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# Taking Our Experience Home

A JOURNEY IN URI PEACEBUILDING



A REPORT TO THE URI CC COMMUNITY

*First came the growing requests for peacebuilding expertise within the URI community. In response, the global hub sought and obtained a grant from the United States Institute of Peace for a pilot project in peacebuilding. As a result, in May 2002, six members of URI Cooperation Circles (CC's) had the unique opportunity to study Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University. This group has formed a URI Peacebuilding Team to enhance the capacity of Peacebuilding work throughout our global network of local Circles.*

Who are we? We are members of URI Cooperation Circles. Representing diverse backgrounds, traditions and life experiences, we have come together, at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI), to study and share, to help formulate practices for URI Peacebuilding. We've come to learn, to develop skills, to imagine and design effective programs for Peacebuilding for our Cooperation Circles and to share what we have learned with our colleagues. This booklet contains the stories of our journey to date — stories of who we are, where we have come from, and what we are taking back to our CCs.

Our journey began as we traveled to Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, from Uganda, the Philippines, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and the United States. It continues as we return home full of inspiration, enriched by our experiences in the courses and from sharing with each other and fellow students in SPI. Our journey will include sharing our learnings with the URI community gathered at the Global Assembly in Rio de Janeiro in August 2002. Our group of six will grow into the hundreds. All of us working to create cultures of peace, justice and healing.

In this book, each of us has chosen to write from our own experience, in our own unique way — about our personal spiritual journeys into interfaith peacebuilding or how our Cooperation Circle developed or what we will take home from our learnings at SPI.

We will create a sequel to this book, the stories of our practice back home, the projects or pilots that we will have developed from our experience at SPI and the ways we have found to share.

We took these courses on behalf of everyone in the URI, as well as everyone in our own CCs and MCCs. We hope they and you find these stories as enriching and inspiring as we found learning together at SPI. We look forward to working together to make our communities and our world a more peaceful place.

In peace,  
Barbara Hartford  
URI PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES  
JUNE 2002



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## **NURTURING PEACE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA & THE WORLD**

(Reflections from the Summer Peacebuilding Institute 2002)

### **MARITES AFRICA**

September 11, 2001 was a fateful day in the history of humankind. It was a day that would be indelibly etched in the memory of those of us who had borne witness to its grim unfolding. What was previously inconceivable, happened, and the whole world watched in stunned disbelief as the New York World Trade Center crumbled in a cloud of dust following the onslaught of the terrorist attacks on the United States. This bold onslaught was a wake-up call that jolted humankind into an all-new level of self-awareness. That a mighty nation should be vulnerable to such an attack was a gruesome reminder of how far we, humankind, have gone to the brink of our own destruction. How precarious, indeed, is our life here on Earth!



In the aftermath of that tragic event, men and women the world over took courage and inspiration from each other and moved on, seemingly with a new sense of self-awareness in their lives. There were those who, despite the fear of further attacks of terror and aggression, found something deep within themselves that began to awaken to a new way of experiencing and perceiving their long cherished beliefs and values in the world. As fear and anxiety about the consequences of that tragic event gripped the hearts of people, various concerns about human survival and peaceful co-existence came to the fore. Sentiments were expressed by many about the need to foster relationships of understanding and good will among peoples and nations everywhere.

In my country, the Philippines, media coverage of 9/11 saturated our consciousness. This gave rise to a heightened awareness of the conflict between Muslims and Christians in the southern region of Mindanao.

With this awareness came a sense of apprehension about the possibility of renewed outbreaks of aggression from either Muslim or Christian fronts.

Among the Christians, there was the fear of increased violence from the Islamic rebel group, *Abu Sayyaf*. It was also feared that members of *Al Qaida*, the international terrorist group linked to Osama bin Laden, might take their terrorist rampage to our country. On the other hand, the Muslims also feared for their own situation. They listened with growing apprehension as President George Bush of America and Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued declarations of *War Against Terrorism* while seeming to zero in mainly on the fight against Islamic militant groups.

Some Muslim intellectuals expressed concern that this “war” was merely a justification of the western world to assert its power over the Arabs, a provocative issue based on Huntington’s “clash of civilization” theory that had been the fodder of debate in many a Muslim-Christian Dialogue forum around Metro Manila.

**This interest in our work was, for us, an indication that interfaith dialogue was the call of our times.**

Yet, in the midst of all the gloomy speculations, there remained a light of hope among us. Some Muslims and Christians who had established good relationships with one another through the years, countered the anti-Islamic sentiments of the larger Christian populace with interfaith peace education and advocacy work. They continued to dialogue with one another and to engage more actively in interfaith peace-building activities. They doubled their efforts to promote initiatives that aimed to foster better understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices among their fellow Filipinos.

It was at the height of all these that **The Peacemakers’ Circle Foundation**, our locally founded interfaith organization in Metro Manila gained the interest and attention of the media. The story of how we came to be as an interfaith peace-building organization was featured in the front page of the Philippine Daily Inquirer shortly after 9/11, and some of our activities and interfaith peace prayer gatherings were covered on television. This interest in our work was, for us, an indication that interfaith dialogue was the call of our times. Media attention and public response to dialogue workshops and interfaith gatherings organized by our circle and other local interfaith groups continued to gain ground in our country. Inspired by this affirmation, we, at The Peacemakers’ Circle persevered in our work with renewed vigor and conviction.

The Peacemakers' Circle is a Manila-based non-profit and non-partisan organization. This is a Founding Member and Cooperation Circle of the **United Religions Initiative (URI)**. It is composed of people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions who are aware of and are concerned about the culture of conflict and violence that seems to prevail in our world today. Members of this Circle believe in the Oneness of Humanity and are guided by the principles of *Unity in Diversity*, *Good Will*, and *Cooperation*. Thinking globally and acting locally from the ideals and teachings of their respective faith traditions, they get together every week; and in the spirit of friendship and dialogue, they have learned to grow in mutual respect and understanding, and in service for the common good.

