



West Africa Peacemaking: MCC Links

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Introduction

Although peacemaking sometimes occurs in a dramatic way, we often encounter peace-making opportunities in small, unexpected ways. This *Peace Office Newsletter* issue tells some stories of Mennonite Central Committee links to peace-making activities in West Africa—Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone. The authors of the stories are both Christian and Muslim.

Peacemaking often is embodied in small steps which are seemingly routine at the time. The articles in this issue by Father Fom, Yakubu Joseph and Siaka Traoré describe several workshops or training sessions in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Even when they are on a relatively small scale, such trainings can have a transformational effect on the participants in their understanding of how to deal with violence other than by confrontation and retribution. Many of the participants have affirmed the importance of that transformation in their lives.

Sumaye Hamza describes an experience when children took the lead toward making peace in their community, even though their elders were more hesitant. The important role that pro-peace observers can play to head off violence in communities before it materializes is described by Gopar Tapkida's stories from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams.

Ken From describes a dramatic example of peacemaking. Sometimes the peace-making task may seem so large that the efforts of any one organization are unlikely to succeed, but the report on West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) from Madjibé Levy and Laurel Borisenko gives cause for hope. And opportunities for peacemaking often sneak up on us through quite small events or in unexpected ways. Those sometimes come to us as examples from non-Christians, as Ruth Boehm describes.

Amina Ahmad reminds us that peace work is a responsibility that we are given. The role of the peacemaker is often to plant seeds, to be steadfast and join with others, even when the end result is unclear. Archbishop Romero's wisdom reminds us that the long view is often necessary: "We accomplish in our lifetime, only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work."

Thanks to Joanna Hiebert Bergen for compiling this issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter*. She and her husband, Dan, worked with MCC in Nigeria for seven years. Together with Matthew Tangbuin, they were part of a three-person administrative team from 2002–2006.

Interfaith Peace Building, a Christian Perspective

by Rev. Fr. Anthony Fom

We live in a society that is beset by poverty, political unrest, social disorder, religious intolerance and general backwardness. Peace is important and a prerequisite for our development and progress. The need for peace building in our society can not be overemphasized. This article will attempt a definition of peace and peace building, and focus on the Christian perspectives that promote interfaith peace building in communities. All this with specific reference to the peace-building initiatives being run by Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC) of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos, Nigeria.

Peace

Peace is more than the absence of violence. It is the state of mind in which there is orderliness in one's relation to God and to others. Peace implies the need for justice in relations between various societies and an acknowledgment that people are of equal worth. Martin Luther King said, "Peace is not the absence of tension, but the presence of justice." A Christian views peace as love of God and neighbor (Mark 12:29-31). Christianity teaches that peace among persons, groups or nations is only possible when people have good will towards each other and an acknowledgement of the universal fatherhood of God. Christ's birth was heralded by the words "Glory to God and peace on earth to men of good will" (Luke 2:14). Christ is also quoted as saying "My peace I give to you. . . . not as the world gives." Christ's type of peace refers to that of the soul, mind and heart, which surpasses human comprehension and endeavor. Peace and justice go hand in hand as there can be no peace without justice. The absence of overt physical harm to persons and property as a result of violence, riots, crime and vandalism combined with justice makes a society peaceful. It is true that religion can become a source of conflict but it is also a valuable resource for peace. People of different races and faiths who live together have found that despite their many differences, there is still much they share in common by faith's inspirations and aspirations in their communities.

Peace building is a process that facilitates the institution of durable peace by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through dialogue and socio-political and economic transformation, as well as recon-

ciliatory efforts to prevent the recurrence of future violence. The core focus of peace building is the creation of positive change, and to thereby move communities from conditions that foster violence to those that promote self-sufficiency and well-being. Christian teachings aim to promote equality of all human beings irrespective of tribe, gender and religious belief. The late Pope John Paul II was known for his journeys around the globe trying to bring better understanding between nations. He called for inter-religious dialogue to build a better society that is free of danger, of the arms race, of poverty, ignorance, discrimination, persecution and suffering.

The process of peace building begins at the personal/individual level. Individuals must undergo a thorough process of healing from the traumatic events of conflict to be able to experience inner peace. The loss of family, friends and property often overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope. The state of hopelessness, of helplessness and of intense negative feelings sometimes leads to psychological and emotional instability in individuals. Christianity teaches that individuals must be able to live above such situations based on the biblical injunctions of forgiveness, just as Jesus did on Calvary (Luke 23:34). The whole teaching of the Bible is the good news of peace. Jesus' teaching was centered on love, service, prayer and forgiveness and such should be the approach of his followers.

