

REPORT

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE HIZMET MOVEMENT TO WORLD PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

**JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION'S
REPORT ON THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
'FAILED COUP' ATTEMPT IN TÜRKİYE**



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Report

Contributions of the Hizmet Movement to Global Peace and Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the contributions of the Hizmet Movement to global peace and sustainable development through the lens of civic engagement. It explores how a faith-inspired civil society movement can promote peaceful coexistence by advancing quality education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, humanitarian service, and community engagement. Rather than offering a comprehensive history of the movement, this report focuses on selected initiatives and practices that illustrate its contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report argues that sustainable peace requires more than the absence of conflict. Lasting peace depends on strengthening social cohesion, promoting inclusive development, protecting human dignity, and encouraging active civic participation. Within this framework, the Hizmet Movement demonstrates how voluntary civic action can complement the efforts of governments and international organizations in addressing contemporary global challenges.

Established through the ideas and teachings of Fethullah Gülen, the Hizmet Movement has evolved into a decentralized global civil society initiative operating in diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Guided by values such as respect for human dignity, peaceful and positive action, volunteerism, dialogue, and service to humanity, the movement seeks to translate shared ethical principles into practical action that benefits local communities while contributing to global cooperation.

The report identifies education as one of the movement's primary contributions to sustainable development. Through schools, educational institutions, scholarship programs, and initiatives that emphasize both academic excellence and ethical responsibility, Hizmet seeks to empower individuals while promoting social inclusion, intercultural understanding, and responsible citizenship. These efforts closely correspond with Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education.

Humanitarian service constitutes another central dimension of the movement's civic engagement. Through relief organizations and volunteer-based humanitarian initiatives, the Hizmet Movement has responded to natural disasters, humanitarian crises, poverty, and limited access to healthcare in different regions of the world. These activities contribute to several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty reduction (SDG 1-2), health (SDG 3), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10), while strengthening community resilience and human dignity.

Dialogue is presented as an essential peacebuilding mechanism throughout the report. By encouraging intercultural and interreligious dialogue, organizing dialogue platforms, and fostering cooperation among diverse communities, Hizmet initiatives seek to reduce prejudice, build mutual trust, and strengthen social cohesion. These activities contribute to the broader objectives of peaceful, inclusive societies and effective partnerships reflected in SDGs 16 and 17.

In addition to the literature review, the report incorporates interviews with practitioners and individuals familiar with the movement's activities in different countries. Their experiences reinforce the view that education, humanitarian service, dialogue, and volunteerism function as

complementary mechanisms that strengthen local communities while contributing to broader goals of peacebuilding and sustainable development.

Overall, the report concludes that the Hizmet Movement represents a practical example of how faith-inspired civic engagement can contribute to sustainable development beyond governmental action. By combining education, humanitarian service, dialogue, and community participation, the movement demonstrates how shared ethical values can be translated into constructive civic initiatives that strengthen peace and social resilience.

The findings suggest that civil society initiatives inspired by universal ethical values have significant potential to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. As global challenges become increasingly interconnected, the experience of the Hizmet Movement illustrates the important role that voluntary civic engagement can play in promoting peaceful coexistence, inclusive development, and sustainable peace at both the local and global levels.

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Report

Global Context and the Question of Sustainable Peace

Contemporary societies are facing increasingly complex challenges that threaten social stability, human development, and peaceful coexistence. Rising polarization, social fragmentation, armed conflicts, political instability, and forced displacement continue to affect communities across different regions of the world. At the same time, declining trust in institutions and weakened social cohesion have reduced societies' capacity to respond collectively to these challenges.

The consequences of these developments extend beyond immediate political and security concerns. Persistent inequalities, barriers to inclusive development, and limited access to justice contribute to cycles of exclusion and vulnerability.¹ In many contexts, communities experiencing insecurity and instability are confronted with difficult choices, including displacement, forced migration, or prolonged social and economic hardship. As trust erodes and perceptions of threat increase, social divisions often deepen, making cooperation and collective action more difficult.

Against this backdrop, the international community has increasingly emphasized the importance of peace, justice, and partnerships through global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² However, achieving sustainable and long-term peace requires a deeper understanding of the conditions that enable individuals and communities to live together with dignity, security, and mutual trust. This report presents the Hizmet Movement (Hizmet means Service in Turkish) as a faith-inspired civil society movement and examines its contributions to global peace and sustainable development through quality education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and humanitarian service, highlighting its role as a civil society best practice in peacebuilding.

Peace, Development, and the Role of Civil Society

One of the key contributors to this field, Johan Galtung, introduced the concept of “Positive Peace,” defining peace not merely as the absence of direct violence but also as the presence of just and inclusive social structures.³ This broader understanding of peace has also increased interest in non-state actors and community-based initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding processes.

Against this broader understanding of peace and development, the Hizmet Movement has emerged as a faith-inspired civil society movement that promotes peaceful coexistence through education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, humanitarian service, and civic engagement. Inspired by

¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024* (New York: UNDP, 2024).

² United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

³ Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–191.

universal ethical values and voluntary service, the movement has established educational, dialogue, and humanitarian initiatives across different regions worldwide, contributing to local communities while fostering global cooperation and mutual understanding. This report examines the Hizmet Movement's contributions to global peace and sustainable development, highlighting its role as a civil society best-practice model in peacebuilding.

The Hizmet Movement: A Civil Society Initiative

Fethullah Gülen (1941–2024) was a Turkish Islamic scholar, educator, author, and preacher whose ideas inspired the emergence of the Hizmet Movement. Beginning his public service in the 1960s, he emphasized the importance of education, ethical responsibility, dialogue, volunteerism, and service to humanity as practical expressions of faith. Drawing upon both the Islamic intellectual tradition and universal human values, Gülen advocated peaceful coexistence, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and positive civic engagement rather than political activism. Throughout his lifetime, he authored more than eighty books and numerous articles on faith, ethics, education, spirituality, and social responsibility, many of which have been translated into multiple languages.⁴ Although he served as the movement's principal intellectual inspiration, the Hizmet Movement developed as a decentralized, volunteer-based civil society initiative that transcends borders and is carried forward by individuals and institutions sharing these values.⁵

The Hizmet Movement is a faith-inspired civil society movement committed to peaceful coexistence and service to humanity through social responsibility and philanthropy. Rooted in altruistic volunteerism and inspired by both Islamic and universal human values, the movement prioritizes education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and humanitarian service as its principal areas of civic engagement. Over time, it has developed into a transnational civic initiative operating across diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

The movement is guided by a shared framework of values that includes respect for human dignity and fundamental human rights, the rule of law, peaceful and positive action, diversity and pluralism, voluntary participation, consultation, civic engagement, and service to society. These values are translated into practice through educational initiatives, dialogue platforms, humanitarian projects, cultural activities, and community service. The movement seeks to strengthen peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and sustainable development by encouraging individuals to transform shared ethical values into constructive civic action.⁶

⁴ Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

⁵ M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004); Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

⁶ Alliance for Shared Values, *Core Values of Hizmet*, accessed July 9, 2026, <https://afsv.org/hizmetcorevalues/>.

