

## Chapter 5

# Contributions of Human Security to Intractable Conflicts\*

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**Abstract:** This chapter aims to identify the conceptual links between intractable conflicts and human security to develop an analytical model geared towards reducing their intractability. To this end, the concept of *human security* has been operationalized based on five fundamental characteristics, and its application is proposed as a strategy to counter the beliefs that perpetuate intractable conflicts. Transforming these beliefs is not achieved solely by creating deliberative spaces. Rather, it is necessary to improve the structural and contextual conditions of the parties involved. This reduces asymmetries between them and, consequently, creates more equitable conditions for reaching agreements on the issues and resources in dispute. These are precisely the possibilities offered by the human security approach.

**Keywords:** belief, human rights, environment, human security, conflict resolution, social transformation

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## **CULTURE OF PEACE: REFLECTIONS DRAWN FROM THE NOTION OF SECURITY**

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## Introduction

In the specialized literature, intractable conflicts have been defined as situations characterized by:

a very long resolution time or an ongoing negotiation process; a seemingly simple, readily available negotiated solution; and conflicting positions among the disputing parties that show no sign of resolution in the short or medium term, with persistent disagreements. (Pacheco-Vega, 2014, p. 229)

Based on the assumption that conflicts arise when parties operate from different frames—that is, different cognitive and cultural lenses through which they perceive reality and make decisions—the specialized literature has identified reframing as a strategy for transforming these conflicts (Shmueli et al., 2006). Reframing a conflict involves modifying how the conflict is understood, thereby promoting reinterpretation that facilitates the identification of shared or at least compatible meanings across the frameworks at play (Lewicki et al., 2003).

For reframing to be effective, it is not enough to simply create deliberative spaces, as much of the specialized literature often proposes. Empirical evidence indicates that deliberation is insufficient to transform the parties' beliefs and perceptions of the adversary (Lindahl & Zachrisson, 2022). This is because frames are not only individual constructions but also social configurations that emerge from the social, cultural, and educational fabric in which the actors are embedded (Bar-Tal, 2000).

This chapter examines the concept of *human security* and its five fundamental dimensions to identify the elements that contribute to improving the structural and contextual conditions of the parties involved in a conflict. It is assumed that

transforming economic, food, health, and environmental conditions not only impacts individual and collective well-being but also helps reduce asymmetries between actors. Reducing these inequalities creates a more equitable framework, facilitating the construction of sustainable agreements both in the interpretation of disputed issues and in the management of the resources involved.

To achieve this objective, this chapter is structured in three sections. The first focuses on the definition and characteristics of intractable conflicts, as well as the strategies proposed to address their tractability. The second examines the concept of *human security*, detailing its attributes and scope. The third presents a concrete proposal that links intractable conflicts to human security, identifying which dimensions of the latter can help transform the collective belief systems that perpetuate these conflicts.

This proposal is based on studies of socio-environmental conflicts, given that these disputes currently occupy a significant portion of the attention and resources of local and national governments, the business sector, and affected communities. Furthermore, although the environment and territory are central to these conflicts, their nature is complicated by the concomitant presence of political, economic, and cultural demands, thereby justifying their classification as intractable.

In this regard, Campbell (2003), based on his research on socio-environmental conflict, argues that moral differences between parties and discrepancies in framing processes are the main obstacles identified by mediators. Therefore, the proposal to transform beliefs—or, in Bar-Tal's (2000) terms, the conflictive *ethos*—through the principles of human security is presented as a relevant and necessary strategy.

## Intractable Conflicts: Definition, Characteristics, and Proposals for Tractability

In the early 1990s, the American sociologist Louis Kriesberg introduced the concept of *intractable conflicts*, thus initiating a debate in the field of conflict studies. These are defined as confrontations that, in addition to being prolonged, are destructive due to the dynamics within which they develop. Despite numerous third-party interventions, they have demonstrated remarkable resistance to resolution or transformation (Kriesberg, 2005).

Since then, a sustained debate has arisen around the definition, causes, and particularities of these conflicts. As Kriesberg himself points out, neither the duration nor the use of violence automatically makes a conflict intractable. In recent decades, an academic consensus has been consolidating around the definition of

intractable conflicts as those that persistently defy proposed resolutions or exhibit marked resistance to transformation (Burgess, 1998; Campbell, 2003; Crocker et al., 2005).