As its Founder and Executive Director, my role of bringing together The Peacemakers' Circle was borne out of an inner awakening to a vision. This happened in 1998 when I met two people from an international peace organization who came to visit my office in Manila. As they spoke about their work, I was struck, not so much by what I heard, but by what I saw. One of them was wearing a white T-shirt and on it was printed the image of the globe surrounded by symbols of all the different religions of the world. That image had a powerful impact on me. It prompted me to take an honest look into my own faith and to question my way of being Christian. I asked myself, ***“Why do we, people of faith, fight each other in the name of God?”*** and ***“What is religion? Why is it such a powerful force of division and conflict in our lives?”*** I found no easy answers.

Instead, I became interested in finding new ways of understanding people, especially those who were different from me in culture and belief. I became aware of a growing interest in interfaith dialogue. As I engaged more fully in this newfound vocation, I began to appreciate that it was only in the true spirit of dialogue that people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions could possibly understand each other, and be able to collaborate with each other for the common good. Truly, there is an urgent need to respond to the call of the times for World Peace and the Healing of the Earth through Individual and Social Transformation.

Thus, my commitment to interfaith peacebuilding began. I saw in this arena a vast potential of opportunities for my own personal growth. I also saw in it infinite possibilities for bridging the minds and hearts of people of different cultures and beliefs in my own country and in the world.

I am now engaged in developing workshops and seminars for the Interfaith Peacebuilding Program of our Peacemakers' Circle. We are cur-

rently in the process of conducting the first module under this program in the various colleges and universities around Metro Manila. This first module is entitled, **Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace**. It is a 3-hour interactive seminar-workshop designed to promote awareness of the need for peace among religions. In the course of the next three years, I look forward to expanding my scope of work to include various government and non-government organizations in the country. I also hope to adapt this program for countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and the Pacific in the on-going effort to promote the URI vision in the region. I am currently preparing to establish a network of contacts with various interfaith groups in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Australia, and Fiji. I hope that by building bridges of friendship and trust with the leaders of these interfaith groups, we would eventually grow together in the URI spirit towards greater commitment to interfaith peacebuilding in the region. I imagine that this can be made possible by way of the interfaith peacebuilding workshops that I am hoping we can conduct in their respective communities by next year, 2003.

**Truly, there is an urgent need to respond to the call of the times for World Peace and the Healing of the Earth through Individual and Social Transformation.**

In the meantime, I look forward to the nurturing of the seeds of peace in my own country. This year, there is reason to hope that a cultural climate for such nurturing is coming about. During her first visit to the United Kingdom early in 2002, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and British Prime Minister Tony Blair had talks that, in the words of President Arroyo, *“dwelt on the need for social equity and interfaith dialogue, long-term harmony and peace.”* In response to this need, the National Social Action Council (NASAC), through its chairperson, Philip Ella Juico, relayed to the President its desire to organize an initiative on interfaith dialogue for peace and development. The response of the Office of the President was positive. The offer was endorsed to Mrs. Sonia Saldivar-Ronda, Presidential Assistant for Religious Affairs and Vice Chairperson of NASAC. She met with the NASAC Board of Directors to work out details of the initiative.

On April 15, 2002, a small group consultation workshop was conducted. This was attended by about 25 persons representing the NASAC Executive Board, Secretariat, Commissions, and invited partner interfaith organizations and individuals. Our Peacemakers' Circle was one of the participating organizations of this workshop.

The whole-day series of activities yielded the consensus for NASAC to spearhead a nationwide interfaith peace project called the **National Interfaith Agenda for Peace and Development**. It stated its purpose as helping to enable the Filipino nation to fully subscribe to the oneness of humanity, and to cooperate with the global community of nations in carrying forward the peace and prosperity of an advancing civilization. The launching program of activities is scheduled for September 9-11, 2002, in time for the one-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the New York World Trade Center. Various activities are lined up for this big event in Manila. Among the highlights are the one-day Interfaith Peacebuilding Workshop and the Interfaith Peace Walk.

The Peacemakers' Circle is presently involved in the design and facilitation of the above-mentioned Peacebuilding Workshop. We had submitted to the NASAC Program Committee a proposal based on the module on

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***Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace.*** This proposal is currently being studied for its methodology and approach to the overall objectives of the program.

Many of the ideas for this Peacemakers' Circle Interfaith Peacebuilding Program have been inspired by the courses that I had taken at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI) 2002 of the Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. My participation in those courses was made possible through the scholarship grant of the **United States Institute of Peace (USIP)** to our URI peacebuilding cadre.

The following are the modules of this program: Module I — Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace; Module II — Violence, Non-Violence, and Conflict Transformation; Module III— Being the Change You Wish to See in the World.

The first two modules of the program are adaptations of the courses that I had taken at the SPI. **RELIGION: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace** is one of the two courses that I now find very useful in my work. The primary facilitator for this course, Ron Kraybill, gifted us with valuable resource people who spoke on the topic from their respective religious contexts. My experience in class enabled me to reaffirm to myself the value of openness of mind and heart when it comes to dialogue with people of other faiths.



This attitude of openness is necessary in the trust-building process especially when the relationship between two opposing groups of people is conflict-ridden and rife with mutually painful experiences of human rights violations. Further in my observations, I came to the conviction that the only way out of the problem of religiously motivated violence among people of faith and practitioners of religion is the “owning” of their roles in the conflict. A sense of self-responsibility is a prerequisite of change. This can only come about in a process of self-awareness leading the dialogue towards an honest look, not only at the bright side, but also at the dark side of their faith.