Jesus' attitude towards warfare is illustrated in Matthew 26:52 where Jesus told Peter to "put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Jesus never killed anyone and did not organize any type of war to kill those who did evil. At the interpersonal level, conflicting parties should identify what things they value and appreciate about each other's beliefs.

Interfaith Peace Building: JDPC initiatives

The interfaith peace-building activities being promoted by Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC) focuses on creating an enabling environment for a dialogue of life between adherents of Islam and Christianity. The outbreak of violence in the years 2001-2004 was characterized by displacement of a large population of people within Plateau state, and from Plateau to neighbor-

The core focus of peace building is the creation of positive change to move communities from conditions that foster violence.

ing states. Communities that had experienced cordial relationships for a very long time started getting divided along religious lines, and this resulted in tension, hostility, suspicion and fear of the unknown. Both religions profess a belief in the existence of a "Supreme Being that is Almighty, the Creator and ultimate Judge of all human beings . . . and while both Muslims and Christians confess inability to comprehend God, some from both camps sometimes think they know exactly what God wants" (Kaigama, 2006). The need to promote an enduring interfaith cooperation and dialogue to end the ethno-religious motivated violence, and to create an atmosphere of peace, justice and healing became a major focus of JDPC. Advocacy to the leaders of the two religions prepared the ground for further peace activities such as training of persons selected from both faiths from all over Plateau state in a Training of Trainers workshop on conflict resolution/management and peace-building techniques. A step-down of the same training was conducted for 30 participants of mixed faiths from each local government area comprising women, men and youths. These trained persons formed Peace Teams to carry out advocacy and interfaith dialogues, and to meet regularly to monitor conflict situations in their communities.

The introduction of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Training (EPRT) Program by JDPC has further strengthened and widened the scope of peace-building activities in the state. EPRT is an interfaith peace-building and emergency preparedness initiative of JDPC working in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Nigeria and in collaboration with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN), the Center for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Nigeria Red Cross (NRC), the National Council of Muslim Youths Organisation (NACOMYO) and the State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA). The series of trainings at both the state and local levels, the implementation of action plan activities, and the monitoring by each local team have reduced the incidence of conflict and have assisted communities in the reintegration process. One of the major achievements of the program is the cordial working relationship and the joined efforts to promote peace by the interfaith and mixed-gender teams.

Christians do not have a monopoly on peace building or non-violence, and there are effective peace builders within the other faiths. The call for the universal reign of peace and harmony is the central hope of all, irrespective of religious affiliation. Peace-building initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation among all groups should be encouraged and "the church should be a model for civic leaders, showing governance which is not wealth-oriented but service-oriented." Collaborative work based on mutual respect for each other's opinion and beliefs and capacity-building activities enable societies to achieve some degree of sustainable peace.

Notes

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Rev. Fr. Anthony G. Fom hails from Plateau State of Nigeria. He was educated at St. Augustine Major Seminary in Jos. He is a graduate of the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, and the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome. He has served several Parishes as Priest, and is now the Coordinator of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos. He has been very instrumental in the establishment of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Team in Plateau State.

Christians do not have a monopoly on peace building or non-violence.

The Peddler as Peacemaker

by Ruth Boehm

I was humbled. Mallam Garba was a Muslim, and he went out of his way to make peace with me.

One day the local peddler, Mallam Garba, was at our house late. He came with produce to sell left over from the market. It wasn't always the highest quality. However, he wanted very good prices for the service to the door. He would bargain very hard. If we thought we had gotten a reasonable deal then he would ask for tea and some sugar. If we thought we had overpaid, he left with a smile. On this particular day he was at our home after dark and his flashlight (torch) was not working. He asked to borrow ours. I had a brand new torch, so I marked it with a blue permanent ink marker so that I would know that he had given it back. I didn't trust him. He left happily with the torch. Several weeks later he returned the torch. This one was an old beat-up torch with different batteries. He left it at our home when our housekeeper was there. I was mad. I felt my trust had been betrayed. I was tired of getting ripped off by people who thought they could get away with things because I was a foreigner. I made the mistake of talking about the torch to him in front of some other people the next time I saw him. Soon

it became a community issue. Two different people came and talked to me about how Mallam Garba was upset because the white lady was upset with him about the torch. He accused our househelper of replacing the new torch with an old one. I became very unhappy about that because our househelper would not do something like that and I was upset that he would ruin her reputation.

A few days later Mallam came to our home with a new torch. He didn't want to have the customer be angry with him or ruin his reputation. I was humbled. Here was I, the one who was supposed to forgive, to model acceptance, to teach about peace between Christians and Muslims, and I got all wound up about a \$2 flashlight and \$3 worth of batteries. I guess I was tired of being taken advantage of, but I was humbled by his effort. Mallam Garba was a Muslim, and he went out of his way to make peace with me.