Regarding their characteristics, authors such as Zartman (2005) point out that intractable conflicts present at least four distinctive features: i) they are prolonged due to their persistent resistance to attempts at transformation or resolution; ii) they are marked by strong polarization between the parties, who tend to interpret the situation in zero-sum terms; iii) they are profitable for certain actors, since their prolongation allows for the mobilization of support and the extraction of strategic resources; iv) they lack maturity for resolution, insofar as the existing conditions grant the parties relative stability or benefits that could be lost if the conflict were resolved.

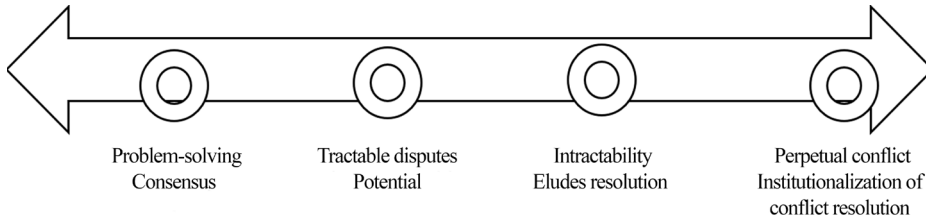
For his part, Campbell (2003) identifies several characteristics that define intractable conflicts: i) the presence of deeply rooted moral conflicts; ii) their temporal extension prevents resolution through conventional mechanisms; iii) a significant power imbalance between the parties, which increases the risk of coercion and escalation of violence; iv) the rigidity of positions, accompanied by a high level of hostility stemming from beliefs intensely held by the conflicting groups; v) the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues in dispute; and v) the existence of divergent frames.

Of the characteristics mentioned above, prolongation is susceptible to multiple interpretations. For this reason, Putnam and Wondolleck (2003) propose focusing attention not so much on the duration of the conflict, but on two key aspects: i) the degree of penetration—that is, how it extends and impacts the social life of the actors involved; and ii) its complexity, understood as the expansion of the number of parties and issues involved. In this regard, the more a conflict expands into other spheres—social, political, and environmental—and the greater the incorporation of demands, issues, and actors, the more prolonged its development will be and, therefore, the more intractable it will become.

The above suggests that intractable conflicts are not static; rather, they can be conceptualized as a spectrum or a cycle of escalations and de-escalations. During this cycle, moments more conducive to resolution can be identified, as well as stages in which the conflict may have transcended intractability to become an enduring conflict (Lewicki et al., 2003; Torrijos & Pérez, 2013).

The shifts within this spectrum are determined by various factors, including changes in the perceptions of the actors involved in the conflict; in the nature and scope of their demands; in the formulation of the objectives they seek to achieve; and in the way violence is employed in the development of the conflict (Kriesberg, 2005).

Figure 1. Spectrum of Intractability



**Source.** Adapted from Lewicki et al. (2003) and Torrijos y Pérez (2013).

The concept of *perpetual conflict* has been included in the analysis of intractable conflicts, based on the recognition that, despite the large amounts of energy that societies spend on these conflicts, when they are prolonged, they tend to reach a certain degree of coupling and stability, as well as a greater capacity to channel all resources toward their maintenance. To that extent,

the passage of time does not imply the depletion of available resources, nor does it lead to the parties' willingness to seek alternative solutions. Rather, it actually reinforces and predisposes subsequent generations to violence and to the search for new ways of capturing resources. (Torrijos & Pérez, 2013, p. 134)

A conflict reaches the status of intractable and perpetual when three logical processes converge and reinforce each other: i) the stabilization or sustainability of violence; ii) the institutionalization of the conflict; and iii) the enduring nature of the aggression. The assembly of these elements, in turn, produces a generational identity based on narratives of struggle and a negative emotional tone that extends to new levels and domains (Torrijos & Pérez, 2013).

This helps explain why, even though conflicts are usually demanding, stressful, painful, and costly for the parties involved, the conflictive *ethos* is difficult to dislodge once it has reached intractability. According to Bar-Tal (2000), the conflictive *ethos* is defined as the set of societal beliefs that, being functional within the conflict, constitute the informational and motivational basis that sustains the parties' continued involvement.