The other SPI course that I find helpful in my work is **Violence, Non-Violence, and Conflict Transformation**. It addressed two broad categories of responses to conflict. Our class facilitator, Lisa Schirch, helped us to see both violence and nonviolence as strategies to balance power and raise awareness in conflicts that are not ready for verbal forms of negotiation, mediation, or dialogue. The first part of the course examined the use of violence as a form or expression of power, communication, culture, shame and humiliation, and trauma healing. The second part of the course introduced the philosophy of nonviolence and examined the strategy and methods of non-violent action, civilian-based defense, and civilian peacekeeping. Nonviolent action is an essential element in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

What really struck me about the whole experience in these SPI classes was the realization that essential to violence is the process of dehumanization. Violence is a result of anger that is, more often than not, triggered by the victim’s feelings of shame and humiliation. The victim becomes the perpetrator of violence when he or she retaliates with a counter force that is equally, if not even more harmful to his aggressor. Usually, the perpetrator of violence is a victim of violence. Thus, the cycle of violence is a cycle of fear, a cycle of retribution in an attempt to redeem the perceived loss of one’s dignity as a human person. Any attempt to break this cycle calls for a new way of looking at violence. It is a challenge that can be taken only when there is a firm commitment to peace. This commitment entails a choice made in favor of the upholding of human dignity of both conflicting parties. All the great religions of the world have something to say about this.

**I believe that it is our challenge as people of faith to create nonviolent power, to identify peaceful approaches to conflict transformation, and to help build a cultural climate where the seeds of peace can bloom and grow.**

The challenge that I wish to bring forth to the would-be religious participants of this workshop module is for them to examine the teachings of their faith and find out how human dignity is upheld in their traditions. Such a process is necessary if they are to truly ***be the change they wish to see in the world*** and be true to their calling. I believe that it is our challenge as people of faith to create nonviolent power, to identify peaceful approaches to conflict transformation, and to help build a cultural climate where the seeds of peace can bloom and grow.

In the larger context of interfaith peacebuilding, I see this seed as a growing reality in the womb of Asia. Those of us who have been born into this culture of reverence for the Divine Presence within the human being would know the fertile ground on which we toil. There is much work that needs to be done to nurture the seed of peace within us. But there is hope in believing that this is possible.

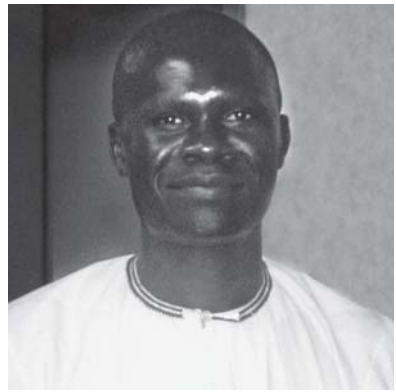
*Lam Cosmas Oryem works in northern Uganda directing the work of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative in mediation, community peace-building and interfaith cooperation. ARLPI joined URI as a CC in 2000, and is planning collaborative development projects with URI. Lam is a member of the URI Uganda MCC.*



## **A Journey To Interfaith Work & Peacebuilding**

LAM ORYEM COSMAS

**D**uring my secondary school days, I joined the student movement, the “Young Christian Student,” which aims at making students responsible and agents of change in their own milieu. Through this movement, I encountered students of other Christian traditions and other faiths. This was more concretized in 1994 when I trained and served on the Civic Education and Election Monitoring Committee of the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC). UJCC is a council composed of the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches. As a Catholic, this helped me to know more and understand the other Christian denominations, through the sharing, friendships and relationships that developed among us. At this time however, I did not have contact with other faith traditions apart from Christians.



When the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), an interfaith peace organization comprised of Christians (Catholic and Anglican) and Muslim Leaders was formed at the beginning of 1998, I was asked by the Catholic Bishop of Gulu to represent the diocese on the task force to support this initiative. I have worked with this team of leaders as its first Coordinator from 1999 to date.

In March 1998, I received an invitation from Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI-Africa) to attend a one month capacity building training for Conflict Transformation and Peace-building for Eastern Africa. The training took place in Machakos, Kenya, and was facilitated by John Paul Lederach from the Conflict Transformation Program of Eastern Mennonite University assisted by the NPI team. During this training, I did encounter more intimately people of other faiths, namely the Muslims from North-Eastern Kenya and the Mennonites. In fact, on my return as a follow-up, I got in

touch with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Uganda and now I'm a local MCC staff member in Uganda, but working for Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative.

ARLPI started with a consultative meeting "Bedo Piny" (means sitting down) in June 1998 to get from the community what needs to be done for peace in our land. As a response, towards the end of the year, a Community Peace-building Program was developed and came into effect in 1999. See [www.Acholipeace.org](http://www.Acholipeace.org).

Among other things, ARLPI undertakes the following peace-building activities as a continuing process:

- ⊗ Annual Peace Rally and Prayer in which the public is invited to participate and where the religious leaders release 'peace messages.'
- ⊗ Training in peace animation/facilitation. We have trained Volunteer Peace Animators (VPAs) in all our sub-counties in Acholiland to work with the 'peace committee' and facilitating activities for peace.
- ⊗ We have formed 'local peace committees' to serve as a team for community peace-building; monitoring threats to peace and peace opportunities in their midst, undertaking peace workshops and linking our community peace-building activities to other community based activities and stakeholders.
- ⊗ Mediation between our community and the bordering Karimoja in north-eastern Uganda under the activity of "Acholi-Karimojong (Jie) Peace Dialogue and Reconciliation." We have also inspired and encouraged the formation of interfaith groups in Teso and Karimoja and mediated between the Teso and Karimojong bordering them.
- ⊗ Lobbied and advocated for government and international attention to the plight of our people especially those living as internally displaced in camps.
- ⊗ Researched and documented two issues namely; "Let My People Go: The Plight of the Forgotten People Living in Internally Displaced Camps in Acholi" in 2001 and "Seventy Times Seven" released in May 2002.

