

PEACE MANIFESTO



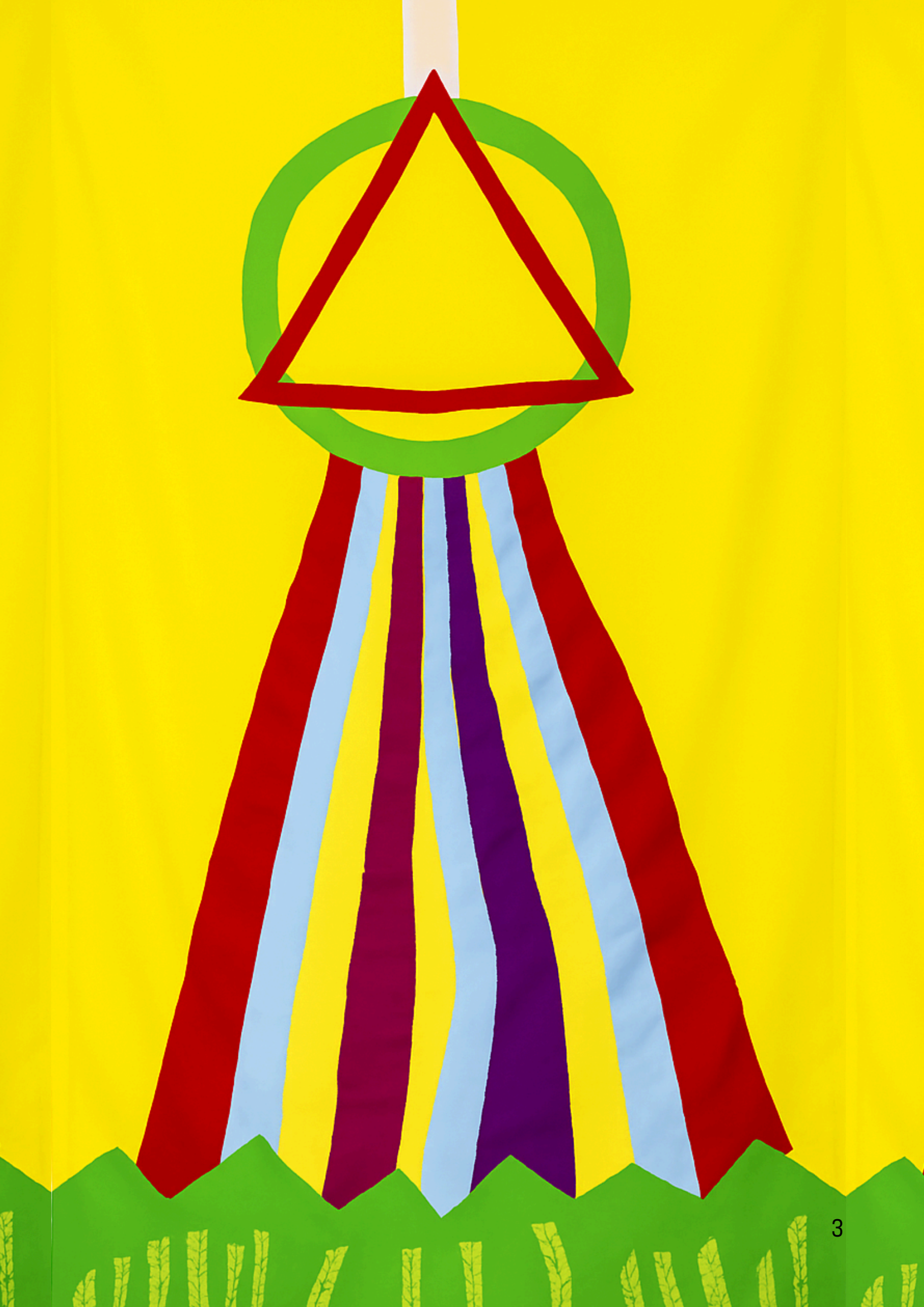
Building collective
security and sustainable
peace through
Diplomacy, Development,
Democracy, and Defence.



PAX CHRISTI FLANDERS' PEACE MANIFESTO

BUILDING COLLECTIVE SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE THROUGH DIPLOMACY, DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRACY, AND DEFENCE.

1. Introduction	4
2. From classical security thinking to comprehensive, global, and cooperative security	6
Classical security thinking	6
Comprehensive, global and cooperative security	7
1) Comprehensive Security	7
2) Global Security	7
3) Cooperative Security	8
Problems with the classic security thinking	5
NATO as a collective defence organization	5
The use of military power	6
An alternative, peaceful approach	16
The core of Collective Security	16
Historical examples	17
The long road to sustainable peace	17
The UN as a global collective security organisation	18
OSCE as a regional collective security organisation	21
The EU as part of a collective security organisation	22
3. The 4D-Approach to Security	23
Diplomacy	23
Development	25
Democracy	27
Defence	31
A new role for defence	31
Banning dangerous weapon systems	32
Foreign military interventions	33
Categorization of military missions according to Pax Christi Flanders	35
An alternative defence budget	35
4. Concluding remarks: Peacebuilders	37