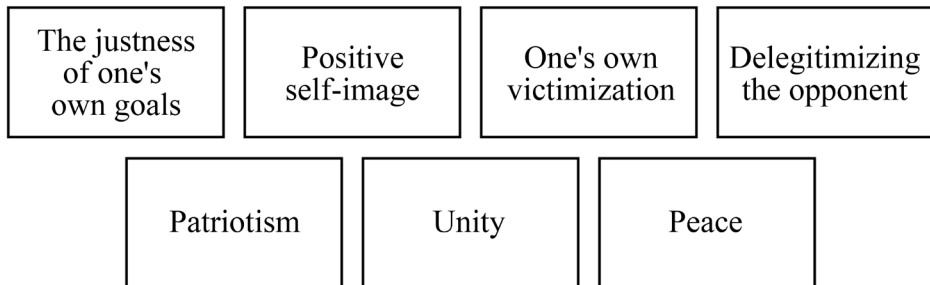
Among the reasons the author identifies for the difficulty of transforming the conflictive *ethos*, its contribution to shaping the parties' identities stands out. Furthermore, the underlying beliefs are reinforced by cultural, economic, and educational systems.

The temporal extent of the conflict implies that at least one generation has grown up without experiencing periods free of confrontation. On the other hand, the conflictive *ethos* serves as the ideological basis for certain political groups that come to power.

Finally, actors immersed in intractable conflicts maintain social mechanisms designed to protect the consensus built around this *ethos*. This is perceived as a functional system for coping with a threatening and stressful situation. Individuals or groups that express divergent beliefs are sanctioned, both formally and informally, thereby inhibiting the emergence and dissemination of alternative ideas and opinions.

From a psychosocial perspective, Bar-Tal (2000) identifies eight societal beliefs that constitute the conflictive *ethos*. This conceptualization provides concrete clues for mitigating the escalation of conflict and fostering its transformation into a manageable dispute (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** *Societal Beliefs that Form the Conflictive Ethos*



**Source.** Adapted from Bar-Tal (2000).

The importance of recognizing societal beliefs in the context of conflict lies in their capacity to guide and constrain the actions of the parties involved. When an individual or group perceives a situation as conflict-prone, they seek to understand its causes, which causes stress and uncertainty. To mitigate these emotions, people tend to attribute responsibility to the actors involved. This cognitive-emotional process contributes to constructing the meaning they give to their own actions within the framework of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000).

This set of beliefs is related to the concept of *frame*. Frames allow actors to structure and organize their experience, guiding their actions in response to a given situation. They are constructed from the careful selection of specific contextual

elements and relationships, with the aim of giving coherence and meaning to lived experience, while excluding those aspects that do not fit the explanatory logic each individual develops. Thus, the frame facilitates the presentation of certain perceptions about what is wrong and what needs to be corrected as self-evident and justified (Lindahl & Zachrisson, 2022). Consequently, conflicts arise when actors in the same situation operate from incompatible frames.

The importance of recognizing frames and framing processes lies in their capacity to identify convergences between actors' objectives and positions. This, in turn, opens avenues for de-escalating the conflict. Once the frames in the disputes have been identified, it is possible to seek mechanisms to align them. This process is known as *reframing* (Pacheco-Vega, 2014).

The goodwill or interest of the parties involved is not enough to reframe a situation, precisely because frames are socially constructed. Hence, the political, social, and economic context plays a determining role in their configuration. In this regard, Bar-Tal (2000) proposes seven fundamental conditions for the sustainable resolution of intractable conflicts:

1. Existence of a formal resolution agreement: This represents a public commitment by the actors involved.
2. Concrete demonstrations of goodwill from the adversary: Actions must demonstrate a genuine change in their attitude toward the conflict.
3. External conditions favorable to change: Convergence between the local, national, and international environments is essential to facilitate the implementation of agreements.
4. Support for internal political structures: These must have the necessary capacity and legitimacy to enforce the agreed-upon commitments.
5. Sustained actions that support the resolution process: Continued support from the parties involved is essential, and the active role of leaders is particularly relevant.
6. Mobilization of the educational, social, and cultural system: This should be oriented toward reconciliation and the transformation of hostile perceptions.
7. Participation of multiple organizations: It is necessary for various entities to be involved in promoting and consolidating new peace and cooperation processes.

