

# CONFLICT: WORTH THE FIGHT?

# POVERTY

In the film *X-Men*, Magneto sees fighting as the way to respond to oppression; Wolverine tries to find a more peaceful way. Faced with poverty, injustice and hunger, people in the developing world have a similar choice to make. Of course, human desires for money, power and control play their part in conflict too. And limited finances to spend on security in developing countries create the perfect environment for rebel and paramilitary groups to rise up.

Christian Aid has a vision: an end to poverty now, not just in the future. And that means we can't give up on peace. The Beatle John Lennon coined a famous phrase around 40 years ago. It's a nice phrase, trips off the tongue. But it will never be anything more than that until we deal with the issues that make people fight. The time has come to claw the phrase back from T-shirts and comedy statements involving peas: give peace a chance.

## Tell me more

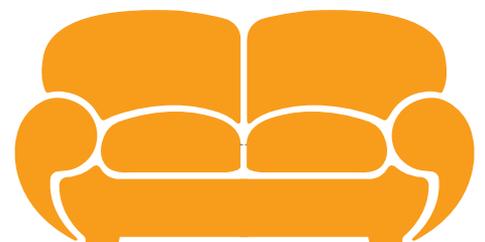
Violence isn't just confined to the developing world. It brings misery across the globe:

- violent crime is falling in England and Wales, but still police recorded 903,993 violent offences in 2008/09<sup>1</sup>
- Scotland's figures are worse, with knife crime 3.5 times higher than in England or Wales<sup>2</sup>
- in Ireland, latest reports show nearly a two per cent rise in serious crime between 2006 and 2007<sup>3</sup>
- young people are the most likely victims of violent crime.<sup>4</sup>

In the western world, violent crime is usually quite hidden – confined to gangs, dark streets and no-go areas. But, in many countries, rather than being something that lurks in the shadows, conflict and violence is a way of life. In Israel and the occupied

**'Even his hopes for the future are affected by the conflict and occupation – he used to want to be a professor.'** A Palestinian mother on discovering her son, aged 13, wants to become involved in the armed conflict.

If you've got nothing then you've got nothing to lose, and maybe something to gain, through violence. If you're not loved, then you've no one to let down. If your world is one of conflict and injustice, perhaps it's instinctive to fight.



Palestinian territories, violent conflict has raged for generations. Around 4,835 Palestinians and 480 Israelis have been killed as a direct result of the conflict between 2000 and the end of 2008.<sup>6</sup> In Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo is struggling to recover from a five-year war in which millions died, mostly through starvation and disease.

If you are born in a conflict zone, you could become one of the 41.2 million people worldwide living in transit (refugees and internally displaced people).<sup>7</sup> The camps you might end up in are a long way from home and often conditions are appalling.

So, as you talk about conflict, appreciate the peaceful environment in which you live. And never forget that peace can spread. Starting right here, right now.

### Kick off

Check out [www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasesions](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasesions) for icebreaker ideas.

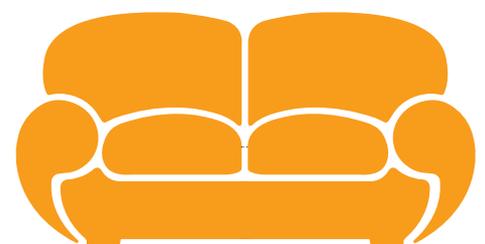
### Talk it out

These questions can be used if you need to prompt conversation or steer the discussion if it veers wildly off course. For more tips, go to [www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasesions](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasesions)

1. Is conflict/war ever justifiable? Can it ever be a good thing? What is the difference between conflict and violence?
2. Is poverty to blame for violence and conflict or is it just a convenient excuse?
3. Can the perpetrators of violence also be its victims? How?
4. Should we get involved in other people's conflict? Haven't we got plenty of our own violent crime to deal with without worrying about conflict elsewhere?
5. Is there really another way? The biblical image of the lion lying down with the lamb belongs to a different reality. How can we overcome our human instincts for survival and revenge?
6. Is it right for governments to prioritise defence over overseas development? (The UK government spent £5.4bn on overseas development in 2007-2008. In the same period, it spent £32.6bn on defence.)<sup>9</sup>
7. The Old Testament is full of violence: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and all that. But by the New Testament, Jesus gives a radical new command: to love your enemy (Luke 6:27-31). So what changed? And how do we balance loving our enemies with not being a pushover?

More than 300,000 children under 18 are currently fighting and dying in armed conflicts around the world. There are many reasons why children join up: because they're hungry and it's a way to get food; through ignorance; through lack of opportunity; or because they're forced to.<sup>5</sup>

**'I believe we have the ability to stop all this aggression that we're living through,'** says Estela Hernandez, 20. She lives in Guatemala, which has one of the highest murder rates in the world.<sup>8</sup> Gang culture dominates but Christian Aid partner Caja Lúdica uses the arts to show young people a different way. **'The future is in our hands, the drive has to come from us. If you attack someone the same will happen to you. But if you respond with dialogue you break the cycle,'** explains Estela.



8. What can we make of conscientious objectors in the light of Jesus' command to love our enemies? If everyone had conscientiously objected in the 1940s, we'd be living under Nazi rule, wouldn't we?
9. Would you fight for the 'right' cause? What might this cause be?
10. The UK is one of the world's four biggest suppliers of arms. How much responsibility do we have to take for conflict in developing countries?

## Reflect

The 'Conflict: worth the fight?' visual reflection on the *Sofa Sessions* DVD and online at [www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasessions](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasessions) can follow on from discussion.

## Less talk, more action

Christian Aid wants to see poverty over, now. But it's not going to happen while conflict destroys lives, livelihoods and communities. That's why we, people living in peaceful environments, need to act. The 'Conflict' section of [www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasessions](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/sofasessions) gives ideas for what you can do.

1 [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109chap3.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109chap3.pdf)

2 [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7421534.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7421534.stm)

3 [www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/crime\\_justice/current/headlinecrime.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/crime_justice/current/headlinecrime.pdf)

4 <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/funding-young-victims>

5 [www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/childsoldiers/webquest/voices2.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/childsoldiers/webquest/voices2.asp)

6 [www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp)

7 [www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c23.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c23.html) and [www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d.html)

8 Guatemala's murder rate is 47 homicides per 100,000 population, according to [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/national\\_activities/gtm/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/national_activities/gtm/en/index.html). As a comparison, police recorded 648 homicides in England and Wales during 2008/09 – equivalent to 1.25 homicides per 100,000 population ([www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109chap3.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109chap3.pdf))

9 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> and [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/international\\_issues/international\\_development/development\\_aid\\_budget.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/international_issues/international_development/development_aid_budget.cfm)

Sources correct August 2009.

