live in peace every day, and working with human rights activists to ensure that injustices are eradicated and much-needed human rights are realized in the region” (Abe 2015). Most organizational websites, however, merely place peace and human rights in a list of objectives that their organization is striving for without defining the terms or the relationship between them.

### ***Religiously Oriented versus Secular Organizations***

A second question we investigated in our survey of organizations was whether NGO characteristics make a difference in how they approach human rights and peace. Consistent with the literature, religiously affiliated or faith-based organizations, particularly those taking a rights-based approach, seem somewhat more likely to discuss peace and to connect human rights with peace than secular organizations. Among the organizations we considered, about 25% (59 out of 237) were faith-based organizations, while the other 75% (178 out of 237) were secular in nature. Religiously affiliated groups were more likely than secular groups to mention peace, with 54% of religiously affiliated groups (32 out of 59) mentioning the term compared to 33% of secular groups (58 out of 178). Further, only 18.5% of the secular groups (33 of 178) demonstrated any connection between peace and human rights on their websites, whereas 28.8% of the faith-based groups (17 of 59) connected the concepts. This finding suggests that religiously affiliated groups may be more likely not only to see peace as an important part of

their mission, but also to view human rights and peace as being closely linked. Of course, this is an initial, superficial finding that does not explore exactly how organizations conceptualize both the concepts and the relationship between them; however, it does indicate support for our hypothesis that organizational characteristics impact how human rights and peace are viewed.

Religiously affiliated groups also seem much more likely to consider issues of “justice”, a term associated with positive peace in its broader sense, and with human rights in its more narrow sense, on their websites, compared to secular organizations. A little over 50% of faith-based groups (30 out of 59) mention “justice” on their websites, in contrast to only 32% (57 out of 178) of secular organizations. This finding suggests a future study should attempt to parse out more explicitly how religion may affect how NGOs perceive peace, human rights, and justice, particularly whether “justice” is conceived in procedural, distributive, or restorative terms.

#### ***Western Organizations versus Non-Western Organizations***

In relation to the differences between organizations in the “West” versus those created or headquartered in other regions of the world, the results are a bit mixed. Non-Western organizations were slightly more likely to mention peace on their websites than those in Western countries. Of the organizations analyzed, 25 out of 59 (42%) Non-Western groups mentioned peace, while 65 out of the 178 groups located in the West mentioned peace (36%). However, the groups were equally likely to connect peace and human rights. In our sample, roughly 20% of each type of group makes these connections (37 of 178 organizations in Western countries versus 12 of 59 of Non-Western organizations). One area where these two types of organizations were markedly different was in their discussion of justice. Groups in the West were much more likely to mention justice than Non-Western groups, with almost 40% (71 of 178) of organizations in the West mentioning justice compared to only 25% (15 out of 59) of Non-Western groups. This finding requires further study, although it suggests that

perhaps Western organizations are more likely to equate human rights with legal justice, whereas groups outside this region are more likely to have a broader understanding of human rights that includes social and economic issues. Additional content analysis of websites and organizational reports, along with interviews might help elaborate how groups conceptualize “justice.”

While the literature may have suggested even greater difference between Western and Non-Western groups, particularly in relation to connecting human rights and peace, our findings are a bit more mixed. One possible explanation is that many of the Non-Western organizations, particularly those located in the Global South, do not have websites, and therefore were underrepresented in our survey. Another potential explanation is the plethora of organizations in our sample that are located in Geneva and throughout Europe but may not identify with the “Western” neoliberal model of human rights, development and peacebuilding. For example, Centre Europe – Tiers Monde (CETIM), a development group housed in Geneva, Switzerland, is firmly against Western modes of development. As they state on their website, “There is no such thing as a developed and an under-developed world, there is only a single, badly developed world” (Centre Europe 2015). Similarly, Nord-Sud XXI, a human rights and development group based in Geneva, is highly critical of the West. In fact, the group was formed “to support the work of the United Nations in the fields of human rights and development by providing a voice for concerns of individuals in the southern hemisphere and to people not normally represented in international forums” and fights against “unhuman globalization” (Nord-Sud n.d.). Consequently, it is possible that our sample, which represents groups working with the Human Rights Council, is not able to fully distinguish “Western” organizations from non-Western ones given that many organizations may have offices in Geneva, or elsewhere in Europe for reasons of convenience. Another possibility is that, given criticism of the Human Rights Council by some groups in the West, some “Western” organizations choose not to affiliate, and therefore are not represented in the sample.