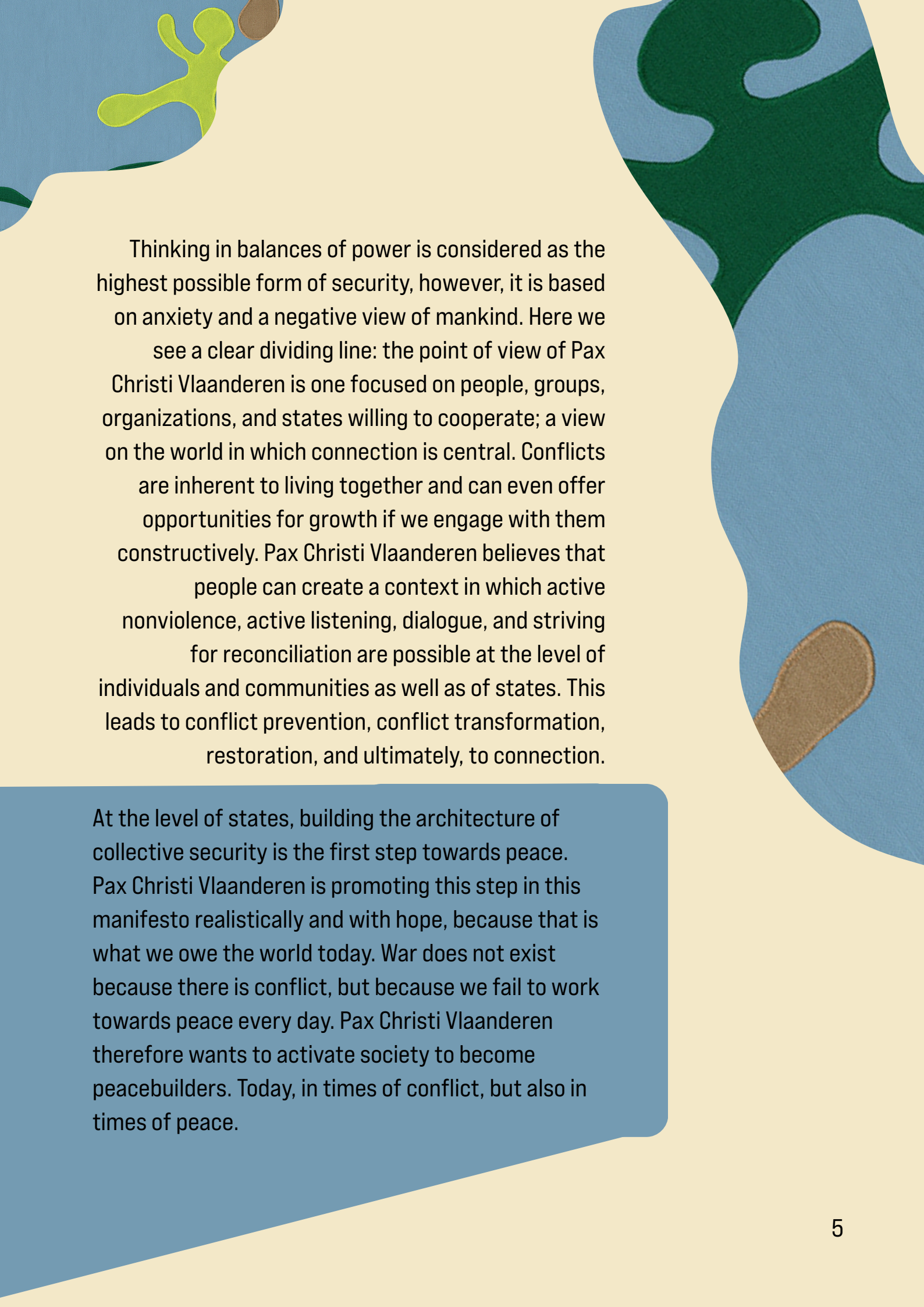


1. INTRODUCTION

With this manifesto, which updates and expands our earlier Manifesto for Peace, Pax Christi Vlaanderen offers a perspective for sustainable peace. We choose collective security as an alternative to the power-balance game that repeatedly escalates into armed conflict and countless unnecessary and innocent victims. Within our peaceful approach to security, we highlight how the “four Ds” are contributing to this point of view: Diplomacy, Development (development cooperation), Democracy, and Defence.

This manifesto is more than just an analysis. It provides a concrete framework for moving from vision to action. Through our 4D approach, we show how peace can take shape in practice: through dialogue, through fair and just development, through democratic legitimacy, and through defence that prioritizes protection and cooperation. These four pillars are the building blocks of collective security and make this manifesto into a guide for both policymakers and society.

Yet we know that this vision does not exist in a vacuum. Today we live in a world at war. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the war in Gaza brought that reality closer again. But war is present in many parts of the world: Congo, Sudan, Yemen... Its horrors force us to make choices and to seek solutions.

The background of the page features abstract, stylized human figures in shades of green and blue, set against a light yellow background. The figures are composed of simple, rounded shapes, suggesting movement and connection. One figure is in the top left, another in the top right, and a third in the bottom right. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on human elements.

Thinking in balances of power is considered as the highest possible form of security, however, it is based on anxiety and a negative view of mankind. Here we see a clear dividing line: the point of view of Pax Christi Vlaanderen is one focused on people, groups, organizations, and states willing to cooperate; a view on the world in which connection is central. Conflicts are inherent to living together and can even offer opportunities for growth if we engage with them constructively. Pax Christi Vlaanderen believes that people can create a context in which active nonviolence, active listening, dialogue, and striving for reconciliation are possible at the level of individuals and communities as well as of states. This leads to conflict prevention, conflict transformation, restoration, and ultimately, to connection.

At the level of states, building the architecture of collective security is the first step towards peace. Pax Christi Vlaanderen is promoting this step in this manifesto realistically and with hope, because that is what we owe the world today. War does not exist because there is conflict, but because we fail to work towards peace every day. Pax Christi Vlaanderen therefore wants to activate society to become peacebuilders. Today, in times of conflict, but also in times of peace.

2. FROM CLASSICAL SECURITY THINKING TO COMPREHENSIVE, GLOBAL, AND COOPERATIVE SECURITY

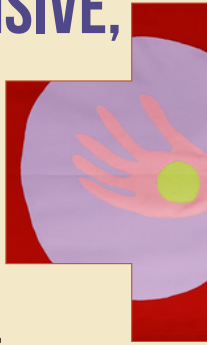
CLASSICAL SECURITY THINKING

In classical security thinking, states must constantly be on their guard for attacks. Supporters of this classic point of view saw it confirmed once again by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In the absence of a world government or overarching authority above states, each state must therefore provide for its own security. To maintain their military power, states need economic power. The main players in this regard are economic and military superpowers (today, the US, China, Russia, India, Japan, and the EU).

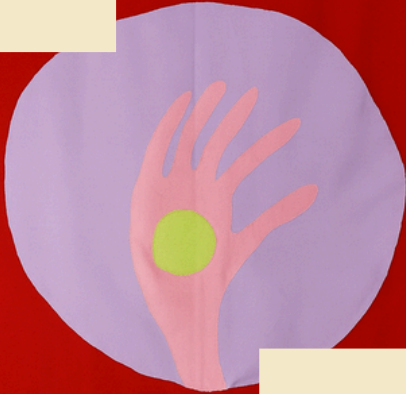
This defensive mindset requires offensive thinking and sometimes acting if only to respond militarily to a potential attack. As the Latin saying goes: "If you want peace, prepare for war." States hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Citizens may not use violence against each other because the state is expected to ensure their safety. The state therefore deploys resources to guarantee this security not only among its citizens (through law enforcement), but also against external threats (through the military).

