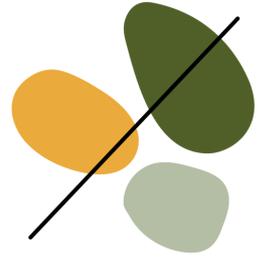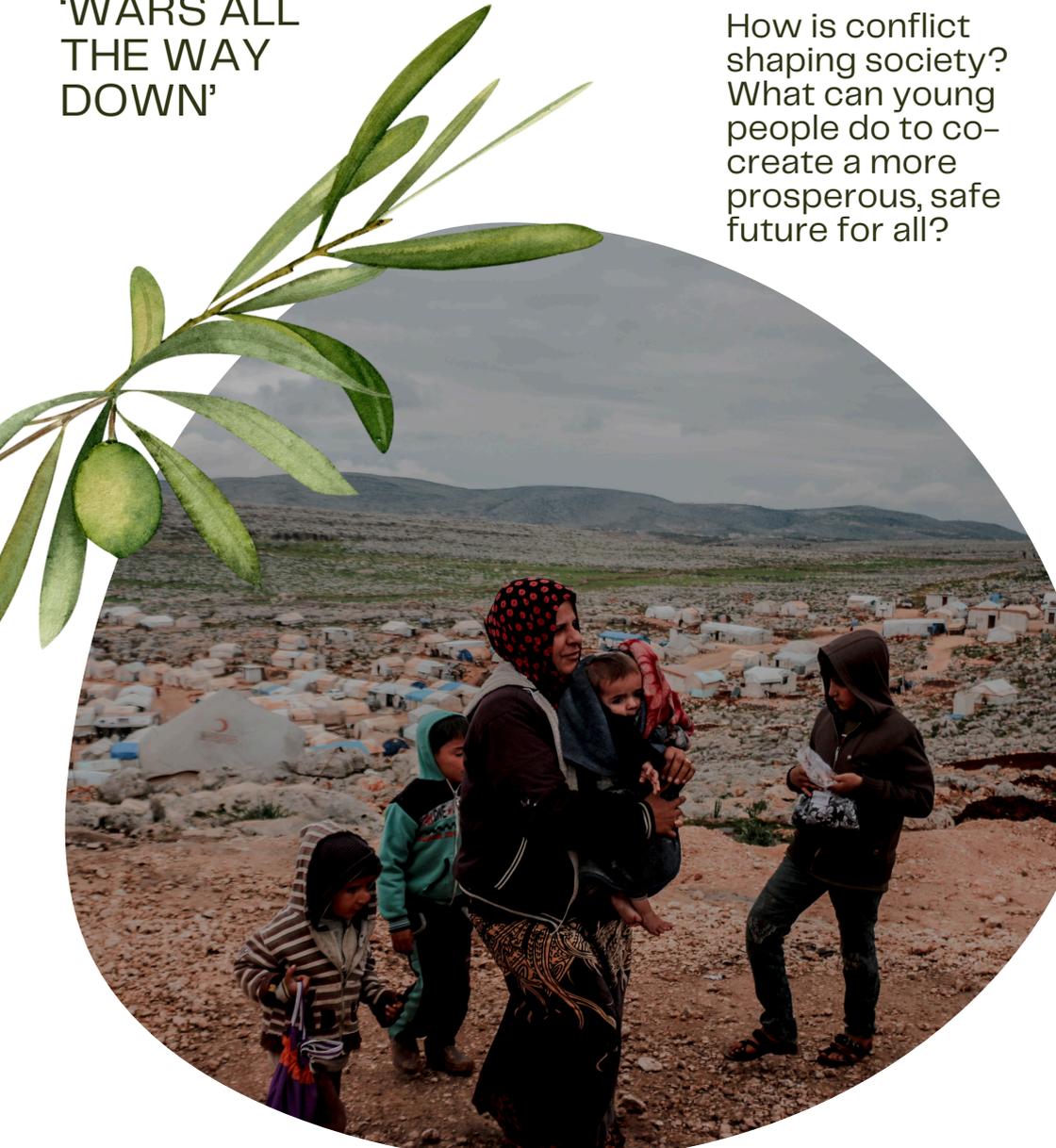# PEACE & CONFLICT

'WARS ALL THE WAY DOWN'

How is conflict shaping society? What can young people do to co–create a more prosperous, safe future for all?

