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## **What ever happened to the peace dividend, anyway?**

A couple of decades ago the wall that was on everybody's minds was in Berlin. Then it came crashing down, pushed over by a wave of reform and renewal that seemed to promise the dawn of a new era for our troubled globe.

There was much talk of "a peace dividend" that would see large amounts of public money freed up from defense spending. No longer needed to wage the Cold War, these funds would be used for loftier purposes. We would all be buying fewer guns, and a lot more butter.

But the push for peace, paradoxically, has faltered in the post-Cold War era. Fast-forward a decade or two, and we find that while wars between nations have decreased in frequency, conflict and violence continue to plague and undermine human progress.

Recently we have witnessed violence and conflict -- some of it involving governments, some of it not -- surge to a record high. Nonstate conflicts have increased by 125 percent since 2010, surpassing all other types of conflict. State-based conflict also rose by over 60 percent in the same period. Meanwhile, civil wars and internal conflicts have now surpassed the number of interstate clashes, marking a shift away from violence between nations to violence within nations.

Yet despite this self-defeating discord, we as a global family have scored successes in bending the arc of human development in a better direction.

We forged a groundbreaking global deal to take action to face the threat of climate change. At the global level, most of the commitments made under the UN Millennium Development Goals were fulfilled, lifting millions of people out of poverty and hunger. And we upped our game via the bold and visionary 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which aims *entre alia* at the total eradication of severe hunger and malnutrition.

So we've had our bright moments, too-- moments when we appeared to be on the launch pad of the "better tomorrow" we had all aspired to for so long.

But our worst impulses are getting in the way.

Today five UN Organizations released the first global assessment of progress towards the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2030. Our first report-card in this noble effort is not good, I'm afraid.

After steadily declining for over a decade, global hunger is on the rise again, affecting 815 million people in 2016, or 11 per cent of the global population. That's 38 million more people than the previous year.

A primary culprit? You guessed it: conflict. The vast majority (490 million) of hungry people on the planet live in countries affected by conflict; 122 out of 155 million stunted children in the world do as well.

This alarm bell tells us that we cannot keep slapping Band-Aids on hunger, treating symptoms. We must tackle roots causes: extreme poverty, under-investment in agriculture and rural communities, unsustainable farming practices, and environmental degradation.

First and foremost, we must invest in peace and stability.

National and regional leaders in conflict zones, as well as the parties directly involved, are the first that need to step up. At the same time, the international community cannot relinquish its responsibility to help broker lasting solutions.

However all of us, as global citizens and members of the same human family, must play our part.

In this era of digital schadenfreude, we have become too inured to violence; we must shake ourselves out of complacency and reboot, turning not only to tried-and-true approaches to peacebuilding but also to new ways of dealing with the ancient scourges of conflict and hunger. This includes dealing with triggers like disputes over natural resources, and providing support to agricultural livelihoods, both of which can mitigate some causes and effects of conflict and contribute to sustaining peace.

There is still a dividend in food security and peace – just waiting for us to cash it in.