

CPI ANNUAL REPORT 2023





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CORDOBA PEACE INSTITUTE - GENEVA (CPI)

CPI-Geneva is an independent non-profit organisation, working on violence prevention and peace promotion. CPI aims to enhance theoretical and practical conflict transformation resources and has extensive experience in West Asian and African contexts. CPI promotes a methodology adapted to and accepted by local communities, conflict parties and peace actors. Since 2002, it has developed unique access and networks in the countries where it works. CPI's outlook is inspired by the Andalusian city of Cordoba: a renowned medieval centre of inter-faith dialogue, and by Geneva: a modern centre of international dialogue and exchange between peoples. CPI has Special Consultative Status with the United Nations.



FOREWORD

In 2023, the world grappled with the ongoing challenges of armed conflict and the severe consequences of climate change. While the crisis in Ukraine remained the primary focus for many, it often overshadowed other critical hotspots around the world, many of which fall within CPI's areas of concern. From Afghanistan to West Africa, Iraq to Mozambique, hundreds of millions of people—young and old—suffered from persistent poor governance, widespread authoritarianism, violent extremism, and shortages of basic resources such as water and food. In the face of these challenges, we must act with determination and optimism, striving to reduce violence and protect both people and the environment that sustains us.

The last quarter of 2023 was a particularly bloody period in West Asia, marked by a war whose atrocities overshadowed other

violent conflicts. The war had far-reaching implications for the credibility of international law, particularly in terms of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It is crucial for all of us to mobilise and work to end these violations of international norms—norms that have been established over decades—in order to prevent a major setback for humanity as a whole.

In 2023, CPI continued its work, focusing on projects to build social cohesion in Iraq, promote interfaith dialogue in West Africa, disseminate constructive alternative narratives in northern Nigeria, and conduct research into the role of Islamic jurists in influencing armed groups and offering practical solutions to conflicts in Africa and Asia.

CPI Director

CPI'S STRATEGIC PROGRAMME

CPI's work in 2023 continued to focus on tensions and polarisations in Muslim-majority societies and aims to bridge the gap between the high incidence of conflicts occurring in these societies and the lack of or limited access to theoretical and practical conflict transformation resources in these regions. Through its activities, the work of CPI focuses on five main areas: 1) Through research and analysis, it identifies and revitalizes local conflict transformation approaches; 2) It builds local conflict transformation expertise and empowers peace actors so that they take the lead on peace initiatives; 3) It launches and supports peace initiatives, facilitating the establishment of safe mediation spaces and other conflict transformation processes; 4) It promotes experience sharing among

conflict transformation practitioners; and 5) It contributes to peaceful interaction among actors with different worldviews, to reduce prejudices and encourage common initiatives.

CPI adheres to the humanitarian principles of independence and impartiality and endeavours to conduct its activities in a manner that promotes non-violence, inclusiveness, and empathy. CPI has created networks and forums that comprise researchers and practitioners in the field of conflict transformation, and activists with a specific expertise in the field in the Arab region, the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, and East Africa. One of the principal aims of these groups is to contribute to the transformation of violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts that involve a religious dimension.



ACTIVITIES BY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Strategic Objective 1: Harnessing and amplifying internal peace resources within Muslim-majority societies by researching, documenting, and disseminating local conflict transformation approaches, alongside the development and accessibility of training materials to empower peace actors in these communities.

Engaging Across Religious Differences

(15.02.2023 – 14.02.2025)

Funded by the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

In February 2023, CPI launched, in partnership with the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich (CSS), a two-year research project titled “Engaging Across Religious Differences: Evidence-based Research on Islamic Jurists who Influence Armed Groups’ Actions and their Capacity to Develop Practical Solutions to Conflicts.” This project aims to study, in five different contexts, how various Islamic jurists interpret Scripture to influence armed groups’ behavior, and what types of dialogue engagement enable these jurists to develop, support, or legitimize practical solutions to conflicts at the level of governance, conduct of hostilities, or negotiation processes. The two principal research questions are:

1. How do Islamic jurists interpret Scripture to shape the governance and conflict behavior of armed groups?
2. Which kinds of dialogue engagement allow such jurists to develop, support, or legitimize practical solutions to conflict on the level of governance, the conduct of hostilities,

or negotiation processes?

