



Worldwide Peacebuilders II

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I hope these articles convey at least a bit of the excitement I found in the eyes and faces of this group of peacebuilders.

Introduction

Eleven years ago, when I was working in Thailand under Mennonite Central Committee, I read a brief book by John Paul Lederach on conflict management and took his seminary class in the same subject.

The main idea I got out of this reading, as well as in the class, was that various cultures have the resources within them to work at understanding and transforming conflict. Further, each culture can be enriched and strengthened in responding to conflict by learning from the peacebuilding practices of other cultures.

Lederach was able to put these ideas into practice not only in his work as a mediator of international conflicts, but also as a professor in the Eastern Mennonite University Conflict Analysis and Training Program.

While I can't claim to have made great strides in learning from the practices of other cultures, I think some of my rough edges in dealing with situations of tension and conflict have been worn down and smoothed by years of experience in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia. Although conflict practices in these regions apparently contradict each other, the practices of both regions can have a beneficial effect on my North American formation in conflict styles.

Four years ago I was able to bring some conflict practices of other cultures to readers of the *Peace Office Newsletter*. In spring 1999 I had the privilege of interviewing nineteen Summer Peacebuilding Institute participants at Eastern Mennonite University to find out how they were working at

restoring peace and justice in their home countries. Articles from those interviews were published in the January–March 2000 *Peace Office Newsletter*.

At the time I was working full-time, with plenty of mandatory overtime, and I had to take vacation time to spend two days at EMU doing the interviews.

But far from being exhausted by the heavy schedule of interviews, I was energized by inspiring stories of people committed to these challenging, frustrating, liberating, and rewarding tasks.

In May 2004 I repeated the journey to EMU and interviewed a smaller number of SPI students. All of the interviewees were sponsored at least in part by Mennonite Central Committee.

This time my schedule was not nearly so full, and my freelance work gives me the freedom to choose, at least to some degree, how busy I will be.

But the energizing effect of meeting a new group of peacebuilders was the same.

We can benefit from the wisdom of ways of addressing conflict that have been developed in other countries over centuries of experience. And I hope these articles convey at least a bit of the excitement I found in the eyes and faces of this group of peacebuilders.

—Editor

Iraqi Peacebuilders Reflect on Their Learnings

The idea was to provide respite from the war zone in Iraq as well as to give Iraqi participants training in trauma response and conflict analysis and transformation.

Iraq Information on the Web

Current information on the situation in Iraq can be found at Web sites such as the following:

World Press Review:
<http://www.worldpress.org/eduView.cfm/hurl/id=18>

Education for Peace in Iraq Center:
www.epic-usa.org

Foreign Policy in Focus/Iraq in Focus:
<http://www.fpif.org/iraq/index.php>

Iraq Occupation Watch:
www.occupationwatch.org

Juan Cole (history professor):
www.juancole.com

Church Folks for a Better America:
www.cfba.info

Cost of [Iraq] War:
www.costofwar.com

Iraq Body Count:
www.iraqbodycount.net

Electronic Iraq:
www.electroniciraq.net

Soon after the initial phase of military action in the ongoing Iraq War concluded in April 2003 with the fall of Baghdad, Mennonite Central Committee sent a delegation to Iraq to assess what could be done to assist the Iraqi people and to help reverse the damage of this latest war on their soil.

When that delegation returned to the MCC office in Amman, Jordan, which oversees MCC programs in Jordan and Iraq, many responses to the trauma of the Iraqi people were discussed. One idea, originating with Francis Dubois of the U.N. Development Program in Baghdad, was to provide training in coping with trauma issues, which he saw as a key need for his staff as well as for many of the Iraqi people. Eventually this idea was refined in many discussions and e-mail conversations to the concept of sending a group of Iraqi people to participate in the STAR (Seminars on Trauma Awareness and Recovery) program at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. MCC Iraq initiated discussion of this possibility with EMU.

The idea was to provide respite from the war zone in Iraq as well as to give Iraqi participants training in trauma response and conflict analysis and transformation.

The STAR program is designed to bring religious leaders and caregivers from communities affected by the events of September 11 or other societal traumas, from the United States and other places in the world, to Eastern Mennonite University for seminars to share knowledge and experience and to gain tools that will help them work more effectively with traumatized people when they return home. The Iraqis also took classes in conflict analysis and transformation at EMU's Summer Peacebuilding Institute.

STAR is sponsored by the Conflict Transformation Program at EMU and Church World Service. This group of Iraqi participants was sponsored jointly by CWS and the MCC Iraq program. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace also contributed funds.

Identifying the Group

Bringing a group of six Iraqi citizens to the United States for training while their country was (and continues to be) under a military occupation by U.S. forces was an extraordi-

narily complex task. Menno Wiebe, MCC Iraq director, was involved in the project in Amman and on trips to Baghdad, while MCCer Edward Miller was resident in Baghdad and was the primary staff member moving the project forward.

