# Customary Values in Correctional Procedures: A Conflict Resolution Model Based on Dalihan Na Tolu

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## ABSTRACT

Overcrowded correctional facilities are prone to interpersonal conflict, yet conflict handling is usually administrative and rarely draws on the cultural resources that inmates share. This study examines how the Batak value system Dalihan Na Tolu, built on respect (*somba marhula-hula*), careful solidarity (*manat mardongan tubu*), and persuasive care (*elek marboru*), is applied in resolving conflicts among inmates at the Class IIB Correctional Facility of Padangsidimpuan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. It also asks what role these values play in easing conflict and building harmony, and what a value-based resolution model looks like. A qualitative case study was conducted. Data came from interviews with four purposively selected informants (two correctional officers and two inmates who had been involved in a conflict), observation, and institutional documents. The data were analysed through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with source and technique triangulation, using Galtung's peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding dimensions as the analytical framework. The findings show that the values are applied not as a formal customary forum but as an ethical orientation of listening to both parties, advising, and embracing them, which runs alongside formal disciplinary procedures. Their role is clearest in peacemaking, fairly clear in peacekeeping, and most limited in peacebuilding, so they do more to calm conflict than to build lasting harmony. The relationship is associative, and fear of sanctions remains a plausible alternative explanation. A preliminary model with three stages and two layers, a formal layer and a value layer, is proposed. It has not been tested and was derived from mild to moderate interpersonal conflicts in a single facility. The study contributes to research on local wisdom in conflict resolution in closed institutions and offers practical points for correctional policy.

**Keywords:** conflict resolution; Dalihan Na Tolu; local wisdom; correctional institution; peacebuilding

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an unavoidable part of social life. It arises from differences in interests, values, norms, and perceptions, and when it is not managed constructively it can escalate into tension and violence. In a correctional institution these risks are amplified. Prisons are what Goffman (1961) described as total institutions, closed social systems in which nearly every aspect of life is regulated within one confined setting. Limited space, loss of privacy, psychological pressure, and constant contact between people of different backgrounds make friction likely. Inmates also tend to form groups on the basis of shared identity such as ethnicity or region of origin (Mubarokah & Larasati, 2023), and social identity theory explains how such in-group and out-group distinctions can, under some conditions, generate exclusivity and conflict (Haslam & Reicher, 2012).

The pressure is especially visible in Indonesia. With 277,935 prisoners, the country is among those with the largest prison populations in the world, according to the World Prison Brief (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, 2025). Data from the Directorate General of Corrections (Direktorat Jenderal Pemasyarakatan, 2026) show that the number of inmates in prisons and detention centres exceeded official capacity throughout the period from 2020 to April 2026. The population peaked at 279,537 in June 2025

against a capacity of 147,414 (about 190%), and in April 2026 it stood at 271,468 against a capacity of 146,860 (about 185%). Overcrowding of this kind is associated with deteriorating prison conditions and health (MacDonald, 2018). It is reasonable to expect that it also intensifies competition over basic needs and the risk of disputes, although the present study does not measure that link.

International standards encourage prison administrations to use conflict prevention, mediation, or other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent disciplinary offences and to resolve conflicts (United Nations, 2015, Rule 38). In day-to-day practice, however, conflict handling in correctional settings is often administrative and situational. It settles the immediate situation, but it may leave the cultural and relational roots of the dispute untouched and give the parties limited participation. Butler and Maruna (2016) discuss how prison disciplinary processes could be rethought in a restorative direction, which indicates that the question is a live one internationally.

Local culture is a resource that is rarely used in this setting. According to Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2020), about 84.64% of the Batak population lives in North Sumatra, their province of origin, which suggests that the province remains the centre of Batak cultural life. Because inmates are generally placed in facilities close to their home regions, it is reasonable to assume that many inmates of the Class IIB Correctional Facility of Padangsidimpuan share a Batak cultural background. This remains an assumption, since data on the ethnic composition of the facility were not available to the authors.

One relevant value system is Dalihan Na Tolu, the kinship philosophy of Batak society. The term means “three-legged hearth”: a hearth stands firmly only when all three stones are in balance, and the image stands for three relational positions that carry reciprocal rights and obligations. The philosophy is expressed in three guiding principles, namely *somba marhula-hula* (respect), *manat mardongan tubu* (careful and solidary relations with kin), and *elek marboru* (affectionate and persuasive guidance) (Panggabean et al., 2024; Panjaitan et al., 2024). Earlier studies describe it as a resource for deliberation and reconciliation in Batak communities (Firmando, 2021; Hamid et al., 2024; Harahap et al., 2023). Those studies, however, concern community settings. To the authors’ knowledge, no earlier qualitative study has examined how Dalihan Na Tolu values figure in resolving conflicts among inmates in a correctional institution, and in particular at the study site.