**ARLPI started with a consultative meeting "Bedo Piny" (sitting down) to get from the community what needs to be done for peace in our land.**

- ☉ We met to collaborate with the religious leaders from Sudan in July 2001 guided by the theme: “Standing Together for Peace.”
- ☉ We have also affiliated internationally as a member Cooperation Circle of the United Religions Initiative with the head office in San Francisco, USA.

Besides strengthening our internal organization through systems and staff development, in conjunction with the Interfaith Cooperation Circle Initiative, the Multiple Cooperation Circle in Uganda, we shall lead and expand peacebuilding through local peace committees. This will take place in Kotido in collaboration with the Kotido Peace Initiative (KOPEIN) and in Katakwi, Teso with the Teso Religious Leaders Effort for Reconciliation.

I attended the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI) 2002 of the Eastern Mennonite University as part of my studies for the MA in Conflict Transformation. For me, SPI is a place where diverse people journey together as a community. In this community participants and instructors affirm each other in who they are and what they do in their daily life to make a difference. It is a place of healing and learning in the space provided by SPI. Participants get more energy and encouragement and deepen their insights through the classes they participate in.

**For me, SPI is a place where diverse people journey together as a community.**

I participated in all the four sessions. During session I, I assisted the main instructor Sam Doe in the course of Community Based Rehabilitation of War Affected Children. In this, I learnt about the situation in other parts of Africa, Middle East and Asia. Meanwhile, I brought in my personal experience of the work various stakeholders are doing to help war-affected children in Uganda by integrating them.

The other courses I attended were: Violence, Nonviolence & Conflict Transformation; Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace; and Qualitative Research for Social Change.

*Shabnam Olinga is a recent graduate of Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and has participated with the Uganda MCC. Her university CC group all graduated; now she is seeking ways to establish a more permanent CC within the University framework, as well as developing peacebuilding workshops for CCs particularly in conflicted areas.*



## **URI Peacebuilder Team**

**SHABNAM OLINGA**

**A**fter going through the course on conflict transformation different concepts like conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, reconciliation to mention but a few, started making more sense. What I learnt from the course was that different situations prompt different reactions and methods of dealing with it. While it may be desirable to resolve a conflict the conflict situation may not be at a stage where mediation is appropriate but another method may lead to the process of mediation.

Most of the methods of conflict transformation used in developing countries such as Uganda have been adopted from a western model that is linear; in most cases it may be changed to suit the culture in which you are working.



In the session on conflict resolution approaches in multicultural settings I liked the method of teaching that mainly involved group discussions, which we started from the very beginning. We, as a class, developed the topics that we wanted to cover through discussing what we expected at the end of the course, and by the end of the seven days we had covered what we wanted.

Working with a number of cultures can be stressful, and since we were learning how to work in a truly multicultural setting, dealing with it was not very easy. We were able to learn from our own small conflicts in class when they were discussed with the whole class, so we had the experience of actually dealing with live examples.

At the end of the session we went through an exercise of writing an action plan based on what we had learned and how we were going to apply that

knowledge. After we were finished we discussed it in small groups and got comments from the group members, which was vital because some of the actions people wanted to do had been done previously by others who could share valuable experience and advice.

One of the activities I had written in my action plan was my intention to share my experiences with members of different CC's especially in the areas affected by conflict and I hope to do this in the form of workshops as an immediate activity.

I am also thinking about starting another CC at Makerere University since the one where I was a member ended because all of us happened to be in the same year and all graduated and left the university. This activity will take more time to plan because my experience at the university is that students are not very receptive to projects or programs related to religion.

To start this CC it might have to be introduced through an existing club. For example, to introduce URI we would have to approach a club such as "Youth Alive" and tell them our intentions. They could invite us to speak to the students who are present, but the initial stage will have to be through someone we know and with whom we have a good relationship.

Another issue of concern is that the majority of the students at the university are of the Christian and Muslim faiths and this could lead to a situation where no one from another denomination is available to join, which does not meet the requirement of at least three different religions.

This session gave me more insight on how to work with people in a multicultural setting such as Uganda. It helped me understand that most of the models used by various NGO's are western models that are linear and need to be changed to suit the situation in which we are working. It was also interesting to learn from people of diverse cultures and traditions and find some similarities in the way we handled conflict situations.

Having been introduced to the field of conflict transformation and conflict transformation approaches in multicultural settings, I was introduced to yet another concept, Appreciative Inquiry. This was very new to me and I am really glad I had the opportunity to attend the two-day workshop. This workshop was just opening a new chapter of ideas on how to use this vital

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tool. At the beginning it seemed to be similar to ethnography, but as we explored the topic it became more clear and evident that the use of positive questions was the core of the inquiry, and helps one to notice strengths and build on them.

The last course I attended was one concerning religion as a source of conflict or a resource for peace. I enjoyed this course a lot because it gave me the opportunity to learn about other religions that I had heard about but

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whose principles I did not really understand.

As a Baha'i, I felt I was in the right place with respect to the courses I took and also because one of the basic principles of the Baha'i faith is the promotion of world peace. Through interacting and sharing experiences with other participants I was able to share my faith beliefs and also to learn from them.

At the end of the third session I was able to take part in a peace institute which was organized by various religious groups in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was happy to know

that all around the world people are trying to promote peace and are finding different ways of resolving conflict. What made me more happy was the fact that different religions came together and invited SPI participants to share their stories; this was a good opportunity to share with them what the United Religions Initiative is trying to do in different countries as well.

In conclusion, I feel that we are striving to make this world a better place to live in and that the process to get there is not easy. Through joining with people of different faiths it gives us hope that we are not alone and someday we shall achieve our goals.