The first task was to identify and invite Iraqi participants who would be representative of the religious (Shi'ite Muslim, Sunni Muslim, and Christian) and ethnic (Arab, Kurdish, and Armenian) diversity of Iraq. Women and men were invited. MCC looked for people in leadership in established Iraqi institutions who might be able to return and use what they had learned within and through those institutions. There was also an emphasis on inviting people who are involved in social work or other kinds of caregiving ministries. (No names of Iraqis are used in this article because of the risks to them in their country.)

It may be difficult for North American readers to imagine why it was difficult for the Iraqis to accept this invitation. There would be significant risk even participating in an activity in the United States. While Mennonite Central Committee is in no way identified with the occupying forces or U.S. policy, in the volatile atmosphere of Iraq it would be possible for someone to misconstrue a trip to the United States as support for the U.S. occupiers.

Many Iraqis are deeply suspicious of or hostile toward the U.S. occupation. Fortunately, Iraqi people are able to make a distinction between the U.S. government together with its policies and the people of the United States, including some of those who worked hard at arranging and implementing this training. Also excluded from identification with the U.S. government is MCC Iraq, which has worked for years in that country to address the long-term impact of the 1991 war and the sanctions regime that caused much suffering in Iraq from 1991 until the fall of Baghdad in 2003.

The fact that six Iraqi persons were willing to trust MCC by participating in this project speaks well of the credibility built by MCC staffers in Iraq over the years.

Janice Moomaw Jenner of the EMU Conflict Transformation Program says, "I have such admiration for their coming. . . . They knew there was risk involved."

Once the invitees were identified, they had to apply for visas for the trip to the United States. Menno Wiebe describes this step as “a daunting process. They were unable to get visas in Baghdad, but had to make a separate trip to Amman to apply.” The trainees had to get exit visas to leave Iraq for the visa-application trip to Amman as well as for the eventual trip to United States.

Follow-up work on the visa applications was done by Wiebe and by Peter Dula, MCC Iraq staff who had by this time replaced Edward Miller. Visa approval was not to be assumed; one invitee was unable to go because a visa was not issued. No reason was given for the rejection.

Finally, transportation out of Iraq was not straightforward. Just before their scheduled departure, the U.S. siege of Fallujah began, resulting in attacks on vehicles on the road between Baghdad and Amman. As a result, instead of traveling overland to Amman, the Iraqi participants were able to get seats on Air Serv International, a private nonprofit airline service that transports United Nations and nongovernmental organization staff.

I was at EMU near the end of this time of training for the group from Iraq. After a long day including classes and a farewell dinner, the Iraqi participants agreed to spend a brief time with me.

What are some of the learnings you will be taking back with you to Iraq?

I have learned how to establish dialogue among communities and households. Confrontation and conflicts start at this level but politicians take the credit.

I got some ideas on how to approach the land conflicts in our area of Iraq. There are many internally displaced people and some returnees from other countries. What I learned at SPI will be helpful in setting up ways of resolving the disputes over land ownership that we are starting to deal with.

I enjoyed establishing new relationships with people from other countries. It was good for me to hear them share what they are suffering. This was very helpful to us, and to hear their solutions to conflict situations.

The courses were helpful to me. There are many things that we know about dealing with conflict, but it was helpful to hear them put into fresh words.

Something I can really apply at the moment is the knowledge that self-care is important. Our situation is difficult in Iraq. We hope

the situation will soon get better, and the “real work” of rebuilding our society can start in the future.

A true smile from the heart is the first step to achieving peace. To be in peace you have to smile. The smile is the sign of peace inside. Reconciliation with yourself shows when you are open with others. This is how we come to share peace with others.

We came from Iraq with a lot of ideas, knowledge, and experience. The time here has been marvelous, but not only in knowledge. We enjoyed the sweet taste of faithfulness and sincerity. All that we have learned in the sessions was beautiful—not only in concepts and ideology, but in the “taste” of it. We learned not only from the professors, but also from the other participants, from their souls and hearts. We read books, and we process the information in the mind. But here it comes from the heart through the mind.

Before I came I didn’t think so much about responsibility toward my people. This has increased my responsibility to my people. Before I left Iraq, friends would ask, “Why don’t you stay in the United States?” My responsibility to my people leads me to go back.

The most important thing I learned here is represented by the question: Do we work to prevent conflict, to resolve it, or to transform it? We can’t prevent conflict because it’s in our heart and soul. Eastern Mennonite University has the advantage over secular peace teaching programs because it thinks both materially and spiritually about such questions.

Do you build peace, or make peace, or maintain peace? I now realize that you need to build peace step by step until you get the whole construction.

An important question as we return to Iraq is “What about desperation and depression?” It will be difficult to get people to forgive and reconcile. Peacebuilding has a start but not an end. It is a lifelong process.

What gives you hope as you return to Iraq?

I have gained hope from being here and seeing different people who care for us and show that they are able to live with us peacefully. This has been a way of restoring ourselves.

Just being here has been a source of hope. I hope our leaders and future leaders can come here and discover the good that is here.

