



# Faith in development: Transcript

## Season 1: Peacebuilding

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### Speakers

Alice Philip, David Couzens, Mariam Tadros

### Episode 1: An introduction to peacebuilding

#### Alice Philip 00:00

Hello and welcome to *Faith in development*, brought to you by Tearfund, a Christian relief and development agency working in over 40 countries across the world. This is a podcast of storytelling and conversation as we explore different areas of development through the lens of faith, drawing on a wealth of incredible people who will share their learning and knowledge with us. In this first episode, we look at the theme of peacebuilding. We speak with Mariam Tadros and David Couzens who lead our peacebuilding work here at Tearfund, and hear from inspiring peacebuilders around the world who are part of our networks. In this mini-series, we'll explore three concepts that inform how we understand and practice peacebuilding in our work. These are moral imagination, hospitality and embrace.

#### Alice Philip 00:44

David, Mariam, welcome to the first episode of *Faith in development*. It's a delight to have you here. You've been working together leading our peacebuilding work for the last four and a half years, and you each bring something really unique to the space. I think our listeners would be interested to hear a bit about how you came to this work. Mariam, do you want to start by telling us a bit about your background and how it's influenced your interest in today's topic of peacebuilding?

## **Mariam Tadros 01:10**

Thanks, Alice. So I started my journey into peacebuilding in a bit of a roundabout way, where I was studying Theology and Religious Studies at university. In my third year of studies, I went on a trip to the Holy Land, so to Israel, and Palestine. As much as it was kind of a pilgrimage, a historical trip, it was really my first time to experience oppression or occupation first hand. It was a ten day trip, but it just left an incredible mark on me. I then finished my BA and went on to study further at university and began to really look at a concept known as Liberation Theology, which really looks at how to reclaim the gospel for the poor. As part of that, I then went out and spent six months living in the Holy Land. That was my real entry point into work for justice. I was working as an intern at a non-violence organization, a faith-based, non-violence organization. We were out protesting every week, we were stopping bulldozers from destroying homes. It was a real baptism of fire into the kind of fight for justice. And yeah, bringing some kind of relief in some ways in a very bleak situation. It was my first time to really immerse into that kind of space. I had also, in my own life, personally, at that point gone through various experiences of grief and injustice with people around me and my family. Those things were beginning to merge a little bit. After that, I fell into work at Tearfund, I'd always planned to go back into academia and teach and into the education space, and then found myself working as a temp during the time of the Haiti earthquake, here in the building for six months, left for a little while and came back again. Alongside that, whilst I was immersing into much more of the humanitarian side, in my own time I was also beginning to explore my own heritage, I was spending time volunteering in some of the poorest parts of Egypt. Again, just seeing the injustice of inequality. That, mixed with my experience and Palestine, Israel, really began to birth something in me that was around what it looks like to build peace. And through that whole time, I think over the last ten years, what's always inspired me and has drawn me has been the people in the middle of that, you know, the fight for justice is almost futile sometimes. And it feels like that. And it feels like you're making very little progress. But there are these people at the heart of it, who just have this incredible ability to see something different and commit their whole lives to, even if it's in their small village, to making life just a little bit better for those who are living either in inequality or living under oppression of some sorts. So yeah, over the last ten years I have been exploring that and especially over the last four and a half, having been quite heavily involved in Tearfund's humanitarian programs, then coming back and being given the opportunity to really set up the peacebuilding work here at Tearfund and where historically we've done bits and pieces, but we'd never intentionally really looked at what it means to build peace when working in areas of conflict. So yes, it's been a journey and one of discovery and one of meeting incredible humans and one of frustration and figuring out how you really try to affect sometimes what feels like unbreakable situations.

## **Alice Philip 04:54**

David, moving on to you. What's your journey been to peacebuilding work?