This evidence-based project thus focuses on the role of Islamic jurists within and close to armed groups in five countries: Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Somalia, and Yemen. Using a comparative approach, the project seeks to examine in what way Islamic jurists interpret Islamic Scripture to influence the political action of militant groups. On this basis, the research outcomes contribute to academic debates, provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between Islamist jurists and armed groups, and support organizations or governments if they one day seek to engage in dialogue or conflict resolution interventions.

Support for the Project of Integrating Quranic Schools into the Malian Education System

(01.11.2021 – 31.05.2023)

Funded by the Swiss FDFA

CPI facilitated exchanges aimed at adopting common language promoting clear and transparent communication to the population about the process of integrating Quranic schools into the national education system. The workshop was organized by the Malian Ministry of National Education (MEN), in collaboration with ENDA local organisation, and brought together 30 participants (MEN staff, representatives of the National Federation of Quranic School Teachers (FENAMEC), and other MEC organizations such as the Coordination of Quranic Teachers and Students Associations (CGMEC) and the Association for Mutual Aid of Quranic Teachers and Students (AMEC).



Results achieved:

- ❖ 311 Qur'anic school teachers in 5 provinces were trained to take ownership of the bridging process in line with the Consultation Framework, between September and November 2019.
- ❖ 490 Qur'anic school teachers were trained by CPI in Bamako, Kayes, Koulikoro, Ségou, Sikasso, Gao, and Mopti in 2022. The aim was to ensure the inclusion of these teachers in the bridging process in a conflict transformation approach. In all regions, governors or their representatives chaired the opening ceremonies.
- ❖ Relations were improved between the National Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding future legislation on the issue.
- ❖ Trust was built between Qur'anic school teachers and the National Ministry of Education.
- ❖ A 5-day communication workshop resulted in a formal agreement on the communication strategy, the stakeholders to be involved, and the channels to be used.

- ❖ Stakeholders have agreed on the themes and methodology of the Consultation Framework as well as the communication strategy to disseminate the process to communities.

Madrassa Project

Funded by the ICRC and the Swiss FDFA

Within the framework of its collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), CPI contributed to the fifth edition of the Madrassa meeting of Sahelian Ulema on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Islamic Law, held on February 28 and March 1, 2023, in Nouakchott, Mauritania, which brought together about thirty Islamic jurists and IHL experts.

Strategic Objective 2: Building and sustaining an active, effective community of conflict transformation practitioners through networking, platforms, and forums, focusing on fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among peace actors in Muslim-majority societies.

Interfaith in Action

(01.05.2022 – 31.10.2023)

Funded by the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT)

The "Interfaith in Action" project, spanning from January 2022 to October 2023, was a collaborative effort aimed at reducing interfaith tensions and promoting social cohesion in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Through workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns, the project engaged a diverse range of participants, including women, youth, media professionals, and religious leaders, to foster harmony and understanding across faiths. The project was funded by the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT), and jointly implemented by CPI and its local partners "Développement Solidaire / Walam Walle (DS/WW)" in Burkina Faso and "Dar al Andalus Center (DAAC)" in Nigeria.

The "Interfaith in Action" project achieved significant outcomes in promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Collaborative initiatives in Nigeria resulted in impactful projects, including a series of six interfaith radio dialogues featuring thought leaders, workshops that engaged 100 women and grassroots leaders to address interfaith tensions, and training programs for 80 young Muslims and Christians to foster harmonious relations. In Burkina Faso, multi-faith media groups received training on conflict resolution, extremism prevention, and peace journalism, enabling them to craft positive narratives that encourage coexistence. Across both countries, workshops brought together diverse participants, including women, youth, and leaders from various faiths, to address tensions and build trust within communities. Awareness campaigns, including a short

video clip and radio broadcasts in Burkina Faso, targeted grassroots audiences with messages of citizenship and mutual respect. The project concluded with final meetings in Abuja and Ouagadougou, where stakeholders assessed its impact, strategized for long-term collaboration, and explored expanding initiatives to reach more regions.

The project had a profound impact on empowering individuals and fostering inclusivity. Youth participants were equipped with tools to promote interfaith dialogue and collaboration, while women and grassroots leaders played a significant role in addressing interfaith challenges. Media professionals in Burkina Faso gained essential skills to reshape interfaith discourse through peace journalism, contributing to a more positive and constructive public narrative. Religious leaders were empowered with resources to guide their communities in building harmonious interfaith relations. Additionally, the project established sustainable platforms for continued interfaith initiatives, laying a foundation for lasting collaboration and social cohesion in the region. Through these efforts, the "Interfaith in Action" project made meaningful strides in bridging interfaith divides and fostering unity in both Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

❖ 90% of participants in Burkina Faso and 83% of participants in Nigeria reported that the project had created a safe and constructive space for open dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and Christians thereby improving interactions amongst faith-based communities.