This study therefore addresses three research questions: (1) How are Dalihan Na Tolu values applied in resolving conflicts among inmates? (2) What role do these values play in easing conflict and shaping harmony? (3) What does a conflict resolution model based on Dalihan Na Tolu principles look like? The study contributes to research on local wisdom in conflict resolution by examining a closed institution, and it proposes a preliminary model that is derived inductively from practice and is explicitly presented as untested.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Conflict Resolution in Galtung’s Framework

The study uses Galtung’s (1996) theory of conflict resolution. In this view resolution is more than stopping violence, which Galtung calls negative peace. It also means addressing the root causes of conflict so that positive peace is achieved, through dialogue, cooperation, and a transformation of the relationship between the parties. Galtung describes three interrelated dimensions. *Peacemaking* is the settlement of conflict through dialogue, negotiation, mediation, or deliberation aimed at an agreement without violence. *Peacekeeping* is the maintenance of stability after a settlement, through oversight, control, and the commitment of the parties, so that the conflict does not recur. *Peacebuilding* is the rebuilding of damaged relationships through trust, cooperation, and reconciliation, and it is oriented toward the structural and cultural roots of conflict.

### Dalihan Na Tolu as a Value System

Dalihan Na Tolu is both a kinship system and a way of life that regulates social relations through balance, mutual respect, and responsibility (Panjaitan et al., 2024). Its three positions are not fixed: a person may occupy different positions in different kinship relations and customary events. Three principles are relevant to conflict resolution. *Somba marhula-hula* means showing respect to the senior or honoured party, expressed

through listening to advice, valuing opinions, and avoiding behaviour that provokes disputes. *Manat mardongan tubu* means acting carefully and keeping good relations with kin of the same clan, which emphasises solidarity, self-control, and prevention of misunderstanding. *Elek marboru* means caring, guiding, and protecting, which favours persuasion, courteous communication, advice, and the restoration of strained relations (Panggabean et al., 2024). The same principles carry different names in the Mandailing tradition, namely *somba mar mora*, *manat mar kahanggi*, and *elek mar anak boru* (Harahap et al., 2023). Because the study site lies in the Tapanuli Selatan region, this difference matters for terminology, and it is taken up in the limitations.

### Previous Studies and Research Gap

Firmando (2021) used observation, interviews, documentation, and focus group discussions to show that Dalihan Na Tolu functions socially, religiously, and symbolically among the Toba Batak, and that conflicts are customarily resolved through kin who act as mediators. Hamid et al. (2024) used an ethnographic approach in Tapanuli Selatan and described the system as a pillar of religious tolerance, with customary and religious leaders involved in deliberation. Harahap et al. (2023) studied religious conflicts among the Mandailing and identified deliberation forums at family, village, and wider levels in which customary leaders act as mediators. Panggabean et al. (2024), in a literature review, examined intergenerational conflict in modern Toba families. Across these studies, resolution takes place in customary forums in community settings, and the authors report concern about weakening understanding among younger generations. None of them examines a correctional institution, where the main forum is an official examination conducted by staff within a hierarchy of rules and sanctions. This is the gap that the present study addresses.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design, which suits its aim of understanding processes, meanings, and perceptions in a natural setting (Safrudin et al., 2023). The researcher acted as the main instrument, and the data were analysed descriptively and analytically with attention to depth of interpretation.

### Research Site and Informants

The case is the Class IIB Correctional Facility of Padangsidimpuan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Fieldwork was carried out in 2026. Informants were selected purposively according to their direct involvement in conflict handling or in a conflict. The interview guides were prepared for the head of the security and order section, correctional officers of that section, customary or Batak community figures, and inmates. In the data actually collected, however, only four informants were interviewed: two officers and two inmates (Table 1). The perspectives of the head of the security and order section and of a customary figure are therefore not represented, which is a limitation discussed below. Informant 2 heads a subsection of that section but is not the head of the section itself, so the section head's own perspective remains absent. Informants are identified by code only.

Table 1. Profile of informants

| Code | Role | Relevant characteristic |
|---|---|---|
| Informant 1 (I1) | Correctional officer, reporting and order (Kamtib) staff | Has served at the facility since 2021 |
| Informant 2 (I2) | Head of the reporting and order subsection | Has served at the facility for about three years and three months |
| Informant 3 (I3) | Inmate who had been involved in a conflict | Creditor in a debt dispute over a food purchase |
| Informant 4 (I4) | Inmate who had been involved in a conflict | Debtor in the same debt dispute |

Source: Authors' fieldwork data (2026).

### Data Collection

Data were gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation, supported by literature study. Interviews explored the informants' views, experiences, and perceptions of conflict handling and of the values involved. Observation of social interaction and dispute handling at the facility was recorded on an observation guide and was used only to complement the interviews, with a limited scope. The documents examined included the facility's organisational information and an institutional chronology of a fight between two inmates in June 2026. Literature study covered earlier research and regulations on corrections.

### Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis was inductive and followed three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Findings were then mapped onto Galtung's three dimensions and onto the three Dalihan Na Tolu values as an analytical framework. This mapping is the authors' reading of the data and is not evidence of the origin of the behaviour. The resolution model was formulated inductively from the findings. Trustworthiness was supported by source triangulation (officers and inmates) and technique triangulation (interviews, documents, and observation).

Because the study is qualitative and does not test hypotheses on a representative sample, relationships are stated as tendencies and as consistency across informants, not as causal or statistical relationships. The strength of support for a relationship was rated *strong* when at least three informants, covering both officers and inmates, supported it; *moderate* when two informants, or informants from one group only, supported it; and *limited* when a single informant supported it. This rating measures the consistency of the data, not statistical significance. Transferability to similar contexts, not generalisation, is the claim made.