## David Couzens 05:00

I guess my story is somewhat different to Mariam's. I joined Tearfund after 30 years in the British Army, and pretty much directly from a nine month tour with the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) headquarters in Afghanistan. And so I was there in Kabul, hiding behind great big concrete walls. And I was working, I was struck by the fact that I was working with some really, really bright people, some really intelligent people. And people who genuinely were trying to do what they thought was best for Afghanistan to help the country to help the people. So you had a combination of really bright people, good intentions, perhaps misguided intentions, but good intentions, and huge amounts of resource. I seem to recall we had a jumbo jet flying in each day with food just for our headquarters. Ludicrous, but just massive, massive amounts of resource. And yet, I looked at all of that, bright people have good intentions, huge access to resources, and just question the impact we were having, and the impact was minimal. You can coerce people to do a certain amount of stuff, but actually, nothing changes. So, I found myself sitting there, reading also at the time, a lot of books by John Paul Ladurac, who is a practitioner and peacebuilder who comes from a Mennonite background, so very much a pacifist background. I was reading quite a lot of Henry Nouwen at the time, as well. And as I read those, it just seemed to make so much more sense than what I was seeing around me. And so that just got me questioning, and then I left, joined Tearfund and I remember sitting in Kigali, and very fortunate to listen to the testimonies of people from their experiences from the genocide. And I remember seeing one woman, and she was sitting next to this man. And this woman was missing a hand, she had a big scar on her head. And at one point, she just sort of pulled the shoulder of her dress down to reveal a huge scar on her shoulder. And she was a survivor of the genocide. And the man next to her was the man who had not only killed a number of members of her family, but who had chased her. She said "chase like dogs". And had, he wasn't actually the one that had thrust a spear into her shoulder. But he was one of the main perpetrators. And yet they were sitting there next to each other, and they were reconciled with each other, there had been a real process of forgiveness. It wasn't easy. It was difficult, and it was long, and it was painful. But they sat there reconciled. And I just contrasted those two situations. And I think building peace has to start at the level of people. And there is stuff top down that needs to happen as well, you need to address some structural things. But you've got to recognise that conflict ultimately is about human beings and the decisions they make, and the way they respond, whether that's out of fear, or hatred, or whatever. And so we need to work at that level of individual human beings. Yes, address the top down stuff, the structural stuff as well. But never forget, it's about human beings.

## Alice Philip 08:50

Both of you obviously have a deep passion for peacebuilding. I wonder if you could tell us why you think peacebuilding is so key to development.

## **Mariam Tadros** 08:59

I think from what I've seen, the development world, the humanitarian world, has spent decades trying to figure out what the most effective responses both to, you know, at Tearfund, we have a focus on extreme poverty, to economic inequality, to advocacy and policy change. We seem to have missed the trick. And I think, as David was just saying, that human relationships, and you know, at Tearfund this is at the very heart of our theory of poverty, that human relationships, if they are broken, you're not going to get anywhere. And we are seeing now across the globe, the largest number of intrastate and interstate wars and conflicts. And if we're not addressing what's at the very heart of that, what's at the root of those conflicts, all the development and humanitarian work is either going to be constant and never ending or is only going to reach a certain level. And so for me, that concept of building peace isn't just about the building piece in terms of stopping violence, that's a crucial part of it. But it's about finding a ground between us as human beings, that allows us to live in the same space together, and share that space together. So, for me, it's, it's an essential part of any development work, whether that's humanitarian or development work that we need to do.

## **David Couzens** 10:33

I think somebody once said that conflict is development in reverse. And I think that every time these conflicts flare up, so much of our development work is undone. And therefore, we have to go to a deeper level, it's not just about addressing the results of that. You need to do that and mitigate the effects of conflict. But if that's all you do, it's just going to rear its head up again, and therefore you have to focus on I think, addressing those underlying issues addressing the root causes of those tensions. And ultimately, as Mariam said, restoring those relationships just like that couple in Rwanda, it's restoring those relationships that actually brings long term peace, and that leads to long term and sustainable development.

## **Mariam Tadros** 11:30

Just to add, as David was speaking, in peacebuilding theory, you have three levels of response: you have your peacekeeping, which is your conflict mitigation, you have your peacemaking, which is conflict resolution, it's very much that finding a resolution for a specific issue. And then you have peacebuilding, which is really about transforming conflict. It's about transforming the very nature of what actually causes us to be at war or at conflict with one another. And that can be at the interpersonal level, as well as at the state level as well.