Ruth Boehm taught at Gindiri College of Theology in Gindiri, Nigeria, from 2002–2005.

Islamic Women and Peace Building

by Amina Ahmad

“Jihad” means any sort of striving that benefits humankind.

In the name of Allah most gracious most merciful.

*“O my Lord! Open for me my chest
And ease my task for me;*

*And loose the knot (defeat) from my
tongue (i.e., remove the incorrectness
from my speech)*

That they understand my speech”

(Quran chapter 20 vs. 25–28).

It is my honor to greet every living soul in peace and with peace because that is the teaching of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).¹ Because “Allah made the word peace the greeting of Muslims and a security upon the people who enter agreement with them,” it is befitting to begin talking with one another with a word of peace because there is no meaningful talking if there is no peace and security.

Islamic women and peace building is a very broad and complicated area. As a non-professional, I will concentrate on personal experiences and those few peace-building activities in the local context.

Today, Islamic women are not left behind in the area of peace building despite various challenges faced from tradition, norms and values. A woman is created for love and peace. “Among his signs is this, that he created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for people who reflect” (*Quran* 30 vs. 21). It is a concern that Muslim women have been manipulated and marginalized in all facets of life. In most Islamic (Muslim) areas women are seen as second-class human beings and are, therefore, not given the opportunity to forge ahead. A woman is not looked to when it comes to decision-making and developmental issues. A woman is seen as useful in

child-bearing, domestic housekeeping, and when a man decides to fulfill his desire.

Women and children are extremely vulnerable during and after conflict situations. Women are killed, or turned into widows, and they lose their children or other family members. The high rates of male mortality in wars along with the displacement of refugees and migrations bring profound changes in families. One of the most devastating effects is the formation of households headed by women who must assume all responsibilities for the households' upkeep. They are also left with psychological pain that may lead to ill health.

Thanks to various awareness programs, Islamic women are now up and doing in conflict management and peace building. They are into various initiatives to create an enabling environment for sustainable peace and development.

Peace work is indeed a strongly desired activity in the minds of Islamic women, a part of their daily lives. The Quran says: "We sent thee not but as a mercy to all creatures." Another verse says that: "Lo! Those who believe (in Mohammed), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabeans. Whoever, believes in God and the last day and does good they have their reward with their Lord and there shall no fear come into them neither shall they grieve" (Quran 2:62; 5:69).²

Although Islam is associated with violence and is seen as a religion of the sword (*Jihad*) in the minds of non-Muslims, Islamic women are working to change this incorrect concept about Islam. "*Jihad*" is a term that has been totally misinterpreted and misunderstood. There is no chapter in the Holy Quran that legitimizes the killing of human beings or committing suicide.

Jihad means striving in the path of Allah. It can be any sort of striving as long as it is something that benefits humankind. For instance, when you strive and educate poor children in your neighborhood, that is *Jihad*. When you strive and initiate peace-building activities, it is another form of *Jihad*. When you eradicate illiteracy in your community, that is *Jihad*. Fighting bribery and corruption is also *Jihad*. *Jihad* is an issue of concern globally, therefore all Muslim communities and organizations need to come up with strategies to change the notion about Jihad and Islam despite the acts of some Islamic extremists that engage in suicide bombing that destroys themselves and their targets. Such extremists create a lot of confusion to the understanding of Islam as a religion of love and peace.

Many of the series of crises in Nigeria from 1999 to the present are presented as religious crises between Muslims and Christians. These crises are sponsored and fueled by the political class of the country to achieve their desired positions. Religion was used during political campaigns in 1999 and 2003 to win elections. In light of that history, as the election year 2007 approaches a variety of Non-Governmental Organizations, Community-Based Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations, and Civil Societies are gearing up to mitigate any form of conflict that may arise.

Islamic women are involved with some of these organizations and working on the following:

1. Awareness programs on peaceful co-existence to the general public
2. Taking part in the political arena as part of various forums concerned with decision making and policy making.
3. Creating income-generating programs to reduce poverty.
4. Initiating peace-building programs for local women's organizations, and taking part in sharing peace-building information with family members and friends.
5. Advocacy to religious organizations to incorporate civic education, conflict management and peace-building activities in their programs of action.
6. Raising the awareness of traditional leaders, husbands and youths of all levels on the danger of being part of activities that can be manipulated by bad politicians.

The above programs are carried out by use of the Holy Quran and Hadith (tradition) of the prophet.

Below are some verses of the Holy Quran that talk about peaceful co-existence.