1.2 Scope of the Report

This report examines the relationship between civic engagement, peacebuilding, and sustainable development through selected dimensions of the Hizmet Movement's activities. In particular, it explores how education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, humanitarian service, and civic engagement contribute to social cohesion, human development, and peaceful coexistence.

The report focuses in-depth on the Hizmet Movement's contributions to selected Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).⁷ These goals provide the framework through which the movement's educational, humanitarian, dialogue, and civic initiatives are implemented. The report presents selected initiatives and institutional practices that demonstrate how the Hizmet Movement translates its core values into practical action in support of peacebuilding and sustainable development.⁸

1.3 Methodology and Structure

This report adopts a qualitative and exploratory research approach to examine the relationship between civic engagement, peacebuilding, and development through the case of the Hizmet Movement. The study draws on four main sources of material: literature review, conceptual analysis, document analysis, and interview findings. A range of secondary academic and institutional sources was reviewed, including scholarly articles, book chapters, policy-oriented publications, and materials related to peacebuilding, civil society, development, and faith-inspired civic engagement. The study also engages in a comparative reading of scholarship on the Hizmet Movement, incorporating both sources emerging from the movement's own intellectual and institutional context and studies that examine it from external academic perspectives.

In addition, interviews conducted as part of the research process constitute an important source for understanding how the movement's educational, humanitarian, and dialogue-oriented activities are perceived and interpreted in different contexts, complementing the literature-based analysis presented in the later sections of the report. Accordingly, the report is organized progressively, moving from the conceptual foundations of peacebuilding and development to the analysis of the Hizmet Movement as a case study, followed by interview findings and concluding reflections.

⁷ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

⁸ Alliance for Shared Values, *Core Values of Hizmet*, accessed July 9, 2026, <https://afsv.org/hizmetcorevalues/>.

PART 2 – THE HIZMET MOVEMENT: A CIVIL SOCIETY APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The Hizmet Movement and the Sustainable Development Goals

The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has highlighted the importance of partnerships among governments, civil society, and local communities in addressing global challenges. Although the Hizmet Movement was established before the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many of its long-standing civic initiatives closely align with the objectives articulated in the 2030 Agenda.⁹ Through education, dialogue, humanitarian service, and community engagement, the movement has contributed to several SDGs while promoting peace, human dignity, and sustainable development. The specific goals examined in this report are outlined in the Scope of the Report and provide the framework for the analysis presented in the following sections.

Within the Hizmet Movement, these areas are not viewed as separate fields of activity but as interconnected dimensions of service to humanity. Inspired by the principles of voluntary service, peaceful and positive action, and social responsibility, the movement seeks to address the underlying causes of social fragmentation by investing in people, strengthening communities, and encouraging cooperation across cultural and religious differences.¹⁰ This integrated approach is reflected in a broad range of educational, dialogue, humanitarian, and community-based initiatives that seek to transform shared ethical values into practical action.

The following sections examine these dimensions through selected examples and institutional practices, illustrating how the Hizmet Movement translates its core values into practical contributions to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Rather than providing an exhaustive account of the movement's global activities, the report focuses on representative best practices that demonstrate the role of faith-inspired civic engagement in addressing contemporary global challenges.

2.2 Civil Society and Faith-Inspired Social Movements

Contemporary peacebuilding scholarship increasingly recognizes that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through governments, legal frameworks, or international organizations. While these actors play essential roles, lasting peace ultimately depends on the active participation of individuals and communities. Sustainable social transformation begins with people who cultivate values such as responsibility, integrity, empathy, and respect, and who translate these norms into everyday action. As these globally endorsed actions spread through families, schools, workplaces, and communities, they strengthen trust, encourage cooperation, and gradually contribute to

⁹ United Nations, *Transforming Our World*.

¹⁰ Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*; Alliance for Shared Values, *Core Values of Hizmet*.

broader social cohesion. In this sense, peacebuilding is not only an institutional process but also a deeply human and community-centered one.

Civil society organizations and faith-inspired civic movements occupy a unique position within this process because they are often rooted in existing relationships of trust, voluntary participation, and shared moral values. Rather than relying primarily on political authority, they mobilize individuals around common ethical principles and encourage collective action for the benefit of society. This relationship among shared values, social trust, and collective action has been widely discussed in the social capital literature particularly by Robert Putnam, who argues that networks of trust and reciprocity strengthen civic participation and democratic life. From this perspective, values are not merely personal beliefs; they become social resources capable of generating cooperation, resilience, and long-term peacebuilding.¹¹

Within this broader conceptual framework, the Hizmet Movement exemplifies a faith-inspired civic initiative that seeks to transform shared moral values into collective action. Emerging from the social context of Anatolia, Fethullah Gülen emphasized that meaningful social change begins with the moral and intellectual development of individuals then extends to families, communities, and society as a whole. Influenced by a long tradition of Islamic scholarship, including Said Nursi,¹² he identified ignorance, poverty, and social division as three of the most significant challenges facing society. Rather than advocating primarily political solutions, he encouraged responses centered on education, dialogue, and humanitarian service as complementary mechanisms for strengthening human dignity, mutual understanding, social trust, and peaceful coexistence.¹³ This value-based understanding of civic engagement provides the conceptual bridge to the following section, which examines these three mechanisms as practical tools for peacebuilding and development.

2.3 Education, Dialogue, and Humanitarian Service as Peacebuilding Tools

The pillars of peacebuilding are composed by education, dialogue, and humanitarian service as complementary mechanisms for strengthening peaceful and resilient societies. Rather than functioning independently, these three dimensions reinforce one another by addressing both the structural and human causes of conflict. This conceptual relationship is also reflected in the practices of Fethullah Gülen, who identifies ignorance, poverty, and internal schism as three major challenges confronting society and associates them with education, humanitarian service, and dialogue as interconnected responses.¹⁴ Together, these mechanisms provide a useful framework for understanding how civic engagement may contribute to sustainable peace and development.

¹¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18–28.

¹² Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

¹³ Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*; Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*.

¹⁴ M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004).

Education

Education is widely recognized as one of the most effective and sustainable instruments of peacebuilding. It contributes to conflict prevention by expanding access to knowledge, opportunities, and meaningful participation in society, thereby reducing social exclusion and the inequalities that often contribute to polarization and conflict. UNESCO increasingly frames education as a foundation for lasting peace, emphasizing that learning should equip individuals with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills necessary to become active contributors to peaceful societies.¹⁵ This understanding is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which recognizes inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities as essential foundations for sustainable development, social inclusion, and peaceful societies.¹⁶ Within this perspective, education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge to include moral, civic, and social formation.

This understanding closely aligns with Fethullah Gülen's educational philosophy. Gülen distinguishes between teaching and education, arguing that while "most human beings can be teachers, the number of educators is severely limited." For him, education is not merely the acquisition of academic knowledge but the cultivation of intellectually competent, ethically responsible, and socially conscious individuals. He further describes the ideal educational model as one that combines "the illumination of the mind in science and knowledge" with "the light of the heart in faith and virtue."¹⁷ Within this framework, education serves as a peacebuilding mechanism by reducing ignorance, nurturing character, encouraging responsibility, and preparing individuals to contribute positively to society.