## **Alice Philip** 12:01

Thanks. Let me take you back, after that overview of peacebuilding and your passion in this area to four and a half years ago, when you began to pioneer this work within Tearfund. Often we'd start by developing a strategy, but I know that you chose a different approach. I'm really interested to unpack a bit more about that process that led to these concepts of moral imagination, hospitality and embrace underpinning everything that you've done since then. Mariam, I know that you were there right at the beginning. So, perhaps you could talk us through that process a bit more?

## **Mariam Tadros** 12:36

Yeah, it was a slightly unorthodox process for the organisation. But we'd also been building on the experience of our section, gender-based violence (GBV) work, that had gone kind of before us and was also in that emergent space. And for us, what we really wanted to do, and you know, credit to our leadership for giving us the space as well, was we wanted to take time to really just live in and immerse ourselves in what it might look like for us as an organisation to do peacebuilding. We could have jumped straight in and said these are the things that we want to do. But we really wanted to understand what is the very foundation, not just of peacebuilding as a whole but for us as Tearfund, as an organisation of what it might look like for us to work in this field, a recognition that we were new in the field and actually needed to take time to really understand where our space was. And also just to let, through trialling, through piloting, through theological reflection, allowing our strategy to emerge, and to not be reliant on a strategy to help us figure that out, but to let it work itself out, and then build a strategy based on that. So for the first six months, we had time of building our theological framework, which was really, as a faith-based organisation, we very much intentionally called it a framework because it wasn't about building a doctrine of what peacebuilding in God's eyes is. But it was very much about putting some frame around what are the key faith-based theological ideas that we want to build this on? As we explored that and as we talked with peacebuilders and experts in the field, out in the field, really these three concepts for us came up so strongly as essential parts of what it is both to be a peace builder and to do peacebuilding. And that's where the moral imagination, hospitality and embrace really emerged quite quickly as three really key concepts that we could begin to frame ourselves around. From that we then began to meet various organizations, various peacebuilders in our field sites and various countries where we work. We began with a gathering of peacebuilders from the Middle East that really for us was a launching pad to understand what it is as an organization we could begin to do in some of these countries and some of the areas where we're working. Some really key things came up for us in that, and I think one of the things that both David and I have really committed to and built on is the idea that you have to put the peace builder at the center of all of it, both the nurture, the character development, the sustainability of a peace builder, and really keeping that at the very heart of what we do, as well as doing the projects and the work in the field as well. So those three concepts are what we've used as a theological reflection and foundation, by which we look at our peacebuilding work.

## **Alice Philip** 15:37

I know, David, that you came into the process a little bit later. And I imagine talking about your background having just come from Afghanistan, and from perhaps a more secular approach, how did this process appear to you and walk us through a bit of your journey with that process?

## David Couzens 15:54

Well, I guess a lot of the reading I was doing, and particularly Henri Nouwen, he writes a lot about hospitality. And I think that that just struck a chord with me. And I think as an organisation, we were very much struck by Isaiah 61, which is perhaps no surprise. The peacebuilding bit really focuses on the second part of that. Isaiah 61 is that well known passage which talks about binding up the broken hearted, providing freedom for the captives, releasing people from darkness. I think as an organisation, we focused on those first three verses. But I was struck by the second half and verse four of that, which then goes on to say that those people, the ones that have been released from the darkness, the ones that have been broken hearted, that have been bound up, released from the darkness, that those people will become oaks of righteousness. And then it goes on and says, and they will rebuild, they will restore, and they will renew. And it just struck me that actually, it's the people who suffered this, that are the ones that God chooses to bring healing. It is the people embedded in experiencing living in conflict in their daily lives, that are the people that God chooses to bring peace. And so our role is very much about empowering them. I was going for a walk through the woods, near where I live. And I saw this oak tree that had been, I'm not sure what had happened to it, but it had just been ripped apart. It was just torn, right down from the top to the roots and that sort of great big scar tree. And yet this tree was still alive, it was still living. And you could see within the scars of this torn apart tree that there are all sorts of bugs and things living in it, and it had become a source of life, for other animals in and around in those woods. And it just made me reflect that there is something very powerful about when people who've lived through those experiences, are prepared to be vulnerable and are prepared to share those scars, to show those scars, that somehow there was a space for healing that is created in that. And therefore for me very much our approach to peacebuilding is about empowering those people who have lived in it, and encouraging and modelling ourselves a willingness to be vulnerable. Because when we are, I think there's a space for healing that happens there.