### ***Women's Groups versus Broad-Based Groups***

Finally, we consider whether and how women's groups approach peace and human rights in comparison to groups focused more broadly. In our sample, only 9% of the organizations (21 of 237) can be considered "women's" groups (meaning that the group is primarily concerned with women's rights in particular or that the group is composed primarily of women). The remaining 216 organizations have a broader mission. Given the small number of women's groups, it is difficult to make too many generalizations, but the initial data provides a basis for guiding further investigation.

Overall, women's groups appear more likely to mention peace and to connect human rights and peace. Of the 21 women's groups, 10 of them mention peace (48%) in comparison to 38% of broader organizations (80 out of 216). Similarly, 33% (7 of 21) of women's organizations connect peace and human rights, whereas 19% (42 of 216) of broader organizations connect these concepts. Less variance is found between women's organizations and other organizations when we consider justice; 33% (7 of the 21) women's groups mention justice in comparison to 37% (79 of 216) of the broader organizations. Thus, women's organizations appear slightly less likely to discuss justice than broader organizations, though this difference is quite small and does not address what *type* of justice is inferred.

Overall, these broad results show that characteristics of organizations, such as whether they are secular or faith-based, located in the West or not, and whether they focus primarily on women's rights or broader rights, may affect how groups consider peace, justice, and human rights. Given that so few organizations explicitly link human rights and peace on their websites, we explore those that do in order to gain a fuller picture of what types of relationships may be envisioned by these groups as a starting point for further study.

### ***The Right to Peace?***

One of the most explicit linkages between human rights and peace found in the literature is the debate surrounding the “right to peace.” Despite recent efforts to re-invigorate the quest for establishing “a right to peace”, only two groups—the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l’homme – specifically mention the right to peace on their websites. This suggests that those NGOs that attend the general Human Rights Council Meetings are not necessarily the same ones actively pursuing the “right to peace” or that groups are concerned that highlighting their concern for this issue might result in negative attention that might undermine their broader human rights efforts. Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l’homme, an African human rights group based in Senegal, specifically discusses the importance of the third generation of human rights – which include the rights of peace, development, security and solidarity (Rencontre 2015). WILPF reports on an informal consultation on the right to peace that it attended with at least 40 states and many international NGOs. The article suggests that WILPF believes that any declaration of the right to peace needs to include women in peacemaking processes, address the root causes of conflict and recognizes the need for disarmament and social justice, as well as the “right to development” (WILPF 2015).

While these two groups discussed the right to peace in positive terms, several of the organizations interviewed in our study were either skeptical of this right or specifically stated that this was not something their organization dealt with. For example, Nicolas Agostini, a UN-Geneva delegate for the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said that the right to peace was not something that their organization was working on (Agostini 2014). Similarly, Heather Collister from the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) said in relation to the right to peace, “we're aware that discussions are going on, but it's not an issue that we've engaged on, at all, actually... we don't... consider ourselves as working on the right to peace” (Collister 2014). Even the Secretary-General of the International Peace

Bureau, Colin Archer, remained somewhat skeptical about how successful a campaign for a “right to peace” would be. In an interview, he specifically stated “I don't think it's all that productive to go too far down that road, the right to peace” (Archer 2014). Most of Archer’s skepticism stemmed from how the “right to peace” could potentially have contradictory implications due to competing understandings of “peace”— such as the right to maintain peace through force on the one hand, and extreme pacifism on the other.

Our initial sample suggests that, decades after it was first introduced, the right to peace continues to be a hotly contested issue. The newly appointed Director of the Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Michael Deeb O.P., for example, noted that the right to peace was “becoming quite polarized in this UN context” (Deeb 2014). Another representative from a Geneva-based human rights group stated that, “they've created this so called right to peace... it's a bogus right, [the] right to peace doesn't exist... I'm a bit skeptical when it's being used. Because it's a bit Utopian, and I don't think there will ever be peace in all parts of the world, so what we try to do, is to try and put pressure on the bad guys to stop killing their own people. Will there be any peace? I doubt it” (Interviewee A 2014). This perspective clearly shows the skepticism, and even the very negative view, that some organizations have toward the right to peace. The fact that so few organizations mention it all certainly suggests that this is not an area where human rights groups are likely to find common ground. More research is required, however, before we could draw any conclusions regarding whether particular group characteristics are correlated with support for the “right to peace” initiative.