*Eve Maliwichi is the Secretary for the Malawi Multiple Cooperation Circle. Following her recent retirement as Teacher Training College Principal, she has taken on the project of generating a viable URI Cooperation Circle in Lilongwe, Malawi, using concepts and practices learned at SPI.*

## **A report on conflict transformation courses held at Summer Peacebuilding Institute, Eastern Mennonite University in the USA**

EVE MALIWICHI, LILONGWE, MALAWI

I belong to Lilongwe Cooperation Circle, an old circle with predominantly new members of different religions and denominations. I'm also the secretary of Malawi's first Multiple Cooperation Circle.

The first course at SPI, Restorative Justice, commenced on 6th to 14th May, the main facilitator being Howard Zehr assisted by Lorrain Schirch. Session II, Violence and Non Violence, ran from 16th to 24th May and was facilitated by Lisa Goldberg. Session III, Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace, was from 28th May to 6th June led by Ron Kraybill and four guest lecturers.



### *What I Learned from the Courses*

**Session I: Restorative Justice** The course started by unveiling the philosophy and principles of Restorative justice, that it is about meeting the needs of everybody involved in a conflict situation, i.e. victims, offenders and the community. Unlike the legal system, it addresses obligations of offenders and uses collaborative process in seeking to put wrongs right. What encouraged me most was that Restorative Justice was presented neither as a pure model nor as a map but it points towards conflict resolution through dialogue and exploration. It need not be utilized wholly but some of its approaches and practices could be applied in community, school, workplaces and religious institutions for resolving and transforming conflicts, healing, and building communities in general.

## *Methodology used*

Participatory methods were used: role-plays, case studies, group discussions, plenary sessions and movies.

**Session II: Violence, Non Violence and Conflict Transformation** This course started by increasing participants' understanding of violence and non-violence. Both phenomena are an expression of unmet needs and an attempt for conflict transformation, power balance — social justice and social change.

Participants were expected to increase their knowledge of theory, practice, and skills and change their attitudes and values of non-violent action as an alternative to violence.

I was inspired by the way the course examined

- 🌐 the origins, causes, uses and consequences of violence at individual, community and global levels;
- 🌐 the philosophy, spirituality, strategies and methods of non-violent action; and
- 🌐 how non-violence relates to the field of conflict transformation.

Addressed in particular were the issues of creating and using power, and the strategic and ethical dilemmas of violence, how and when to use non-violent action and how to mobilize others to respond non-violently towards violence.

## *Methodology used*

Group discussions on how and when to mobilize others to respond non-violently towards violence were conducted. There were also videos on role model figures in non-violence e.g. Mahatma Gandhi, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Bishop Romero.

**Session 3. Religion: Source of conflict, Resource for Peace** This session started by stating that people of different religions should have firm roots and foundation in their own faith so as to be able to understand and respect other religions and build peace. Religion was defined in several ways, meaning basically 'to bind together,' and it has components of creed, cult, code and community. In view of this Islam, Christianity and Judaism were examined by practitioners of these faiths.

**ISLAM:** Early history of Islam and Mohammed was expounded. The contention of the Qur'an is that positive peace is the establishment of conditions of just relationships.

**CHRISTIANITY:** The early history of Christianity was examined in the light of Protestants: radicals, mainliners, fundamental and Pentecostal evangelists, and Catholics [traditionalists].

**JUDAISM:** An intellectual history of Judaism was examined in terms of Israel (a form of peoplehood), Torah (a way of life) and God (Religion).

As a URI member, I received many insights from this course. All religions have to explore their religious beliefs and practices that divide as well as develop capacity to respond constructively and effectively to others. All religions have the resource for promoting tolerance as well as using demonization of “the other” as a source for violence. Lastly all religions should deal with the cycle of conflict from prevention through conflict management (mediation and negotiation) to peace and reconciliation.

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### *Relevance of the Course and Way Forward*

Community-based approaches to peace building can easily be adopted in Malawi and blend with the already existing traditional structures of the indigenous groups who value people, relationships, trust building and reconciliation. Although there hasn't been a major war, the country experiences religious, ethnic and political intolerance, which more often than not erupts into conflicts and violence. In this regard, our CCs peacebuilding activities will be more focused on developing preventative strategies rather than waiting for a crisis. Awareness of 'just peace,' education, and training would create a society that is vigilant against the evils of governments, fellow citizens and other systems.

The course is of great relevance to myself as an individual, my work place, the Malawi nation, and most importantly to URI Lilongwe Cooperation Circle [LCC] in its efforts to uphold its goals of fighting religiously motivated violence and building cultures of peace in the world. At the LCC level, our long-term goal will be capacity building and raising awareness through education and training with the hope of reaching out to other cooperation circles and Multiple CCs in Malawi. This being our focus, it will be necessary

to engage in a needs analysis exercise before developing a curriculum and materials for the various peace programs and workshops. Our short-term plans will be focused on attempts to resolve conflict by applying mediation and negotiating skills in peace building.

**Community based approaches to peace building can easily be adopted in Malawi and blend with the already existing traditional structures of the indigenous groups who value people, relationships, trust building and reconciliation.**

The first phase will be briefing and holding a sensitization and awareness seminar for the Lilongwe CC. This attempt will be made to expose and empower members to the main concepts of peace building. In trying to deepen our understanding of the phenomena, networks with other NGO workers, community peace builders and human rights activists involved in similar programs will be established.

The fact that URI is a heterogeneous group consisting of members from varied religions and denominations, there is no doubt that it will excel in its interfaith conflict transformation and other peace building activities more than other church based organizations, which feel hand cuffed when dealing with communities of diverse religions.

### *Challenges*

The mission and goals contained in this report have not taken into consideration the issue of limited human, material resources and infrastructure. Another challenge is the expected community skepticism of the peace interventions, due to the fear of loss of culture and roles among others.