1. "O humankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily, the most honored among you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you. Verily, God is knowing, well acquainted (with who each one of you really is)" (49:13). This shows that no individual, tribe or nation is superior to any other but only those that are doing the right thing, contributing positively in the lives of mankind.
2. "The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel (o man) the evil deed with one which is the best, then lo! He, between whom and you there was

Further Resources

VIDEOS

"We Should Talk Peace", video produced by Mennonite Central Committee, 2006 (27 minutes).

BOOKS

Chris Shu'aibu Abashiya and Ayuba Jalaba Ulea, *Christianity and Islam: A Plea for Understanding and Tolerance*. Jos, Nigeria: Midland Press, 1991. 283 pp.

Islamic women look at peace work as a responsibility ordained to them by Almighty Allah.

enmity, becomes as though he was a bosom friend. But none is granted (to practice such forgiveness) save those who are self-restrained and patient, and none is granted it save those who are very fortunate” (41: 34–35).

3. “And remember the favor of God on you: how you were enemies and he reconciled your hearts so that you became as brothers by the grace of God; and how you were at the brink of an abyss of fire and He saved you from it” (3:103). This verse shows that it is never too late for two warring parties to reconcile. In many cases people agree to disagree and relationships become strong and better.

Finally, Islamic women look at peace work as a responsibility ordained to them by Almighty Allah. The fruit of their work may take a long time to ripen. But women make things move

and it is my belief that if these peace-building initiatives continue, the goals and objectives will be achieved. It might not be now, maybe in a hundred years to come, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step.

Notes

1. “Peace Be Upon Him.”
2. “Sabeen” is the same as “Sabian.” Under Islamic sharia, the Sabians form a protected religious group, along with Christians and Jews. These nations contained both believers and disbelievers.

Amina Ahmad is a graduate of Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria. She works as a training officer at the Plateau State Directorate of Adult and Non-formal Education, and she also leads the Association of Concerned Community Women (ACCW), an organization of Muslim women which trains Muslim women and communities on issues of multi-faith peace building and HIV/AIDS.

Youth and Peace in Nigeria’s Plateau State

by Yakubu Joseph

Politicians have exploited the energy and zeal of the youth.

We found a genuine desire for peace.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa—a population of about 130 million—with more than half the population under 25 years of age. On one hand, the country is blessed with abundant youth resources. However, the youth have been exploited and manipulated by the elites to disrupt peace in many towns and villages. Often they end up as victims without any attention from their ‘godfathers’ who invest in violence to reap economic or political gains. As peace builders, we of the Center for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN) have come to realize that by making the youth our prime focus we are able to accelerate peace building—particularly preventive peace building—and mitigate conflicts.

Paradoxically, there has been an increase in the number and magnitude of communal conflicts in Nigeria since the country’s return to democracy in 1999. These violent conflicts led to loss of lives and property, left communities devastated and many people’s livelihoods shattered. The poor, especially women and children, became more vulnerable.

In most of the conflicts, the youth carry out the destruction and sustain the largest casualties. They also have become more predisposed to carry out secondary violence such as alcohol, drug, and sexual abuse and

armed robbery. Youth are often recruited to perpetrate violence by influential members of the society who have political and economic power (so-called elders or shadow-parties). As the violence unfolds, these recruiters may even label the youth as hoodlums who are not to be taken as a serious threat to the community. By minimizing the destructive tendencies of the youth, the shadow-parties create a scenario that does not give room for educating and sensitizing youth on nonviolence.

Political Manipulation

Politicians have deliberately exploited the energy and zeal that youth possess. First, by polarizing the communities along ethnic lines, the politicians gained ‘blind’ solidarity among their own people. Already there are structures in the polity that feed and nurture ethnic antagonism. The ethnic groups usually operate as pressure groups. Their militant arms are the youth that constitute themselves into armed militia groups and use violence to negotiate their demands or to intimidate their opponents. Many young people have been recruited into militia groups and they have become the source of energy of a vicious cycle of violence. Over the past few years, civil society organizations, especially faith-

based organizations, have designed peace programs that are targeted at young people in order to reduce their susceptibility to violence. Although peace-building efforts are yielding positive results, they still lag behind the investment in violence by politicians towards the 2007 general elections.

Second, although Nigeria is an oil-producing country, more than half the population lives in poverty. The political elites take advantage of this high level of poverty to target the youth where the unemployment level is high. Poverty and unemployment make it easier to recruit youth as political thugs or militiamen. There appears to be a marked division of labor in all conflicts. The role of the elites, tribal champions or religious leaders is to instigate the conflict by making provocative and inciting utterances. They are also able to mobilize resources to equip the youth. The youth are the ones who take to the streets to carry out the mayhem.

Because they constitute such a large proportion of Nigeria's population, and because of their potential role in conflict, youth are and must be regarded as key stakeholders in every peace-building program.