CONTENT OVERVIEW

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."
– Eleanor Roosevelt

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

'Nothing destorys the possibility of dreaming like war and conflict', writes my collleague and The 50 Percent co–director Matias Lara. I have never experienced military conflict, but to be transparent, as a young person in today's world, it is one of the things I fear the most, simply because I understand that all my dreams, all the things I love, all that I want to accomplish are all tied together by the relative peace we in most parts of the Western world still get to experience.

It is also because I have not experienced conflict directly that this editor's letter has been the most difficult for me to write so far. For a long time I asked myself whether I was the right person to write this, or whether I should give this space to someone else who can speak from experience. But the truth is, in today's world, we are all involved in conflict. We may not be experiencing it direclty, but the leaders that we elect may perpetrate it, our tax dollars fund it, and current social narratives enable it. Whether we like it or not, we all have a role to play in conflict and it's resolution.

My favourite part of being an editor has always been getting to read stories that relay experiences so different to mine and learn about places I am yet to visit. While putting this zine together, these stories invited me to ask about my role in conflict resolution, demanded me to ask myself if I am doing 'enough' and taught me about new ways to think about peace building.

Stories bring us together, connect us and remind us that we have so much more in common than the things that divide us – reminding us of the futility of conflict and laying the ground for conflict transformation. In this edition, I am honour to bring you stories from those that have experienced conflict, or those working directly to resolve it. I hope you learn from them as much as I did.

–Vanessa Terschluse,
Editor–in–Chief

DIGITAL PEACEBUILDING: TRANSFORMING OUR SYSTEMS IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE CIVIC SPACES WITH ACTIVISM IN THE CLOUD AND ON THE GROUND

By Lani Anaya Jiménez and
Carolyn Williams

For many years, and with the fourth digital revolution, technology has become more central in peacebuilding. Most studies have done historical categorizations (Scirch, 2020) or waves of digital communication in which online and offline spaces increasingly connect with each other (Campbell, 2020). As a new field, people are carefully debating the impacts on digital peacebuilding and international relations. Technology has contributed to positive peace, for instance, by fostering inclusive decision–making processes.
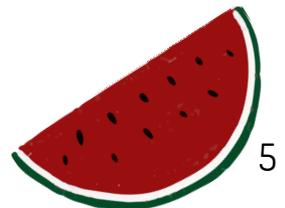
However, it also becomes divisive by enhancing our stereotypes, power relations, or even counterproductive in terms of endangering protection and privacy. There is no guarantee that technology "necessarily always results in positive change" (Kahl & Larrauri, 2013; p. 12). In short, digital technologies are not good or bad themselves, but rather this is determined by how we make use of them.

Within the sphere of digital peacebuilding, young people tend to be an object of study – a subject instead of an agent – with studies arguing that youth are "digital natives". Yet young people are building peace and facilitating collective action across a range of human rights issues online and offline. Generally, young people are literate in both spaces, but especially millennials act as the transitional generation bridging digital and traditional civic spaces (e.g. communicating in

handwriting, mobile texting and computer typing). Millennial leaders span the continuum of hybrid action, in other words, we participate across the spectrum of collective connection, linking online and offline spaces, which presents opportunities for collective action and the protection of digital and physical civic space.

In this article we assume that digital space can be used to amplify actions in physical reality. It is possible to launch systems for hybrid change online and across civic spaces. We argue
that by sharing contrasting perspectives in "safe spaces" across this continuum and engaging in diverse dialogue both online and offline is a way of "bursting bubbles" of isolation and polarization that form, often most visible along the lines of hashtags and followers. Although peace activism looks different in digital and physical civic spaces, the core is **collective connection**.
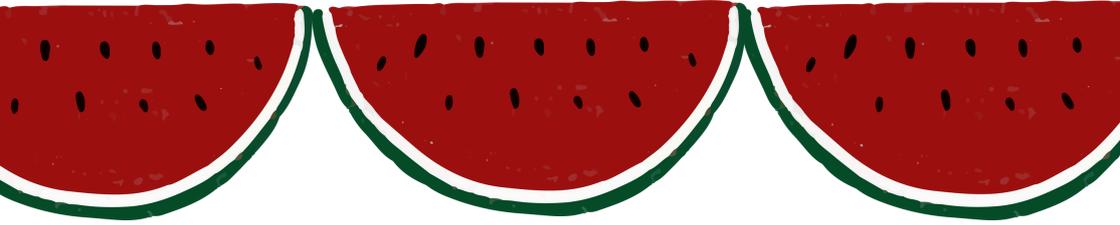
Our main vehicle for connection in this glocal , digitalized world is social media which has reshaped "how, when and whether conflicts will manifest or end in the physical world" (Sleibi; Proctor, 2021; Brown & Livingston, 2019). Ultimately, there have also been debates on what it means to be an international actor in local conflicts or whether digital spaces reproduce the systemic power relations of historic international diplomacy (Richmond, 2023). While it is relevant that international actors are not dictating the transformation of conflicts, digital spaces offer an opportunity for international accompaniment. Nevertheless, to translate this collective connection into meaningful collective action and collective protection, preventative measures must be taken.