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Iraqis Study Peace at EMU, Plant Tree as Symbol of Hope

Sponsored in part by MCC, six Iraqi citizens attended three weeks of conflict transformation courses at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, in May 2004 and planted a tree on campus as a symbol of hope. The Iraqis attended a one-week seminar on trauma awareness and recovery and two week-long sessions of the Summer Peacebuilding Institute, sponsored by the university's Conflict Transformation Program. "The workshops we attended were extremely valuable to our work in Iraq," said one participant, who asked not to be named due to security concerns. "Violence will only lead to more violence. We want to take back and apply the values to help build up peace in our country." They planted the tree, a southern magnolia, in front of the Hillside Suites residence May 27.

—MCC News Service

Hope is always there because people need hope to live. The Iraqi people are no different. I love my country. I love my people. This increases my hope.

The children of Iraq give me hope. When I see those who are babies now, I imagine what their lives will be like. I hope that when they are 10 or 15 years old they will see better days. My wish is that they won't see war and that they will enjoy the wealth that our country can produce.

Hope is a natural feeling inside all of us. We have very strong hope for the future.

Iraq is a country of civilization with a history of thousands of years. In the past the Persians, Alexander the Great, and other forces have invaded Iraq. In these invasions each time Iraq has suffered a disaster, but each time it begins again with a new spirit of living because of the hope of the Iraqi people.

In fall of 2003 we did a survey of a random sample of Iraqi people—18 to 70 years old, high and low educational standards, female and male, illiterate and literate. We asked the people, "Are you hopeful for the future?" And 96 percent of the sample responded, "Yes, we are optimistic!" Even though there was violence, kidnappings, buildings burning, the hope is there. They won't lose their hope. I believe this is because Iraqi people have a strong will and are patient—they are people who will struggle to live a better life.

Returning to Put It into Practice

MCC Iraq confirms that all of the Iraqi citizens returned home safely following their time at the STAR program and the Summer Peacebuilding Institute.

One participant said in an e-mail from Iraq after returning there, "It is great you are still

remembering us. I am so, so happy for that, believe me! While I am reading this e-mail my eyes are full of tears. . . . When you see [the tree we planted], please remember all the nice days."

Another participant e-mailed, "It is really nice to know that the tree we [planted] together is blooming. It is the symbol of hope in this difficult time of conflicts and instability in our country. The situation here in Iraq is not that good; it is horribly hot and electricity shuts down 12 to 15 hours a day!!! Also the assassinations, bombing, and bloodshed are unfortunately continuous. We are still keeping to the hope and working as much as we can to do awareness-raising and implanting the seeds of peace in the hearts and minds of people, despite all the risks and difficulties."

While they were in Harrisonburg for this training, the Iraq group were hosted for meals by a number of local families. Jenner says, "The friends from Iraq told us they were glad that all the American people oppose what the U.S. government is doing in Iraq. We had to let them down by informing them that this group of hosts here in Harrisonburg may not be completely representative of U.S. public opinion!"

Remembering the generous hospitality of the Arab people I knew when I lived in the Middle East for five years, I was glad that Harrisonburg families were ready to show some hospitality to the group from Iraq.

During my time with the Iraqis I was reminded of why no Western power has been able to establish a long-lasting colonial regime in Iraq. If these representatives are any indication, the Iraqi people are smart, articulate, cautious yet willing to take risks, and rooted in their land and their culture in a way that an occupying army can never be.

Siaka Traore: Peace Programme Coordinator

Pastor Siaka Traore is a Mennonite pastor in Burkina Faso.

Traore was raised as a Muslim.

This unique background gives him special gifts for his current responsibilities as Peace Programme Coordinator for MCC West Africa. His position is located in the regional

office for MCC in west Africa. "My responsibility is to lead peace programs to respond to the many conflicts in west Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire)."

What led Pastor Traore to get involved in peace work? "Before I got this job I was interested to be a peacemaker and did it informally as a Mennonite pastor

in Burkina Faso. I was involved in conflicts among Christians and also involving non-Christians. As I did this, the desire grew to be involved full-time in peacebuilding.”

He speaks of wondering whether he was the right one for the job. “When MCC asked me to take this position, I was not very confident that I could do it. But after a period of consideration and prayer, I said yes. From 2001 until now I have been working for peace in west Africa. My main task is to reinforce local organizations working actively for peace.

“I also am involved in a partnership called the West African Network for Peacebuilding. I worked with this group to provide peace training in Ghana two times. I also travel to Chad about once a year to see what the two peace organizations there are doing.”

I asked Pastor Traore about some of his other responsibilities. “In March 2004 we hosted the first forum on peace in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. About 25 people attended, including church leaders and non-Christians involved in civil society. It is also my job to follow up on the National Day of Forgiveness in Burkina Faso, to tell the government that they have to be faithful in their commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation.”

How do you become a peacemaker in Burkina Faso? “People come to you and can accept your advice if they are confident in you.”

Pastor Traore feels confident working with conflict situations in both the Christian and Muslim communities, as well as situations involving both Christians and Muslims. “Before I became a Christian, I was a Muslim. My wife is from a Christian family.”