Youth as Peacemakers

During the ethno-religious conflict that erupted in Jos¹ on September 7, 2001 and continued throughout the state for more than two years, some parts of the city were not affected. Young people in some of those areas came together and held hands across the conflict divide, and were able to develop buffer zones to prevent escalation of the crisis into their area. It took both physical and moral courage for the youth to do that.

In the aftermath of the conflict it became necessary to engage youth in the peace reconstruction process. To this end, the Jos Catholic Archdiocese through its Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) designed a post-conflict peace-building project. JDPC invited the National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO) to collaborate with them in implementing the project, funded by the German charity Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Both organizations mobilized Christian and Muslim youth to take part, and Mennonite Central Committee provided the resource persons for the training of trainers in conflict transformation. Rev. Gopar Tapkida, the MCC peace program coordinator in Nigeria, and I were asked to facilitate a multi-stage workshop for youth from across Plateau State.

Our task was to work with people who were harboring mutual suspicion and hatred

towards one another, sometimes including the trauma of losing loved ones. In such a daunting situation, two things helped us to succeed. First, the youth were adventurous. They were willing to find new horizons for peace, unlike some of their elders. We found a genuine desire for peace sandwiched between their feelings of grief and acrimony. The second factor was the transformational approach to training which our workshops employ. This approach focuses largely on personal transformation, including the invitation to the participants to carry out a self-awareness evaluation and to envisage a common and interdependent future². The stories shared by the youth and the relationships they later developed were obvious signs of their commitment to work for peace.

By the time the training cycle for trainers was completed, 10 women, 10 men and 10 youth had been trained in each of the 17 Local Government Councils in Plateau State. Eventually, JDPC selected 53 young people to constitute a state coordinating team. At the local government level, peace clubs of about thirty members each were formed, and were trained in peace and conflict-monitoring skills so they could provide early-warning information about brewing conflicts. The state coordinating team met every two months to receive and review reports from all the local clubs. Through their efforts quite a number of squabbles that would have led to violent confrontations were nipped in the bud.

Numerous youth associations organized as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) play an active part in promoting peace. They carry out peace campaigns and rallies to sensitize and educate the public. As the public's level of awareness increases, it will become more difficult for the conflict sponsors to manipulate the youth. Recently the Plateau Youth Council organized a one-day lecture to sensitize young people to resist being used to perpetrate political violence during the up-coming 2007 general elections. NGOs involved in peace work consider youth as vital stakeholders. In consultation with them, special packages are designed for the youth. These may include activities that promote interaction among youth from rival groups, such as football. Joint projects conducted by rival groups such as rebuilding of physical structures damaged during the conflict will further build confidence and enhance reintegration among them. More and more young people are making a commitment for peace to secure their future, as a counter to those who are recruited to disrupt and ruin it.

Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime, only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about,
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but, it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builder and the worker.
We are workers, not Master Builders, ministers not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

—Archbishop Oscar Romero
(martyred on March 24th, 1980)

Conclusion

The continuing sectarian conflicts cause parents to teach their children intolerance. To counter, we have promoted the establishment of peace teams and peace clubs in communities and schools. These serve to strengthen the values of peace, mutual understanding and tolerance among youth of diverse backgrounds. CEPAN is going to follow the JDPC model in nine additional local governments in Plateau State.

It is also important for NGOs, churches and government agencies to provide vocational and skills programs for the youth. Attacking unemployment among the youth increases their immunity against violence and encourages them to become responsible citizens.

Finally, efforts to recruit or encourage young people to become peace builders rather than fighters is a wise investment in the future of a society. Ignorance is a major opportunistic social disease that must be overcome. While there seems to be a fair appreciation of this proposition, there are insufficient resources for peace education. Mennonite Central

committee has been encouraging and supporting theological institutions to run peace courses. Whether peace education occurs through formal training or informally, the underlying purpose is to increase people's capacity to constructively handle conflict in ways that can help society grow.

Notes

1. Jos is the capital city of Plateau State in North-Central Nigeria. It was previously regarded to be the most peaceful city in Nigeria before this conflict between predominantly Muslim settlers and predominantly Christian indigenes, with major loss of life on all sides.

2. Lederach, J.P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.

Yakubu Joseph is Executive Director of Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), an NGO that was an offshoot of MCC's work in Nigeria, founded to strengthen the values of peace, mutual understanding and tolerance among the diverse ethnic and religious peoples of Nigeria.

To counter intolerance we have promoted the establishment of peace teams and peace clubs

Children As Bridge Builders In Peace Making

by Sumaye F. Hamza

If children can be used to perpetrate violence they can also be used to build and sustain peace.

The Christian and Muslim children decided that there would be peace because they wanted to continue with their games and activities together.