It is important to be critically and carefully aware of our engagement – considering the difference between performative and meaningful activism, especially on social media channels as digital civic space. In recent years, the "town square" looks more like "the metaverse" so we must ensure safe, sustainable and connected civic spaces amidst this transition to a digital world with AI becoming mainstream in daily life. Research has demonstrated that young leaders connect digitally to foster peace (Anaya Jiménez & Robinson, 2023) with the observations that youth who are active in digital spaces are more likely to form networks with youth with same identities rather than different ones (Bosch, Sanz, & Sabaté, 2017). We must be self-critical in our group formation.

Some years ago, when offline was the main place of interaction, people with different identities and interests gathered more easily (e.g. parties, conventions, courses, etc.) Today, in online spaces, we are forming our own "bubbles"; choosing what we like, who we want to befriend, or to follow. Usually, these are people with similar identities and perspectives rather than different ones, so it is very likely that while we are engaging in those groups, our openness to other ideas will become more restrained (ibid). Such polarization in digital civic spaces has accelerated resulting from the impacts of COVID-19 isolation and political extremism dividing people farther and further. To prevent closed feedback loops that risk entrenching conflict identities and polarized positions, we must foster open and inclusive civic spaces for participation and dialogue, even by diversifying our algorithm, following accounts that agree but also disagree with our political and ideological views; algorithms are designed by humans with biases that are reflected in the systems they create.

We observe that digital space creates connection and also distance. We are looking at conflicts in Congo, Haiti, Israel and Palestine,
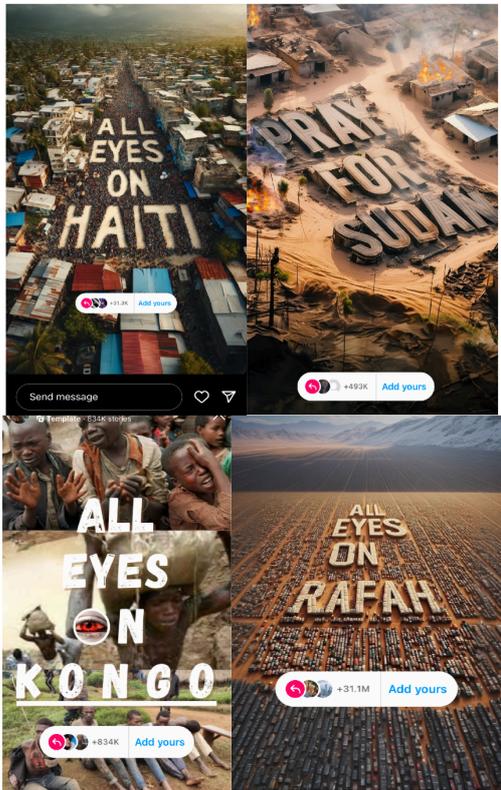
Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen just by opening TikTok or Instagram.

We are more informed than any other generation in history, but what does this mean? Are we meant to be mere witnesses to conflicts, climate change and share them in our feeds? Linking online and offline efforts is one way we can shift awareness and create change. While careful measures must be taken to prevent worsening mental health, it can also mean stepping towards **collective actions** that are meaningful in their outcome. Some examples could be to translate the concerns you see on the internet into a nonviolent movement, or to fundraise for a specific cause. We are able to advocate, socialize, act and even protect in digital civic space.

As we mention the ways we can engage to transform systems and facilitate collective action, it is important that we think about how to protect the people who are risking themselves to record content or show their faces, which might place them at risk of threat. This highlights the need to consider the cost of participation and the need for **collective protection**. Moreover, nowadays AI is using our own information in the form of data to feed algorithms, so before sharing information from our communities, we can ask for consent to share pictures, names, and roles of the persons involved in any post. This is about protecting their identities and data, which also strengthens social cohesion. Likewise, instead of sharing sanitized or misleading AI-generated images of conflict zones and activism, share the voices of affected local people or their representatives (e.g. trusted journalists, peace activists).

