Our world – an increasingly peaceful place
14 January 2014, by Annica Hulth

"Of course it is controversial to make a prognosis such as this, and naturally there are many factors that may change, but our model builds on extensive research and conflict data from between 1946 and 2012 from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project."

One of the most important developments is that global poverty is decreasing. This also means fewer conflicts, since countries with high poverty, low education and young populations are at greater risk of becoming involved in conflicts.

More than half of the world's conflicts during 2012 were in the poorest quarter of all countries.

"There are several reasons for that. Poverty is an incentive for conflict and can lead to uprisings. It is also easy to recruit soldiers in countries with many poor, and the elite loses less from the economic effects of the conflict. That is why decreased poverty is one of the most important factors in our model."

Another factor is the so-called 'conflict trap'. The longer there has been peace in a country, the lower the risk of war.

"Conflicts feed conflicts and peace nurtures peace. Five years after a conflict the risk of a new conflict is five times greater than before the conflict. Every year of peace makes a difference", says Håvard Hegre.

Here too, a positive development can be seen. In 2012 the world's countries had seen on average 42 years of peace, which can be compared to an average of 27 years in 1960.

"Since we have had a trend of decreasing conflicts for the last 20 years, we can be optimistic about the coming 40 years."

Another important factor is that the attitudes towards violence and conflicts has changed, according to Håvard Hegre.
"The war between the US and Vietnam would not have been possible today. That was only 40 years ago, and since then there has been a dramatic change in our attitude towards use of violence."

However, another type of conflict is on the rise, which has not been possible to predict using the model that the researchers have developed: In countries such as Syria and Libya, demands for democratisation have caused violent conflicts.

"We must add democratisation to our model to give a better prognosis. This means we need to be able to predict changes to political systems over the coming years, which increases complexity."

In the long run, democratisation is a process which strengthens peace. It tends to bring increased levels of education, reduced poverty and higher incomes. So in spite of these new conflicts, the prognosis of fewer wars around the world remains.

"The media are conflict oriented and their selection is not representative. There is great focus on the conflict in Syria, but not much is being written about Colombia where the conflict is almost over", says Håvard Hegre.

Provided by Uppsala University