One of Traore’s courses at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute reminded him that Christians are not always committed to peacemaking.

“In the second session, I attended a course called Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace. We listened to a Christian theologian, a rabbi, and an imam. I got the impression that Christianity is the source of much conflict in the world. I am still processing this and am not sure how it fits with my theology.”

Pastor Traore speaks of the spirituality at the core of his motivation for peace work. “Each morning I begin with a prayer: I want

God to act in my life as if on the first day I met him. For the rest of my life I want to be a disciple of Jesus, submit more of my life to him, and let a good image of him shine for the next generation in my context.”

A Burkinabe Peace Practice

We in the West have much to learn from the peacebuilding practices of people in other parts of the world. The Summer Peacebuilding Institute recognizes this principle in structuring some of its classes around sharing of such practices by participants from various countries and looking at ways of transferring these practices to other cultures.

When Pastor Traore was asked about how conflicts are addressed in his country, he referred to the concept of *alliance à plaisanterie*. Taken literally, this French term can be translated “joking relationship.” But it is used in Burkina Faso to name a relationship that goes deeper and is actually binding on both parties to the relationship. It is as if the pleasantries of an easy, teasing relationship build bonds that give confidence that one’s request of the other will be granted. Further, the first party would only make a request that he or she knows the other party will grant.

In a way, the humor and good times of the *alliance à plaisanterie* are a precursor to the hard work of making peace happen, as illustrated by this anecdote.

“There is a practice in Burkina Faso called the ‘joking relationship’ (*alliance à plaisanterie*). If you are in this *alliance à plaisanterie* with another person from your family, tribe, clan, or another group, you cannot refuse that person’s request. And the *alliance à plaisanterie* can also exist between groups such as villages or clans or tribes.

“For example, in the past my village was in conflict with a nearby village. There was not an *alliance à plaisanterie* between the two villages. But a tribe in another area, which has an *alliance à plaisanterie* with my village and the other village, was able to come to us and demand that the villages stop the conflict. And because of the *alliance à plaisanterie* we had with the outside tribe, we accepted this demand and stopped the conflict.”

Establishing joking relationships as a way of making peace? Maybe we do approach peace work too often as a sober and heavy activity. If we can find ways to lighten up, we need to credit the encouragement of our Burkinabe brother Pastor Siaka Traore.

Burkina Faso on the Web

Readers can get detailed information on Burkina Faso including current news at the following Web sites:

Africa South of the Sahara:
Burkina Faso: <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/burkina.html>

Photos for Peace: Burkina Faso:
http://www.photosforpeace.org/gallery/burkina_faso

allAfrica.com/Burkina Faso:
<http://allafrica.com/burkinafaso/newswire/>

Each morning I begin with a prayer: I want God to act in my life as if on the first day I met him. For the rest of my life I want to be a disciple of Jesus, submit more of my life to him, and let a good image of him shine for the next generation in my context.

Yanti Diredja and Krisni Noor Patrianti: Peace Center Staff

We host discussion groups at the center for students on peace-related topics. The center also provides training for women, children, and church members, as well as interfaith training sessions.

Center for the Study and Promotion of Peace

The mission of the center, part of Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is “to empower individuals and communities for peacebuilding in families, religious communities, working places, and within society based on love, truth, justice, and peace; through research and promotion of peace, education and training, consultation and conflict intervention, trauma healing, and provision of information.”

More information about the center and its projects is available in Indonesian and English at www.ukdw.ac.id/pspp.

Indonesia is a country of over 200 million people. About 90 percent of the population is Muslim, making Indonesia the largest Muslim country in the world.

Around 7 or 8 percent of the population is Christian, and it is this Christian minority who have founded Duta Wacana Christian University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on the main island of Java about 500 kilometers west of the capital city, Jakarta.

Rev. Yanti Diredja and Krisni Noor Patrianti are Indonesian Christian women who are staff members at the Center for the Study and Promotion of Peace, a social service unit of the university. “The center is supported by the Department of Humanities and the Department of Theology at Duta Wacana Christian University of Yogyakarta, which has around 3,000 students,” Rev. Yanti said. “The students are mostly Christian but there are also Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.”

The Center for the Study and Promotion of Peace is a partner of MCC Indonesia, which also sponsored Rev. Yanti Diredja and Krisni Noor Patrianti’s participation in the Summer Peacebuilding Institute.

While other parts of Indonesia are plagued by tensions and sometimes violence between Muslims and Christians, Krisni and Rev. Yanti indicated that this is not an issue in Yogyakarta.

“Yogyakarta is considered a student city, with several universities,” Krisni explained. “Students and university staff tend to be more open to other religions than the general public, and we have no problem in Yogyakarta with Muslim-Christian violence.”

The Center for the Study and Promotion of Peace is designed to maintain a peace presence and witness in this university city. Programs of the center address students as well as church members and others from the surrounding areas.

Krisni is a trainer at the center. She described her role: “We host discussion groups at the center for students on peace-related topics. The center also provides training for women, children, and church members, as well as interfaith training sessions.”