Burgess and Burgess (1998) proposed constructive confrontation as a method for addressing intractable conflicts. This perspective suggests that the parties

should reach solutions through direct mediation, without third-party intervention. To achieve this, they propose three steps:

1. Diagnosing the dispute and mapping the conflict: This phase requires identifying the participating actors, potential intermediaries, the parties' interests and positions, as well as the long-term structural framework of the conflict.
2. Identifying and analyzing overlapping conflicts: Distinguishing between core and secondary issues is crucial. Without proper analysis, superficial issues can hinder the understanding and resolution of deeper aspects.
3. Reducing the complexity of the conflict: The goal is to simplify or segment overlapping elements, thus allowing efforts to be focused on the key issues of the dispute (Caton, 2003).

The practical application of these proposals in addressing intractable conflicts is highly complex. Therefore, it is essential to explore different analytical approaches and examine concepts that have been implemented in real-world conflict contexts. This will allow us to evaluate their scope and the contributions they can make to the understanding and management of disputes. Within this framework, a fundamental concept is that of *human security*.

## Human Security: Definition, Characteristics, and Scope

It is essential to revisit the definition of human security to operationalize the concept and to explore possible connections between its theoretical formulation and the dynamics of intractable conflicts. In this chapter, human security means

to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity. (United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security [UNTFHS], 2008, p. 6)

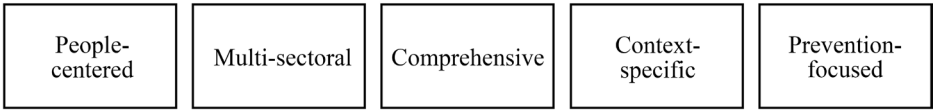
This definition implies a move beyond traditional conceptions of security, which prioritized the nation-state as the sole guarantor, primarily through military

defense mechanisms. In contrast, human security recognizes the plurality of threats to individuals' life and liberty, which must be addressed comprehensively, with a focus on human rights and individual dignity.

These new approaches to human security are the result of profound transformations, not only in the roles and configurations of states and other international actors, but also in the complex, interdependent nature of current economic, social, cultural, and environmental problems. In this context, the international security system—established after the Second World War and focused on the protection of states—is insufficient because it disregards the experience of people directly affected by conflicts (Commission on Human Security, 2003). Therefore, it is pertinent to examine more closely the definition of human security to assess its explanatory and practical potential in the face of the challenges posed by contemporary conflicts, particularly those considered intractable.

In the UN's published work, at least five fundamental characteristics or principles that shape the human security approach can be identified (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** *Characteristics of Human Security*



**Source.** Adapted from Commission on Human Security (2003).

1. From a people-centered perspective, human security is achieved through an integrative and participatory approach. This framework not only considers individuals and communities as beneficiaries of protection, but also as key actors in identifying their own needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities. It also promotes the collaborative development of assessments of the insecurities affecting each context, highlighting the importance of mobilizing resources at the local level, including the knowledge, means, and adaptation strategies inherent to each community (UNTFHS, 2008). It is important to emphasize that its scope is not limited exclusively to the individual. On the contrary, it also incorporates communities, broadening the spectrum of protection to include those social groups that have historically faced conditions of vulnerability. This approach is especially relevant for establishing dialogue in intractable conflicts, which are not only

manifested at the interpersonal level but also involve complex relationships among groups, authorities, and a diversity of collectively organized actors. In this respect, human security offers a broader analytical framework for understanding and addressing the structural and symbolic dynamics that characterize this type of conflict.