Classical security thinking assigns three functions to an army: protection of national territory, foreign military interventions, and assistance to the nation (e.g., during terrorism, natural disasters, or pandemics). Depending on the external security environment, the emphasis may lie more on territorial defence or on external interventions. For NATO, after the Cold War the emphasis was on military interventions (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya) until Russia occupied Crimea in 2014, after which the focus shifted back to territorial defence. The war in Ukraine and the perceived threat from China will only reinforce this trend.

A worldview based on fear and anxiety therefore by definition goes hand in hand with power politics. What one wins, the other loses.



COMPREHENSIVE, GLOBAL AND COOPERATIVE SECURITY



Pax Christi Vlaanderen, however, regards human beings, and all of humanity as the key actors. A peace policy should therefore serve the well-being of people, and not the abstract notion of states. What is the point of wealthy and supposedly secure states if citizens are anxious and dissatisfied, and if climate change and a nuclear arms race are putting the future of our planet at risk? This is why Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates for comprehensive, global, and cooperative security.

1) COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY

Comprehensive security encompasses not only military but also human, economic, social, ecological, and cultural security. In human security, the safety of the person is central not only physical safety, but also the active pursuit of human dignity for all. In his 1941 Four Freedoms speech, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that freedom from fear and freedom from want are fundamental. The United Nations used these freedoms as pillars of their Millennium Declaration. Security cannot be separated from other rights.

2) GLOBAL SECURITY

Global security asserts that national security is inseparable from the security of our planet. Beyond pandemics, two threats are making peace impossible and could mean the end of life on Earth: **nuclear weapons** and **climate change**.

3) COOPERATIVE SECURITY

Cooperative security is regarding security as a shared responsibility something that requires working together. We do not speak of security against others, but with others. Unlike classical security thinking, cooperative security is based on a win-win approach for all parties. Little of this can currently be seen between the US and Russia or between the US and China. Yet during the Cold War, the US and USSR/Russia managed to maintain shared security through bilateral agreements (such as START I and START II) and multilateral arms-control treaties (such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe). This approach can be applied again today.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen also unequivocally advocates a strong focus on conflict prevention. Mutual respect, active listening, dialogue, and reconciliation can prevent many violent conflicts. This can be done, for example, by investing in diplomacy as institutionalized dialogue, in development cooperation, and in nonviolent mediation. Preventing war is far cheaper than waging it. Financial resources are better spent on healthcare, education, and reducing socio-economic inequality. This also helps to address the factors that fuel violent conflict.

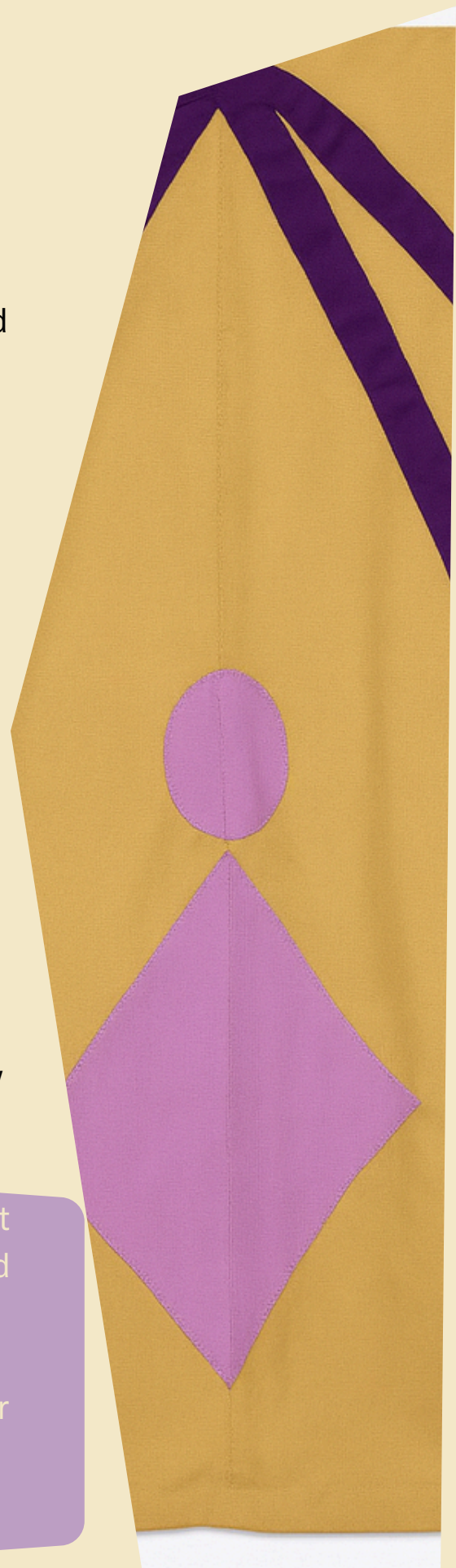
The EU is an excellent example: after the Second World War its creation put an end to centuries of war between Germany and France. The EU rightly received the Nobel Peace Prize for this achievement.

Nuclear Weapons

In theory, the nuclear threat is the easiest to solve: simply eliminate all nuclear weapons. This was already laid out in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, signed by all countries except Israel, India, and Pakistan (North Korea withdrew in 2002). Nuclear-armed states promised to disarm, and the rest of the world promised never to acquire nuclear weapons. The 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons supplements the NPT with an unequivocal ban.

Yet nuclear-armed states and their allies remain committed to nuclear deterrence. Despite all promises, roughly 12,119 nuclear weapons still exist worldwide. The nuclear-armed states (US, Russia, China, UK, France, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) continue to invest in the modernization of their nuclear weapons for more than 100 billion dollars per year. As long as no substantial disarmament steps are taken, there is a high likelihood that more nuclear-armed states will emerge and that these weapons will (un)intentionally be used again. That would be catastrophic.

Belgium is formally a non-nuclear weapon state, but it is a member of NATO, a nuclear alliance. Since the Cold War, our country has hosted U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. A November 2020 opinion poll shows that 77 percent of Belgians support the Ban Treaty, but our government refuses to sign it and remains silent, making it difficult to establish a societal and political debate.