### ***Positive versus Negative Rights and Peace***

Two general approaches to human rights and peace appear prominent based on the website survey and sample interviews. The first perspective gives human rights preference over peace, and asserts that respect for human rights may lead to greater peace. These groups tend to see peace and human rights in

more negative terms as the absence of war and as fundamental freedoms (usually political and civil liberties) governments cannot take from their subjects. The second perspective views peace as an important component of human rights efforts, using a positive definition of peace that incorporates social justice and human rights often viewed more broadly in terms of human security or inclusive of economic and social rights.

The Dominicans for Justice and Peace, a faith-based group established by the Order of Preachers, connect human rights and peace, and specifically connect human rights to the idea of “social justice.” In discussing their United Nations work, they use the terminology of positive peace, stating that their role is “focusing on the challenge of justice and peace in the world; to contribute to the ongoing discourse on social justice and human rights violations worldwide; to provide an international forum for members of the Dominican family who are active in these fields to advocate on behalf of victims of human rights violations” (Dominican Network 2015). In an interview with Michael Deeb O.P., the Director of Dominicans for Justice and Peace, this conception of peace is clear. He says, “our Catholic social teachings spell it out quite significantly to say that it’s [peace] not just the absence of war... peace is... in their hearts” which “means for people to find a sense of harmony within themselves and... amongst each other.” Further, Father Deeb states that dealing with “the inequality and the poverty” within the world “are major aspects towards building peace” and that “if we don’t deal with those things it will diminish the prospects of peace” (Deeb 2014). The perceptions of peace here are clearly about more than just the absence of war, and contain both a spiritual element and a broader social justice element.

Similarly, in a 2008 statement submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Anti-Discrimination Unit., titled “Initiatives for the Global Dialogue for Promotion of a Culture of Tolerance and Peace based on Respect for Human Rights and Religious Diversity,” the Bahá’í International Community stated that they welcomed the opportunity “to put forward its

contributions with regards to initiatives that promote a culture of peace based on respect for human rights and religious diversity” (Bahá’í 2015). In an interview with Ms. Diane Ala’i, a Representative of the Bahá’í International Community United Nations office in Geneva, Ms. Ala’i mentioned the organization’s “Peace Statement” that explains that “peace can only be achieved if some principle problems that society today faces are resolved... and some... are linked with human rights” (Ala’i 2014). She goes on to say that these issues are related to gender equality; economic, social, and cultural rights; and social justice. Thus, for her, peace is linked to more than civil and political rights – it relates to social justice and a broader set of positive rights within a society. These interviews suggest that religious groups may be more inclined to understand “justice” in terms of social and economic indicators rather than in more narrow legal or procedural terms.

The positive view of both peace and human rights in religious organizations is further illustrated in an interview with Franciscans International. Markus Heinze ofm, the Director of the organization, suggests that the group is primarily a human rights group and that their “main approach is really a rights based approach” (Heinze 2014). He suggests the group contributes to peace by looking at it “from a human rights perspective.” Following up on these ideas Francesca Restifo, the International Advocacy Director for the organization, states that from this “human rights based approach,” peace was not “just... a ceasefire or that there’s no violence between different armed groups” (Restifo 2014). Rather, she suggests that peace is “a situation for human beings as well as the whole nature of the environment to live in... that everyone is respected... in their rights, in their dignity.” Another faith-based group in Geneva made similar connections between peace and human rights, noting their complementarity and mutual influence. In an interview, a representative from another faith-based organization in Geneva stated that their organization was largely formed for the purpose of promoting peace, “peace based on social justice”

(Interviewee B 2014). The representative described the organization's work on peacebuilding, affirming that a peacebuilding approach helps make the Human Rights Council's efforts more effective.