## Alice Philip 18:33

You both spoken about being inspired by people in the field. I wondered if you could give us an example of one person who has really inspired you, and who perhaps embodies some of these concepts of embrace, hospitality, moral imagination, where you've seen it incarnated in people?

## Mariam Tadros 18:53

As part of our first gathering of Middle East peacebuilders, we had about 45 people in that room from six different countries across the region. Each one a peacebuilder in their own right and inspiring in their own way. And this kind of links to my own personal story, and that two people that were in the room, were our peacebuilders, from Egypt, actually. I'd met them in my parallel life, probably about six years previously, and they'd been working on development work in upper Egypt, which is where it's the highest levels of poverty in Egypt, but also the highest levels of sectarianism between Muslims and Christians in the country. I remember at that gathering, sitting under a tree, funnily enough with them both, and they just had, they're a married couple, and they just had this incredible dream of the kind of spaces that they wanted to create in their society. And for me, I mean, it was so contagious, but there was just something in it as I was listening to them share. It was a dream that they'd carried for maybe 20 or 30 years in the time that they've been

doing development work. And their dream was that they could see in and amidst all the sectarianism and and amidst all the conflict and the fighting and the inequality and the poverty, they just had this ability to see a different way. And that, for me is where the moral imagination comes to life, which is this ability in the midst of darkness to imagine something else, and to make that dream turn into a reality for people. And so their dream really was to create spaces, they had no idea what it was going to look like, but to create spaces where young people who were struggling with unemployment, who now you know, drug addiction is at its highest it's ever been, who came perhaps from broken backgrounds, as Muslims and Christians never spent time together, they wanted to create spaces where they could bring people into a room, and just spend time together and facilitate that space. So, a year after that, we were able to begin that project. It was such an emergent program, we've just evaluated it. But what was so exciting about it was just that it was these two people's dream. And they made it happen. And we've seen some of the impact of that first time for some young people, not just as Muslims and Christians to be in the room together. But for girls and boys to be in the room together for more than a day. People's reflections on their time was 'I felt like I was in family', where we saw Christians going to visit Muslims in their mosques, Muslims going to visit Christians in their churches, they've now started an Arts Club, where they meet once every couple of weeks to watch a film together and then have a debrief where in the time that they're together in the workshops, they explore ideas of conflict where they explore ideas of citizenship. So much has come out around trauma. And you know, as David was saying, that shared storytelling space of being able to tell their stories, even from their families, where historically you wouldn't do that out loud. And, you know, it's a small thing, but it's significant. And it all started, I think, two things, the ability to dream and imagine, and then having an organization that can come alongside you, and allow that, to come through and trust you, as you're doing, as you're going through that process as well.

### **Alice Philip** 22:37

Thank you for sharing that story. David, you're inspired by many people. Tell us one story.

### **David Couzens** 22:45

I think one person that's that has inspired me is Dieudonné Nahimana from Burundi. His personal story and his testimony is amazing. I remember sitting over a very long dinner once in northeast Burundi, as he both told his story and also his vision for what he was trying to do. His story, his father had been murdered in a bout of ethnic violence. He'd been given the opportunity, he was away at school in the south of the country, and his friends gathered all the children that were of that tribe, the same tribe as those that had killed his father and gave him the opportunity to kill those children. And he refused. And he helped them to escape. And he then found themselves living on the streets in the capital, Bujumbura. And then he was taken in by a friend at university. And he went through a process of deciding fairly on that he would forgive the killers of his family. Many years later, he went back to the village where he was brought up, and was handing out food supplies. There's a lot of hunger at the time in the villages there. He said, he just felt this tug on his shirt. And he looked around and there were two children. And they said, 'please, can we have some food?' And he realised that these two children were the children of the people who had killed his family. And he said, at that moment, forgiveness became real. In his mind, he had forgiven long, long before, and he said at that moment, it became real. And he did, he gave him some food, and actually, he's funded their education