2. Characterized by its multisectoral approach, human security promotes dialogue and cooperation among actors from different sectors—such as the economic, political, social, and environmental sectors—that contribute to guaranteeing stable living conditions for individuals and communities. This approach fosters coherence and intersectoral coordination, overcoming traditional institutional fragmentation. It also seeks to evaluate the collateral effects—both positive and negative—of each human security intervention, with an emphasis on the differential impacts on affected communities (UNTFHS, 2008).
3. Characterized by its comprehensive approach, human security is structured around seven components: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. This comprehensive framework aims to address the multiplicity of threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities that affect the security of individuals and communities. It also entails analyzing actors and sectors that, to date, have not been considered relevant to the formulation and implementation of policies, programs, or projects, thereby promoting the development of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder responses (UNTFHS, 2008).
4. Human security is based on a context-specific and situated understanding of the realities that it seeks to transform. This approach requires an in-depth analysis of each situation to identify infringed freedoms and threatened rights, taking into account the historical, social, cultural, and political particularities that shape each context. Based on this diagnosis, the needs and capacities of the affected communities can be identified, facilitating the design of more relevant and realistic strategies. This approach considers the local, national, regional, and global dimensions, recognizing the complexity and interdependence of the factors that influence the situation and, therefore, its transformation.
5. Human security is oriented toward the prevention of conflicts and crises, which implies the early identification of risks, threats, and vulnerability factors. The objective is to address the underlying causes of these threats

before they escalate into critical situations. This approach is structured around two key concepts: protection, understood as the guarantee of security against immediate threats, and empowerment, conceived as the strengthening of individual and collective capacities to confront, resist, and transform these threats (UNTFHS, 2008).

In the case of protection, the United Nations defines it as “strategies, set up by States, international agencies, NGOs, and the private sector [that] shield people from menaces” (Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 31). From this perspective, protection constitutes a top-down approach, focused on developing norms, procedures, and institutions designed to ensure the security of individuals against serious and widespread threats. These actions are promoted by a diverse range of actors, including States, international agencies, civil society, NGOs, and the private sector.

On the other hand, empowerment is defined as “strategies [that] enable people to develop their resilience to difficult conditions” (Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 31). Unlike the top-down approach to protection, empowerment adopts a bottom-up perspective, oriented towards recognizing, strengthening, and mobilizing the individual and collective capacities of people. The goal is for them to reach their full potential and to actively participate in developing solutions that contribute to their security and well-being.

Both protection and empowerment are complementary principles, the coordination of which is essential to guarantee the comprehensiveness of the various components of human security. However, the balance between these two approaches largely depends on the characteristics of the context.

### Connection between Human Security and Intractable Conflicts: A Proposal from Socio-Environmental Conflicts

Conflict resolution theory often addresses intractable conflicts by drawing on the postulates of deliberative theory, understood as an instrument oriented toward consensus-building through deliberative processes grounded in reason and argumentative exchange. However, empirical studies have shown that these processes do not always yield consensus (Johanson et al., 2022).

A concrete example of these dynamics is socio-environmental conflicts, many of which have been categorized as intractable. Empirical studies reveal a series of structural challenges. First, there is a diversity of values and cultural

frameworks among the actors involved, which, along with a lack of trust, respect, and willingness to engage in dialogue, hinders the possibility of constructive deliberation. Second, these disputes often involve structural economic and social issues that transcend the strictly environmental sphere and reveal tensions related to development models, resource distribution, and territorial justice. Third, these conflicts unfold within normative and regulatory frameworks that constrain the scope and quality of the debates and, in many cases, reproduce the institutional *status quo*. Finally, the various participating groups may resort to different or even contradictory forms of deliberation, further complicating efforts to establish a minimal consensus (Caton, 2003).

As Merlinsky (2013) points out, socio-environmental conflicts constitute genuine political struggles, in which not only access to and use of resources are contested, but also the definition of public and private spheres, as well as the legitimacy of the actors empowered to make decisions about these resources:

[...] they call into question the power relations that facilitate access to these resources, which involve decisions about their use by some actors and the exclusion of their availability to others. These are situations of tension, opposition, and/or dispute in which not only environmental impacts are at stake. (p. 40)

Johansson et al. (2022) present the results of their research, in which the principles of deliberation were applied in two contexts of socio-environmental conflict in Sweden. The principles considered were: i) inclusivity, understood as the need for all perspectives to be heard and given equal opportunity to influence the final outcome; ii) sufficient time to allow for effective participation in the deliberative processes; iii) a productive group atmosphere, that is, an environment that fosters dialogue and reduces hostility; iv) multiple forms of communication; v) clear and flexible rules, along with the establishment of an agenda; vi) a system for tracking progress; and vii) highlighting the potential impacts or benefits derived from the deliberation process (Johansson et al., 2022).