Not only faith-based organizations articulate the relationship between peace and human rights in a positive way, however. Madeleine Rees, the Secretary General for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), for example, states that "peace just isn't one thing" and that in order to achieve peace "you actually have to break it down into those needs which of course are rights" (Rees 2014). In her interview, Rees describes a positive orientation to peace, noting that WILPF "focus[es] on human rights based approaches to identification of what peace would look like" and asserting that "the absence of war is not peace." Using a gender lens consistent with the history of WILPF activism, Rees notes that "you can't deal with issues of peace, unless you deal with root causes" and states that "peace ... is based ... [on] a recognition and realization of human rights from a gender perspective." Although one cannot generalize from a single organization, such statements are consistent with the literature suggesting women's organizations are more likely to link human rights and peace in a holistic manner due in part to the history of women's struggles for both peace and equality. Another historic peace organization, the International Peace Bureau (IPB), also articulated a strong connection between human rights and peace. When asked about conceptions of peace, Colin Archer, the Secretary-General of the IPB, said that "one of the important developments in peace studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been... to say peace is not only the absence of war, or violence, it's also to do with social justice,... democracy and human rights, ... our relationship with the environment. It's a much more holistic concept, this idea of structural violence brought in by Galtung" (Archer 2014). This more positive orientation toward peace that includes mention of Galtung's concept of structural violence (Galtung 1996) is consistent with the field of peace studies, which traditionally has a more encompassing view of peace as inclusive of social justice concerns than the newer field of conflict resolution, which has tended to emphasize dialogue and ending overt conflict.

Although this study focused explicitly on peace and human rights, a question for further research might be how these organizations conceptualize conflict and whether there is a difference in how conflict resolution oriented groups conceptualize human rights.

Not all groups surveyed, however, equate peace and human rights; indeed, this is consistent with the literature that questions the causal relationship between peace and human rights. One such example is Al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights group. In a paper posted on their website titled, “Peace and Human Rights: Palestine as a Case Study,” Shawan Jabarin states, “Some might believe that achieving peace is a primary prerequisite to allow any positive development in the exercise of human rights. However, I firmly believe that, in terms of the mechanics of the issue, the inverse is true. Unless grounded on principles of justice and respect for basic human rights, a genuine and permanent peace cannot be attained” (Jabarin 2008: 4). In another article, Al-Haq argues that:

Whilst much is made by the international community of the need of Israel and the Palestinians to return to the 'peace process', there is little explicit recognition of the fact that any peace process, in order to be just and sustainable, must be predicated on a respect for human rights. Israel's attack on human rights defenders not only constitutes a grave violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and the wider Palestinian population, but also frustrates any possible peace process, by preventing those best able to advocate for human rights from pursuing their activities. (Al-Haq 2010)

This perception of human rights and peace clearly sees human rights as being necessary in order to have peace, with peace being largely associated with negative peace. In fact, even though this group explicitly connects human rights and peace, it is clear that human rights are given priority, and that these must be dealt with before any real peace process can be considered. This is consistent with research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which observes that while “human rights” are disregarded as a concept among many Israelis due to their equation of human rights advocacy with the Palestinian cause, “peace” is disregarded as a concept among Palestinians due to the concerns stated by Al-Haq above (Abu-Nimer and Kaufman 2006; Hallward 2011).

Similar to Al-Haq, which views human rights as a necessary precursor to peace, the Colombian Commission of Jurists articulates the following vision:

To be a reference point on human rights, nationally and internationally, defending and promoting a comprehensive approach to human security based on the respect and realization of human rights, both as an end and as a means, from the perspective of the right to truth, justice, and reparation, aiming for an equitable distribution of land and the right to work as means of achieving peace, development, and prosperity in our country, with special emphasis on farmers, workers, ethnic groups, displaced people, women and children. (Colombian 2015)

Yet again, human rights are seen as a means of achieving peace, with the provision of human rights – defined in social and economic terms--deemed a necessary factor in the creation of peace. Both of these organizations are from countries that have experienced protracted violent conflict characterized by the flagrant abuse of rights; this context likely shapes the orientation to peace and human rights and is a factor worthy of further study. For example, although the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) asserts that “there can be no sustainable peace without accountability for the most serious human rights violations... without the fight against impunity” (Agostini 2014), the emphasis is on flagrant human rights abuses rather than the provision of economic, social, and political rights.

Another group of organizations interviewed demonstrated their prioritization of human rights over peace. Heather Collister, a representative from the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) indicated that while their work with human rights defenders was ultimately about peace, particularly in countries with conflict, they do not really use the language of “peace” (Collister 2014). Likewise, some of the largest human rights groups, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch do not mention peace at all on their websites. Another representative interviewed from a Geneva-based group that considers itself a human rights advocacy organization, suggests that peace has little to do with human rights. Rather, he suggested that democracy would likely have a greater impact on human rights than peace in areas currently experiencing conflict. He argues that “you can be at peace and still kill people,

meaning peace is usually with ...other country... you don't have to have a declared war, or a conflict internally to violate human rights. So for us yes, democracy, rule of law, free media, freedom of expression, it's more vital pillars... in governance rather than the existence of peace” (Interviewee A 2014).