Within the Hizmet Movement, these principles have been translated into educational institutions that foster inclusive societies by integrating academic learning with character formation, family engagement, civic responsibility, and community service. Beyond formal education, these initiatives also promote social empowerment and help mitigate polarization by encouraging dialogue, mutual respect, and active citizenship. The following sections examine selected examples of these educational practices in greater detail.

Dialogue and Community Engagement

Dialogue is a second pillar of contemporary peacebuilding by fostering mutual understanding, reducing prejudice, and strengthening trust across religious, cultural, and ethnic differences. International organizations, including the United Nations, increasingly recognize intercultural and interreligious dialogue as essential for promoting peaceful coexistence, social cohesion, and inclusive societies. This understanding is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16

¹⁵ UNESCO, Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (Paris: UNESCO, 2023).

¹⁶ United Nations, Transforming Our World.

¹⁷ Gülen, Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance; Gülen, Pearls of Wisdom.

(Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), which emphasizes the importance of peaceful and inclusive societies, effective institutions, and participatory decision-making as essential foundations for sustainable development.¹⁸ Rather than viewing dialogue simply as communication, contemporary peacebuilding frameworks emphasize its role in cultivating long-term relationships based on respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility.

Within the Hizmet Movement tradition, dialogue is similarly understood as a disciplined practice grounded in respect for human dignity and the recognition of common humanity. Gülen argues that genuine dialogue requires humility, justice, and sincere efforts to understand others rather than to defeat them in debate. Closely related to this understanding is the Islamic concept of *ta'aruf* (knowing one another), which is interpreted within Hizmet literature as an invitation to build relationships across differences and to strengthen peaceful coexistence through mutual recognition.¹⁹ Community engagement further reinforces this process by transforming shared values into collective civic action, thereby strengthening social trust, participation, and resilience. Today, Hizmet-inspired educational, dialogue, and humanitarian initiatives are active in more than 160 countries, demonstrating how locally driven civic engagement can contribute to global peacebuilding and sustainable development.

Humanitarian Service

Humanitarian service constitutes the third complementary mechanism of peacebuilding because sustainable peace also requires responding to concrete human needs. Contemporary peacebuilding research increasingly recognizes that poverty, exclusion, and inequality are among the structural conditions that contribute to instability and conflict. This understanding also reflects the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which recognize that reducing poverty and hunger, addressing social exclusion, and promoting inclusive societies are essential components of sustainable development and lasting peace.²⁰ Consequently, humanitarian assistance is viewed not only as emergency relief but also as an important contribution to social inclusion, human dignity, and community resilience.

Within the Hizmet Movement, humanitarian service is understood as a practical expression of moral responsibility toward society. Volunteerism, compassion, and service are regarded as ethical obligations rather than activities motivated by material gain. Gülen's writings consistently emphasize that faith should inspire socially beneficial action through education, dialogue, relief

¹⁸ United Nations, Transforming Our World; United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Strategic Plan 2024–2026 (New York: UNAOC, 2024).

¹⁹ Gülen, Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance; Jon Pahl, "The Gülen/Hizmet Movement: A Study in Civic Responsibility and Peacebuilding."

²⁰ United Nations and World Bank, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

efforts, and support for vulnerable communities.²¹ Accordingly, humanitarian service is understood not simply as charitable assistance but as the transformation of shared moral values into collective action that strengthens trust, restores dignity, and contributes to peaceful coexistence.

Taken together, education, dialogue, and humanitarian service illustrate how peacebuilding extends beyond conflict prevention to encompass the long-term cultivation of ethical individuals, inclusive communities, and resilient societies. These three mechanisms provide the conceptual framework for the following chapters' examination of the Hizmet Movement's institutions, initiatives, and contributions to global peace and development.

PART 3: THE HIZMET MOVEMENT — HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

3.1 Historical Emergence and Core Values

The Hizmet Movement, meaning "service" in Turkish, is a transnational, faith-inspired civil society movement rooted in the teachings of Fethullah Gülen (1941–2024), a Turkish Islamic scholar, educator, and writer.²² Though Gülen is widely recognized as the movement's founding intellectual, Hizmet itself operates without a formal hierarchy or central organization, functioning instead as a decentralized network of volunteers, educators, businesspeople, and civil society actors united by a shared ethical and spiritual vision.

The movement's origins can be traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s in Izmir, Türkiye, where Gülen, then working as an Imam, began gathering students and young professionals around the idea that authentic service to humanity was itself an act of worship. Deeply influenced by Said Nursi (1878–1960), a prominent Kurdish-Turkish Islamic thinker who argued for the reconciliation of science and religion, Gülen developed an educational philosophy that positioned moral character formation alongside academic excellence as the twin goals of schooling. In Gülen's worldview, the three great enemies of human society were ignorance, disunity, and poverty, and the solution for all three was education combined with altruistic service.²³

From these modest beginnings, the Hizmet Movement grew rapidly through the 1980s and into the 1990s, largely propelled by Türkiye's economic liberalization, which empowered a new class of devoted Muslims who were social entrepreneurs funding schools and civil society organizations.

²¹ Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*; Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

²² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Fethullah Gülen," last modified 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fethullah-Gulen>; M. Cetin, *The Gülen Movement: Civic Service without Borders* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2010).

²³ Thomas Michel, *Peace and Dialogue in a Plural Society* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2014).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a particularly significant opening: Hizmet volunteers and teachers expanded their civic and formal education institutions to Central Asia and the Balkans, establishing schools in newly independent states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan at a time when these societies were rebuilding educational infrastructure. By the late 1990s, the movement had expanded into Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. At its peak, Hizmet-inspired schools, universities, dialogue centers, and charitable organizations were present in more than 160 countries.²⁴ This expansion represented a new pathway for peacebuilding through education, one driven not by governments or international agencies but by ordinary volunteers committed to service as a spiritual calling.

The movement's core values, as articulated through Gülen's extensive writings and speeches, center on several interlocking principles: the universality of human dignity, the compatibility of Islam with democracy and science, the importance of dialogue across religious and cultural lines, and the duty of the privileged to serve the disadvantaged. Gülen frequently emphasized that Muslims who serve others through teaching, building schools, delivering aid, or fostering understanding are fulfilling a spiritual obligation instead of merely performing a social function. This theological grounding gave Hizmet a distinctive character that set it apart from state-driven development programs and from more politically oriented Islamic movements.²⁵

3.1.1 The Educational Model: STEM, Character, and Global Citizenship

Before examining the movement's global institutions, it is important to understand what made Hizmet schools distinctive as educational environments. Unlike madrasas or faith-based institutions that center on religious curricula, Hizmet schools were entirely secular in their academic programming, offering rigorous, science-centered education that aligned with, and often exceeded, state standards in their host countries. The curriculum emphasized STEM subjects, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as the foundation of a modern education, reflecting Gülen's conviction that scientific literacy and religious faith were complementary. Students at Hizmet schools were expected to engage seriously with the natural sciences, mathematics, and technology as pathways to understanding and improving the world.²⁶

This academic rigor produced measurable results. Hizmet schools became known across Central Asia, Africa, and the Balkans for producing students who excelled in national and international mathematics and science olympiads, outperforming state institutions with far greater resources. In Azerbaijan, graduates consistently ranked among the highest performers in national academic

²⁴ Greg Barton, Paul Weller, and Ihsan Yilmaz, eds., *The Muslim World and Politics in Transition: Creative Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (London: Continuum, 2013).