Rev. Yanti’s role at the center focuses more on addressing the needs of victims of violence. “I am a pastor for women and children. Often women and children are victims of conflict and violence. Each year from mid-June to mid-July we run camps for children, one for Christian children and an interfaith camp.

“We also have a program called Happy House in Maluku Province and in Jakarta. In each Happy House we provide training for women and children 8–14 years of age. We provide training for support workers in the Happy Houses and do research to see if the Happy Houses are effective.”

How did their course work at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute apply to their work at the center?

“In the course Peace Curriculum for Youth and Children, we learned to write a training manual,” Rev. Yanti responded. “We now have the outline and will work on completing the manual when we are back in Indonesia.”

Krisni added, “We learned about providing safe places for peace work. An example was a recent training in Sulawesi, which was intended to address tensions between Muslims and Christians. The planning committee made up of local nongovernmental organizations scheduled the training to begin at a local Muslim facility. But none of the Christians showed up, fearing that they would not be safe.

“So the organizers went throughout the area and picked up the Christian participants individually and took them to a new venue at a local hotel. Because the hotel was a neutral place, it was a safe place for this training.”

A Story of Forgiveness

An example of an activity in Indonesia that resulted in forgiveness and reconciliation was a training that was implemented in Poso, Sulawesi. Christian and Muslim women leaders were invited to the training. Krisni said, “On the first day all the Christians brought their Bibles and the Muslims wore the *jilbab* (head covering); Christians sat on one side of the room and the Muslims sat on the other side.”

As the training proceeded, the women told stories and they realized that they all were victims. Rev. Yanti continued the story: “They had a role play where Christians played the roles of Muslims and Muslims played the roles of Christians. As the role play went on, they realized how each had been treating the other side as enemies.

“On both sides women asked for forgiveness and there were tears in many eyes as the former enemies embraced and danced.”

As a result of this training, a dangerous conflict of two or three years, with several deaths, was brought to an end.

Maria Mbelu: Council of Churches Leader

Most MCC-sponsored participants at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute are staff or directors of peacebuilding organizations.

Maria Mbelu’s assignment is broader than peacebuilding. “I am the General Secretary of the Council of Swaziland Churches, which was formed in 1976 by representatives of the Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic Churches. They felt called to preach the gospel in totality, i.e., taking care of the spiritual, socioeconomic, and political needs of a person.”

Mbelu continued: “The Council believes in attending to the human being in totality. Politics is part and parcel of us; people in the pews are affected by politics. But the council does not belong to political parties.

“If something is done by the government that may be infringing on the rights of people in Swaziland, we make an appointment and talk peacefully with the government. We also don’t believe in interfering in politics—we believe in trying to solve problems in an amicable way.”

As an example of the action programs of the Council of Swaziland Churches, Mbelu mentioned a response to refugees from South Africa. “In 1976 we felt that we should help the refugees who were then fleeing into Swaziland from South Africa. After the Council was formed, we immediately moved into the job of assisting refugees. Later we also helped refugees from conflict in Mozambique.

“Since that time we have established programs in governance, economic justice, legal and human rights education and conflict transformation, HIV/AIDS and its human rights implications, gender awareness, lobbying, and advocacy.

“The Council sets all the activities in the context of peace and justice. For instance, on the issue of governance, whenever the Council observes that certain government actions violate the rights of the people, it engages with the government authorities in peaceful discussions. Sometimes press statements are prepared by the Council aimed at addressing issues of national concern.”

Mbelu elaborated: “As a church organization we believe it is our responsibility to be a voice of those who find it difficult to talk for themselves. We derive our mandate from John 10:10: “I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly” and Proverbs 31:8–9: “Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

Some Specific Activities

As an example of the Council’s work on specific issues, Mbelu expanded on the activities related to HIV/AIDS and human rights: “The Council conducts awareness-raising workshops on issues of family law emphasizing the importance of maintaining families. The Council provides legal aid counseling to needy women who are not financially supported by their husbands, bringing together all parties to discuss and arrive at a peaceful solution where the husband supports the family by channeling monies through the Council.

“People are also educated on how to write a will—this is very important in the event of death of those parents infected by the HIV/AIDS virus. The absence of a will adversely affects HIV/AIDS orphans as their parents’ properties end up falling into the hands of greedy relatives.”

Web Resources on Swaziland

Africanet.com/Swaziland:
<http://www.africanet.com/africanet/country/swazi/home.htm>

CountryReports.org/Swaziland:
<http://www.countryreports.org/content/swaziland.htm>

Swaziland National Trust Commission: <http://www.sntc.org.sz/tourism/sdsocial.html>

allAfrica.com/Swaziland:
<http://allafrica.com/swaziland/>

AfricaOnline.com/Swaziland:
<http://www.swazineews.co.sz/>

Part of the reason we can make our views known in this way is that Swaziland is a country where people have a tradition of sitting around the table and talking in community with all affected parties. Community meetings for settling disputes and discussion of issues of national concern are usually held at the chief's kraal.