*Tendai Chikuku heads the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre in Southern Africa in Harare. Her CC, the Zimbabwe National Forum for Interfaith Dialogue, began as a local Christian/Muslim dialogue action, then joined URI in 2000, playing an active role in national interfaith events and embracing a global outlook.*



## A spiritual journey into interfaith dialogue

TENDAI CHIKUKU

To work for peace and justice one has to be rooted within one's spirituality and life's journey. We are what we are through our own struggles, our own travels, our own upbringing, our socialization and also through our innate characteristics. It is through our life experiences that we wear our social and political lenses that guide and challenge us through our life's journey. We become what we are through our interaction with God, the self, the social community and the natural community. If there is harmony and respect between the different segments it is possible to have some semblance of peace and focus.



In my own quest to find a common understanding and vision in a plural and a diversified environment it is more meaningful to start from where I began. I grew up in one of the oldest townships of Zimbabwe, Harare as it was then called, and this township was specifically designated as a black area. With independence from the British in 1980, it became Mbare. We grew up in an environment of great diversity by living amongst families from Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and occasionally from South Africa. Adding more colour to this diversity were musical groups from as far as the D.R Congo who came to Zimbabwe in pursuit of fortunes. It truly was a black cosmopolitan township with varied music, strongly dominated by South Africa.

The children from the immigrant families could speak our native language fluently, but their parents still spoke the languages from their original countries. Their cultural practices were different from ours and we were never judgmental in our opinions and views, but rather fascinated by some of them. This is the period when I was also first exposed to other religions,

which, at my tender age, I could not fully grasp. Islam came to us with its mystics and myths and, unfortunately, as my family did not know much about Islam, I grew up understanding it from my peers whose knowledge of the religion was not better than mine. I remember one of the ‘musts’ we had as kids was never to pass through the Mbare Mosque when it was dark because (and here our imagination was riotous) anything could happen to you.

I was also exposed to traditional religions which were easier to identify with since most of the practices and norms were common to us as Africans. However some were pretty foreign, like the ‘Gure’ dancers from some parts of Malawi. They used to have cultural dances, which we called ‘Chigure,’ and they wore masks and all the paraphernalia to look awesome

**We become what we are through our interaction with God, the self, the social community and the natural community.**

and frightening indeed. There were probably a lot of unfounded myths regarding this group but we never had the opportunity of fully coming to terms with them or understanding them. All we knew was to run for our lives when we saw anyone dressed in their apparel walking towards us.

My own family was deeply religious, we were British Methodist (to distinguish from the United Methodist Church) and every Sunday it was a must to go to Sunday School. Although it was far, it was an event we looked forward to as it had its rewards — for some of the money meant for offertory found its way to buying sugar cane and other nice things to eat on our way back from the Church.

When I left my roots in Mbare and went to the United Kingdom for further studies, I was then exposed to even more diversity in terms of race, cultures and religions. I did my advanced levels at a College in London where I had friends who were Moslems, Christians and Hindus. Although we mixed freely and could visit each other, my grasp of the different religions was still hazy and truly at this time I was neither motivated nor inspired to go further than the surface to explore the different faiths.

In my second year at College a Moslem girlfriend of mine from Iran fell in love with a Hindu boy. For me, I thought it was a great idea until I heard about the problems they were going to face if their relationship continued, because of religious differences and intolerances. Probably this was the time when the seed of doubt was planted that all was not well in the world of different faiths. For me intolerance had been, as early as my childhood could grasp the concept, rooted in racial differences and not because one belonged to a different faith.

Although my interest in other religions was ignited, the flame dimmed as I spent three years at Warwick University studying for a Bachelors Degree in Sociology and Education. It was rekindled when I was pursuing my MSc in Information Science at Loughborough University of Technology. I now had a large circle of friends from different faiths and different Continents. Being more mature and genuinely motivated, we held passionate discussions on the different faiths. Because there was no official platform or society to discuss interfaith issues, we normally congregated in my apartment. The events taking place in Persia and Palestine also stimulated the interfaith discussions.

When I returned to my country in 1984, it had become independent and most of the political social barriers had been dismantled. Thus, there was no more segregation for blacks in terms of housing, education, employment, etc. It was a new beginning!

I worked for a research institution, affiliated with the University of Zimbabwe, but I felt something was lacking. When the regional Church body, the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Center in Southern Africa (EDICESA), employed me as the Head of the Information Science, I felt a deep stirring within me as if I had finally come home. Our mandate was to be the communication service arm of the Churches in Southern Africa and communicate socio-political and economic issues from a Christian perspective and to alert the regional Church to issues needing attention and to synthesize energies and act collectively and pro-actively. From 1987 to 1994, all the energies were focused upon the dismantling of the apartheid regime in Namibia and South Africa. The regional Church truly became one and a lot of advocacy, meetings and workshops were done in exposing the horrors of apartheid.

The end of the apartheid era revealed the immense power and strength of a united Church and that moving mountains is possible.

### *Interfaith Dialogue*

The independence of South Africa in 1994 shortly followed my promotion to head EDICESA. I took a reflective position and analyzed all the achievements that had taken place and all the shortcomings of the strategies that had been used. One of the shortcomings that was that other faiths, which

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we had left out, had fought a long and remarkable fight against the South African regime on their own.

This time also coincided with the outcry in Zimbabwe over “halaal” meat. (“Halaal” describes an animal or its meat prepared in the manner prescribed by Islamic law.) It suddenly dawned on the Christian community that they were eating halaal meat and there were strong, critical and angry expressions about that. (The government abbot airs had since independence in 1980 employed Moslems to ensure that halaal conditions were met because of the beef exports to the European Union which provided a large chunk of foreign currency to the country) The media also had its field day and some satanic practices were being casually thrown in and this propelled and fueled anger amongst some Christian Communities.