Climate

The climate issue is more tangible than nuclear weapons, but also more difficult to solve, partly because it calls into question our growth-based economic system. Pax Christi Flanders advocates a holistic approach, as included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustainable Security Index of the Oxford Research Group.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity carry the risk of triggering conflicts. To avoid this, we must move toward ecologically responsible and just prosperity, combined with a sufficiently strong state (government, police, and judiciary) and a vibrant society (NGOs, civil society, grassroots organisations).

As noted earlier, human security is central to Pax Christi Flanders: people must be protected not only against traditional military threats, but also against socio-economic threats such as poverty and inequality.



PROBLEMS WITH THE CLASSIC SECURITY THINKING

Classic security policy focuses on preventing wars between states, primarily through military and economic power tools and only secondarily through diplomatic efforts. Some states seek ever more power to become the hegemon the most powerful state that dominates all others.

Most classical security thinkers argue, however, that states should have sufficient rather than maximum military and economic power in order to reach a balance of power, which they believe supports international stability. But shifting power differences between states are inherent to the system, making the situation unstable and dangerous. The most powerful state might attack the less powerful one to prevent it from becoming stronger (which was probably Russia's fear toward an advancing West). Or the rising power becomes overconfident and attacks the declining one. Consider the rise of Germany and the decline of the UK at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century one of the roots of the First World War.



NATO AS A COLLECTIVE DEFENCE ORGANIZATION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded in 1949 to counter the threat of the USSR and communism to the West. After the USSR and the Warsaw Pact (NATO's counterpart) dissolved in 1991, it would have been logical to dissolve NATO as well. Unfortunately, that did not happen. Instead, NATO expanded toward Eastern Europe and Russia, even though the West had verbally promised not to do so. The U.S. and Europe did not engage with proposals to integrate Russia as an equal partner into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

As a result, there was no safety net in case of conflicts between Russia and the West. Both power blocs had a deteriorating relationship after the Kosovo War (1999), the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty on missile defence systems in 2001, the Iraq War in 2003, and NATO's expansion rounds, including the 2008 promise to admit Georgia and Ukraine as members. It was well-known that this promise was a red line for Russia and that the country did not feel recognized as a great power, but these concerns were repeatedly ignored.

This resulted in Russia lashing out constantly since 2007. NATO's former adversary once again became the enemy. None of this justifies the war against Ukraine, but it does help us to better understand what is driving the Kremlin.

When the old enemy disappeared in the early 1990s, NATO shifted from defending its own territory to launching foreign missions: the wars in Yugoslavia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (NATO since 2003), and Libya (2011). The outcomes of these interventions can hardly be called successful.



Finally, NATO is one of the major obstacles to nuclear disarmament. Two-thirds of all global nuclear weapon expenditures come from the U.S., the UK, and France. Until recently, the U.S. was the only country in the world that stationed nuclear weapons on foreign territory (including in Belgium). In the meantime, Belarus has now also installed Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

NATO still refuses to declare that it will never use nuclear weapons first even though, with a joint defence budget of 1.5 trillion dollars per year, it is the most powerful military alliance humanity has ever known. For comparison: China spends 300 billion dollars, Russia 140 billion dollars. Pax Christi Flanders therefore believes that since the end of the Cold War, NATO has undermined rather than strengthened our security.

THE USE OF MILITARY POWER

States possess a range of military tools that can help them maintain power and protect themselves: defence, armament, alliances, and spheres of influence. To obtain these power instruments, economic resources (expressed in Gross National Product, GNP) are needed.

The primary instrument of military power is a well-equipped army (military personnel, weapons, sound command structures, etc.). One indicator of an army's strength is its defence budget. Each year, the world spends about 2.7 trillion dollars on defence, a quarter more than just before the end of the Cold War. In comparison: with 200 billion dollars per year, we could eradicate extreme poverty and famine worldwide. Even the COVID-19 pandemic had no significant impact on global military budgets.

Some states, also known as night-watchman or garrison states, such as the U.S. (3.4 percent), Russia (7.1 percent), and Greece (3.1 percent), spend a high share of their GNP on defence (figures from 2024). Other countries such as Belgium (1.3 percent, with a target of 2 percent in 2025), Germany (1.4 percent before the war in Ukraine; now 2 percent), Japan (1 percent before the war; now 1.4 percent), and Canada (1.3 percent) spend relatively less on defence. At the June 2025 NATO summit, it was decided that all NATO states will have to spend 3.5 + 1.5 percent effectively turning all of them into night-watchman states. Still, countries like Japan (55 billion USD) or Germany (88 billion USD) already had large defence budgets due to their high GNP, ranking respectively as the world's ninth and seventh largest defence spenders.

In many countries of the Middle East, North Africa, or South Asia, more money is spent on defence than on healthcare. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, the global economic cost of violent conflict in 2020 was nearly 15 trillion dollars, 11.6 percent of global income.



According to Pax Christi Flanders, armament can actually lead to the so-called security dilemma: a situation in which states feel less safe because neighbours and adversaries arm themselves as well. Even if armament is intended to be defensive, it is often perceived as offensive. Fully defensive weapon systems do not exist. Missile defence systems may seem purely defensive at first glance, but adversaries do not see them that way because they can neutralize offensive weapons potentially causing the side without missile defence to lose a war. This fuels the offensive-defensive arms race even further.

Another military power instrument, especially for smaller states, is forming alliances (also known as collective defence organizations). In these alliances, states promise to assist each other if any one of them is being attacked. Alliances are useful in times of great danger, especially when war is imminent, as is again the case today in Europe.

Alliances in peacetime, however, are perverse because they must seek an external enemy to justify their existence as NATO did after 1990.

Finally, there are spheres of influence. Large states that feel insecure try to create spheres of influence, often in the form of buffer states. A good example is Ukraine, which Russia sees as a buffer against the West.

AN ALTERNATIVE, PEACEFUL APPROACH

Thinking in terms of balance of power aims above all at preventing war. Sometimes it succeeds, but often it does not. In any case, it does not comply to the peace ideal that Pax Christi Flanders advocates. To reach that ideal, we must evolve toward cooperation between states in the form of a collective security architecture.