When individuals recognize that all forms of life are unique and essential, that all human beings are the beneficiaries of the right to development, and that both peace and violence have their origin in the consciousness of persons, a sense of responsibility to act and think in a peaceful manner will develop. Through this peaceful consciousness, individuals will understand the nature of these conditions which are necessary for their well-being and development. (United Nations, 1989)

Peace can be viewed as a state of living in harmony with one another. Violence is created through the decision of individuals to disrupt this harmony. Therefore, it is individuals who can also decide to make peace and sustain peace. I believe that the art of making peace involves individuals, especially children, being at peace with themselves and then being at peace with others. The Islamic message on peace is that "we build a world of peace on earth so that we may be granted peace in our eternal life in the hereafter." Consequently, in order to sustain the peace that children and

others make within themselves and with others, being at peace with the environment within which we live is crucial.

Sustainable peace therefore goes beyond the level of the person, to the society and the environment. In any crisis situation 92 percent of victims are women and children. An example of the effect of violence is evident in the wars and atrocities which occurred in Sierra Leone and Liberia. These forced thousands of children out of school, which deprived them of their right to education. The situation also made thousands of children orphans, victims of sexual abuse and hard labor, while others were lured into participating in armed conflict. All too often, girls became victims of trafficking.

In Nigeria, even though there is no war, there is continuing violence and killings in many parts of the country. In addition to the effects outlined above, farmlands have been destroyed, with dire consequences for food production, the economy of those communities, and the ecosystem on which we all depend.

If children can be used to perpetrate violence they can also be used to build and sustain peace in our society. I write as a Muslim educator interested in seeing that children acquire good values that will make them useful in the society for peaceful growth and sustainable development. There is no doubt that children—pre-primary to secondary level—can become great agents in peace building. When this group of people are at peace and act as bridge builders in making peace, then the world can be at peace.

Building the bridge of peace

If children are well educated and provided with good information on peace-making from the pre-primary level, they will imbibe the culture of cooperation, harmonious co-existence, love, tolerance, forgiveness, sharing, respect for self and others, and honesty that are important in sustaining any peace-making process. According to Islam, the three basic elements of building a peace culture are: “Compassion, Forgiveness and Respect for all.” Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad says “A true believer is one with whom others feel secure—one who returns love for hatred.” At this point I would like to emphasize the importance of parents and teachers in supporting children in building the culture of peace. Both parents and teachers are the quiet peace-makers and mentors who instill the message of peace in the minds of children and students. To this end, they should be seen to practice the culture of peace in their actions and behavior. If parents or teachers are always aggressive, they should realize that children will imitate that culture. When children come together because of the peaceful values they have learned from their parents and teachers, they can reach a beneficial goal.

The role of children as bridge builders is illustrated in the following example. In the community where I live there was an ethno-religious crisis. The engagement of children in games and activities together had started long before the crisis, and those games helped maintain peace in the community. The children had a team which served as a unifying factor. Both the Christian and Muslim children decided to mount a check point where the movement of people in and out of the community, including that of their parents, was checked. The children decided that there would be peace because they wanted to continue with their games. This act made the adults resolve to have peace; they held a series of meetings to ensure that the crisis did not happen in their community. Children can indeed nurture peace in their community.

The success of the children in preventing the crisis from reaching their community, and taking concrete steps to sustain the peace they had, shows how integration in our schools and communities can help to build upon the values of peace among children. Children from different religions and ethnicities can attend the same schools, use the same facilities, play the same games, and thereby learn the process of peacemaking. That commonality in the school or the community serves as a unifying factor for them. It may benefit our communities if we introduce clubs through which the children can organize football games, debates, quizzes, excursions and local voluntary work. A number of countries have used such an integrated approach and it has worked for them. The integration of children in peacemaking will go a long way toward creating harmonious relationships and sustainable development in our communities.

Everyone interested in peace should appreciate the importance of involving children in building the bridge of sustainable peace.

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Sumaye Hamza is an educator whose career has spanned many years with the Plateau State Government in Nigeria. She is also engaged in community development activities in peace and education, and is pursuing doctoral studies at the University of London.

“My voice alone can't sing a song of peace”

The words of the song sung by Chuck Neufeld and Bryan Moyer Suderman often came to mind in the spring of 2004. I was teaching a class on Peace Theology at Gindiri College of Theology. It was the first time this course was taught at this Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) school. I quickly learned that it was impossible to talk about peace without the discussion leading into a conversation about Christian-Muslim relationships.

Conflict broke out in an area not far from the school. It was labeled as a Christian-Muslim conflict, but it had many layers of tribal and political history. Feelings ran high on the school campus. Some students had relatives who were killed. Many students and staff had experienced losses of friends, family or property as the result of other Christian-Muslim encounters in the past. Some staff and students who had agreed with Christ's teachings about turning the other cheek were calling it into question.