²⁵ M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

²⁶ Fatih Z. Colak, "Fethullah Gülen's Educational Philosophy as a Core Value of the Hizmet Movement," *Gülen Movement*, 2017, <https://www.gulenmovement.com>.

competitions, and many went on to represent their countries in international olympiads.²⁷ In Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania, Hizmet schools introduced competitive STEM programming in regions where science education had been chronically underfunded, expanding access to rigorous academic training for students who might otherwise have had none.²⁸

Alongside STEM, Hizmet schools were also known for language education and intercultural programming. International Festival of Language and Culture²⁹ (IFLC) is an annual event in which students from around the world perform songs in multiple languages, showcasing poems, speeches, and theatrical pieces in Turkish, English, and local languages, became signature events of Hizmet school culture, drawing families and community members together around a celebration of multilingualism and cultural appreciation.³⁰ The IFLC festivals reflected the movement's understanding that language competency and intercultural openness were not separate from academic excellence but integral to it: a well-educated person was one who could communicate across cultures, not merely solve equations.

Teacher-parent-student triangular relationships are also a deliberate focus; Hizmet teachers are expected to visit families at home, maintain personal knowledge of each student's circumstances, and treat education as a collaborative relationship between the school and the community rather than a transaction between the institution and the student.³¹ This model of holistic, community-embedded education has become one of the movement's most recognizable and celebrated features in its host countries. In alignment with SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, Hizmet schools have demonstrated that civil society actors can deliver transformative education outcomes in environments where state systems have fallen short.³²

3.1.2 The 2016 Purge and Its Aftermath: A Civil Society Movement Under Attack

Understanding Hizmet's global contributions requires confronting the political catastrophe that has reshaped the movement since 2016. On July 15, 2016, a 'failed coup' attempt occurred in an attempt to overthrow the current ruling regime in Türkiye. In the months that followed, the Turkish government launched what Amnesty International described as "a crackdown of exceptional proportions," targeting those it accused of links to the Hizmet Movement, groundlessly associating

²⁷ Gülen Movement, "Graduates' Views on the Effectiveness of Gülen-Inspired Schools in Azerbaijan," 2017, <https://www.gulenmovement.com>.

²⁸ David H. Shinn, *Hizmet in Africa: The Activities and Significance of the Gülen Movement* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2015).

²⁹ International Festival of Language and Culture, <https://intflc.org>

³⁰ Thomas Michel, *Peace and Dialogue in a Plural Society* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2014).

³¹ M. Cetin, *The Gülen Movement: Civic Service without Borders* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2010).

³² United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

the Hizmet Movement with armed terrorism.³³ The movement has unequivocally denied such accusations and any involvement in the coup attempt.³⁴

The scale of what followed was staggering: over 130,000 civil servants purged by emergency decree, over 40,000 people placed in pretrial detention, 22,474 teachers had their licenses revoked, and 1,424 private educational institutions were shut down. Amnesty International documented credible evidence of torture, beatings, rape, and sexual abuse of detainees in this period.³⁵ The Turkish government suspended the European Convention on Human Rights for the duration of the emergency period, removing fundamental legal protections from tens of thousands of people swept up in the purge. Thousands of educators who had spent careers building schools in the world's most underserved communities lost their livelihoods overnight — not through due process or individual investigation, but through collective suspicion and emergency decree.³⁶

3.2 Institutions, Organizations, and Global Networks

Hizmet's institutional landscape is deliberately decentralized. Rather than a single umbrella organization, the movement operates through a constellation of independently registered schools, universities, media outlets, interfaith dialogue centers, and humanitarian foundations, all inspired by a common philosophy but governed locally.³⁷ This structure reflects both a principled commitment to civic pluralism and a practical adaptability to diverse national legal frameworks.

Educational Institutions: At the core of the Hizmet Movement's global footprint are its schools. More than 1,000 Gülen-inspired schools operated across over 160 countries, from Nigeria and Tanzania to India, Australia, and the United States.³⁸ These institutions are secular in their curricula, following state-mandated programs in their host countries, but are distinguished by their STEM focus, character education, and intercultural programming. In addition to formal schools, Hizmet Movement-affiliated foundations established tutoring centers and reading rooms, particularly in underserved regions in southeastern Türkiye and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, offering free academic support to youth who might otherwise have had no access to quality education.³⁹ Following the countrywide purge across all civil and academic spheres, the majority of Hizmet-affiliated schools worldwide were arbitrarily transferred to the state-controlled Maarif

³³ Amnesty International UK, *Turkey: A Crackdown of Exceptional Proportions* (London: Amnesty International UK, 2016).

³⁴ Alliance for Shared Values, "July 15 Coup Attempt and Its Aftermath," accessed July 14, 2026, <https://afsv.org/>.

³⁵ Amnesty International UK, *Turkey: A Crackdown of Exceptional Proportions*.

³⁶ Stockholm Center for Freedom, *Mass Purge in Turkey* (2025); Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST), *Annual Report*(2025).

³⁷ Joshua D. Hendrick, *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

³⁸ David H. Shinn, *Hizmet in Africa: The Activities and Significance of the Gülen Movement* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2015); Gülen Movement, "Graduates' Views on the Effectiveness of Gülen-Inspired Schools in Azerbaijan," 2017, <https://www.gulenmovement.com>.

³⁹ Gülen Movement, "Graduates' Views on the Effectiveness of Gülen-Inspired Schools in Azerbaijan," 2017, <https://www.gulenmovement.com>.

Foundation.⁴⁰ In 2024 alone, schools in Kyrgyzstan and Burkina Faso were confiscated under diplomatic pressure by the Turkish government, stripping those communities of the civil society-rooted education model they had hosted for decades.⁴¹

Humanitarian Organizations: Kimse Yok Mu ("Is Anybody There?") was founded in 2002 and grew into one of Türkiye's largest and most operationally sophisticated relief organizations, active in 90 countries across five program areas⁴²: emergency disaster relief, in-kind humanitarian assistance, educational scholarships, sister-family sponsorships, and long-term development projects. Forcibly dissolved by the Turkish government in 2016, its humanitarian mission has continued through successor organizations — primarily Embrace Relief (U.S.-based) and Time to Help (Europe-based).⁴³

Dialogue and Civil Society Organizations: The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), established in Istanbul in 1994, became a leading platform for interfaith and intercultural dialogue working towards the culture of peace, sustainable development, and human rights. In 2012, JWF became the first organization from Türkiye to receive General Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁴⁴ JWF moved its Headquarters to New York in 2014 and registered as a New York-based non-governmental organization. Now affiliated with the UN Department of Global Communications, JWF continues to create forums for intellectual engagement, generate knowledge on the UN priorities with stakeholders, build partnerships worldwide, and develop policy recommendations for timely and gender-sensitive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴⁵ Internationally, the movement's dialogue ecosystem includes the Niagara Foundation in Chicago, the Pacifica Institute in California, Dialogue Institute in Texas, the Cosmicus Foundation in the Netherlands, the Australian Intercultural Society in Australia, and many others. Together, these organizations constitute a global civil society network oriented toward intercultural understanding and conflict prevention and aim to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals on local and global levels.