THE CORE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Collective security means that states recognize one another's right to security and cooperate based on this recognition within a regulatory framework designed to prevent war. These rules are laid down in international law and treaties. A collective security organization is essential for this. Such organizations already exist today: the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Clear rules also ensure clear communication. Possible miscalculations and misunderstandings between states can be assessed and corrected more quickly. Conflicts between states are inevitable, but within a collective security structure, rules ensure that such conflicts are resolved before they escalate into interstate violence.

Under classical balance-of-power logic, it is “every state for itself”, and states can at most form fragile alliances. In collective security, states guarantee one another a peaceful way of handling conflicts. This removes the incentive to engage in military buildup and creates space for development-oriented investments that address the root causes of many conflicts.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Earlier in history, there are several examples of peace based on collective security. Consider the Concert of Europe (after the Congress of Vienna in 1815), which ensured decades of stability and peace in Europe, partly because France (the defeated power) was included. The League of Nations, founded after World War I, was another such organization though less successful because Germany (the defeated state) was initially excluded and because not all major powers (such as the U.S.) joined. Small and large states had equal power there something that was changed later in the UN.

THE LONG ROAD TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

For Pax Christi Flanders, durable, positive peace remains the ultimate benchmark. To achieve this goal, individuals, groups, and societal structures must jointly take up the challenge of sustainable development.

The collective security that we advocate is a meaningful intermediate step. Further along the path toward sustainable peace lies a security community: a group of states that do not fear one another. Classical balance-of-power thinking considers this impossible. Yet there are examples showing that security communities are possible: the Scandinavian countries or the European Union. Within collective security, security communities have room to grow.

THE UN AS A GLOBAL COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANIZATION

The UN comes closest to a world government, although it is certainly not one (yet). This international organization, of which almost all states in the world are members, includes dozens of agencies dealing with various issues. One of these is the UN Security Council. The Security Council is the world's most important body for peace and security and can take binding measures for all countries. The Council has fifteen members, including five permanent ones (the P-5: the US, Russia, China, the UK, and France) and ten states elected for two-year terms. The composition of the Security Council is outdated: major countries such as India and Brazil do not have a permanent seat. Changing this requires the approval of the existing P-5, which makes the likelihood of reform virtually zero and undermines the Council's legitimacy.

This could be offset by a more active UN General Assembly (GA) a kind of UN Parliament where all states already have one vote. In recent years, the GA has adopted both the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the recognition of Palestine.

According to Pax Christi Flanders, the UN should also reach out to non-state actors (NGOs, academic institutions, and international associations of cities or regions) active in relevant fields, by establishing a procedure for mandatory consultation.

Binding decisions by the UN Security Council with far-reaching consequences include punishing a member state with economic sanctions, possibly followed by military action. On paper, sanctions seem to be a middle way between a “soft” diplomatic condemnation and a “hard” military intervention, but studies show that many sanctions fail to achieve their intended effect. Ordinary citizens suffer more than political elites. Another disadvantage is that traditional trade sanctions are often circumvented through smuggling on the black market. In some cases, the sanctioned state shifts to a fortress economy (as Russia has since 2022). Sanctions can also lead to counter-measures, meaning everyone loses, as we see today in the war in Ukraine. Finally, sanctions are easy to impose but difficult to lift, causing their effects to linger.

Better alternatives include newer smart or targeted sanctions, which try to avoid these pitfalls by, for example, denying visas to political leaders or freezing the assets of individuals or companies.

During the Cold War, the UN Security Council was largely paralysed by the veto power held by the five permanent members. Even today, the veto power can block essential decisions. For example, the US shields Israel from condemnation, making decision-making extremely difficult: of the twenty-five deadliest conflicts since the Cold War, no decision was taken in ten cases.

On the other hand, the veto power was introduced to ensure that the most powerful states of 1945 would join the UN and remain engaged unlike the League of Nations, which failed partly for this reason.

Ideally, the veto would be abolished, but then other incentives would be needed to keep major powers involved. Pax Christi Flanders advocates a refinement of the veto: when a veto is used, the state must present a constructive, detailed alternative within a set deadline, after which the veto expires. Another option is allowing the GA, by a two-thirds majority, to override a veto.

Additionally, Pax Christi Flanders calls for strengthening the International Criminal Court, the body that prosecutes war criminals. It should be given more resources and authority to bring those responsible (perpetrators, commanders, and the industries behind them) for crimes against humanity, genocide, and ecocide to justice. This can support reconciliation and have a deterrent effect.

Finally, it must be noted that the UN's financial resources are limited and depend on contributions from member states. Pax Christi Flanders believes that reducing global military spending could benefit UN funding or, conversely, UN contributions could become part of an alternative defence budget.

OSCE AS A REGIONAL COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANISATION

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was established in 1994 and stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The US, Russia, and European states all participate. It evolved from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), launched in the early 1970s in Helsinki. Under the CSCE, arms-control negotiations took place that delivered major progress after the Cold War.

Even more significant was that the West pushed human rights as one of the three pillars of the CSCE process, forcing the USSR to confront these issues. This gave momentum to trade unions like Solidarity in Poland and human-rights organisations like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia key forces behind the major protests and revolutions at the end of the 1980s. The CSCE thus played an important role in ending the Cold War.

However, the OSCE has never been able to fully demonstrate its effectiveness, partly because NATO continued to exist and because tensions between Russia and the West have grown since the 1990s. Before the 2022 war, the OSCE was the only international organisation with observers on the ground in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Pax Christi Flanders calls for strengthening the OSCE's powers and budget so that it can eventually take over NATO's role as the main regional security organisation. This would allow the US, the EU, and Russia to engage in permanent diplomatic dialogue within the OSCE framework on regional conflicts such as those in Ukraine.

THE EU AS PART OF A COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANISATION

Although the EU's predecessor was explicitly created as a peace project between France and Germany, its powers have expanded over the decades, including into foreign and security policy. If the current European Monetary Union is complemented by a future European Political Union (a federal Europe), defence would likely also become a European competence. At that point, our primary political community would not be the nation-state but the supranational EU. The French seat on the Security Council could then be replaced by an EU seat.

Pax Christi Flanders argues that a European Defence Union should focus on territorial protection and civil support not on military intervention. This is entirely feasible if it is embedded in a well-functioning regional and global collective security system. External military interventions should be used sparingly and always require approval from the UN Security Council.

Cooperation within the EU could lead to defence savings through specialisation and pooling and sharing. A strong European Defence Union, grounded in the principles of comprehensive, global, and cooperative security, would make NATO unnecessary, according to Pax Christi Flanders. It would also limit the excessive influence of non-EU countries such as the US over security matters in and around Europe.