Problematic AI images circulated widely in May 2024 as social media activism for Haiti, Sudan, Congo, and Gaza (source: Instagram)

To transform systems, we identify three aspects of interaction as a glocal civic community:

🍉 collective connection

🍉 collective action

🍉 collective protection to facilitate and amplify safe, meaningful engagement online and offline

We invite you to co-develop digital collective transformation by joining our padlet on the 50 percent website (www.the50percent.org)

WAR... WAR NEVER CHANGES

By Matias Ignacio Lara, The 50 Percent co-Director

Do you remember the first time you cared about armed conflicts and the impacts of war? Like most of my generation, for me, it was the terrorist attack of 9/11. I can remember the bar where I was sitting when the second plane hit the Twin Towers.

I even remember the channel that the TV was tuned on. I remember it so clearly because it was the first time I was afraid of the calamities a global-scale war could bring.

We know very well that war brings fear. But where does it leave hope?

In 1982, Gabriel García Márquez said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech for literature: "The inventors of fables, who believe everything, feel entitled to believe that it is still not too late to undertake the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and overwhelming utopia of life, where no one can decide for others even how to die, where love is truly genuine and happiness is possible, and where lineages condemned to a hundred years of solitude finally and forever have a second chance on earth."

Have you ever wished for a second chance?

In his powerful words, "el Gabo," as he is known in Latin America, was saying that we need to build a different future where each one of us can dream without boundaries.

But (and there's always a but) we live in a world where mindsets are fixed on finding nothing but boundaries surrounding us. Terms like "impossible" and "non-viable" are part of our everyday life. This happens because we live in a system programmed to maintain the status quo, leaving little to no possibility for significant changes.

To keep dreaming today, we must learn how systems work and how to act to transform them (or how to "dance" with them, in the words of Donella Meadows).

But nothing destroys the possibility of dreaming like war and conflict. Hope becomes a scarce commodity when survival is threatened, and the future becomes uncertain.

For this reason, we need to understand the complexity underlying armed conflicts and violence. To achieve this, we must unlearn what we know about peacemaking and conflict transformation.

Traditional theorists and stakeholders of peace and conflict often use the term "conflict resolution." Many legal documents in this field talk about conflict resolution, as if an armed conflict is a math problem that can be solved simply by adding or subtracting a couple of elements.

However, building peace is a long-term goal requiring more than short-term resource deployment and strategies. It requires deep involvement and commitment from local stakeholders. International coalitions (armed or humanitarian operations) cannot understand the deep roots of conflict in a region and who the key stakeholders and primary actors are that need to be part of the peacebuilding process.

What I am I saying is that Even if the 'experts' are telling you that they know what to do, if they are not taking the time to hear, empower, and involve the local community, things won't change. Experience shows they will get worse.

The poor results of this approach are scattered all over the world, and we are all aware of them. Nevertheless, so-called experts continue to insist on the same strategies and actions to achieve "conflict resolution." Maybe it's time to start wondering who benefits from this way of doing things.

But what can we do?

First, we must be conscious that peacebuilding is not an easy job – it takes time. Time to listen to people and to understand their issues, conflicts, and emotions. It takes time to build relationships with those impacted by conflict, and let them know what lies in your heart and mind, and then you can start a sincere dialogue that sets the foundation for peace.

Secondly, remember that everlasting peace can only be achieved if we all work together. Don't compete with the people working in the same field as you. Instead, focus your energy on collaborating and building partnerships that bring us closer to the goal.

Finally, believe that peace and a second chance are possible. Because if there is one thing that the current system does every day, it is making us think that we won't be able to change this world.

 Spoiler alert: We will.

IN CONVERSATION WITH SANDY ABDELRAHMAN, CO-FOUNDER OF SKAPED

Can you tell me about yourself and why you co-founded Skaped?

I am a British/Egyptian creative social entrepreneur, feminist, activist & the co-founder & CEO of Skaped. Born in Egypt, I grew up in east London and am passionate about using art for social action and bringing communities together to create the change they want

I established Skaped as an east London community-led artivist charity that empowers young people to engage with community building and social change through the creative arts. Skaped was co-founded by two young migrant women who use their lived experiences to inspire and empower youth especially from marginalised communities to grow in confidence and be more able to create the change they want to see. I wanted to create something that didn't exist for us and be by and for young people for real. We have so far been doing amazing work with our young people and the community.

