



## Press release Conflict Barometer 2008

### Heidelberg institute: Number of highly-violent conflicts rising

Heidelberg, December 15, 2008. With the publication of the "Conflict Barometer 2008", the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) has presented its latest data and analyses concerning events and developments in the world of conflict this year. Out of a total number of 345 conflicts monitored, the political scientists have counted 39 highly violent disputes, including nine wars. In addition, 95 violent crises were counted, i.e. conflict seeing a sporadic use of violence. Last year the number of highly violent conflicts had been considerably lower with 32 cases, among them six wars, presenting a significant deescalation compared to 2006. Thus the situation has considerably deteriorated in 2008, even though the majority of conflicts (i.e. 211) were conducted peacefully.

The Middle East and Maghreb, and Africa, each accounted for three out of this year's nine wars, followed by two wars fought in Asia, and one in Europe, that is, the crisis between Russia and Georgia, which escalated to war in August. Unlike this new and very brief war, four of these wars were already conducted with this extreme use of force in 2006 and 2007, i.e. the conflict between the Taliban and the western-supported government of Afghanistan as well as the conflicts in Darfur (Sudan), Somalia, and Sri Lanka. The crisis in Darfur between African rebel groups and the Arab-dominated government, supported by Arab militias, has been conducted on the level of a war for the fifth year running. This conflict is led with a marked use of cruelty not least towards the civilian population. Further, almost half of this year's serious crises have been fought out on this high level of violence since last year already. This indicates an alarming process of hardening in many highly violent conflicts.

The world's most affected regions are Africa, the Middle East and Maghreb, as well as Asia and Oceania. The number of highly-violent conflicts in Africa has risen from nine last year to twelve, including three wars. There is a contiguous crisis zone ranging from Chad over Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya to the DR Congo, where a number of highly-violent conflicts and numerous crises are fatally interlocked and reciprocally adding to each other's intensity. Afghanistan and Iraq remained flashpoints of violence in the Middle East and Maghreb. Northern Iraq also is the scene of a war between Turkey and Kurdish rebels. Asia and Oceania's worst affected crisis region borders immediately on Afghanistan: In Pakistan, Islamists and various tribes are leading a war against the government, and Sunnites and Shiites are fighting each other with a great amount of violence. In the Indian-Pakistani border region of Kashmir, disputed by these two nuclear powers, separatists are using massive violence against the Indian government. Immense troop contingents face each other, which have been involved in an hours-long shootout this year. Tensions along the border increased in the wake of the devastating Mumbai terrorist attacks when it emerged that the attackers had come from Pakistan. Additionally, a number of highly violent conflicts raged in northeast India, and off India's southeast coast the war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan government has reached its third year on this intensity level.

The most obvious escalation, however, has occurred in Europe, where there were no highly violent conflicts whatsoever last year as opposed to four in 2008. The Georgian government's attempt at regaining control over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia in a major offensive met with a Russian invasion stopping short of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. Separatist militias in Abkhazia stepped up their struggle in the wake of the intervention. In addition, Islamist separatists in Russia's Caucasus republics, especially Ingushetia, have been conducting terrorists attacks on a regular basis.

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