Deliberative theory applied to natural resource conflicts underscores the importance of principles such as inclusivity, equity, non-coercion, clarity, and flexibility. It also emphasizes the need to base agreements on previously agreed-upon norms, agenda, and objectives. Furthermore, it highlights the role of an impartial and competent facilitator to guide the process (Fisher et al., 2020; Schultz et al., 2018).

However, the empirical findings of Johansson et al. (2022) diverge from theoretical positions. Despite adjustments made during the deliberative process, it was not possible to establish a productive group atmosphere due to deep-seated historical antagonisms among the actors involved. This dynamic is characteristic of socio-environmental conflicts, in which territorial, cultural, and social claims are deeply rooted and have often been rendered historically invisible or delegitimized by relevant authorities.

The research also revealed that, while deliberative spaces can adapt their rules and agendas to the dynamics of the actors involved—avoiding the imposition of unilateral conditions—the agreements reached lose legitimacy and meaning when the actors identified as responsible for the injustices (the State and the business sector) do not assume an active, transparent, and self-critical role. Furthermore, a structural difficulty was identified in ensuring the uninterrupted participation of the same actors, attributable to time constraints and concurrent responsibilities that prevented sustained involvement. The need to document the process, maintain collective interest, and synchronize the participation timelines of all involved parties poses a highly complex operational challenge.

Regulatory frameworks are subject to contention at multiple levels, hindering the achievement of agreements. Each actor develops a particular interpretation of legal and constitutional norms to uphold the primacy of their own rights and interests. In this context, it was not possible to reach substantive issue-consensus, defined as situations in which actors develop convergent perceptions of the problem and similar preferences regarding its resolution. Nor could working agreements be established, which occur when actors, despite differing motivations, manage to provide a solution acceptable to all parties involved.

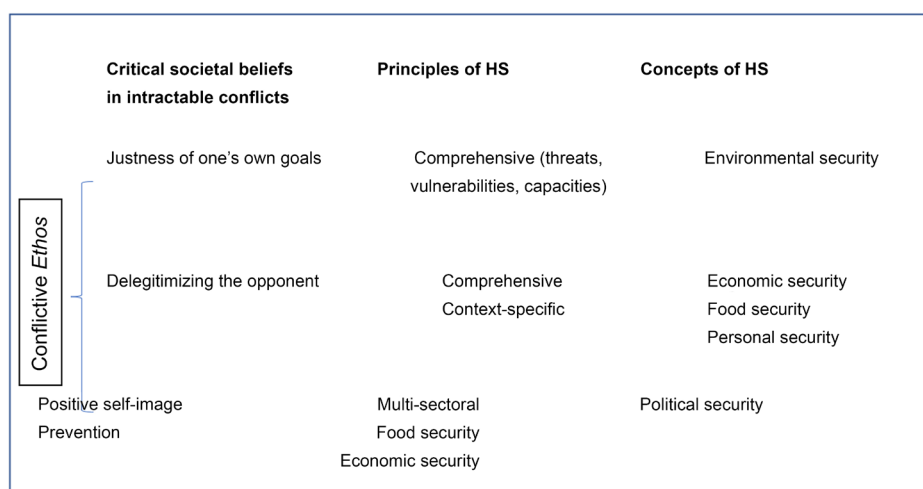
Despite the aforementioned difficulties, a meta-consensus was reached, defined as actors' willingness to recognize and accept the legitimacy of other frames and to develop a rational understanding of them. This outcome holds substantial value within the framework of a pluralist democracy, as it represents progress toward conceiving of the other not as an enemy, but as a legitimate adversary whose perspective is worthy of consideration. According to Mouffe (1999), in a deliberative and pluralist democracy, it is permissible to oppose the opponent's ideas vehemently, but never to deny their right to hold and defend them.

Recognizing the validity of alternative frames or interpretations of the conflict helps weaken the logic of delegitimizing the opponent and victimizing them, a process that tends to solidify in contexts of prolonged confrontation. However, while building a meta-consensus is necessary to initiate a de-escalation process,

it is not sufficient to transform the conflict into a dispute susceptible to resolution. This is because framing processes are not only a product of deliberation, but are also deeply conditioned by social, cultural, and educational structures that require broader transformations to foster a change in the conflictive *ethos*.

