



## "The Role of Art and Culture in Peacebuilding"

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to speak today about the profound role of art and culture in promoting peace. In a world often divided by conflict, we sometimes overlook the power of creative expression to foster understanding, unity, and ultimately peace. Switzerland, through its international cooperation, has long recognized this transformative potential.

Art is more than aesthetics; it's a universal language that transcends borders and ideologies. As Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Art should

cause violence to be set aside. And it is only art that can accomplish this." Art brings people together by fostering empathy, offering alternative narratives, and creating spaces for dialogue. From Myanmar to Colombia, we see how art not only expresses personal stories but also builds bridges between divided communities.

In the SDC's 2024 *Thematic Guidance on Culture and Development*, cultural rights are affirmed as human rights. It is furthermore stated that a vibrant cultural sector is not a luxury—it drives social change, fosters democratic participation, and amplifies marginalized voices. Through artistic expression, conflict-affected communities process trauma, build resilience, and move toward reconciliation.

So how do art and culture contribute to peace? In three key ways: resilience, spaces, and shifts.

First, art builds **resilience**. In conflict zones, cultural activities help people endure hardship, offering non-violent ways to channel grief and anger. In Colombia for example, displaced farmers used music to share their stories of injustice, transforming pain into collective healing.

Second, art creates **spaces for dialogue**. Safe spaces are vital for peacebuilding. Whether through theater, music, or visual art, these platforms bring together individuals from different backgrounds, fostering understanding and trust. In an SDC supported project in Sri Lanka, a theater group united conflicting factions through performances during the civil war. Another example from Tunisia (we will see a short video in a couple of moments) shows how a cultural center in the south of the country brings together formerly hostile groups for a joint dialogue.

Lastly, art catalyzes **shifts in perceptions**. Artistic expression can challenge entrenched narratives, inspiring unexpected yet transformative changes. In Colombia, a single concert shifted how policymakers viewed victims of violence, illustrating art's power to transform society.

Importantly, art also provides hope. In crises, when normalcy feels unattainable, art offers a glimpse of a re-imagined future. Many peace movements are led by young artists who use digital platforms to foster non-violence and inspire change.

Switzerland, through the SDC, supports this vital work on culture and development in over 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, dedicating 1% of its budget to cultural initiatives. However, as we look toward the future with budget constraints, it is more crucial than ever to strategically leverage the arts for peacebuilding.

In closing, the path to peace is not linear—it requires resilience, creativity, and patience. Art and culture provide the tools to imagine new possibilities, rebuild trust, and connect on a human level in ways political negotiations alone cannot achieve.

As practitioners, let's continue to champion the power of culture in our peacebuilding efforts. Together, through creativity, we can transform conflict into cooperation and division into unity.

Thank you!