Teaching peace at this time in the school was very unpopular. There were a few people who were still talking about non-violent responses as being the way to go, but they felt very alone. It was during this time that I realized that one of the roles we had to play in Nigeria was to simply stick to our beliefs. We had to also support those Nigerian voices that were speaking up for peace. We had to pray and we had to ask those in North America and around the world who also believed in non-violence and Christ's teachings to pray for peace and to continue to live out a peace witness in their own places. One voice alone can't do it. Not even two or fifty. But one voice is a beginning, to be steadfast, and to join with others.

—Ruth Boehm

Ruth Boehm taught at Gindiri College of Theology in Gindiri, Nigeria, from 2002–2005.

West Africa Peace Institute, Ghana

by Madjibé Levy and Laurel Borisenko

The West Africa Peace Institute (WAPI), Accra, Ghana, has become the main training event sponsored by the West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP). The MCC West Africa office, located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, has sponsored attendance at this training by a number of its partners from Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and has supported the establishment of WANEP offices in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The Mennonite connections to the West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) are deep-rooted and on-going. WANEP was born in 1997 during a brainstorming session involving Samuel Doe, Emmanuel Bombande, and others while they were attending the Summer Peace-building Institute (SPI) at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Harrisonburg, Virginia. Samuel and Emmanuel are now co-directors of WANEP, and almost all the WAPI lecturers are EMU graduates. WANEP has established itself as a network with a presence in most West African countries experiencing violent conflict. WANEP provides training and consultation services, as well as detailed, grass-roots information and analyses of current political situations in West Africa.

Because the participants in the WAPI training are practitioners from nearly every country in West Africa, the ability to learn from other participants increases the value of the course studies. The role-plays, videos, and exercises used in the training are therefore based on actual issues faced in the West African region.

The opportunity to network with WANEP instructors and with other peace-building participants is a particularly valuable aspect of the training. For example, in 2003 the

MCC West Africa participants met with participants from both Sierra Leone and Liberia. The civil war in Liberia had gone on for fourteen years, and that in Sierra Leone for ten. In both cases the country's infrastructure was almost completely destroyed, and the return of refugees in large numbers placed further strains on the ability of the governments to cope with the post-war needs. The identified post-war needs included the basic ones of food, shelter, clean water, health supplies, schools, tools, and seeds. In addition, as MCC has long been aware, crises often require longer-term and on-going assistance such as capacity-building to strengthen and rebuild civil society, and training and support for reconciliation efforts between ethnic groups. Trauma counseling is both an immediate and a continuing need. There is need for post-war counseling for children—including the re-integration of child soldiers—and for women and girls who were sexually abused throughout the war.

Efforts such as those of WANEP are important in order to counter the perception and reality as described below by one commentator.

“West Africa is one of the most violent, unstable, poverty-stricken regions in the world. Governments in the region have not been able to guarantee peace and security to their people, nor the security of their own borders. States have not been able to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of their citizens; however, each state has a strong military with the ability to crush popular uprisings. Too many of the presidents are dictators with no validity or ability to manage state affairs.”

Madjibé Levy has been MCC West Africa Director for Relief and Food Security since 2001, and Laurel Borisenko was MCC Regional Co-Director for West Africa from 2003 to 2006, both located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

The ability to learn from other West African participants increases the value of the course studies.

Peace Seminar for FEME Women in Burkina Faso

by Siaka Traoré

A training workshop for women of the member churches of FEME (Fédération des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques du Burkina Faso / Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions) was held September 12–16, 2005 in Ouagadougou, Burkina

Faso. The topic was “The role of women in management of conflicts.” FEME functions as a Council of Churches for numerous Protestant denominations in Burkina Faso. The facilitator for the workshop/seminar was Rev. Gopar Tapkida, Coordinator of the MCC peace program in Nigeria.

This event was organized in response to a request by the Alliance of Evangelical Women for a workshop specifically for women from the FEME churches. Twenty-four women from the ten FEME denominations came from numerous provinces of Burkina Faso to attend this September 2005 workshop. The initial interest for this women's workshop arose following an MCC-sponsored seminar for church leaders in Ouagadougou in March 2004 on the topic of "The role of the church in the construction of peace."

During the four days, the women received information about how conflicts manifest themselves, and constructive ways to transform a conflict situation. The participants were particularly interested to learn how to better work for peace because, although it is women who bring new life into the world, they and their children are often the first victims of conflicts.

Numerous times throughout the workshop the women participants deplored the absence of their husbands, and they asked that a similar event might be planned to give their spouses the same training.