My work has earned recognition, including features in Glamour Magazine UK among the 50- most empowering Nu-Gen activists you need to know about, as a Global Young Change- Maker of 2020,

Natwest WISE100 women 2023, and a Finalist for the 2024 Social Business Star of the Future. I've represented the UK at the UN Youth Summit 2017 in New York and collaborated with organisations such as Reprieve, Refugee Action, and Amnesty International.

You describe Skaped as an 'artivist charity' – can you tell us what artivism means to you?

Artivism is truly where the magic happens—it's the intersection of art and activism that inspires meaningful change. To me, activism represents our passion for the change we envision, while art serves as the powerful tool, we can wield to convey our messages, provoke empathy, and inspire action. It's about using creativity to not only capture attention but also to spark genuine care and drive positive transformation in our communities. For me, artivism is deeply personal —it's about channelling emotions, experiences, and beliefs into impactful artistic expressions that resonate with others and drive collective change.

What role do the creative arts play in changing our understanding of peace and conflict?

The creative arts play a vital role in reshaping our understanding of peace and conflict. Throughout history, art has served as a powerful tool to document human rights violations, injustice, conflict, and inequality worldwide. I believe that art is uniquely positioned to foster meaningful conversations about human rights and advocate for the protection of our fundamental freedoms.

One of the most compelling aspects of creativity and the arts is their accessibility to all, regardless of background or socioeconomic status. Imagination knows no boundaries and can be harnessed from anywhere. Personally, I experienced the transformative power of the arts when I first moved to the UK and struggled to find my place. Engaging in drama allowed me to break out of my shell, express my emotions, and discover myself.

By enabling individuals to express their struggles and triumphs through creative expression, we empower them to share their voices and advocate for human rights. The arts encourage us to explore new perspectives and imagine different possibilities, making them a potent vehicle for promoting and advancing human rights worldwide.

How can the arts help us act upon conflicts that may be geographically far away from where we are?

The arts are an incredible and a powerful tool to raise awareness about conflicts that's happening around us whether it's near or far away. Despite our distance, many of us in the global West are connected to these conflicts through diaspora, so while it's away on the ground it's not away emotionally.

Consider works like "Brinco" by Judi Werthein, which sparked international controversy and dialogue about migration, capitalism, and border crossings. Such artwork prompts us to confront complex issues and engage in meaningful discussions that transcend geographical boundaries. Through creative expression, art can bridge the gap between distant conflicts and our own lived experiences, inspiring empathy, activism, and a sense of global solidarity.

How can grassroot organisations such as Skaped help us address global conflicts on a local level?

Grassroots organisations like Skaped play a crucial role in addressing global conflicts at the local level by empowering young people to engage with issues they care about using artistic mediums and tools. At Skaped, our ethos revolves around fostering debate and ensuring that young individuals are encouraged to question everything around them.

It's important for grassroots organisations to recognise that young people are already actively raising awareness and amplifying their voices, particularly through platforms like social media. The responsibility lies with adults to pause and listen attentively to these voices. It's essential for young people to engage in activism in ways that feel authentic and comfortable to them—whether through joining protests, signing petitions, or expressing themselves creatively through art and other forms of creativity.

Providing a safe and supportive environment where young individuals can share their voices is key to empowering them to contribute meaningfully to addressing global conflicts.

Skaped believes in the transformative power of education as a political tool. We understand that failing to educate young people risks creating passive individuals instead of the proactive leaders and role models that our society urgently needs. Our vision is to cultivate a world where future generations are aware of their rights and responsibilities, irrespective of their backgrounds or origins. Through these efforts, grassroots organisations like Skaped contribute to fostering a generation of empowered and socially conscious individuals committed to positive change.

THE COST OF CONFLICT: A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE UKRAINE WAR'S IMPACT

By Oleksandra Fomin

The ongoing war in Ukraine, initiated by Russia's invasion in February 2022, has had profound and far-reaching impacts both locally and globally. This conflict has triggered a series of economic, social, and geopolitical disruptions that are reshaping the world in unprecedented ways. This article delves into the multifaceted costs of this conflict, drawing from various sources to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Economic Disruption

The war in Ukraine has severely disrupted the global economy. One of the immediate impacts has been the rise in energy prices. European natural gas prices surged by 60%, while Brent crude oil prices consistently hovered around $120 per barrel in the early months of the conflict (McKinsey & Company, 2023 & McKinsey & Company, 2022). This spike in energy prices has strained economies worldwide, particularly in Europe, which is heavily reliant on Russian energy supplies.