❖ Over 90% of participants expressed readiness to disseminate the conflict transformation approach, promoting social

- ❖ cohesion and engaging with their communities on this sensitive topic.
- ❖ 240 participants who directly benefited from the joint actions, without counting the ongoing awareness-raising campaigns disseminated on radio, TV, and social networks illustrating the potential for long-term impact and transformation in these regions.

Reconciliation and Political Dialogue in Iraq (01.01.2023 – 28.02.2024)

Funded by the German Federal Foreign Office

The “Reconciliation and Political Dialogue in Iraq” project, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, aimed to fostering social cohesion and promoting reconciliation through a range of initiatives. In Tel Afar, the Cordoba Cultural Café has become a hub for educational and socio-cultural events, hosting over 30 activities in 2023. These events provided a platform for community interaction, cultural exchange, and advocacy. Highlights include the 2023 Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra, artistic workshops, capacity-building sessions for youth, and advocacy on pressing issues such as water shortages and rights for individuals with special needs. A variety of creative and interactive activities supported social cohesion, including painting murals, organizing poetry evenings, and facilitating sports and gardening events.

The project also extended its focus to legal and advocacy efforts. CPI supported Iraqi refugee families in Turkey by establishing a legal clinic to assist with accessing civil documents. A total of 65 cases were processed, reflecting the program’s commitment to addressing bureaucratic hurdles and providing legal support.



Legislative and Capacity-Building Initiatives

A key component of the project focused on the right to know the fate of missing persons. CPI played a pivotal role in merging two existing laws into a unified “Law on Missing Persons Affairs,” which awaits parliamentary approval. This initiative brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including government ministries, security forces, civil society actors, and international law experts, during a December 2023 conference in Baghdad. Capacity-building efforts complemented legislative progress, with dedicated training sessions for the Martyrs Foundation conducted in Lebanon and Erbil in 2023.

Community and Cultural Engagement in Tel Afar

The project’s achievements in Tel Afar underscore its commitment to rebuilding and strengthening community bonds. A diverse array of events was implemented, ranging from art workshops and youth camps to advocacy for vulnerable groups and environmental beautification. Examples include:

- Sports and Cultural Engagement: Initiatives like the Arabian Gulf Cup and football reintegration programs.
- Environmental and Social Advocacy: Activities such as planting flowers at local hospitals and addressing water shortages.
- Youth and Educational Activities: Training programs on conflict transformation, citizen journalism, and enhancing the roles of educational counselors.
- Artistic and Cultural Contributions: Poetry evenings, mural painting, and musical performances to foster creativity and expression.

Future Outlook

This project's holistic approach to reconciliation, combining grassroots cultural initiatives, legal support, and legislative progress, highlights a comprehensive strategy for addressing Iraq's post-conflict challenges. The continued facilitation of community activities, legal assistance for vulnerable populations, and progress on legislative frameworks are vital to sustaining peace and fostering social cohesion in Iraq.

Strategic Objective 3a: Promoting inclusivity, social cohesion, and peaceful interaction across diverse communities, particularly in Muslim-majority societies, by engaging all constituents in efforts to prevent extremism and reduce polarization.

Fiqhi Pathways in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, East African Swahili Coast, and Afghanistan

(15.02.2023 – 14.05.2024)

Funded by the Swiss FDFA

The current humanitarian landscape in Africa and the Middle East is marked by significant challenges, with 294 out of 450 armed groups of humanitarian concern operating in these regions as of 2023, according to ICRC. The situation is particularly acute in the Sahel region, where unprecedented humanitarian needs have emerged following major political events in 2022 and 2023. According to OCHA's March 2024 overview, 35.2 million people require humanitarian assistance across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, including 5.6 million internally displaced persons and 1.7 million refugees.

Given the limited success of military interventions, there has been a growing recognition of the need for alternative approaches to conflict resolution. Former African Union Commissioner Smail Chergui has highlighted the importance of involving local leaders and authorities in developing effective stabilization strategies. This shift in approach acknowledges that over half of all armed conflicts now involve groups expressing their interests in Islamic terms.