The interviews with various Geneva-based organizations seem to corroborate the general findings of the study. It appears that in addition to faith-based or religiously affiliated groups discussing peace and human rights more than secular groups, these groups also tend to consider peace and human rights in positive terms, including a strong emphasis social justice. The one women’s group that was interviewed also demonstrated similar tendencies. On the other hand, broader human rights groups seemed a bit more likely to consider human rights and peace in the negative sense, and saw human rights as being a necessary precursor to peace. For these groups, peace could not be achieved without accountability for human rights violations, and for some, peace would not necessarily aid in the fight for human rights.

## **Conclusions**

This study has demonstrated that the NGOs most closely connected with international human rights policy, and specifically with the Human Rights Council, do not often make explicit linkages between human rights and peace when describing their work. Most organizations that do connect these issues do so in only a cursory way, recognizing that they are interconnected, but not elaborating on the relationship.

Faith-based or religiously affiliated organizations were more likely to discuss peace and to connect peace to human rights, often using the concept of “justice” to encompass the “positive” dimension of peace as it relates to human rights. Some faith-based groups, however, appeared more reluctant to adopt “rights” language in their discourse, or at least were less likely than secular groups to use rights language on their websites. In a somewhat contradictory finding, those groups outside of the

West were more focused on peace than groups based in the “West” and were less likely to be focused on justice. This finding is puzzling given that the literature suggests non-Western organizations, like faith-based organizations, are more likely to be concerned with issues of social justice and second generation (economic and social rights) than Western organizations. More research is needed to explore whether finding is due to a terminological difference between Western and non-Western organizations, the lack of websites for many of the organizations located outside of the West, because justice is conceptualized in legal, procedural terms among the Western groups, or because not all groups located in the West identify with what the literature describes as a “Western” orientation. As expected, women’s groups were more likely to mention peace and to connect human rights and peace, and to consider peace and human rights in positive terms. One interesting finding was the lack of discussion of the “right to peace” by the vast majority of these organizations and the ambivalent or even negative view of this “right” that some organizations expressed. This suggests that the issue of a “right to peace” is quite divisive in the human rights (and peace) communities, and is something that warrants greater attention and research.

This study has a number of limitations, but serves as an initial survey of the intersection of human rights and peace, providing data to shape and guide further research into the topic. The first limitation regards our sample: we only surveyed the websites of human rights groups that are directly connected to the Human Rights Council. There are numerous human rights groups working internationally, and many of these groups may make greater connections between human rights and peace; likewise, we did not survey the wide range of peace and conflict resolution organizations, many of whom include human rights in their mandates even if they do not explicitly identify as a human rights organization. Further, several groups that were connected to the Human Rights Council did not have websites or other information available on the internet. This creates a particular problem since many of these groups tend to be smaller

and often are located outside of the West. Thus, the sample considered in this paper over represents those groups based in the West.

A second limitation of the study is that it relies heavily on website information, with only a limited number of extended interviews. Additional interviews would help discover how organizations conceptualize human rights, peace, and the relationship between the two, especially given that this information is often not explicitly discussed on their websites, but a subject that many have likely considered, particularly given the work of many of these organizations in areas of conflict. Future research should conduct additional interviews with human rights groups, not only in Geneva, but also from countries around the world, to better ascertain the breadth of views on the intersection of human rights and peace in the NGO community.

Even with its limitations, this study provides some interesting information about how peace and human rights are conceptualized quite differently by religious, secular, Western, non-Western, and women-oriented groups. Given the mainstreaming of human rights in UN Peace Operations as well as the increasing discussion around the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in the policy community, more attention should be paid to the varying assumptions regarding the relationship between human rights and peace. More importantly, efforts to view peace and human rights more broadly and in more positive ways may help bridge some of the gaps that have formed between different types of human rights organizations. Furthermore, as policymakers become increasingly concerned with matters of religious extremism, conflict defined partially in religious terms, or human rights violations of religious minorities, the question of how religious groups conceptualize the relationship between human rights and peace could provide fruitful insight, and our work suggests ways that policymakers might better connect with these groups.

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