Hizmet-affiliated civil society organizations (CSOs) have contributed to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in concrete, measurable ways. Through the Abant Platform, the JWF brought together people from diverse backgrounds, including secularists, Islamists, Kurds, Turks, and

⁴⁰ Stockholm Center for Freedom, *Forced Transfer of Hizmet-Affiliated Schools to the Maarif Foundation* (2024).

⁴¹ Stockholm Center for Freedom, *Kyrgyzstan and Burkina Faso Schools Confiscated become a leading platform for interfaith and intercultural dialogue, working towards acated under Turkish Government Pressure*(2024).

⁴² Ali Kaya, "Third World Development: Case of Kimse Yok Mu? Solidarity and Aid Association as a Muslim Initiative," 2014.

⁴³ Alliance for Shared Values, "Humanitarian Aid," accessed July 14, 2026, <https://afsv.org/activities/humanitarian-aid/>.

⁴⁴ Journalists and Writers Foundation, "JWF Gained General Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)" <https://jwf.org/jwf-gained-general-consultative-status-with-economic-and-social-council-ecosoc/focus/sustainable-development/>.

⁴⁵ Journalists and Writers Foundation. "Journalists and Writers Foundation." <https://jwf.org>.

members of various faith communities to discuss some of Türkiye's most contested political and social questions, establishing a model for structured civil society dialogue in an environment where such dialogue had historically been suppressed. The movement's dialogue centers across five continents have organized thousands of interfaith events, academic symposia, and community service projects that build the kind of personal trust between people of different backgrounds that formal peace agreements cannot manufacture. This grassroots, relationship-driven approach to peacebuilding is precisely what Lederach (1997) identifies as essential to sustainable peace and precisely what SDG 16 calls for when it envisions "peaceful and inclusive societies" built through the participation of civil society.⁴⁶

PART 4: CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

While earlier sections examined the Hizmet Movement's historical development, institutions, and global initiatives through academic literature and institutional examples, the next part complements these findings with qualitative interviews conducted for this research. These interviews provide firsthand perspectives from individuals directly involved in Hizmet-inspired educational, humanitarian, dialogue, and community-based initiatives.

Participants came from diverse professional, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, including researchers, civil society leaders, volunteers, executive directors, and graduates of Hizmet Movement schools. They represented the United States, India, South Africa, the Netherlands, Greece, and Afghanistan, allowing this research to examine the movement from a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

The interviews were analyzed and grouped based on common themes rather than individual experiences alone. Accordingly, the following sections combine academic literature with participants' perspectives to examine the Hizmet Movement's contributions to education, humanitarian service, interfaith dialogue, community engagement, and peacebuilding.

4.1 Educational Contributions and Youth Empowerment

Education has always been the Hizmet Movement's primary instrument of social change. Throughout his lifetime, Fethullah Gülen advocated for "building schools instead of mosques", a conviction that the formation of knowledgeable, ethically grounded, and internationally minded young people is the most sustainable path to peace.⁴⁷ This philosophy translated into a global educational legacy spanning continents and generations, directly aligned with SDG 4: Quality Education's vision of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

⁴⁶ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 1997) schools affiliated with the Hizmet Movement.

⁴⁷ M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004).

Hizmet Movement schools transformed the educational landscape in many of the communities they entered, particularly in regions where access to quality schooling was disproportionately limited. In sub-Saharan Africa, Ambassador David Shinn's landmark study *Hizmet in Africa* (2015) documented more than 95 Gülen-inspired primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions offering rigorous academic programming across both North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁸ Many of these schools served the first generation of students in their families to receive quality formal education, and offered scholarships to students from families in dire financial need — removing the economic barriers that prevent the most vulnerable children from accessing learning. The movement's scholarship programs, funded by a network of Hizmet-affiliated donors and businesses, covered tuition, boarding, and materials for thousands of students across Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, prioritizing those with demonstrated academic potential but no means to pursue it.

In terms of outcomes, these investments consistently distinguished Hizmet Movement schools from their peers. Students at Hizmet schools in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, and Tanzania earned top placements in national academic competitions and international mathematics and science olympiads, demonstrating that the movement's model was not merely aspirational but rigorously effective.⁴⁹ Language festivals brought communities together around intercultural celebration, and teacher-parent relationships, sustained through home visits and ongoing communication- ensured that students' full circumstances were known and supported by their educators.

What distinguishes Hizmet's educational model beyond academics is the deliberate cultivation of values alongside intellect. Schools operated on the premise that students should graduate not merely as competent professionals but as ethical citizens capable of contributing to pluralistic, peaceful societies. The curriculum was strictly secular and state-compliant, but supported by an ethos of tolerance, hard work, respect for diversity, and service. Research on Hizmet Movement school principals in South Africa found that teachers and administrators treated classroom design, home visits, structured values programming, and cross-cultural events as deliberate tools for building tolerance, recognizing that schools are among the few institutions capable of shaping the attitudes of the next generation before social divisions harden.⁵⁰

Youth empowerment within Hizmet also takes place through structured mentorship and community-building programs. Young volunteers participate in informal mentorship gatherings that serve as pedagogical settings where they discuss ideas, build community, and internalize the movement's values of service and empathy. These structured mentorship platforms have been

⁴⁸ David H. Shinn, *Hizmet in Africa: The Activities and Significance of the Gülen Movement* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ Gülen Movement, "Graduates' Views on the Effectiveness of Gülen-Inspired Schools in Azerbaijan," <https://www.gulenmovement.com>; David H. Shinn, *Hizmet in Africa*,.

⁵⁰ Ahmet Cetin and Charlene Smith, *Hizmet Movement School Principals' Perception of Tolerance and Its Impact on Tolerance Education Practices in South African Hizmet Schools* (2019).

documented as significant socialization tools, providing young volunteers with a sense of belonging, ethical orientation, and motivation for civic engagement. In underserved urban and rural communities, free tutoring centers and reading rooms staffed by Hizmet volunteers served as pipelines for first-generation university students, particularly in regions of southeastern Türkiye and parts of Africa where formal educational infrastructure was inaccessible.

The movement's commitment to education as a peacebuilding strategy aligns closely with Lederach's (1997) multi-track peacebuilding model, which identifies grassroots civil society actors, including educators, as indispensable to sustainable peace.⁵¹ Whereas governments and international organizations tend to operate at the level of formal agreements and institutions, movements like Hizmet work at the level of individual character formation, community trust, and cultural exchange, precisely the level at which durable peace is built and maintained.

Regardless of their country or professional background, interviewees consistently described education as the foundation of the Hizmet Movement's efforts to promote peace, social responsibility, and long-term community development. Rather than focusing solely on academic success, participants agreed that Hizmet-inspired education also promotes character development and service to society.