A promising development in conflict resolution involves the "Fiqhi Pathways" approach, which facilitates dialogue between credible Muslim scholars and religiously-inspired armed groups. This method explores options within Islamic jurisprudence for improving governance, humanitarian access, and civilian protection. The process supports mediation efforts by increasing awareness of various interpretative options within Islamic law, creating more flexibility in negotiations and preventing the hardening of positions.

The engagement process focuses on practical issues related to governance, humanitarian access, and civilian protection, working through recognized Islamic scholars who have the legitimacy and expertise to engage in interpretation (ijtihad). This approach has already yielded tangible results in some areas, including the lifting of sieges, improved humanitarian aid access, and the reopening of schools in the Sahel region. These efforts represent a significant step toward developing sustainable, culturally-informed solutions to complex regional conflicts.

The "Fiqhi Pathways" project, funded by the Swiss FDFA, aims to engage scholars credible

in the eyes of armed groups on issues related to the conduct of hostilities in accordance with international humanitarian law and Islamic law, good governance, and preference for dialogue. This program covers the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, East African Swahili Coast, and Afghanistan.

Promoting Social Cohesion and the Dissemination of Constructive Alternative Narratives in Northern Nigeria

(01.03.2023-31.03.2024)

Funded by the Swiss FDFA

In collaboration with Dar el Andalus Center (DAAC)

CPI has conducted the Constructing Alternative Narratives project in Nigeria through 3 phases of the project covering 2019-2024, funded by the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss FDFA and implemented in close collaboration with the local partner Dar el Andalus Center (DAAC) in 9 states of Nigeria. The three components are as follows: 1) Interfaith Dialogue with Students 2) Constructing Alternative Narratives and 3) Sulhu process (Reconciliation in NE Nigeria). It has the overall goal of "inclusive, participative, and peaceful coexistence between communities with different cultural and religious backgrounds" as well as providing constructive alternatives narratives to extremist discourse through the empowerment of the youth and gatekeepers of the community based on a conflict transformation approach.

The project implemented in close collaboration with DAAC has capitalized on the previous experience to work on "Promoting social cohesion and the Dissemination of Constructive Alternative Narratives". Indeed, faced with the

high risk of increased extremization among those most at risk of recruitment, and interfaith violences the intervention has contributed to addressing the root causes of extremization and the call for interfaith violence. Equipping the communities with a greater understanding of the true precepts of Islam and deeper critical thinking based on religious tolerance is fundamental to countering extremist discourse and messages.

Results Achieved

Dissemination of Constructive Alternative Narrative

- CAN book was written to provide alternative narratives to extremist religious discourse in NE Nigeria. Produced in English, Hausa and Kanuri language, 7 000 copies were distributed. To facilitate the dissemination, it was transformed into 7 smaller booklets and recorded into Kanuri and French to facilitate the oral dissemination in NE Nigeria and the lake Tchad basin area
- Workshops were conducted for 322 Traditional Ruler and Religious leaders to provide and disseminate constructive alternative narrative based on conflict transformation approach.
- Workshops organized for 382 journalists and media executives on peace journalism covering media ethics and constructive alternative narratives.
- Trainings held for 290 Internally Displaced Women (IDPs) in Borno, and Yobe in order to empower them by introducing constructive alternative narratives and identifying false arguments propagated by extremist groups in order to lessen the opportunities for recruitment into extremist groups. The training also addressed basic trauma management skills and financial literacy. They were given MP3 devices

- containing valuable content such as Hausa Radio dramas on de-radicalization as well as peace songs and messages they can relisten to and share with other women and with children and Youth.

Facilitation of the Reconciliation process in NE Nigeria

- Supporting the ongoing reconciliation process in NE Nigeria by conducting 7 trainings and workshops in Maiduguri for between 50 and 70 participants including Imams, scholars, community leaders, women leaders, and youths as well as former associate members of armed groups to engage in comprehensive dialogue regarding the reintegration of the former members of armed groups into the community. These trainings based on a conflict transformation approach are focused on the Islamic precept of Sulhu which promotes reconciliation and forgiveness.

Interfaith Dialogue among Students

- Multiple interfaith dialogue workshops gathering 259 Students including two sensitization sessions for gatekeepers to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence with participants from Islamic and Christian faiths.
- Creation of Peace Clubs with representatives from Christianity and Islam as well as teachers, members of the Ministry of Education, National Union of Teachers, and head of department of Peace and Conflict in Taraba state.
- Step-down training for 80 students of Muslim and Christian faiths held in Abuja in order to strengthen social cohesion and reduce inter-religious tensions. Literature and social media messages

were disseminated as a complimentary approach to reinforce these ideas.