## RESULTS

### Research Setting

The facility is a technical implementation unit of the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections, supervised technically by the Directorate General of Corrections and structurally by the Regional Office in North Sumatra. It has a capacity of 456 persons, whereas the 2026 population was 866: 704 convicted prisoners (700 men and 4 women) and 162 pretrial detainees (157 men and 5 women). This is an occupancy of about 190%. The facility has 85 staff members (76 men and 9 women), most of whom hold a senior high school diploma or equivalent. The ratio of staff to inmates is thus limited, which burdens supervision, guidance, and conflict handling.

### Application of Dalihan Na Tolu Values in Conflict Resolution

All four informants described the same formal sequence for handling conflicts, summarised in Table 2. A block officer usually learns of the conflict first and investigates. If the problem cannot be handled at the block, it is reported to staff of the Security Guard Unit (KPLP), who draft a chronology and hand it to the Security and Order Section (Kamtib). Both parties are then summoned and examined. When officers witness a conflict directly, the parties are taken straight to the staff room.

Table 2. Procedure for handling conflicts among inmates

| Stage | Activity | Actor | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Initial awareness and investigation | Block officer learns of the conflict and investigates. If the conflict is witnessed directly, the parties are taken to the staff room. | Block or duty officer | I1, I4 |
| 2. Reporting and chronology | Conflicts not resolved at the block are reported to KPLP staff, who draft a chronology and hand it to Kamtib. | KPLP staff | I1, I2, I3 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3. Summons and examination | Both parties are summoned to the staff room and questioned; witnesses may be called. | Kamtib staff | I1–I4 |
| 4. Dialogue and deliberation | Officers listen to both parties, explain facility rules, and look for a solution. | Kamtib staff | I1–I4 |
| 5. Reconciliation and agreement | Parties shake hands before officers; a written statement or agreement, sometimes stamped, is signed and documented. | Officers and parties | I1, I2, I3 |
| 6. Disciplinary follow-up | Disciplinary punishment in an isolation cell; an official report (BAP) if the quarrel is repeated or becomes a physical fight. | Officers | I1–I4 |

Source: Interviews, authors' analysis (2026).

**Peacemaking: Dialogic Examination and Reconciliation**

Officers described dialogue as the first move, not the sanction. I1 said that a quarrel limited to a verbal exchange does not lead directly to a BAP, which is made only if the quarrel is repeated twice. I2 tied the follow-up to the severity of the violation, which the facility classifies as light, medium, or heavy, and said that disputes that cause no victim can be reconciled. All four informants confirmed that the parties were given the chance to speak. I2 explained why officers listen first:

"Yes, we listen first, and then we draw conclusions that the violation they committed is sometimes just a momentary emotion. So we give advice, so that they do not repeat the same mistake." (I2, translated by the authors)

I3 confirmed this from the inmate's side ("I was ready to admit fault") and considered the officers fair, since "we were both blamed because we were both making noise." I4 reported the same assessment, that both parties were judged equally at fault. Yet I3 also said that the opposing party "still did not accept it," which shows that having a voice and being treated fairly did not immediately restore the relationship.

The dialogue ends with a reconciliation that is documented. I2 described it as follows: the parties promise in a written statement not to repeat the problem, shake hands in front of officers, and the moment is documented "as our archive" so that there is evidence of the promise if a violation recurs. I1 added that the statement is signed and sometimes stamped. Reconciliation runs side by side with sanctions. I2 said that parties who do not reconcile are normally given disciplinary punishment, typically a period in an isolation cell, and both inmates experienced reconciliation and sanction together. An institutional chronology supports the formal side of this account. It records a fight in June 2026 that was suspected to have been triggered by an unsettled debt and was stopped by a trusty. KPLP staff examined both inmates and witnesses and reported to the head of KPLP. Both inmates were found to have violated the provisions on fighting in Ministerial Regulation No. 8 of 2024, as cited in the document. A heavy-level disciplinary punishment was proposed (isolation of up to 14 days, postponement or restriction of conditional rights, entry in Register F, or transfer to another facility), and the head of the facility decided that the case be processed according to the standard operating procedure.

In this dimension the clearest value is *elek marboru*. Officers open with dialogue instead of punishment, ask about the cause of the quarrel, and advise persuasively, which matches the indicator of a persuasive approach through communication and advice. I1 linked the method to custom, saying that inviting the parties to talk is "like their deliberation in custom," with advice given as at a "customary feast." *Somba marhula-hula* appears in the respect shown to both parties as people entitled to be heard: officers listened to both, took neither side, and judged both equally at fault, and I3 showed respect for the process by admitting fault. In the Batak tradition, *somba* denotes respect toward a senior party. In the correctional setting its meaning is widened by the authors to a mutual respect between officers and inmates and among inmates, and this widening is the authors' interpretation. *Manat mardongan tubu* is more limited in this dimension and shows in the officers' caution not to conclude before hearing both sides and to scale the follow-up to the severity of the violation. Because the reconciliation comes with a signed statement and sanctions, the values operate within the framework of facility

rules and not in a customary forum, and no informant named Dalihan Na Tolu spontaneously when describing the procedure.