What has she learned at the SPI? Mbelu responded, "I have received some new ideas for working with conflicts around internally displaced persons, conflict issues related to religion that are now brewing, and resourcing for workshops in Swaziland on conflict transformation."

As an example of a current conflict related to religious faith, she lifted up an issue facing the Swaziland state television broadcasting system, where Muslims and Baha'is are requesting air time to expose the public to their religious views and beliefs. Traditionally, the system has broadcast some programming from the Christian majority in Swaziland.

"Some Christian groups do not want to allow this [Muslim and Baha'i broadcasts], saying, 'We don't want to expose our children to these non-Christian beliefs.' But the Council tends toward the approach of building around areas where all agree rather than highlighting areas of disagreement."

The Council of Swaziland Churches does not hesitate to state its views to the country's government. "Part of the reason we can

make our views known in this way is that Swaziland is a country where people have a tradition of sitting around the table and talking in community with all affected parties. Community meetings for settling disputes and discussion of issues of national concern are usually held at the chief's kraal (*umphakatsi* in Siswati, the national language). Once an issue of national concern has been discussed at the *umphakatsi* level it is further taken to the *tinkhundla* centers, which are combinations of several *umphakatsi*/chiefdoms.

"If there is a problem in a village, one of the parties will report it to the chief. He will bring the parties together around the table in an *inkhundla*, which would also include the chief's advisers. The chief and the advisers listen to both sides, and then may request that one side apologize to the other. They may also impose a fine."

Maria Mbelu's self-assurance and deep knowledge of issues in Swaziland made it clear that she is a formidable voice for peace and justice in her country.

Nikolai (Mykola) Mazharenko: Library Director

Many people have told me I have a gift from God in the area of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Nikolai Mazharenko works comfortably in three languages: Ukrainian, Russian, and English.

His name is Mykola in Ukrainian, Nikolai in Russian.

He spent time in Canada a few years back under the MCC International Visitor Exchange Program. There he polished his English language skills.

He is also a young man in a hurry, with a calling to make peace: "Many people have told me I have a gift from God in the area of reconciliation and peacebuilding. I was invited by MCC to get training at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute and to work with church conflict in the Ukraine."

As an example of these conflicts, Nikolai mentions the tension between the Baptist Independent Churches and the Baptist Registered Churches, which decided in the days of the Soviet Union to register with the gov-

ernment. The Baptist Independent Churches decided to remain unrecognized by the government, and the tensions between these groups continue even though the Soviet Union broke up in 1991.

Peacebuilding in the Library

Mazharenko is the director of the library at Donetsk Christian University in Donetsk, Ukraine. He is also working on a B.Th. degree at the university, which he hopes to complete in 2005.

While the university library might be the last place one would expect to find conflict situations, anytime there are people working together there will be disagreements.

"God has prepared me for a role in peacebuilding. In my work as head of the university library I have employees and need to deal with conflict situations.

"I also worked for about a year as church administrator of my congregation, after the pastor resigned and until we got a new pastor, and was able to help the church work through a conflict during this time."

When asked for an example of peacebuilding in his experience, Mazharenko told the story of a deep-seated conflict he was able to address in his home town of Stroganovka, Ukraine.

"In October 2003 I visited my mother in Stroganovka. While I was there I was invited to preach in the Registered Baptist Church in nearby Grigorevka, the same place where I became a believer in 1991."

Mazharenko explained that in 2003 there were serious misunderstandings between this Baptist church and the town's Orthodox church, and the conflict was coming to the point of an explosion. On the Sunday when he was invited to preach, there was a visitor from the Orthodox church to observe what was being taught. Early in the service the Baptist pastor spoke briefly on the conflict.

Mazharenko continued: "I preached for 90 minutes, using Bible texts as well as quotes from Orthodox priests and church fathers such as Augustine. I encouraged them to reflect on the question 'What is the Christian life?' Following that service the conflict was greatly diminished and the two congregations have been able to get along."

As Nikolai thinks about the need for peacebuilding in the former Soviet Union, he reflects on the way social and religious issues were kept in check under the prior government: "For the 80 years under Communism in the Ukraine, conflicts were suppressed by the heavy hand of the government. But now some of these conflicts, including within the church, are coming out into the open.

"There is conflict between young and old in the church, with most of the preachers and church leaders from an older generation and young people calling for changes in preaching and music styles."

And he states with conviction his concern for the spirituality of the congregations in the Ukraine. "There is a strong accent on the moral life and evangelism in the churches. But what about the spiritual life?"

New Commitment

For Nikolai Mazharenko, the time at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute was a time of new commitment. "When I was flying here for the SPI, I had a strong feeling that my life would be changed by this experience. Near the end of the first course, Introduction to Conflict Transformation, I felt that I wanted to dedicate my life to peacebuilding."

Mazharenko gives the reason why he is in a hurry to prepare himself further for a role in peacebuilding in the Ukraine. "I am planning to spend part of my time after I complete my degree studying law in Moscow. Peacebuilding needs knowledge of the law. That will be the contribution I can make to a team effort to address church conflict from several perspectives."