Strategic Objective 3b: Raising awareness among policymakers, gatekeepers, community, and religious leaders about their critical role in encouraging peaceful coexistence and understanding between communities with different worldviews.

PUBLICATIONS

Abbas Aroua, *Introduction to Conflict Transformation*, (Arabic), 2nd ed. Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva, 2023.

Abbas Aroua, *The Origin, Path and Purpose: Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim's Conflict Typology*, Cordoba Research Papers, Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva. June 2023.

Zacchari Cheikh, *La justice transitionnelle en Irak*, Cordoba Research Papers, Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva. August 2023.

Catherine Borrelli, *Youth Empowerment Through Building and Disseminating Alternative Narratives: The Sulhu Process in Northeast Nigeria*, Conflict Transformation in Practice. Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva, August 2023.

Ozair Khan, Book Review: Adam Baczkowski's book *La guerre par le droit – Les tribunaux Taliban en Afghanistan* CNRS Editions, 2021. March 2023.

NEWSLETTERS

CPI produced a monthly newsletter aimed to keep track of the discussions and debates among scholars on issues of governance policies of the Taliban, especially in the areas of education, social policies, and statecraft and



governance institutions. several governance issues have been the subject of internal debate and divergent views among various influential actors within the Taliban, such as girls' education and women's employment, the place of different schools of Islamic thought in the public square, the role of political parties and the drafting of the constitution.

Within the framework of the Fiqhi Pathways project implemented jointly by CPI and the Swiss FDFA's Peace and Human Rights Division, engagement with Deobandi scholars of or close to Taliban and Pakistan is pursued to promote governance in line with IHL and Islamic jurisprudence through Fiqhi dialogue exchanges.

EXTERNAL EVENTS

- CPI participated on January 27, 2023, in a seminar in Cambridge, UK, organized by the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT) to discuss the development of the "Religion and Peacebuilding" component of their

"Social Consequences of Religions" (SCORE) program.

- CPI participated on June 5-6, 2023, in a workshop titled "Religion for Peace? Identifying Conditions and Mechanisms for Interfaith Peace," organized by the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Berlin. The workshop, which brought together about twenty academics and peace practitioners, focused on different facets of interfaith relations, particularly on the role that religion can play for peace.

- On July 5, 2023, CPI participated in a roundtable on "Possibilities for Peacebuilding and Pluralism" organized by Pepperdine University (PU) and the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT) at PU's new international campus, the Pepperdine Chateau d'Hauteville in Saint-Légier-La Chiésaz, Switzerland. The event brought together academics and practitioners whose work intersects with concepts of religious freedom, religious literacy, and pluralistic virtue.

- On October 5, 2023, CPI participated with other experts in a roundtable at ZHAW School of Management and Law in Winterthur, Switzerland, on the theme “Why has the Middle East become a global mediation hotspot?” CPI contributed to this event by providing insight into the requirements for effective mediation in the MENA region.

- CPI participated in the 15th meeting of the advisory group and the 10th anniversary celebration of the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, held in Helsinki, Finland, from October 25-27, 2023.

- On November 21, 2023, CPI participated in a virtual meeting of the Advisory Council for ACCORD publication 30 edited by Conciliation Resources and titled “Still time to talk: Adaptation and innovation in peace mediation.”

- On December 6, 2023, CPI attended the presentation of the “ICRC’s 2023 Global Mapping of Armed Groups” by the International Committee of the Red Cross, organized at the ICRC Humanitarium in Geneva. For several years, the ICRC has been conducting an annual survey of armed groups of humanitarian interest to identify behavioral trends and improve its engagement.

ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees is the governing body of CPI. It has the responsibility to ensure compliance with the mission of CPI and that the assets of CPI are fully engaged in achieving its goal in line with international professional standards. The Advisory Committee provides technical expertise and guidance and ensures that the programs and projects of CPI comply with its strategic objectives, core values, methodology and approach, and guiding principles. The Executive Management (the Director and the General Manager) has the mandate to direct and manage CPI according to the directives of the Board of Trustees and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee. The External Auditor is appointed by the Board of Trustees to review and approve the accounts of CPI. The audited accounts are reported every year with CPI’s annual report to the Swiss Federal Supervisory Authority.