Currently, we see creeping decision-making toward greater European defence integration (via PESCO, the European Defence Agency, the European Defence Fund...) without any democratic input from the European Parliament or civil society.

3. THE 4D-APPROACH TO SECURITY

How Do We Guarantee Our Security? And how do we design policies that truly protect people? These are the challenges policymakers face today. From the standpoint of classical security thinking, the focus lies mainly on Defence. Pax Christi Flanders, however, opts for a peace-centred approach in which the four Ds; Defence, Diplomacy, Development, and Democracy together form the foundation.

DIPLMACY

Conflicts between individuals, within organisations, and between states are unfortunately unavoidable. There are three primary responses to conflict: fighting, avoidance, or giving in. None of these are ideal. Fighting escalates the conflict; as an old Pax Christi campaign once said, “Violence gets you nowhere.” Avoiding the conflict or immediately giving in only blinds you to the underlying causes, which will likely resurface.

A far better approach is problem-solving: listening and communicating with the other party in order to address the conflict and its causes together in a constructive way, usually through dialogue and sometimes negotiation (without threatening violence). Each side gives and takes.

In international politics, this is the role of diplomacy an institution with deep historical roots whose usefulness is well proven. Ambassadors represent their countries worldwide, enabling quick and direct communication to resolve bilateral issues.

Wars end through peace agreements achieved via diplomacy. The four-year war in the Balkans in the 1990s was ended by the Dayton Agreement. The IRA in Northern Ireland stopped its terrorist attacks thanks to the Good Friday Agreement. Even when peace agreements fail, diplomacy is required to achieve a ceasefire (as after the Korean War in 1953).

Collective security also requires diplomacy. The successful “Concert of Europe” after 1815 consisted of multiple congresses and diplomatic meetings, of which the Congress of Vienna is the most famous. The engine of international organisations like the UN, OSCE, and EU is multilateral diplomacy. Within the EU, constant consultation takes place between member states and institutions to make decisions. Without violence. Without immediate concessions. Without avoidance. If diplomacy did not exist, we would have to invent it immediately.

Diplomacy is not always easy: it requires patience, perseverance, creativity, empathy, and more.

Sometimes it takes years to reach a peace agreement. What is incomprehensible, however, is when states or international organisations refuse to talk. A negative example is the EU and NATO’s current policy toward Russia since its invasion of Ukraine in 2022: there is little to no diplomatic contact, especially from Brussels. Meanwhile, EU and NATO states are heavily investing in defence. If diplomacy were used and a solution with Russia were found, much of this defence spending would be unnecessary.

The Harmel Doctrine named after Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel states that the ideal approach combines defence and diplomacy, and NATO applied this in the early 1970s. Where is the Harmel Doctrine in 2025 regarding the war in Ukraine?

DEVELOPMENT

Diplomatic negotiation does not only involve formal agreements. To bring warring parties closer, material solutions and confidence-building measures are also needed and these cost money.

The first form of material support involves urgent humanitarian interventions to alleviate immediate suffering: for example, medical care for injured civilians while fighting is ongoing. This work is often carried out by specialised UN agencies or civil-society organisations such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent or Doctors Without Borders.

Support for refugees emergency shelter, food, water, sanitation, and protection is also part of this. An extreme example is the violent conflict in Sudan since April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Two years later, nearly 13 million people one in three Sudanese are displaced: around 8.6 million internally and 3.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries.

n this case, the needs exceed financial capacities: the refugee flow must stop and become a priority topic in negotiations. But in certain cases, protective measures for refugees can be taken and temporarily funded as part of peace negotiations. This was the case, for example, in the targeted medical support for returning Syrian families in the northwest of the country after the fall of the Assad regime is one example. Another example is the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan for the period 2022–2025, supported by the UN and other international partners. It opens a large but sparsely populated agricultural area along the border to refugees from the region. The programme supports both refugees and local communities with schools, healthcare services, and other essential facilities for everyone, both locals and displaced people.

In the longer term, a peace agreement may include arrangements for reconstruction or compensation for damages suffered. In the case of wars and large-scale conflicts such as the war in Ukraine, such issues will become the subject of separate initiatives once the conflict has ended.

Development must also focus on strengthening the rule of law, democratic governance, and the creation of social, economic, and cultural structures in cooperation with civil society organisations. In cases where reconciliation or truth commissions are used for conflict management (such as in South Africa), the channels and instruments for testimonies and reconciliation initiatives can likewise be funded.

For Pax Christi, a clear distinction must be made between development within the 3D approach and development cooperation aimed at sustainable development in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs – UN definition). LDC development is based on the self-development of target groups, supported by individuals, organisations, states and international institutions out of solidarity with this process.

At the same time, there is a striking connection: the vast majority of conflicts and wars are directly linked to inequality in wealth and power structures, and poverty is a constant source of conflict.

DEMOCRACY

Although democracy is not always explicitly mentioned as the fourth “D”, it nevertheless plays an essential role in the success of the other three pillars of security policy. Before examining how this fourth D fits into the security approach, we outline the key features of a democracy or democratic rule of law.

A democratic state governed by the rule of law is characterised first and foremost by a legal framework with robust and independent democratic institutions across the branches of power. The population elects a parliament in free and fair elections. This legislative power makes laws. The government implements them. The judiciary ensures the fair application of these laws. After a term in office, elected officials must again be held accountable through elections. But there are also mechanisms for accountability between elections.

In addition to these formal branches of power, free and independent media serve as a critical watchdog. They scrutinise those in power by reporting critically on government policy and provide a platform for diverse voices and opinions. They ensure transparency and access to information, enabling citizens to make informed decisions and participate actively in democratic processes.

Social media increasingly take over the role of traditional media. Policymakers also use these channels extensively to communicate their messages and policy proposals directly to the public. Especially for young people, social media are an important source of news. Due to the growing importance of social media, media literacy and critical awareness of the objectivity of messages and sources are indispensable.

Democracy is more than voting every few years. It requires democratic citizenship. Beyond critical awareness via traditional and social media, this includes active civic participation. A democratic state governed by the rule of law facilitates and involves strong, independent civil society institutions such as socio-cultural organisations, trade unions, NGOs that contribute to oversight and civic engagement.