### *KAIROS Moment*

We realized that this was an opportune moment and not to be lost. We called a workshop in which we invited theological students from the three leading seminaries and from the University of Zimbabwe. We also invited Moslems from Harare and from their Center in Kwekwe, one of the small towns in the country. On the day of the workshop, there was a buzz of excitement as most invited people turned up including the print and electronic media. The Christians presented their perspective in which they were critical of being forced to eat halaal meat and they questioned the invoking of the name of Allah before each slaughter. The Moslem black scholars presented their perspective and before they started they made interesting remarks intoning that the Christians and Moslems present were all blacks and Zimbabweans and they argued that, that should be a unifying factor in itself. Secondly, they pointed out that being a Christian or a Moslem was an accident of history. That is, if Arabs had arrived earlier than the Europeans in the region, then most people would have been Moslems. On the issue of halaal meat, the Moslems argued that, their religion forbade them to kill and thus before killing any animal they had to ask for forgiveness from Allah. They also said that they bled all the blood from the animals since it was healthier and that point medically had been proved. From the Christian side there was a spirited counter-attack but the anger had gone. At the end of the meeting they agreed to get to know each other and share information about each other as this helped to dispel myths and rumours. This for me was “a breaking the ice moment” for there had been no opportunity or platform for these two different faiths to sit down and get to know each other.



The Moslem Community in their appreciation of having been invited also responded by inviting my organization to facilitate a visit to their Mosque in Kwekwe, to which the Christians enthusiastically agreed. The visit to their Mosque was truly remarkable since for all the Christians who attended the meeting, it was their first visit to a Mosque. The Christians were graciously received and at the end of the service were each given a copy of The Koran as a way of symbolizing a new beginning in mutual dialogue and understanding .

### *Re-affirming each other*

Several interfaith dialogue meetings have followed and one that vividly comes to mind was the Christian-Moslem women's meeting. At this meeting we discussed the women from the Bible and the Koran who had been moving forces in our religious beliefs and work. It was a meeting which opened several doors. One of the outcomes was the need to work together on HIV/AIDS. We frankly discussed the way that AIDS was taking its toll amongst both Christians and Moslems and we thought that if we combined our efforts and resources we could reach out to a larger constituency. Our efforts are now bearing fruit in that we have started advocacy work on HIV/AIDS and are now producing a monthly insert, which goes with the EDICISA News throughout the region. The insert is entitled, 'HIV/AIDS Bulletin; an interfaith response', which encompasses views from different faiths in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

On issues of national concerns, we have appeared together on radio and television. This has led to people writing letters or phoning, wanting to know more of the different religions. This has also resulted in some hate letters coming from Christians who feel that we are compromising Christianity by being in dialogue with the Moslems.

**The realization that has come out strongly is that our doctrines are different and diverse, but that within that diversity lies our unity. Since most religions are advocates for peace and justice, there is therefore a compelling need to come and work together.**

## *United Religions Initiative (URI)*

When the URI Africa Regional Coordinator introduced the United Religions Initiative to us, he found fertile ground in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa where inter-faith dialogue was already spreading its roots. The realization that has come out strongly is that our doctrines are different and diverse, but within that diversity lies our unity. Since most religions are advocates for peace and justice, there is a compelling need to come and work together.

The Zimbabwe National Forum for Interfaith Dialogue CC, formed in April of 2000, is looking at all sectors that hitherto had been exclusive of other religions; for example, in the education sector, efforts have been made in the curriculum to move away from Bible Studies to Religious Studies. On National events, only Christians have been the ones invited to open and close with prayers, and again efforts are being made to be more inclusive.

The drive for most URI Circles and organizations has been to act locally but think globally. This probably explains why the grass-roots formation of CC's is spreading at a rapid pace. From this premise it is easier to respond pro-actively to local issues because the CC's are already embedded within the communities.

## *Collaboration with other Organizations*

The relevance of any organization can easily be evaluated through how other organizations value you. Within the Zimbabwe context, strong network links have been forged with the Iranian Embassy as well as with the Palestinian Embassy. We are now being invited to all their official events and this is helping in forging other new relationships with other diplomatic corps.

The year 2001 was the United Nations Year of Dialogue Amongst Different Civilizations and our Forum for Interfaith Dialogue CC was on the Steering Committees of Religion and Dialogue; Women, Religion and Dialogue; and Media, Religion and Dialogue. Of the two national meetings that were held, we acted as resource persons. Two forum members presented papers on Religion and Dialogue and I acted as the facilitator on Women, Religion and Dialogue. For both events prominent Government officials, such as the Vice President and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament attended. There was extensive media coverage in the newspaper and on television.

*Barbara Hartford is the Peacebuilding Initiatives manager for URI and works out of the Global Hub office in San Francisco, California, USA. She discovered in the Conflict Transformation Program of Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) a training philosophy that shares the values of URI and inspirational faith-based peacebuilders of international stature and respect.*

#### BARBARA HARTFORD

**M**y journey to the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI) of EMU began June 26, 2000, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Many will recognize this as the moment we signed the Charter of the URI, culminating four years of determined work with wonderful “just ordinary folks” from around the world who became trusted partners. Our leading question became “how will we now fulfill the Purpose?”

Subsidiary questions were: How will we end violence among religions? How to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings? Are we smart, strong, creative, and caring enough to make the ‘trimtab’ difference? Will our commitment to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles see us through? What tools and skills will we need?

Propelled by the growing request from CC members around the world for relevant skills training and a mandate from the Interim Global Council, we set out to enhance our capacity to fulfill the promise of URI in Peacebuilding.