One of the strongest and most memorable examples of the Hizmet Movement's impact on education came from T.P., an Afghan graduate of Hizmet-inspired schools who witnessed firsthand their transformative role in Afghanistan. Based on her personal experience, she described education as the movement's most important contribution to Afghan society. She explained, "It expanded opportunities for people inside the country and opened doors that would not have existed otherwise." T.P. added that the values she learned in middle and high school have shaped how she sees the world today. According to T.P., the Hizmet Movement's educational philosophy goes far beyond academic achievement. She claimed that the schools encouraged students to excel academically and to become individuals who value community, responsibility, and humanity. This view reflects the Hizmet Movement's approach to education, which encompasses more than academic achievement; it also emphasizes having morals and being a good person. She also mentioned the influence of her teachers, recalling that they constantly encouraged her to think about how she could help her people and contribute to society. T.P. added that, thanks to her experience, she learned to think not only about herself but also about the broader community she is part of. This perspective reflects the Hizmet Movement's combination of humanitarian aid and education. She explained that her civic responsibility and global awareness have improved in Hizmet-inspired schools thanks to her teachers.

In addition to T.P.'s experiences and views, Dr. Alp Aslandogan, Executive Director of the Alliance for Shared Values (AFSV), supported her points, saying, "People see that those running

⁵¹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 1997).

Hizmet-inspired schools are genuinely interested in providing an excellent educational experience and in helping children develop their character." He also explained that what attracted him to Hizmet was not only its focus on inner spiritual development but also its vision of contributing to solving society's problems. He added that people were not simply talking about problems; they were discussing what was possible and what they could do to solve them. According to Aslandogan, "Behind the spread of Hizmet is living the values," emphasizing that the movement's influence comes from putting its principles into practice.

Similarly, Dr. Rajendran Govender, Commissioner at the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) in South Africa, confirms their statements and adds, "I have witnessed educational initiatives that provide academic excellence and cultivate ethical leadership, social responsibility, and global citizenship." He further explained that the greatest contribution of the Hizmet Movement is not only found in its institutions but also in its people. He described volunteerism as one of the movement's defining characteristics and a main reason for its global impact. These observations further support the idea that Hizmet's educational initiatives are closely connected with ethical values and service to humanity.⁵²

4.2 Humanitarian Assistance and Social Solidarity

Hizmet's humanitarian work is grounded in the theological principle that serving a human being, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, or nationality, is an act of worship. This universalism has been one of the movement's defining characteristics and a key reason for its effectiveness in building relationships across community lines.

Today, Embrace Relief⁵³ stands as one of the most prominent Hizmet-affiliated humanitarian organizations operating internationally. Founded in 2008 and registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in the United States, Embrace Relief carries forward the tradition of Kimse Yok Mu with a focus on research-based, sustainable programming across five major areas: health, clean water, education, food security, and women's empowerment. Its record across these areas offers a compelling illustration of what faith-inspired humanitarian organizations can accomplish when they combine volunteer commitment with professional program design.

In delivering health services, contributing to the implementation of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), Embrace Relief has deployed volunteer medical teams to conduct health clinics and perform free cataract surgeries for patients in Mali who lack access to basic health services in regions of extreme poverty. Mobile health units have been dispatched to remote communities across sub-Saharan Africa, providing medical check-ups, essential medications, and health education to populations with no regular access to healthcare. In 2025, Embrace USA, Embrace

⁵² Alliance for Shared Values, "Board of Directors," accessed July 14, 2026, <https://afsv.org/about-us/board-of-directors/>.

⁵³ <https://www.embracerelief.org>

Relief's domestic initiative, partnered with the Pacifica Institute to provide food, water, and blankets to survivors of the January 2025 California wildfires, and partnered with the American Red Cross following Hurricanes Milton and Helene in late 2024, demonstrating a model of humanitarian response that operates domestically as well as internationally.⁵⁴

Contributing to access to clean water, which is aligned with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Embrace Relief has constructed over 350 water wells across Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Kenya, Chad, and other countries, providing clean, safe water to over 315,000 people daily. The organization's "Fountains of Hope" project, which reconstructs abandoned water wells across Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, won third place among more than 60 entries at the Journalists and Writers Foundation's Pioneers in SDGs 2023 Awards, a recognition that places Embrace Relief's water programming within the broader context of global SDG implementation efforts.⁵⁵ These water projects are designed for long-term sustainability, not short-term emergency relief, reflecting a development philosophy rooted in lasting community impact rather than one-time intervention.

Embrace Relief also prioritizes youth engagement as a core organizational principle. Its Student Club program operates at high schools and universities across the United States, connecting young people with hands-on humanitarian projects through mentorship, fundraising, and international service trips. Student Club members have organized fundraising festivals and traveled to Uganda to contribute directly to community projects, gaining firsthand experience in humanitarian service and developing the kind of global civic awareness that the SDG framework identifies as essential to building the next generation of development leaders.⁵⁶ Through its Group FUNdraising program, youth teams can choose a humanitarian cause, raise funds, and travel internationally to see their efforts implemented in the communities they have supported.

Embrace Relief has distributed over 1.5 million pounds of food in more than 40 countries, served 935,000 families through hunger relief initiatives, and provided vocational training to women in Kenya and Haiti, teaching jewelry-making, sewing, and personal finance to enable economic independence.⁵⁷ These programs connect directly to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Health), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water), demonstrating that Hizmet-affiliated humanitarian organizations operate across the full spectrum of the UN's global development framework.

Historically, Kimse Yok Mu, the predecessor organization forcibly dissolved by the Turkish government in 2016, exemplified this same comprehensive model. Its operations spanned emergency disaster relief following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake,

⁵⁴ Embrace Relief. "Embrace USA Disaster Relief." <https://www.embracerelief.org>.

⁵⁵ Embrace Relief. "Fountains of Hope." <https://www.embracerelief.org>.

⁵⁶ Embrace Relief. "Student Club." <https://www.embracerelief.org>; United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

⁵⁷ North America Civic Platform (NACP). "Humanitarian Relief & Aid." <https://www.nacplatform.org/humanitarian-relief-efforts>.

and major floods across South Asia, as well as long-term development projects including the construction of the Deva Research and Training Hospital in Somalia, a 60-bed facility that became a critical healthcare institution for the region.⁵⁸ The dissolution of Kimse Yok Mu by emergency decree, while the organization was actively running programs in 90 countries, represents a concrete and measurable regression in global humanitarian capacity. Communities that lost their support did so not because the organization failed, but because a government decided to destroy it.

Participants described humanitarian service not only as emergency relief but also as an expression of compassion, solidarity, and responsibility toward society. Instead of focusing on short-term support, they emphasized building long-lasting relationships, addressing community needs, and serving humanity regardless of religion, ethnicity, or cultural background.

Hüsne Türkan, a volunteer at PIGI KOINSEP, a Greek-based civil society organization, described humanitarian service as a natural part of the Hizmet Movement's identity. Reflecting on the experiences of Hizmet-affiliated volunteers who had to leave Türkiye due to persecution, she explained, "From the very first days we arrived in Greece, we tried to make sure that no one was left alone or homeless." She added, "When new refugees [Hizmet volunteers] arrived, we opened our homes, shared our clothes, and shared our food." According to Türkan, "Community service is part of our character. We don't know how to remain passive when there is a need around us."