For this reason, this chapter revisits the contributions of the human security approach as a conceptual tool for understanding and addressing intractable conflicts, particularly socio-environmental conflicts. It argues that human security can contribute to transforming the conflictive *ethos*. According to Bar-Tal (2000), among the eight social beliefs that characterize conflicts, three are especially relevant in the case of intractable conflicts: the justness of one's own goals, delegitimizing the opponent, and a positive self-image. Based on this premise, an analytical proposal is presented focusing on the potential transformation of these beliefs.

**Figure 4.** *Proposed Connection between Human Security and Intractable Conflicts*



**Source.** Own elaboration.

Regarding the belief in the justness of one's own goals, it is important to highlight its decisive influence on shaping the conflictive *ethos*. Each party involved in the conflict tends to develop justifications, rationales, myths, symbols, and rituals that not only legitimize their position but also construct a sense of justice around their cause.

In the case of socio-environmental conflicts, groups that proclaim themselves defenders of the territory and natural resources often base their cause on a strong sense of justice, which is difficult to refute as it is grounded in values such as

harmony with nature, territorial autonomy, and the defense of life. On the other hand, actors who support the implementation of megaprojects or activities perceived as threats by environmental groups also claim legitimacy for their objectives, arguing that they pursue the economic and social development of the communities involved.

To prevent these opposing conceptions of justice from intensifying the conflict, it is necessary to transform the parties' cognitive foundations. This is achieved by creating new symbols and redefining their purposes (Bar-Tal, 2000). In this sense, the holistic principle of human security offers a valuable framework, especially when integrated into the environmental security approach. The latter seeks to counteract the threats arising from "environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, and pollution" (UNTFHS, 2008, p. 7).

While this definition excludes the essential demands of environmental groups—particularly those with a territorial base that prioritize sovereignty over security—it can provide a minimum common ground for understanding and collaboration among government authorities, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and private-sector actors. Moving towards consensus on environmental security, as articulated in the international frameworks proposed by the UN, could serve as a starting point for developing agreements oriented toward sustainability and conflict mitigation.

Furthermore, the operationalization of the holistic principle proposes three key categories for risk identification: threats, vulnerabilities, and community capacities. To the extent that the beliefs and perceptions of all actors involved in socio-environmental conflicts are recognized and analyzed—including not only communities, but also government authorities and other stakeholders—it will be possible to identify points of convergence that could form the basis for a common agenda.

The belief in delegitimizing the opponent hinders the transition from an intractable conflict to a dispute that can be addressed, as it perpetuates negative stereotypes and a process of dehumanization that legitimizes one's own actions, including the use of violence (Bar-Tal, 2000).

In the case of socio-environmental conflicts, a progressive increase in levels of violence has been observed. The number of murdered environmental leaders<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that this violence occurs within a context of profoundly

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<sup>1</sup> According to Global Witness (2022), more than 1,700 environmental defenders have been killed in the last decade.

asymmetrical relationships, in which states and transnational corporations hold a significant advantage in the use of force.

To counteract this process of dehumanization, the holistic and contextual principles are essential. First, the holistic principle enables recognition of the multiple threats to the lives and integrity of individuals and communities, thereby transcending the traditional notion of personal security. This implies fostering a deeper, more collaborative relationship between civil society and states, one that extends beyond military logic.

To the extent that the commitment to guaranteeing the economic and food security of communities—and not just their personal security—is recognized, affected populations will be able to feel legitimized as collective subjects whose needs are being met, rather than being perceived as mere military targets. Similarly, they will be able to recognize a human dimension in their adversaries, thereby reducing negative stereotypes.

Furthermore, opening the debate around these additional dimensions of security—particularly food security, which is threatened, for example, by megaprojects in agricultural areas—helps to recognize that socio-environmental conflicts transcend purely technical discussions. These conflicts encompass political, economic, and social dimensions that require the design and implementation of viable strategies.

The contextual principle of human security enables us to situate socio-environmental conflicts within their respective local contexts, given that many actors' beliefs are shaped by national and international frameworks that hinder recognition of local needs. By focusing on these needs and the authorities capable of addressing them, it is possible to reach agreements that are unfeasible at other territorial scales due to the complexity of the conflict, characterized by the diversity of actors, values, interests, and resources involved.