The agricultural sector has also been hit hard. Ukraine and Russia are major exporters of wheat, accounting for about 30% of global production. The conflict caused wheat prices to rise by approximately 40%, exacerbating food insecurity in many parts of the world (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The disruption of agricultural supply chains has had a cascading effect on global food prices, leading to a cost-of-living crisis in many countries (UNEP – UN Environment Programme, 2022).

Humanitarian Crisis

The human cost of the war is staggering. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, both internally and as refugees in neighbouring countries. The United Nations reports that over 7 million people have fled Ukraine, creating one of the largest refugee crises in recent history (Harvard Gazette, 2022). This massive displacement has not only strained the resources of host countries but has also disrupted the lives of countless families, leading to long-term social and economic challenges.

The war has also resulted in significant infrastructure damage. According to the World Bank, the cost of rebuilding Ukraine is estimated to be between $411 billion and $1 trillion (World Economic Forum, 2024). This includes damage to residential buildings, hospitals, schools, and the telecommunications network. The sheer scale of destruction necessitates a coordinated international effort for reconstruction, which will be a long and arduous process.

Geopolitical Shifts

Geopolitically, the Ukraine war has led to significant realignments. Russia has become increasingly isolated on the global stage, with Western nations imposing severe economic sanctions. This isolation has forced Russia to pivot towards other countries, particularly China,

The war has also prompted NATO to strengthen its eastern flank, with countries like Sweden and Finland seeking membership in the alliance. This expansion of NATO is seen as a direct response to the perceived threat from Russia, fundamentally altering the security landscape of Europe (Harvard Gazette, 2022).

Global Supply Chains

The disruption of global supply chains is another major consequence of the war. Many Western companies have either left or scaled back their operations in Russia, leading to a drastic reduction in foreign corporate presence. For example, the number of large foreign companies operating in Russia has shrunk by a factor of six,

Additionally, the conflict has caused volatility in the prices of key commodities such as nickel and palladium, which are crucial for various industries including automotive and electronics. This has further strained global supply chains, leading to increased production costs and delays (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Environmental Impact

The environmental impact of the war is also significant. The destruction of infrastructure, particularly in industrial areas, has led to the release of hazardous substances into the environment. Furthermore, the disruption of agricultural activities has affected food security and led to long-term soil degradation and ecosystem damage (UNDP, 2022).

Rebuilding Efforts

Despite the ongoing conflict, efforts to rebuild Ukraine are already underway. The international community, including the European Union and various NGOs, has pledged substantial support for reconstruction.
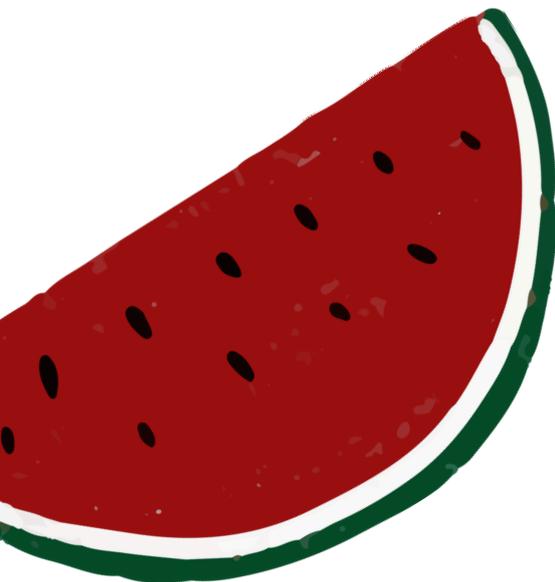
Initiatives such as the Davos Baukultur Alliance aim to provide sustainable and holistic rebuilding solutions that address both immediate needs and long–term development goals (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Conclusion

The cost of the conflict in Ukraine is multifaceted and immense, impacting economies, societies, and geopolitics on a global scale. The immediate challenges of energy prices, food security, and humanitarian crises are compounded by long–term issues such as infrastructure reconstruction and geopolitical realignment. As the war continues, the international community must support Ukraine and mitigate the broader impacts of this conflict.

A ZINE FOR A CAUSE

WE ARE A GLOBAL
COMMUNITY WORKING
TO BUILD A BETTER
FUTURE

JOIN 50 PERCENTERS
AROUND THE WORLD IN
BUILDING A GLOBAL
SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT
DRIVING YOUTH-LED
SYSTEMS CHANGE, FROM
GRASSROOTS TO
LEADERSHIP LEVEL!