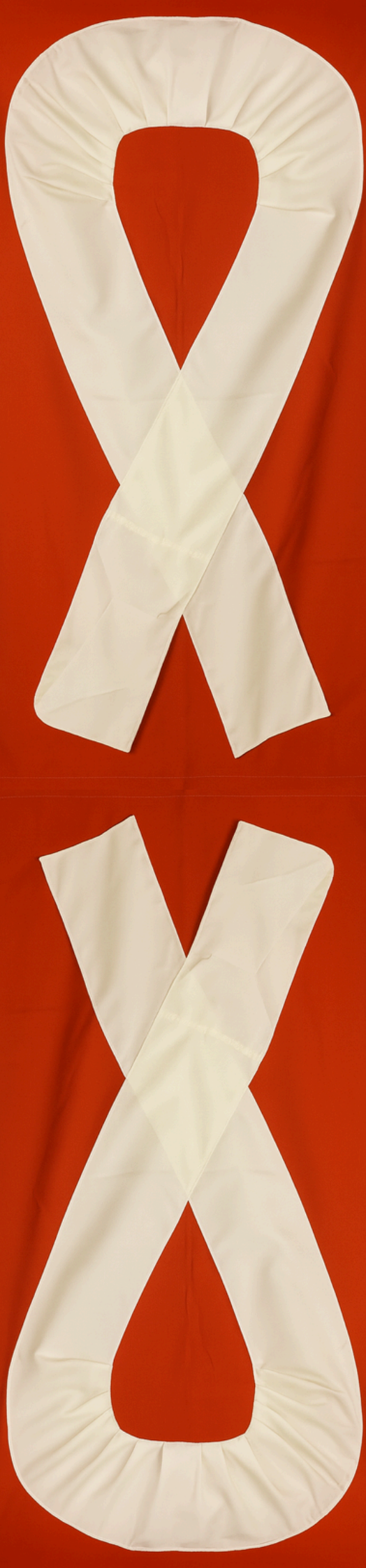
These organisations amplify the voices of people who would otherwise struggle to be heard by policymakers. When policy takes these voices seriously, considers diversity and minorities in society, and strives for equality and social inclusion, we can speak of an inclusive political culture.

A democratic rule of law also respects fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, assembly, and religion. A robust democratic state has the capacity to adapt to and respond to societal changes and crises without abandoning the fundamental principles listed above.

HOW DO THESE CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACY CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SECURITY APPROACH?

In a democracy, citizens generally perceive their government as more legitimate than in non-democratic systems. This legitimacy promotes social cohesion and stability, reduces internal conflict, and makes the country more resilient to external threats. In short, society becomes safer.

In diplomatic terms, democracy fosters greater transparency and openness in international relations. Democratic states are seen as more reliable and are more inclined toward peaceful and cooperative diplomacy, contributing to international peace. Decisions about defence spending and development cooperation are also part of democratic decision-making, where choices are weighed and debated publicly and politically.



Although in Belgium the King formally declares a state of war, the constitution explicitly states that he must inform parliament, the representatives of the people. Parliament must approve the military budget and exercise oversight over the government, including military actions.

Regarding such military actions, democratic states also appear less inclined to wage war against one another. This observation is the core of the “Democratic Peace Theory”. According to this theory, democracies share values such as respect for human rights, the rule of law, and resolving conflicts through dialogue. These principles lead leaders of democratic countries to prefer diplomacy and peace-oriented solutions over war. Public opinion in democracies is also often critical of war and able to make its voice heard, making policymakers less likely to pursue aggressive actions.

A state that respects the rights of its own citizens is also perceived internationally as more trustworthy and peaceful. The opposite also holds: a state that represses its own population is unlikely to respect the sovereignty and rights of other states.

In short, a strong democratic foundation increases the safety and stability of a country and influences the other three Ds. Democracy therefore plays a key role in our security approach.

DEFENCE

Pax Christi Flanders advocates for a minimalist (EU) army within the UN (as a global collective security organisation) and, where possible, also within a regional (European, Eurasian or Euro-Atlantic) collective security organisation whether a strengthened OSCE or a fundamentally reformed NATO (including Russia). Additionally, we call for a Minister for Peace and Disarmament instead of Defence (similar to New Zealand's Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control).

A NEW ROLE FOR DEFENCE

In the coming years, we will increasingly face new threats resulting from climate change (such as floods and forest or heath fires). The most obvious role for Defence besides territorial protection is to provide more assistance to the nation (and also to less developed states facing similar challenges). This is especially relevant for a country like Belgium, where Civil Protection and B-FAST (intended for rescue operations abroad) have been scaled down. During the Verviers–Pepinster floods in the summer of 2021, civilians had to wait 14 hours on rooftops for help while the army had helicopters available.

For NATO as a collective defence organisation, there is no role in peacetime.

Finally, it must be said that the UN's financial resources are limited and depend on contributions from member states. In this context, Pax Christi Flanders advocates non-compulsory, but government-organised and compensated, volunteer service for students or recent graduates (similar to the system in Germany). Young adults who wish to do so could help fight fires, floods and other disasters (with Civil Protection), engage in nature conservation and biodiversity work, or support the health, social, cultural sectors or NGOs. This promotes societal engagement, encourages interactions between groups of young people who would otherwise not meet, and helps counter polarisation.

BANNING DANGEROUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

Weapons that cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants must be banned, as required by international humanitarian law (Geneva Conventions). Only in this way can unnecessary suffering be prevented. Biological weapons (1972), anti-personnel mines (1997), chemical weapons (1993) and cluster munitions (2008) have already been banned. This principle now also applies to nuclear weapons, thanks to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). Pax Christi Flanders calls on Belgium to sign and ratify this treaty as soon as possible. A first step was Belgium's attendance as an observer at the first and second meetings of the treaty parties but unfortunately not the third.

New weapon systems, such as autonomous weapons (which can select and engage targets without human supervision), should also be declared illegal.

We also advocate that producers and traders of weapons systems be held criminally accountable when their products are used unlawfully. Through the conventional arms trade, many of our weapons still end up in conflict zones and in countries that violate human rights. Additionally, a tax on arms trading could curb and make the market more transparent, strengthening mutual trust between states. Revenue from such a tax could be invested in healthcare, education, or even an international peace fund to help countries and individuals recover after war.