Finally, the belief in a positive self-image is intertwined with delegitimizing the opponent, creating a dichotomy between a "we" perceived as "good" and a "they" seen as "bad." To reduce this degree of polarization—which tends to intensify in protracted conflicts—it is essential to apply the principles of multisectoral collaboration and prevention.

Regarding the principle of multi-sectoral collaboration, its potential lies in its capacity to convene the various sectors and actors involved in conflict-prone situations, facilitating deliberation and dialogue within a human-rights framework. This principle seeks to guarantee the coherence and coordination of public

policies among sectors that have historically operated in a fragmented manner (UNTFHS, 2008). For this approach to be effective, it is essential to create spaces for interaction among the actors involved, as this can foster information exchange and encourage reframing the beliefs that underpin their respective positions.

The study by Johansson et al. (2022) has demonstrated that creating spaces for dialogue can, at the very least, contribute to the recognition of other interpretive frameworks and to their valuation as legitimate. In this context, the key concept is that of *political security*, understood as the capacity to participate in decision-making processes.

Moreover, the principle of prevention addresses the structural causes of human insecurity. In this regard, ensuring a minimum threshold of well-being for individuals and communities before creating spaces for deliberation creates more conducive conditions for dialogue. This not only ensures that individuals have more time and energy to participate actively—since they are not absorbed by satisfying basic survival needs—but also helps to mitigate the intensity of social demands that often emerge in socio-environmental conflicts, such as the right to food or to a decent livelihood. When these demands are not met, they tend to complicate disputes to the point of rendering them intractable.

## Conclusions

Intractable conflicts are characterized by prolonged duration and high polarization, stemming from profound divergences in the parties' frames. Furthermore, they are often characterized by multiple demands and involve diverse actors operating across different territorial scales.

When the sectors and actors involved in a conflict reach a certain stability and comfort within the conflict dynamic itself—that is, when the conflict acquires a degree of institutionalization, the identities of the parties consolidate in mutual opposition, and resources are allocated to maintaining the *status quo* caused by the dispute—what Torrijos and Pérez (2013) have termed *perpetual conflicts* emerge.

To prevent conflicts from reaching such a degree of immobility, and recognizing that they are dynamic processes characterized by moments of escalation and de-escalation, the concept of human security and its operationalization have been invoked. This enables the identification of principles that help transform intractable conflicts into disputes that can be managed (Kriesberg, 2005).

Specifically, the application of these principles has focused on socio-environmental disputes, which are paradigmatic cases of intractable conflict. This is because socio-environmental conflicts are essentially political and highlight profound debates about diverse conceptions of justice, democracy, and territorial appropriation, which manifest themselves through the resources and strategies deployed by the actors involved.

In this respect, the analysis has focused on the three most deeply rooted social beliefs within the conflictive *ethos* that, according to Bar-Tal (2000), perpetuate conflict: justness of one's own goals, delegitimizing the opponent, and a positive self-image. For each of these beliefs, a correspondence has been established with the principles of human security, which could contribute to its transformation. For example, with respect to the justness of one's own goals, the holistic principle facilitates the development of new conceptual frameworks and values linked to environmental security that can be shared by the parties involved.

In delegitimizing the opponent, holistic and contextual principles are fundamental to modifying the dynamics of intractable conflicts. Specifically, a comprehensive perspective recognizes that the threats in these conflicts extend beyond the mere defense of life, encompassing economic, food, and environmental dimensions. The joint recognition of these elements helps counteract the dehumanization that often accompanies the delegitimization of the "other," also known as the *opponent*.

As for the contextual principle, reconstructing the threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities of the parties in their immediate contexts and territorial scales fosters the construction of agreements that are unfeasible at the national or international level due to the complexity arising from the multiplicity of interests, values, sectors, and actors involved.

Finally, the belief in a positive self-image can be transformed through the principle of multi-sectorality, as convening all actors involved in a conflict to design joint security strategies fosters spaces for deliberation. In this way, the principle of prevention helps ensure economic, food, health, environmental, and personal well-being—conditions necessary for the full development of individuals and communities within the social sphere. Progress in these dimensions of security can reduce the demands accumulated during protracted conflicts. This facilitates the recognition and addressing of the specific demands arising from intractable conflicts, thus paving the way for their eventual resolution.

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