# Foreword

*Cedric de Coning*

In this first volume of 2026, the AJCR features four articles and a book review covering bottom-up peace and development, the exclusion of women from peace processes, security-sector reform and the relationship between peacebuilding and stabilisation. Geographically, this edition covers Lesotho and Zimbabwe in southern Africa and Liberia in west Africa.

Munyayiwashe Shumba, Shadreck Khanye and Vitalis Sibanda look at how grassroots peacebuilding, particularly through Local Peace Committees established by the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum, has contributed to development and social stability in the Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe. The article engages with broader African debates on how locally driven development can contribute to peace and stability, especially in the absence of strong state intervention.

Everjoy Magwegwe and Prince Zimuto write about the exclusion of women from formal peace negotiations in the context of Liberia. They show that even when women possess significant conflict-resolution experience and leadership skills, they remain relegated to observer status in formal negotiations and propose enforceable participation quotas and gender-sensitive peacebuilding guidelines to transform symbolic inclusion into substantive participation.

Bokang Moshoeshoe writes about security-sector reform in Lesotho. He argues that a recent amendment of the constitution of Lesotho introduces important procedural reforms in relation to appointments, oversight mechanisms and professional standards. However, it does not fundamentally alter the concentration of authority within the executive. He finds that the reforms align with international

and regional norms on democratic security-sector governance yet fall short of achieving meaningful structural transformation.

Andrew E. Yaw Tchie writes about finding the balance between peacebuilding and stabilisation in African-led interventions. He argues that African-led interventions have over-emphasised stabilisation. He calls on the African Union and others to re-think the role of peacebuilding and to build on existing policies to ensure that future operations address the underlying drivers of conflict. This will result in more sustainable, context-specific, locally grounded and adaptive African-led peace operations.

Finally, we conclude this edition with a review of Marija Todorova and Lucía Ruiz Rosendo's 2025 *The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict* by Jiaqi Zhu, Yang Yao and Qiujun Su. Through a wide range of historical and contemporary case studies, the book demonstrates how language mediation shapes military operations, humanitarian interventions, judicial processes, asylum procedures and peace negotiations. The book argues that translation and interpreting are not peripheral to conflict dynamics but constitute central mechanisms through which conflict is managed, negotiated and, at times, transformed.