**Peacekeeping: Control and Prevention of Recurrence**

To keep the settlement in place, the first tool is the written commitment. I1 described a ladder of consequences if the act is repeated: a written agreement or warning, and a BAP if it happens twice. Monitoring begins with the block officer, who is closest to the parties, and failing that with their cellmates, supported by coordination with KPLP staff and block officers. I2 added two measures related to housing. Officers may separate the parties' cells for security reasons if a new conflict is feared, although the general practice is to return them to their original cell. Officers also call a representative of the cell to "always advise his friends not to commit violations in our facility." Prevention also relies on spiritual guidance, which I2 called a form of supervision and I1 described as personality development at the mosque for Muslim inmates and at the church for Christian inmates.

From the inmates' side, prevention was felt mainly as guidance and sanctions. I4 said inmates were directed "not to do this again, for the comfort of the facility," and described Register F as the sanction most inmates want to avoid because it blocks the processing of their rights. I4 also changed his own conduct by no longer buying on credit: "I don't buy on credit any more; I pay directly." In this dimension *manat mardongan tubu* stands out. Monitoring by cellmates and advice from a cell representative are forms of mutual care driven among the inmates themselves, not only by officers, and I4's decision to stop buying on credit can be read as caution to prevent the same cause of conflict from returning. *Elek marboru* shows in guidance and advice that aim to guide, not to punish. The isolation cell and Register F, by contrast, are instruments of the formal layer and are not read as expressions of Dalihan Na Tolu. Here the cultural values work as an informal layer that accompanies formal control.

**Peacebuilding: Restoration of Post-Conflict Relationships**

Three informants who were asked about the relationship after the conflict described social relations that generally resumed, with limits. I3 said the relationship improved gradually ("in time we became friends again, like family") and that the two now greet each other. Forgiveness came after the remaining debt was settled by an officer, who asked whether I3 would forgive the other party if the debt were paid. I3 agreed to forgive but "did not want to do business with him again," and the opponent has not returned as a customer. I4 reported that the relationship was back to normal without awkwardness, but on his own condition: "He still sells [food]. I also buy. But I don't buy on credit, I just pay." From the officers' side, I1 observed that in minor problems inmates mostly mix again, and the relationship may become closer or merely one of mutual restraint. Asked about efforts to rebuild relationships, I2 mentioned socialisation of facility rules and I1 mentioned spiritual guidance. No programme aimed directly at restoring the relationship between the parties was found in the data.

*Elek marboru* is visible in the officer's step of going beyond a formal peace to help settle the root of the problem (the debt) and asking about willingness to forgive. *Manat mardongan tubu* is visible in the inmates' careful maintenance of the relationship, namely befriending each other again and transacting without credit. I3's phrase "like family" may be read as the language of kinship, in line with *manat*, even though I3 did not mention clan or custom, so this reading is the authors' interpretation. Application of the values in this dimension is nevertheless limited and selective: social relations recovered but commercial relations did not, recovery rested on the inmates' own initiative and on an officer's help in one case, and no structured programme existed. The application of the values across the three dimensions is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Practices found and Dalihan Na Tolu values reflected, by Galtung's dimension

| Dimension | Practices found (source) | Values reflected | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peacemaking | Summons, examination, dialogue, both parties heard, advice, reconciliation, and written statement | *Elek marboru* (dialogue and advice); *somba marhula-hula* (listening to and treating both | Reconciliation runs alongside sanctions |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (I1–I4) | parties as equals) | |
| Peacekeeping | Written statement, monitoring by block officers and cellmates, KPLP coordination, cell separation, cell representative advising, guidance, and sanctions (I1, I2, I4) | *Manat mardongan tubu* (mutual care and caution); *elek marboru* (guidance and advice) | Isolation cell and Register F belong to the formal layer |
| Peacebuilding | Settling the root problem, forgiveness, gradual restoration of relations, spiritual guidance, and socialisation of rules (I1–I4) | *Elek marboru* (embracing and helping to settle the root problem); *manat mardongan tubu* (keeping relationships) | Selective restoration; no dedicated programme found |

Source: Interviews and documents, authors' analysis (2026). The mapping of practices onto values is the authors' reading.

**Consistency Across Sources and Techniques**

The accounts of officers and inmates generally agree on the handling procedure, the opportunity to speak, and reconciliation accompanied by sanctions (Table 4). Two differences appeared and both can be explained. First, I1 said the initial response is not a BAP, whereas I3 said the first response was a BAP. This reflects the type of conflict: I1 spoke of verbal quarrels and I3 had been in a physical fight. Second, I3 framed the root of the dispute as reluctance to pay and I4 as having no money when asked for payment. This is a difference in perspective on one event, and it indicates that the two accounts were not a jointly agreed narrative.

Table 4. Source and technique triangulation

| **Aspect** | **Officers (I1, I2)** | **Inmates (I3, I4)** | **Documents** | **Assessment** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Handling procedure | Block officer, KPLP staff, then Kamtib staff | Taken to staff and directed to KPLP and Kamtib | Section structure; chronology document | Convergent |
| Opportunity to speak | Both parties heard first | Given the chance; witnesses explained much of the chronology (I4) | No comparison document | Convergent |
| BAP at initial handling | Not directly for verbal quarrels | BAP for a physical fight (I3) | No comparison document | Different, explained by severity |
| Reconciliation and sanction | Reconciliation, written statement, punishment if not reconciled | Reconciled and placed in isolation cell | Written statement and archive (officers' account) | Convergent |
| Root of the problem (debt) | Debt mentioned as a form of quarrel | Framed differently by the two parties | No comparison document | Different, as perspective |
| Relationship recovery | Mix again; closer or mutually restrained | Friends again; commercial relation not restored or conditional | Facility vision on restored relations | Partly convergent |

Source: Interviews and documents, authors' analysis (2026).