FOREIGN MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

Since military force usually leads to more violence and innocent civilian casualties rather than solutions, Pax Christi Flanders is, in principle, opposed to foreign military interventions. Wars produce not only losers and winners are not only states, but also arms dealers, the weapons industry and their investors.

Furthermore, the question arises: which country has the authority to intervene in another country? If the West intervenes in the Middle East today, could China do the same here in the future?

There are few examples of successful military interventions (Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan...). The stated reasons often conceal underlying interests such as material resources (oil, gas, and other raw materials).

Military interventions also cost enormous amounts of lives and money that would be better invested in conflict prevention.

Pax Christi Flanders therefore sees few scenarios in which the Belgian army could make a meaningful contribution to a legitimate foreign military intervention, except for self-defence (in wartime). This again raises serious questions about “the purchase of the century”: the 34 F-35s, which will cost €4 billion in acquisition alone. The total lifecycle cost may reach €15 billion. The justification for purchasing these aircraft appears even weaker given that they are designed to carry the nuclear weapons stored on Belgian soil. It is likely that the number of F-35s ordered will further increase due to decisions by the Arizona government.

In addition to protecting the national territory and assisting the nation, Belgian Defence should focus on tasks within its core expertise (such as demining, providing logistical support to refugees or disaster victims, engineering tasks like repairing bridges and infrastructure, and cybersecurity) instead of trying to cover every possible domain.

CATEGORIZATION OF MILITARY MISSIONS ACCORDING TO PAX CHRISTI FLANDERS

Pax Christi Flanders proposes using the following categorization for military missions:

Military missions that are always illegitimate and often also illegal

- Territorial expansion
- Preventive attacks to curb proliferation, for example Israel against Iran in July 2025.

Military missions that are usually illegitimate because the true reason is not disclosed

- Humanitarian interventions
- Democratization of states
- Peace-enforcement missions

Military missions that are not illegitimate but stem from traditional security thinking

- Protection of allies who are being attacked

Possible legitimate interventions (in addition to self-defence)

- Collective security (after approval by the UN Security Council)
- Evacuation of nationals
- Peacekeeping missions (after approval by the UN Security Council)
- Protection of shipping lanes

AN ALTERNATIVE DEFENCE BUDGET

Traditional security policy does not only strive for the highest possible defence budget to mitigate 'the many threats.' In countries without major threats (such as Belgium), Defence is often seen as a job-creation programme. Economically, however, investments in other sectors are more profitable.

According to Pax Christi Flanders, the Belgian army could be further downsized to **20,000 military personnel** through natural attrition and potential retraining options.

Within NATO, it was agreed in 2014 (after Russia's annexation of Crimea) that member states should spend **2% of GDP on Defence**. As mentioned earlier, the Arizona government wants Belgium to reach 2% starting in 2025. At the NATO Summit in The Hague in June 2025, it was agreed to spend **3.5 + 1.5 (= 5)% by 2035**.

Pax Christi Flanders believes that the majority of the defence budget would be better spent on other priorities for example on **peacebuilding (without military means) in unstable states, or on combating climate change**. The international fund intended to help developing countries cope with the effects of climate change still has not reached the promised 100 billion dollars.

Huge investments are also needed to meet the coming social challenges. By focusing on peacebuilding, the number of conflicts will decline, resulting in fewer refugees and less need for military interventions.

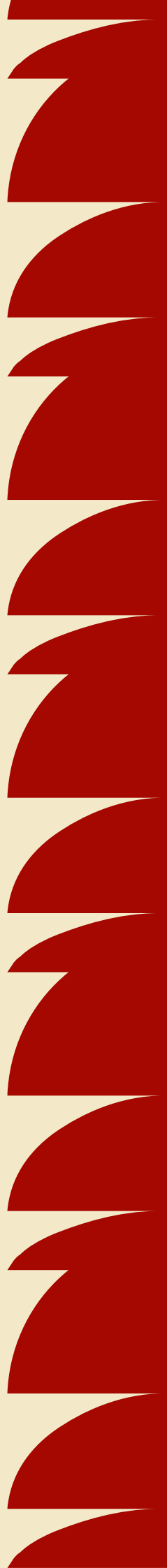
Another possibility is to include, within NATO's 5% norm, the expenditures for domestic security (such as police and cybersecurity), the UN, and development cooperation.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: PEACEBUILDERS

The climate crisis and nuclear weapons remain the greatest threats to the planet and to human security. Only cooperation between communities and states can avert this existential danger. The current security architecture rooted in military balance of power mainly creates new risks. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the possibility of destruction remains. As long as ever-growing defence budgets are justified, we deprive essential investments in the environment, education, and social justice of the resources they desperately need.

That is why Pax Christi Flanders outlines a different path with this manifesto: [collective security as an alternative to the balance of power](#). Collective security is based on the belief that security is shared, and that cooperation yields more than competition. It shifts attention from armament to human dignity, from fear to interconnectedness.

In our approach, the four D's are central. [Diplomacy](#) creates space for dialogue and prevents escalation. [Development](#) offers perspective and tackles the inequalities that often form the breeding ground for conflict. [Democracy](#) guarantees legitimacy, transparency, and participation, which make peace sustainable. And [Defence](#) also has a role, but a new one: not as a driver of arms races or foreign interventions, but as a force that protects civilians, provides disaster relief, and contributes to international peace under clear conditions.



This vision is more than a written manifesto it does not remain on paper. Through our Peacebuilders campaign, we translate this Manifesto for Peace into a concrete social project. In Peace Labs across Flanders and Brussels, people of all ages and backgrounds create new symbols and stories of peace. These come together in the Temple of Peace, a visible and tangible sign that peace is not an abstract ideal, but something we can create and experience together.

Thus, this manifesto becomes more than a policy document: it is the substantive backbone of a broad movement that makes peace a daily commitment.

The choice is in front of us: do we continue investing in a fragile balance of power, or do we build together an architecture of collective security and sustainable peace? Pax Christi Flanders chooses the latter unequivocally, and seeks to activate citizens, policymakers, companies, and civil society organisations as peacebuilders who work for peace every day.

COLOFON

Peace Manifesto – Pax Christi Flanders

Contact: orry@paxchristi.be

www.paxchristi.be – www.vredesbouwers.be

For the original Flemish “Manifest voor Vrede”, see <https://www.vredesbouwers.be/manifest-van-de-vrede>