INTERNSHIPS

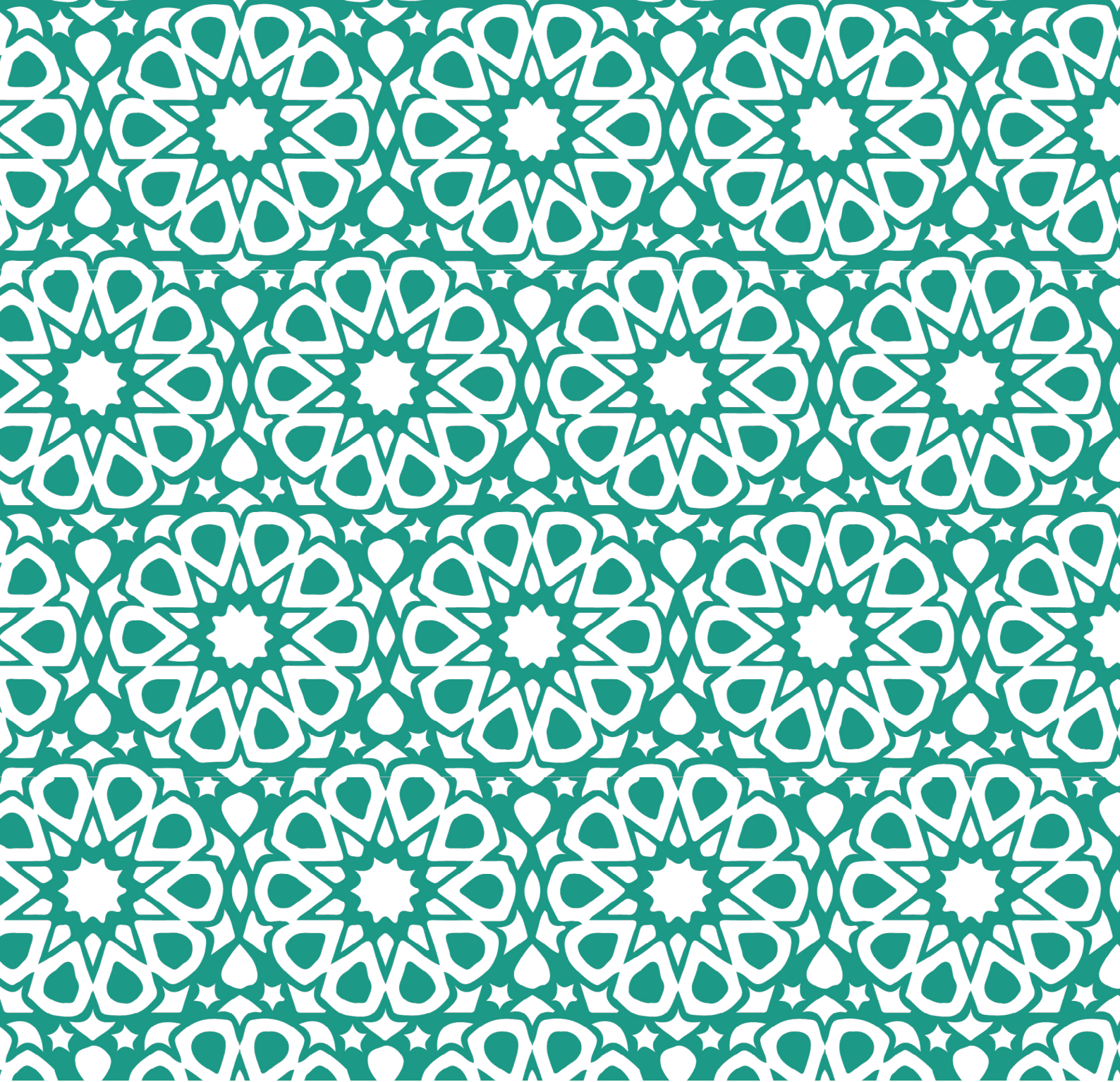
CPI hosted in 2023 three students for internship from the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Global Studies Institute, University of Geneva, and the Université Paris 1 Panthéon – Sorbonne.

Income:	
Public & Private Funds	CHF 1’692’339

The main CPI donors in 2023 were the Swiss FDFA, the German FFO, the EU and the TRT.

Expenses:	
Activities	CHF 1’075’933
Human Resources	CHF 480’860
Running Costs	CHF 44’450

Registered Offices:
Iraq
Libya
Mauritania



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