Türkan also shared the reactions of Greek society. Following humanitarian initiatives, local residents expressed their appreciation by saying, "This level of solidarity is something we rarely experience here," and "We are not used to seeing this kind of volunteerism and cooperation." These observations suggest that the movement's humanitarian efforts not only addressed immediate needs but also strengthened trust between different communities.

Similarly, Necibe Çetintaş, Dialogue Coordinator at the SECU Foundation in the Netherlands, a nonprofit organization dedicated to education, intercultural dialogue, refugee support, and community engagement, was honored with the Dutch Order of Orange-Nassau for her contributions to society. She emphasized that the movement's dialogue initiatives and humanitarian projects "help people understand one another and build bridges between cultures." According to Çetintaş, these activities bring together people from different backgrounds and create opportunities for mutual understanding and dialogue. The idea of building bridges emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews, with participants from different countries associating the Hizmet Movement with connecting people across cultural, religious, and social differences.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ali Kaya, "Third World Development: Case of Kimse Yok Mu? Solidarity and Aid Association as a Muslim Initiative," 2014; [Turquoise.org](https://turquoise.org), "Why Hizmet Can Answer the World's Most Compelling Problem: Religious Violence," 2021, <https://turquoise.org.za/2021/01>.

⁵⁹ "Dutch Royal Honor Awarded to Volunteer Wanted in Turkey over Gülen Links," *Turkish Minute*, April 30, 2026, accessed July 14, 2026, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2026/04/30/dutch-royal-honor-awarded-to-volunteer-wanted-in-turkey-over-gulen-links/>.

Furthermore, Behzad Fatmi, Executive Director of Indialogue Foundation in India, emphasized that humanitarian service reflects a broader commitment. He argued, "In this fragmented world, we need people who are selfless and dedicated not only to their communities but to humanity." He explained that the Hizmet Movement represents "a mission and a vision for a balanced life" and argued that its ideas are not limited to theory but are put into practice through education, interfaith dialogue, and humanitarian work. He further stated, "Hizmet is not to serve Islam or the Muslim community only; it is to serve humanity." These perspectives support the idea that humanitarian service within the Hizmet Movement is grounded in universal values of compassion, solidarity, and selfless service.⁶⁰

Taken together, the interviews suggest that humanitarian assistance is understood not only as responding to immediate needs but also as building lasting relationships based on trust, compassion, and shared responsibility. Across different cultural and professional backgrounds, participants consistently described service to humanity as one of the Hizmet Movement's most significant contributions to peacebuilding and social development.

4.3 Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding Efforts

Among all Hizmet's contributions to global peace, its dialogue initiatives are perhaps the most philosophically distinctive. In a world where religious, cultural and racial differences continue to be weaponized as a justification for violence, the movement has consistently advanced the proposition that genuine engagement across faiths, not merely coexistence, but active, relationship-building dialogue, is both spiritually required and politically essential.

Fethullah Gülen's personal commitment to interfaith dialogue⁶¹ was demonstrated through high-profile meetings with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican⁶² (1998), Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, and Israeli Sephardic Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, among others. These encounters reflected a theological conviction, grounded in Sufi traditions and the teachings of Said Nursi, that all human beings are worthy of respect and relationship, and that the perceived clash between Islam and the West was a failure of understanding rather than an inevitable civilizational conflict.⁶³

Since its establishment, the Journalists and Writers Foundation has carried out significant global work to promote the culture of peace and empower inclusive societies. In 2012, JWF became the first organization from Türkiye to receive General Consultative Status with the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This affiliation enabled the JWF to empower its 56 Global Partners

⁶⁰ Behzad Fatmi, "Author Profile," In Dialogue, accessed July 14, 2026, <https://indialogue.in/author/behzad-fatmigmail-com/>.

⁶¹ <https://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life-en/meeting-with-the-pope-john-paul-ii/fethullah-gulen-and-the-pope>

⁶² <https://jwf.org/gulen-meets-with-christian-and-jewish-leaders-to-advocate-dialogue-tolerance/focus/peace/>

⁶³ Nexus Magazine and University of Haifa, "Fethullah Gülen and Interfaith Dialogue in Times of Crisis," 2025, <https://nexus.haifa.ac.il>.

from 30 countries by creating forums to showcase their respective civil society best practices, working on most of the SDGs, and providing policy recommendations on the sidelines of UN meetings and conventions.

Some of the JWF's flagship initiatives include the Annual SDGs Conference: In the Margins of the UN General Assembly⁶⁴. This multi-stakeholder platform generates inclusive policy suggestions to address setbacks in the stagnating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs Conference also unfolds key thematic discussions aligned with broader global development frameworks, offering an opportunity to revive multilateralism with the mission of reflecting the realities of our day and address future challenges and opportunities. The 3-Days of UNGA Actions, co-facilitated by the JWF and its 56 Global Partners, include a High-Level Reception, SDGs Roundtables, and the signature SDGs Conference, convening multidisciplinary development stakeholders, academics, civil society leaders, journalists, and human rights defenders to promote inclusive action-oriented strategies on diverse themes around the pillars of multilateralism and human rights while addressing contemporary challenges of our time. JWF also proactively participates in and mobilizes its stakeholders during the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings and organizes annual Media and Journalism Webinars and the Global Youth Leadership Program.^{65 66}

Journalists and Writers Foundation's work on the culture of peace and on promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue was recognized with the prestigious Bronze Medal⁶⁷, presented by King Abdullah II of Jordan, as part of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2024 initiative. In 2024, over 1,180 events were held globally to promote peace, harmony, and dialogue among people of diverse faiths. The Journalists and Writers Foundation received this global recognition for its projects: Creating A Safe Space for Interfaith Dialogue and Global Voices: Youth Interfaith Digital Storytelling Campaign, which foster unity and interfaith dialogue through digital stories.

Independent researchers and academics who have studied the Hizmet Movement have consistently recognized its significance for global peace. Esposito and Yilmaz (2010) conclude that the movement builds meaningful connections across communities and religions, the kind of cross-cultural trust essential to preventing and resolving conflict.⁶⁸ Bagu (2015), a conflict studies researcher, argues that Hizmet's model of dialogue and service has real potential to reduce religious violence across societies worldwide.⁶⁹ Abu-Nimer (2003), whose work examines Islamic traditions of nonviolent peacebuilding, identifies compassion, justice, and respect for human life

⁶⁴ SDGs Conference: In the Margins of the UNGA; <https://unga-conference.org>

⁶⁵ JWF Official website; <https://jwf.org/>

⁶⁶ JWF Academy website; <https://jwfacademy.org>

⁶⁷ <https://jwf.org/jwf-wins-third-prize-and-bronze-medal/jwf-2024-events/>

⁶⁸ John L. Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ Kandakai J. Bagu, "Plurality, Peacebuilding and Islam: Gulen Optimism and the Cognitive Justice Prism" (SSRN working paper, 2015), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2613974>.

as the core principles of this tradition, precisely the values that Hizmet has translated into schools, humanitarian programs, and dialogue centers on every continent.⁷⁰

Interviewees described dialogue as one of the Hizmet Movement's main contributions to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Rather than viewing dialogue as simple communication, they emphasized its role in bringing together people from different cultures, religions, and backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and building trust across communities.