Another member of the team at Donetsk Christian University is Andrei Zolotarev, who was interviewed along with his wife Lyudmila for the January–March 2000 *Peace Office Newsletter* issue on "Worldwide Peacebuilders."

The Zolotarevs and Mazharenko are using the skills honed at the SPI to bring their energy and determination to the task of building peace in the Ukraine.

Ukraine Resources on the Web

Donetsk Christian University:
[http:// www.dcu.donbass.com/eng/news.shtml](http://www.dcu.donbass.com/eng/news.shtml)

uazone.net Guide to Ukraine:
<http://ukraine.uazone.net/>

Ukraine: In the Aftermath:
<http://www.tifft.com/home.html>

CountryReports.org/Ukraine:
<http://www.countryreports.org/content/ukraine.htm>

BBC Ukraine profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1102303.stm

Musa Mohamad Sanguila: Peacebuilder in the Philippines

I wasn't able to connect with Musa Mohamad Sanguila at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute, so I have worked with him to complete a virtual interview by e-mail.

Musa Mohamad Sanguila is the executive director of PAKAGDAIT, Inc., an inter-faith peace organization based in Iligan City, Mindanao, the Philippines. He was a found-

ing member of the board of trustees and continues as a Muslim member of the board.

Is teaching peacebuilding part of your work? Sanguila's response was an enthusiastic, virtually shouted "YES! In our context, grass-roots peacebuilding adult reeducation is a crucial component. Therefore, teaching, lectures, and facilitations are a common form in my kind of work."

Amazingly, when Muslim and Christian leaders talked, they usually discussed about their desire for peace. . . . Religion, which for centuries has been viewed as the source of conflict, is now used as a resource for peace.

Do you plan to do more peacebuilding work in the future? “Yes!—for as long as the material basis and the structures of violence and war exist, especially in our localities. Simply put, if the compelling reason is there, peacebuilding work becomes my career and my way of life.”

How did you become interested in the Summer Peacebuilding Institute? “A combination of opportunity and a challenge: I welcomed the opportunity to formally study peacebuilding outside the Philippines and to have international classmates while the challenge now is the application stage—in our particular settings—which is actually a test of learnings and wisdom.”

What are some of the things you learned at the SPI that you will be able to use in your current work? Sanguila responded, “Practically the whole training course is indeed very insightful and very relevant in my kind of work in the Philippines. I have already reechoed to my staff some aspects of the difference between monologue and dialogue in adult education. They practiced and found it effective and exciting.

“The seven steps of planning feedback strategies, among other things, are actually things that we were doing, but new labels have been given to them.”

Interfaith Action for Peace

As a concrete example of the kind of interfaith action for peace that Musa Mohamad Sanguila advocates, he and a Catholic colleague, Carino V. Antequisa, have cowritten an article entitled “Inter-Faith in Action towards Conflict Transformation.” Antequisa is active with several peace and justice groups in Mindanao, including membership on the board of trustees of PAKAGDAIT.

The authors go into the history of the Philippines and the history of Mindanao, the province of the Philippines where many Muslims live. They give details of the introduction of Christian settlers into Mindanao under colonial governments and the dis-possession of the local Moro (“Moor” or

Muslim) people of much of their land. The Christian settlers have taken over nearly all the prime agricultural land and forests of Mindanao, contradicting the traditions of local Muslims and indigenous people that land was not to be “owned” individually but to be held in trust by the clan and preserved for future generations.

“After centuries of bitter strife,” say Antequisa and Sanguila, “being a Muslim or Christian became a political identity rather than simply being a religious one. Being a Muslim in Mindanao is not simply to be a believer of Islam but a defender of the Moro people’s right to self-determination. Being a Christian and the majority in Mindanao is also not simply to be a Catholic or a Protestant but to be viewed as the threat to Moro identity.”

The authors propose conflict transformation as a “dynamic process to reconciliation” and go on to say that “In the case of Mindanao, transforming conflict means improving interreligious relations, appreciating the long and complicated history of the conflict, building the pillars of reconciliation, and improving the lives of the people affected by the conflict.”

They describe religion as “both a source of conflict and a powerful resource for peace.” Speaking of interreligious dialogue in the 1970s and following, Antequisa and Sanguila say, “Amazingly, when Muslim and Christian leaders talked, they usually discussed about their desire for peace. . . . Religion, which for centuries has been viewed as the source of conflict, is now used as a resource for peace.

“Peace will remain a dream if the faith in the heart of people is not connected to the social realities they are living. Such faith needs to be instrumental in raising the people’s awareness in the history of their community and the conflict. It should be the driving force in transforming the institutions of society and in improving their livelihoods.”

Rita Sawaya: Human Rights Activist in Lebanon

Raised in Beirut in the crucible of the Lebanese civil war, Rita Sawaya has dedicated herself to human rights work as a volunteer with the Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights–Lebanon.

But how many activists can claim, like Ms. Sawaya, to be an archaeologist and expert in ancient art? Her wide-ranging interests bring breadth and vision to her human rights work.