ever since. So he's a man who models that forgiveness, but then sitting with him over dinner and just hearing him talk with real passion. For him, he was saying, you cannot see change happening in Burundi until you change the culture of leadership and moving from a form of leadership that is exploitative, that is self serving, to one that is based on sort of servant leadership, the model of Jesus in there. And he is working incredibly, with young people, developing a group of young leaders that model that. And he can do that because of his personal story. And that he actually models that, he lives it out himself. And so just seeing people like that, hugely inspiring for me.

### **Alice Philip 25:22**

We're going to be looking at each of these concepts in more depth over the coming weeks, moral imagination, hospitality and embrace. But just give us a taster as we end of how one of these concepts has influenced the way that your strategy has developed over the past few years.

### **David Couzens 25:39**

Well, I guess, shortly after the peacebuilding work started, Tearfund then took on fragile states as one of our corporate priorities. Within that, a desire to address the root causes of that. I've been heavily involved in shaping some of that, and really our thinking about peacebuilding, about those concepts of embrace, moral imagination and hospitality have massively influenced the way we've been thinking about that. As part of that work in fragile states, one of the things that we want countries to do is to embody, to model a fragile states DNA. This infuses and infects the whole way in which we work in fragile states. And that DNA is about being relational, it's about prioritising relationships. It's about being hospitable. It's about making people feel that they're valued, that they're welcome. No matter who they are, no matter where they've come from, they matter as individuals, it's about being willing to reach out and embrace people who are different, who may have different points of view come from different perspectives, but making sure that they know that they're welcomed, it's about being creative. It's about imagining different ways of being. And it's about empowering people. And so that that peacebuilding work has really influenced, I think, our wider work on fragile states.

### **Mariam Tadros 27:11**

For me what was coming to mind was one of our programs, that I think as we've developed, it has kind of tried to hold those three concepts. And I guess first to just say that, before we go into, over the next episodes, the specifics of them, just to say the three are so interconnected, the ability to start off by imagining a different way, by seeing in the midst of conflict, that there is possibility for something else. And once you begin to dream and imagine that, the ability to then hold space and invite the other into your space, and hold them as they are within your space, and to feel safe enough to do that. And then as you build that relationship, the ability to embrace one another, and to move into another way together in relationship. And one of the ways I've seen that beginning to happen is with our peacebuilders in Iraq, where we have a community of about 15 peacebuilders, who come from Muslim, Sunni Shia, Shabak, backgrounds, Christian and Yazidi, all of whom should not be friends, who over the last three years, three and a bit years, have been building this community together, where we started off again at that beginning



that early gathering in the first year of our strategy, where most of them didn't know each other. They began to build relationships with one another, they began to form this small community of peacebuilders, we began to imagine together what peacebuilding in their spaces could look like. We work in three different areas, four different areas in Iraq. And just their ability to see something that could be done together. So that, for me was the beginning of kind of the imagination of what's possible. But then, for me, one of the highlights was last March, actually, one just gone where I was there, and we were doing some conflict transformation training together. And I hadn't seen them for a little while, but then seeing this group of people in this room, who had gone from not knowing each other, to beginning to work together. At this moment, I could deeply see the friendship that they had with one another.

That for me, it was a real moment of, there is something in this hospitable space, of just being together, doing stuff together. And then actually being in relationship with one another, so visiting each other in their homes, turning up, whether it's for times of joy or times of grief. But there was a deep friendship amongst them, which was, for me, just an incredible moment of seeing how that journey can really kind of come to life.

## **Alice Philip** 29:52

It's been such a privilege to share this space with you both this morning. We're really looking forward to the next episodes, exploring each of these concepts in more depth. Thank you, Mariam, thank you, David. This was the first episode of Faith in development.