Necibe Çetintaş stated that dialogue creates opportunities for people from different backgrounds to connect. She shared a practical example from her own experience, stating, "For four years, we have organized daily iftar programs that bring together people from different religions, cultures, and backgrounds around the same table." According to Çetintaş, "Building bridges between people of different faiths and backgrounds is one of the most meaningful contributions we can make to society."

Behzad Fatmi shared a similar perspective, emphasizing that Hizmet's willingness to engage with diverse cultures has been one of its greatest strengths. As he stated, "This openness to learning from other cultures has contributed significantly to Hizmet's success." His perspective suggests that dialogue is based not only on sharing one's own values but also on learning from others through mutual respect and understanding.

Dr. Rajendran Govender also highlighted the movement's inclusive nature. He explained, "Although Fethullah Gülen was an Islamic scholar, the values and principles he promoted are for humanity as a whole, not for one particular religious group." His remarks support the idea that the movement's dialogue initiatives are grounded in universal values that encourage cooperation across different religious and cultural communities. Taken together, the interviews suggest that participants view dialogue as more than conversation. They described it as a practical way to build trust, strengthen relationships, and promote peaceful coexistence across different communities.

4.4 Women and Youth: Initiatives, Programs, and Community Engagement

Women and youth are not only peripheral to the Hizmet Movement's mission but, in many respects, its engine. Women have constituted a significant proportion of the movement's volunteer base since its earliest days, serving as teachers, administrators, community organizers, and donors. The Hizmet Movement community structure reflects an organizational model in which women hold authority as mentors and are expected to shape the moral development of younger members.

In educational terms, the Hizmet Movement's investment in girls' education has been particularly notable in challenging environments. Volunteers established schools for girls in Afghanistan during the Taliban period, in northern Iraq, and across parts of sub-Saharan Africa where girls' access to formal education remained severely restricted. These initiatives were driven by the

⁷⁰ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

conviction that educating women is among the highest-impact investments a society can make, a position fully consistent with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and its emphasis on ensuring equal access to education for women and girls.⁷¹ Embrace Relief's RISE program⁷² continues this tradition today, offering an educational leadership and management program and a young women's higher education program in Tanzania, with the goal of encouraging women to pursue education and empowering them to drive positive change in their societies (NACP Platform). Research by Gokturk⁷³ documenting women teachers at Gülen community schools in Türkiye found that the movement created a distinct space for religiously conservative women to assume public professional roles, functioning as teachers and school leaders, in a society that had struggled with gender inequality. In this context, Hizmet Movement's schools served as a vehicle for gender-based social change.

Beyond volunteer service and school-based engagement, Hizmet has developed structured, institutional mentorship programs aimed at the long-term professional and civic development of young people. The most notable of these is the Young Professionals network, a sustained mentorship initiative that connects early-career individuals with experienced professionals across fields including education, medicine, law, and business. Unlike short-term project-based programs, Young Professionals operates as an ongoing community of practice: mentees receive guidance on career development, ethical leadership, and civic responsibility, while mentors draw on the Hizmet tradition of senior-to-junior mentorship culture central to the movement since its earliest days. This model of institutional mentorship reflects a deliberate investment in human development that extends well beyond the classroom, recognizing that sustainable peace and development are ultimately built by the quality of people within a society, not just the institutions around them. In this respect, Hizmet's youth development work aligns directly with SDG 4's goal of equipping young people with the knowledge, values, and skills needed for active global citizenship.⁷⁴

Across the United States, Hizmet-affiliated organizations have developed youth-focused programming that reflects this same commitment to civic formation and intercultural engagement. The Niagara Foundation, headquartered in Chicago with branches across nine Midwestern states, organizes intercultural trips, leadership forums, and community service events specifically designed to bring together young people of different faiths and backgrounds, building the interpersonal relationships that sustain pluralistic civic life [36]. The Rumi Forum in Washington, D.C., founded in 1999, similarly centers youth and emerging leaders in its programming, hosting

⁷¹ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

⁷² Embrace Relief, "RISE (Reach, Inspire, Support, Educate)," <https://www.embracerelief.org>.

⁷³ Dilek Gokturk, *Women Teachers at the Gülen Community Schools in Turkey: An Ethnographic Study* (PhD diss., Purdue University, n.d.), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI3669228>.

⁷⁴ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015) implemented in American communities, contributing to social cohesion and interfaith understanding at home and

panel discussions, community iftars, and interfaith engagement events that connect young professionals across Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities in the greater D.C. area [37]. The Pacifica Institute, operating across the West Coast, organizes youth dialogue programs and community service initiatives in California, Washington, and Texas. Collectively, these U.S.-based organizations demonstrate that Hizmet's model of youth civic development is not limited to the developing world, it is actively being implemented in American communities, contributing to social cohesion and interfaith understanding at home as well as abroad.

5.1 Overall Conclusions

This report explores the Hizmet Movement's contributions to global peace and development by analyzing academic literature, institutional examples, and qualitative interviews. The findings demonstrate that Hizmet-inspired initiatives contribute to global peace and sustainable development through education, humanitarian service, dialogue, and civic engagement. These contributions correspond closely with several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The research revealed that education, humanitarian service, dialogue, and civic engagement are the primary contributions of the Hizmet Movement to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Both the literature and the interviews emphasized that Hizmet-inspired initiatives not only provide education and humanitarian assistance but also promote social responsibility, mutual understanding, and community engagement. Participants from different countries shared similar experiences, suggesting that these values are reflected in various cultural and social contexts.

The interviews also showed that the movement's long-term influence is related to its focus on volunteerism and service. Rather than focusing solely on institutions, interviewees repeatedly emphasized the people behind those institutions and their commitment to putting shared values into practice. This commitment to action was considered one of the movement's defining characteristics.

The findings also reinforce the broader argument presented throughout this report: sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through governments or international organizations but requires the active engagement of civil society and local communities. As contemporary societies continue to face polarization, inequality, displacement, and declining social trust, community-based initiatives that foster education, dialogue, humanitarian service, and civic participation become increasingly important for strengthening social cohesion and building resilient societies.

While the Hizmet Movement represents only one example of a faith-inspired civil society initiative, the practices examined in this report demonstrate how values-based civic engagement can help address global challenges through peaceful, voluntary, and inclusive action. In this

respect, the movement offers a practical example of how education, humanitarian service, and intercultural dialogue can complement broader international efforts to advance peace and sustainable development.

In conclusion, this report's findings suggest that the Hizmet Movement makes significant contributions to peacebuilding and development through education, humanitarian service, dialogue, and civic engagement. While this report focuses on selected aspects of the movement, it is clear that community-based initiatives grounded in voluntary service foster stronger social cohesion, greater mutual understanding, and more peaceful societies.



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