“I started as a learner/volunteer with the Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights–Lebanon in 1994,” she says. “I was a student in archaeology at that time, and my focus was mainly on women’s and children’s rights.

“I joined the foundation because it is a nondiscriminatory place where people whose rights are violated are helped without regard for differences in religious background, ethnicity, or gender. There are volunteers from all different contexts—Muslims, Christians, and Druse.”

Sawaya goes on: “Human rights is the noblest thing to work on, better than to be involved in politics. So often the conflicts between political parties have resulted in bloodshed and created other problems.

“I joined because it is a way of expressing respect for oneself and for others. An additional reason is that the foundation not only has a practical approach, intervening with advice for people whose rights have been violated, but there is also an educational approach where people’s awareness is being raised so that they can appreciate themselves, develop self-respect, and know their rights and responsibilities.”

The Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights–Lebanon conducts training programs in the major universities in Lebanon, as well as free training programs outside university contexts. It has been an important source of information and energy for Sawaya and for many others.

“I have been involved in casework with women and children focusing on legal rights and advocacy, and training youth in human rights. Trainees are recruited from former students of the human rights courses at various universities, and the training is open to others as well. I also work in the environmental section where there is urgent need to

save and preserve the ecosystem that is being destroyed by careless use.

“One of the finest achievements of the FHHRL is that over the past three years we have held press conferences where grievances are reported by the victims before the media. The purpose is to encourage the Lebanese society to confront the authorities and inform the public about violations of human rights. These grievances are supported by detailed evidence including real names, dates, and places. This can best be appreciated when compared to the oppressed Middle Eastern societies where violations are most often endured in silence.”

Growing Up during the Civil War

Sawaya speaks of her motivation to be of service and the process of deciding how to do that: “It was hard for me to choose what to do. I grew up in Beirut during the civil war. In response, I had to do something with my life to benefit others.”

As a university student, she specialized in medieval Christian archaeology. Later, during and after graduate studies, Sawaya worked as an archaeologist and also taught at the university level. “I work as an archaeologist. I have also taught at the Institute of Sacred Art at the University of the Holy Spirit and I am presently teaching in the Department of Theology at Antonine University, both being Maronite Christian institutions. I teach Christian art and iconography, ancient Near Eastern mythologies, the political history of the people of the Old Testament, and biblical Hebrew.”

How did Sawaya become a human rights activist? “My transformation started with my volunteer work, which has transformed my life and made my aspirations more concrete. I have always been disappointed in the world’s violence and hypocrisy and the way the world rejects good and accepts evil.

“My work with the foundation changed this. It has given me a conceptual framework and an effective way of responding to conflict and trauma that can be transformed at the different levels of society in protracted, violent, and complex situations of social confrontation. It has been a confirmation for me that conflict could be transformed into sustainable peaceful resolution.”

I would summarize it like this: SPI is a peacebuilding lab. The approaches I have learned here will change my relationships with people in my activist work, in my academic work, and in my personal life. I now have new lenses.

Lebanon Web Sites

Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights Lebanon (site under construction): <http://www.fhhrl.org.lb/>

World Information Zone/Lebanon: <http://www.worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=Lebanon>

CountryReports.org/Lebanon: <http://www.countryreports.org/content/lebanon.htm>

Cedarland: www.cedarland.org

Al Mashriq: almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon

Daily Star newspaper: www.dailystar.com.lb

Al Hayat newspaper: <http://english.daralhayat.com>



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A Peacebuilding Lab

I was interested in her responses to the Summer Peacebuilding Institute. “Before I came to SPI, I was not prepared for the seriousness of the training in peacebuilding, for the diversity, for the willingness of Mennonites to create a space where people of different cultures can remold their relationships in a systematic way, in an interactive context of study, where there is a concerted effort to transform conflict.

“I would summarize it like this: SPI is a peacebuilding lab. The approaches I have learned here will change my relationships with people in my activist work, in my academic work, and in my personal life. I now have new lenses. I have more peacebuilding resources to pass on to people in my country or wherever I may work in this field. My experience at SPI has significantly added to my repertoire of peacebuilding resources.

“This summer at SPI I acquired new skills in such critical areas as restorative justice, philosophy and praxis of reconciliation, capacity building for peace organizations, and interactive teaching methods. This experi-

ence will prove to be invaluable in my new goals of establishing better networking and cooperation among our entire constituency.”

Sawaya reflected on conflict and peacebuilding practices among the Arab peoples and cultures. “In some ways the Mediterranean people have an advantage over less traditional societies—they are more effective at the interpersonal level. Their anger flares up quickly, but it is also soon dissipated and forgiveness follows. Reconciliation in Lebanon is much more possible than in countries where this emotional display and forgiveness are not traditional.

“The Lebanese people can make use of the liberty of expression that they have. The volunteers of the foundation are examples of sustainable peacemaking. It has become a family that is continuously growing and expanding its peaceful influence.”

My family and I spent five years in the Middle East. The interview with Rita Sawaya reminded me of the energy and charm of the Arab people who were our colleagues and friends during that time. And it was a sign for me of the hope for a peaceful future for the Middle East.