**The Role of Dalihan Na Tolu Values in Easing Conflict and Shaping Harmony**

The role of the values differs across the three dimensions. In peacemaking, both officers judged

communication and advice more appropriate than immediate sanctions. I1 said that sanctions are heavy, so communication comes first, and that advice from someone the inmates respect, such as "an older brother (*abang*) or a kinsman (*partuturan*)," is more likely to be accepted. I2 said officers first ask about problems with family or friends, "because our inmates differ in character." I4 thought problems could be talked through but cited rising emotion as an obstacle. Reference to *abang* and *partuturan* points to the kinship logic that underlies Dalihan Na Tolu, but because no customary figure was interviewed, this link is the authors' interpretation. The obstacles are momentary emotion (I4) and incomplete acceptance by the opponent (I3), so the values work gradually and not automatically.

In peacekeeping, the role is that of informal social control. I1 said some inmates already know one another from the police custody stage and that some share a clan, so that ties of kinship exist among them, and that this makes them "keep each other's relationship." I2 observed that inmates from the Tabagsel region tend to be more careful, so that "a big problem can be made smaller, a small problem can be eliminated." I4 explained that respect grows from recognising each other's position: "we can judge who is older than us and who is younger, and we must know how to respect them so that we can be respected," adding that one respects those who are older and appreciates those who are younger. However, this evidence comes mostly from the two officers, no inmate named clan or kinship as a dampening factor, and I4 named sanctions as a strong deterrent. In this dimension, therefore, the values are a complement to sanctions and not a replacement for them.

In peacebuilding, the role is the most limited. The values support interpersonal restoration through carefulness in keeping relationships (*manat mardongan tubu*) and through the officer's help in settling the root problem (*elek marboru*). But the selective recovery and the absence of a dedicated programme indicate that the values have not become a structured peacebuilding mechanism. The structural roots that I2 mentioned, limited cell space and crowding, also appear untouched by the conflict-resolution practices found. I2 answered "Yes" to a question that named the values of respect, affection, and embracing, but this answer was given to a leading question and is read as a general affirmation and not as a detailed account. The overall pattern is that the values are clearest in dialogue, fairly clear in control, and most limited in restoration. Table 5 rates the relationships found and the strength of their support.

Table 5. Relationships found, their direction, and the strength of data support

| **Relationship found** | **Direction** | **Supporting informants** | **Support level** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respect and mutual appreciation among inmates form the basis of good relations and dampen friction | Strengthens harmony | I4, I1, I2 | Strong |
| Clan-based kinship ties and mutual care strengthen informal social control | Strengthens easing of conflict | I1, I2 | Moderate |
| Dialogue, advice, and a chance to speak before sanctions promote acceptance of reconciliation and restored relations | Strengthens resolution | I1, I2, I3, I4 | Strong |
| Perceived fairness (both parties judged equally at fault) supports acceptance of officers' decisions | Strengthens acceptance | I3, I4 | Moderate |
| Disciplinary sanctions (isolation cell, Register F) deter repetition | Strengthens prevention | I1–I4 (deterrence: I4) | Strong for application; limited for deterrent effect |
| Momentary emotion and small matters such as debt escalate into fights | Enlarges conflict | I1–I4 | Strong |
| Limited cell space and crowding enlarge the triggers of conflict | Enlarges conflict | I2 | Limited |

Source: Interviews, authors' analysis (2026). Support level indicates the consistency of data across informants, not statistical significance. I3 and I4 narrate one event, so rows that rest on them are not independent cases.

The direction of the relationship is positive with respect to harmony: the more the values of respect, solidarity, and embracing are practised, the more conducive the atmosphere of resolution, as the informants described it. The relationship is associative and interpretive, not a measured causal link, because the data contain no comparison condition without the values.

## A Conflict Resolution Model Based on Dalihan Na Tolu Principles

The model (Figure 1 and Table 6) has two layers and three stages. The *formal layer* (facility rules, the BAP, and proportional sanctions) provides boundaries and legal certainty. The *value layer* (respect, caution in keeping relationships, and embracing) is the way in which resolution is carried out. Separating the layers guards the model against two misreadings: that cultural values replace rules, or that mere compliance expresses the values. The three stages follow Galtung's dimensions and are not meant as a rigid sequence, because some values work across stages: *manat mardongan tubu* appears in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and *elek marboru* in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