One of the “ordinary” folks who saw clearly the promise and possibility of URI was Cynthia Sampson. Cynthia, who has a gift for connecting ideas and people, creating networks and relationships and empowering others, suggested that if we were going to learn about global Peacebuilding, we would do well to start with John Paul Lederach, a leading conflict transformation strategist, practitioner, trainer and consultant from Eastern Mennonite University, and the founding director of the Conflict Transformation Program (CTP). Following this advice, and entering doors that Cynthia opened for us, we began by taking John Paul’s course in Fundamentals of Peacebuilding at EMU and indeed found the URI there!

The values of the CTP are “peace and nonviolence, social justice, public service, reconciliation, personal wholeness, and appreciation for diversity of all types,” a very direct manifestation of the Principles of URI. They further encourage students to develop ethical and emotional resources to enable them to work effectively under stress and maintain a healthy state of moral, emotional, and physical well-being—in other words, to “be the peace we want to see.”

That course took place in early January, 2001. Snow fell on my colleague, Christine Kisembo—who came to attend from the Kampala, Uganda, MCC—for the first time in her life. We studied, read, and role-played a simulated the Nicaraguan peace process from one end of the campus to another—a power-

**The work of peace-building must be imbedded in a culture that creates peace—people giving their lives, over time, dedicated to fostering a climate in which something like peace can be possible.**

SCOTT APPLEBY

ful learning device—and generally had our eyes opened and hearts filled by John Paul, the faculty and other participants equally. Christine has since then incorporated concepts and practices from that course into URI workshops in many locations in Uganda.

Six months later, I took a second course at CTP’s intensive Summer Peacebuilding Institute, which draws peacebuilding professionals from all over the world. This course, Multicultural Approaches to Peacebuilding was facilitated by Mohammed Abu-Nimer—similar to the one that Shabnam has just taken and reported on in this book.

Emerging from that provocative course, my goals were to find funding for more URI members to experience and share this SPI training and, further, to begin to provide training specifically designed for URI CC members’ purposes at our first Global Assembly in Rio in 2002. Mohammed graciously agreed to participate in this URI training session if it became viable.

Now, a year later in June 2002, URI peacebuilding training is more than viable, it is real and is happening. This book and program are witness to the acceptance that the URI now has in the world and validation of our Purpose and Principles. The U.S. Institute of Peace has endorsed us with a grant to provide SPI training to several URI CC members. The directors of SPI have encouraged us at every step and were encouraging, helpful, and very flexible.

We have been students together. For me, engaging in the work at SPI this summer, I have been pushed to confront the limits of my own tolerance and to move beyond them. I felt discouraged at the depths of hate and conflict in the world, but deeply hopeful at each story of an act of heroism or witnessing the tiny flame of life that simply endures against all odds. In class and out, together we cried with the Rwandans, as we studied their recent history of genocide, then settled in to explore possible avenues of reconciliation. We studied the South African truth and reconciliation process, criticizing it for not going far enough to create real reconciliation, praising it for existing at all, a first for our civilization. We have seen that the work of URI has the potential to contribute to the globalization of hope. We are inspired by the potential power of faith-based approaches to reconciliation, “where Peace and Justice, Truth and Mercy meet.”

**We have seen that the work of URI has the potential to contribute to the ‘globalization of hope.’**

And so we have taken some steps toward outfitting ourselves to be more effective URI Peacebuilders, and as such are currently planning the pre-Assembly course for 30 participants and the Peacebuilding focus parts of the Global Assembly for everyone with a global team, including Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Claudia Liebler as faculty and resource people.

I’d like to close by putting this URI/SPI Peacebuilding program into perspective. This program is only one of many activities that are taking place all over the world in our network of local actions becoming globally connected. We are only a few of the many committed and courageous URI Peacebuilders who are hard at work in every region. We all need to tell our stories and listen to each other. We are excitedly looking forward to learning much more about all the Peacebuilding work that our URI colleagues have been doing.

At our first Global Assembly the holistic picture of URI areas of action to create a culture of peace, justice and healing — as held by the Action Agenda in our Charter — will shine more brightly than ever before. We will know each others’ work much more intimately, and be able to help and support each other at new levels afterward.

For me, the words of one of our guest experts, Scott Appleby, describe the arena in which URI will contribute uniquely to global peacebuilding: “The work of peacebuilding must be imbedded in a culture that creates peace, people giving their lives, over time, dedicated to fostering a climate in which something like peace can be possible.”

## IN CONCLUSION

We have the following commitments, both exciting and challenging:

- 🌐 We will share our stories broadly with the URI community
- 🌐 We will each create projects or activities in the venues of our own Cooperation Circles that make use of this learning experience, and we will share the results of this work with the global URI community and others.
- 🌐 We will create a Peacebuilding training course to present in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 13-17, 2002, with Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Claudia Liebler. This course will precede the Global Assembly, and will include the best of our own experiences and learnings from the Summer Peacebuilding Institute.
- 🌐 We will work with the program design team to integrate peacebuilding focus components into URI's first Global Assembly in August, 2002, both in plenary and breakout groups.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are all profoundly grateful to:

REV. CN. CHARLES GIBBS, URI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR — to whom we all matter

RT. REV. WILLIAM E. SWING, URI PRESIDENT — the source and visionary

INTERIM GLOBAL COUNCIL — each and every member

U. S. INSTITUTE OF PEACE — Judy Barsolou and April Hall

BETTY HARTFORD AND NANCY MURRAY — very special donors

SUMMER PEACEBUILDING INSTITUTE — Directors, Instructors, Staff, RA's,  
and fellow students, who shared their lives, hopes and dreams with us

CYNTHIA SAMPSON — bridge builder, champion connector

CLAUDIA LIEBLER — for the gift of Appreciative Inquiry

MOHAMMED ABU-NIMER — bridging cultures with humor and warmth

OUR FELLOW URI CC MEMBERS AROUND THE WORLD —  
for whom we do this work



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