Tapkida said he was delighted to have had this opportunity to share the training technique for peacemaking. As part of the seminar, the participants are invited to carry out

a self-awareness evaluation, and to make a commitment to collaboration. The transformational technique sees the survivors of crisis as major resources in the vision for peace. Both the perpetrator and the afflicted are wounded and need healing. Participants return to their homes with curiosity and new eyes to observe the dynamics within their families, neighborhoods and the larger landscapes. No person is insignificant. Because of the nature of inter-denominational and cross-gender dialogues, a renewed awareness of "the other" is possible. You and I—we—are intertwined and interconnected in ways not previously imagined.

Although he has led many training workshops, this was the first francophone one conducted by Tapkida. He said, "In the workshops I have led in Nigeria, it is not uncommon to have two languages spoken, usually English and Hausa. I have even conducted some of them entirely in Hausa. However, this is the first time when I, as facilitator, did not know the language (French) of any of the participants. I am pleased that the participants found the training to be valuable."

Pastor Siaka Traoré was a member of the leadership team in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, of MCC West Africa from 2001 to 2006.

A Christian Witness to Thieves

At 2 a.m. shots were fired into the air as the armed robbers smashed into three homes on the Gindiri Schools compound, including the home of our next-door neighbor, the Provost. He later commented, "I heard them coming and I could have killed one of them. But what kind of a person would that make me? In the nearby home of the Principal of the church-operated high school, the leader of the gang demanded a watch and it became apparent that it had already been pocketed by one of the other intruders. When a dispute began between the thieves for the watch, the Principal commented, "I have another watch that I will bring for you." He went, brought out a watch that had special memories for him, and gave it to the gang leader. Both the Provost and the Principal have leadership positions with hundreds of students and numerous others in the church community. With some cash, cell phones and watches, the thieves disappeared into the night. The example of these two men in going the second mile and refusing to retaliate was an example to their students and community of what it means to follow the Prince of Peace in a time of conflict.

—Ken From

Ken From taught at Gindiri College of Theology in Gindiri, Nigeria, most recently in 2006.

Stories of Crisis Intervention in Central Nigeria

by Gopar Tapkida

In the wake of the Jos riots of September 2001, Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams (EPRT) were formed in Plateau state of Nigeria. EPRT is comprised of ten organizations which cut across faith groups and agencies¹. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has provided the major peace-building capacity of EPRT and most of these organizations that have joined to sponsor the teams.

These are some stories from the work of several EPR Teams in Plateau State.

In the Wase local government area, there had been some on-going disagreement and tussle at Wadata Market between Muslim and Christian communities. The problem escalated a few years ago into conflict that engulfed the Wase people who were predominantly Muslims and the Langtang people who were predominantly Christians. Knowing the contagious nature of any con-

flict that is framed around religion, the local EPRT team in the area summoned the stakeholders of the various ethnic and faith groups for a forum of interactive dialogue. This interaction brought about the reduction of tension and subsequent transformation of the conflict. It also brought about the realization that both groups need each other for their businesses to survive.

In the Jos South community there was an impending conflict between a Christian preacher and some Muslims youths. This Christian preacher used to pass by the mosque in the community at 5.30 in the morning every day during the Muslims' fasting period, which was the time for the Muslims to gather for their early morning prayers. The Muslim youths interpreted this Christian preacher's action as a deliberated attempt to ridicule their faith. Consequently, they decided that they would behead the preacher

The EPRT members requested that the case be withdrawn from the court, and they applied restorative justice principles.



Mennonite
Central
Committee

21 South 12th Street
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Akron, PA 17501-0500

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when he next came by the mosque. When news of this plan got to the chief Imam of the mosque, he immediately informed the EPRT members in the area who intervened by carrying out a series of mediation sessions between the preacher and the youths. These mediation sessions led to a successful resolution of the conflict.

Two communities from two different local government areas, Jos South and Riyom, had been having a land dispute, and the case had been in court for a very long time. Since the court had not decided the case, the communities were becoming impatient. At the beginning of the planting season, violent conflict broke out between the two communities which led to intervention by the police. Since the police also could not resolve the conflict, they invited the local EPRT members to handle it. The EPRT members requested that the case be withdrawn from the court, and they applied restorative justice principles. This approach is yielding peace-building dividends in significant ways. Active fighting between these two communities ceased, and the chief of the area has offered to serve and work with EPRT members in the area.

Notes

1. The Management Advisory Committee of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams (EPRT) is made up of the following ten organizations:

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)

Red Cross Society of Plateau State

Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN)

The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN)

Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN)

National Council of Muslim Youth Organization of Nigeria (NACOMYO)

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

Jama'atu Nasril Islam Aid Group (JNI)

State Emergency Management Agency, Plateau State (SEMA)

Rev. Gopar Tapkida is the MCC peace program coordinator in Nigeria.