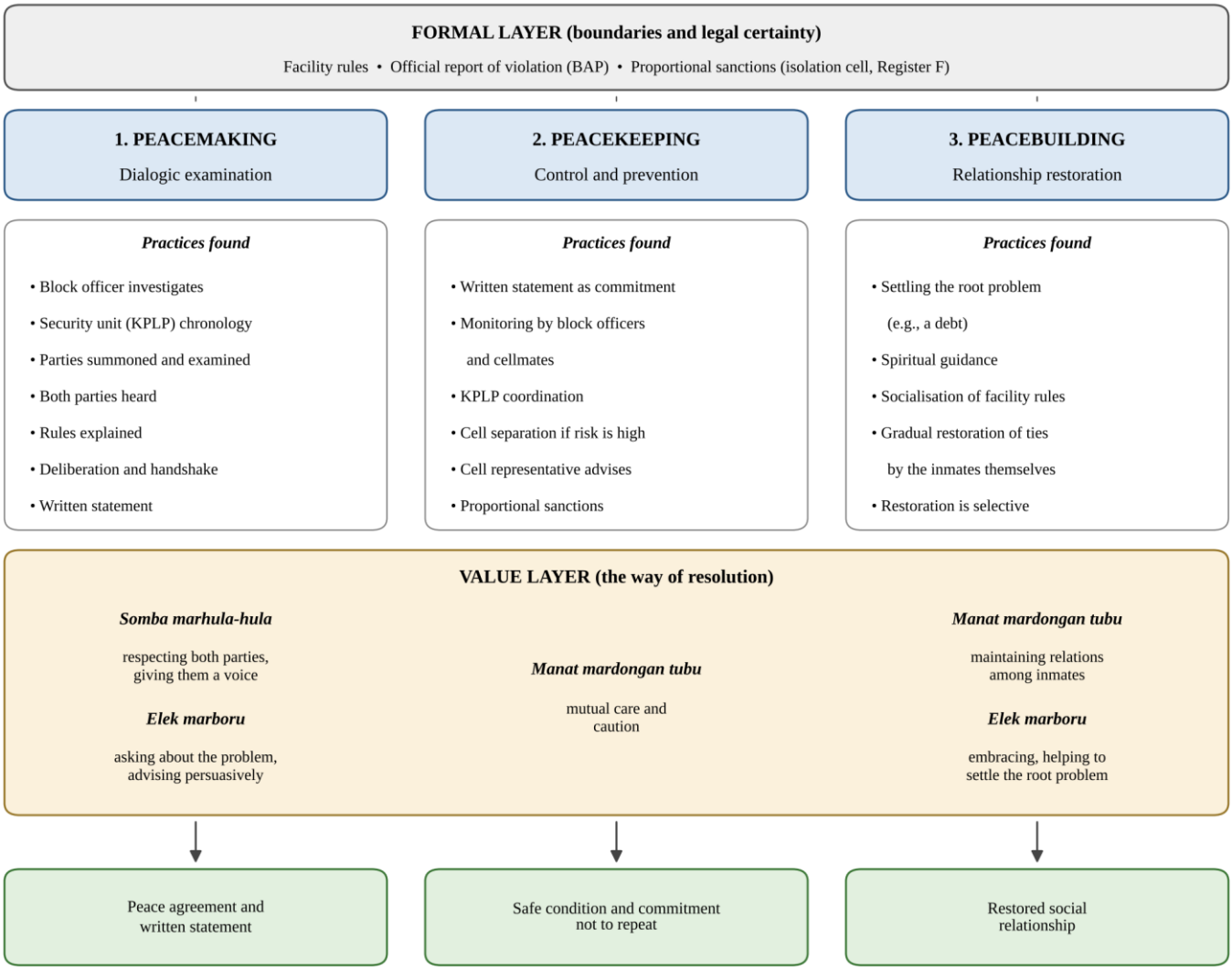


Figure 1. Conflict resolution model based on Dalihan Na Tolu principles at the Class IIB Correctional Facility of Padangsidimpuan. Source: Authors' analysis of primary data and Galtung (1996), 2026.

The first stage rests on the procedure already in operation (Table 2): investigation by the block officer, the KPLP chronology, summons, examination, dialogue, explanation of the rules, and documented reconciliation. The stage therefore adds no new procedure. It names the values that accompany existing ones, namely *somba marhula-hula* in respect for both parties and *elek marboru* in persuasive advice, while the BAP and the explanation of rules remain in the formal layer. The second stage rests on the written statement, monitoring by block officers and cellmates, KPLP coordination, cell separation when risk is high, the cell representative who

advises friends, and proportional sanctions. Two elements of this stage come directly from the data and are existing practices, not additions by the authors: the respected figure ("an older brother or a kinsman," I1) and the cell representative asked to advise friends (I2). The third stage rests on settling the root problem, spiritual guidance, socialisation of rules, and relationships restored gradually by the inmates. It is the least structured stage in the data, and therefore the part of the model that most needs strengthening and testing. Any form such strengthening takes would be a proposal to be tested and is not a finding of this study.

Table 6. Elements of the Dalihan Na Tolu-based conflict resolution model

| Stage | Practices already found | Aligned values | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Peacemaking: dialogic examination | Block officer investigates; KPLP chronology; both parties summoned and heard; rules explained; deliberation and reconciliation (I1–I4) | *Somba marhula-hula* (respecting both parties, giving them a voice); *elek marboru* (asking about the problem, advising) | Peace agreement and written statement |
| 2. Peacekeeping: control and prevention | Written statement; monitoring by block officers and cellmates; KPLP coordination; cell separation if risky; cell representative advising; proportional sanctions (I1, I2, I4) | *Manat mardongan tubu* (mutual care and caution); formal layer as the boundary | Safe condition and commitment not to repeat |
| 3. Peacebuilding: restoring relations | Settling the root problem (debt); spiritual guidance; socialisation of rules; relations restored gradually by inmates (I1–I4) | *Manat mardongan tubu* (keeping relations); *elek marboru* (embracing) | Restored social relationship and willingness to maintain it |

Source: Interviews and documents, authors' analysis (2026). The mapping of practices onto values is the authors' reading.

# DISCUSSION

### Values as an Ethical Orientation Inside Institutional Procedure

The central finding is that Dalihan Na Tolu values are present in resolving conflicts among inmates as a way of interacting, namely respecting, caring for, and embracing the parties, that accompanies formal procedure. They are not a named customary mechanism that is run as such. This reading rests on the convergence of three layers of data: the officers' accounts of a persuasive approach, the inmates' experience of fair treatment and a chance to speak, and institutional documents showing that handling proceeds through the security and order structure. The difference from earlier studies lies in the forum. In Firmando (2021), Hamid et al. (2024), and Harahap et al. (2023), conflicts are resolved in customary forums that involve kin and customary leaders. In the facility, the main forum is an examination by staff who sit within a hierarchy and are bound by rules. Rules and sanctions can be read as playing a role that is functionally similar to customary law in the framework of Harahap et al. (2023), namely providing limits and certainty, but this is an analogy and does not make the two equivalent. The application of Dalihan Na Tolu in the facility is thus better described as the absorption of values into institutional procedure than as the conduct of customary deliberation.

The mapping of behaviour onto values has to be read with alternative explanations in mind. Listening to both parties, asking about the background, and giving advice are also features of the humane communication commonly used in correctional guidance, so the behaviour does not automatically originate in Dalihan Na Tolu. What can responsibly be said is that the behaviour is consistent with the indicators of the values. Several cues strengthen the link to cultural values: I1's explicit comparison with deliberation and advice in custom, the mention of respected figures such as an older brother or kinsman, and I2's observation about inmates from Tabagsel. Their strength is limited, however, because I2's affirmation answered a question that named the values and no informant raised the term Dalihan Na Tolu unprompted.

**Peacemaking: A Mediator That Is Not Neutral**

The peacemaking dimension is fulfilled at the level of procedure. All informants said the parties were summoned and given the chance to speak, and three mentioned a reconciliation carried out by officers. This matches Galtung's (1996) understanding of peacemaking as resolution through dialogue and deliberation without violence. The officers' role as a third party should be read carefully. Fahri (2021) stresses that a mediator is a neutral party with no stake in the outcome who helps the parties to agree without coercion. Some of these features are present, such as the perception that no side was favoured (I3) and the judgment that both were equally at fault (I4). But officers are not pure mediators, since they hold the authority to impose disciplinary punishment. Reconciliation after a physical fight is therefore reached in the shadow of sanctions, so the element of "without coercion" is only partly met. This does not mean the peace lacks the parties' own conscience, since I3 said he was ready to admit fault. The data show peace formed from a combination of the parties' awareness and institutional pressure, and they cannot separate the share of each.

The findings also add nuance to the administrative picture of prison conflict handling that motivated this study. The examination stage gives both parties a voice, so a participatory element exists. But the final outcome of a physical fight remains an administrative sanction, so a restorative approach has not fully replaced a disciplinary one. This is consistent with the discussion by Butler and Maruna (2016) of the tension between disciplinary and restorative logics, and it also echoes the encouragement of mediation and other alternative mechanisms in Rule 38 of the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations, 2015).

**Peacekeeping: Controlled Conflict Is Not Yet Sustainable Peace**

In peacekeeping, informants converged on three practices: monitoring by block officers and cellmates, separating cells where new conflict is feared, and enforcing disciplinary sanctions. Both groups of informants mentioned sanctions, so source triangulation is satisfied for this element. Monitoring by cellmates and by cell representatives, in contrast, rests only on the officers' spoken accounts and is not supported by documents or observation. Galtung (1996) treats peacekeeping as maintaining a safe situation after a settlement, and the practices correspond to that purpose. In Galtung's terms the condition they produce is closer to negative peace, that is, conflict under control but not necessarily a restored relationship.

The value most consistent with these practices is *manat mardongan tubu*, expressed in monitoring by cellmates, advice from a cell representative, and the inmate's decision to stop buying on credit. The reading must separate two layers. The isolation cell, Register F, and proportional sanctions are instruments of the formal layer and are not expressions of Dalihan Na Tolu; the value layer works around them as informal social control. Fear of disciplinary consequences is a plausible alternative explanation for both the reconciliation and the absence of recurrence, and the data do not allow the contribution of culture and of fear to be separated. In the practice found, persuasive values are the way resolution is carried out and rules and sanctions are the boundary that secures compliance. The values appear as a complement to disciplinary mechanisms, not as their substitute. The kinship cue also qualifies social identity accounts (Haslam & Reicher, 2012): among the conflicts described, which were interpersonal, no informant mentioned inter-clan or inter-ethnic conflict, and shared clan appeared as a dampening and not a triggering factor. This conclusion is limited to four informants and interpersonal conflict.

Informants' positive assessments should also be read with care. Some of I4's answers were brief agreement with leading questions, and inmates' favourable views of officers may be shaped by the power relation in the interview, as the form of address "Komandan" suggests. Inmates' views of officer fairness are therefore treated as perceptions and not as objective proof of procedural fairness.

**Peacebuilding: Selective Restoration and Structural Roots**

Reaching a peace agreement needs to be distinguished from restoring social relations. Relations were restored for the three informants who were asked, but selectively: I3 forgave and befriended the other party but refused to trade again, whereas I4 resumed transactions on the condition of no credit. Social recovery thus ran faster than economic recovery. This is consistent with Galtung's (1996) view of peace as a gradual process, but there

are not enough data to conclude that the peace is sustainable, because there are no long-term data on whether conflict between the same parties recurred. The programmes the officers named for rebuilding relationships, socialisation of rules and spiritual guidance, are normative and do not target the relationship between the parties. The institutional vision refers to restored life relationships, but no specific mechanism for restoring the relationship between the disputing parties was found. The orientation toward restoration therefore exists, while its fit with a designed programme cannot be established.

The structural roots that I2 mentioned, limited cell space and overcrowding, also appear untouched by the resolution practices found. Given that Galtung's peacebuilding is oriented toward the structural and cultural roots of conflict, and that overcrowding is associated with worse prison conditions (MacDonald, 2018), this is a notable gap. It suggests that a value-based approach, however well run, addresses relations between individuals and not the conditions that continually produce friction. The finding also adds nuance to Harahap et al. (2023), who describe customary deliberation that proceeds to the restoration of relations: in the facility, no comparable stage exists as a separate forum.

**Contribution, Implications, and Limitations**

Theoretically, the study shows that in a correctional institution Dalihan Na Tolu values operate inside a hierarchical and sanction-bearing procedure and not in a customary forum, so that controlled conflict is not the same as sustainable peace. This is consistent with the argument of Prasojo and Pabbajah (2020) that local wisdom such as tolerance, solidarity, and deliberation can be a contextual conflict resolution mechanism, with the added condition that these values work within an institutional frame. Practically, the model can be applied alongside existing rules and sanctions without changing the institutional structure, because its elements are practices that already exist. The aspect that deserves most attention is the restoration of relations after conflict, for which no structured programme was found. As policy, a locally grounded approach can complement rules and sanctions but does not replace disciplinary mechanisms, and its wider use needs to be tested first.

Several limitations bound these conclusions. The data come from four informants in one facility, and two of them narrate the same event. The perspectives of the head of the security and order section and of a customary figure are absent, and observation and documents are limited as comparison for the interviews. Some interview questions were leading, and the interview setting may have shaped inmates' answers. The Toba Batak set of terms was used as the analytical framework, whereas the Mandailing and Angkola traditions of Tapanuli Selatan use other terms; since no informant used customary terms, the data cannot determine which set fits the site, and a local customary figure should be consulted. The model was formulated from mild to moderate interpersonal conflicts (a debt dispute and a fight between two inmates), so its applicability to group conflict or serious violence cannot be claimed. It is a preliminary model that has not been tested.

# CONCLUSION

Dalihan Na Tolu values at the Class IIB Correctional Facility of Padangsidimpuan are applied as a way of interacting in resolving conflicts among inmates, namely respecting, caring for, advising, and embracing the parties, and not as a formal customary mechanism. The pattern holds across Galtung's dimensions: in peacemaking through an examination that gives both parties a voice, advice, and reconciliation; in peacekeeping through monitoring by officers and cellmates, coordination, and advice from a cell representative; and in peacebuilding through settling the root problem, forgiveness, and spiritual guidance, informally and selectively. The isolation cell and Register F are formal instruments and not expressions of the values.

The role of the values is clearest in peacemaking, fairly clear in peacekeeping, and most limited in peacebuilding. Conflict can be stopped and controlled, but the restoration of social relations is not yet structured, so the values do more to calm conflict than to build lasting harmony. The relationship between values and harmony is associative and not causal, because fear of sanctions is an alternative explanation, and the role of clan kinship is supported only by officers and is therefore a preliminary finding. The values thus complement, and do not replace, the facility's disciplinary mechanisms.

The proposed model has three stages that follow Galtung's dimensions and two layers, a formal layer of rules, BAP, and proportional sanctions, and a value layer of respect, caution in keeping relationships, and embracing. It is an inductive and preliminary model that has not been tested, and it cannot be claimed for group conflict or serious violence. Three recommendations follow. First, facility managers can strengthen the values already visible in practice (respecting, advising, and embracing) in dialogue, reconciliation, and post-conflict relationship maintenance, within existing rules and sanctions. Second, policymakers should give more attention to restoring relations after conflict, since no structured programme was found, and any form of strengthening is a proposal that needs testing. Third, future research should test and refine the model with a wider range of informants, including the head of the security and order section and customary figures; use observation and documents as comparison; avoid leading questions; distinguish agreement, cessation of conflict, and restored relationships; follow up on whether peace is sustained; and extend the test to group conflict and other facilities.

### Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with official research permission from the correctional facility. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the use of interview data for academic research and scholarly publication, and their right to decline to answer any question or withdraw from participation at any time without providing a reason. Permission to record interviews was obtained from the participants. To protect confidentiality, participants were identified using codes (I1–I4) rather than their real names, and personally identifying information was not disclosed in the manuscript. Interview data were used in accordance with the participants' consent. This study did not receive approval from an institutional ethics committee.

### Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no financial or personal conflicts of interest. For transparency, the authors' institution belongs to the same ministry that oversees the research site.

### Data Availability

The data are not publicly available. They consist of interview transcripts and institutional documents concerning inmates in custody and contain sensitive information. Informants consented to the use of their statements for research on condition of confidentiality, and the transcripts are archived by the institution. De-identified excerpts supporting the findings are presented in the article. Further data may be made available by the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to informants' consent and institutional approval.

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