



YOUTH AS A ROLE MODEL FOR PEACE BUILDING

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Peacebuilders

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland 70th
Federation Conference, October 28th - 30th 2004 in
Bournemouth. "Peace and Tolerance, The roots are in our
community, the opportunities in our hands"

Good morning ladies. Today I wish to introduce you to the organisation United Network of Young Peacebuilders also known as UNOY which trains and promotes youth as peace builders and has been building a network across the Globe since 1989. My presentation is mainly to show you what the youth from around the world are doing to promote a peaceful environment. These initiatives are inspiring, amazing and thought provoking. The power point is showing pictures of young peace-builders participating in UNOY activities.

My first example is of a youth working in a violent conflict zone, **Colombia. Jesualdo** has just graduated as a lawyer and works for an association called 'Concultura Ciudadana' doing technical trainings such as carpentry, brick laying in schools and for school leavers. They do not call this training peace training because the government has adopted a zero tolerance stance and distrusts peace NGOs because they also deal with the guerillas. However, the aim behind this project is to delay the youth becoming involved in the conflict till they are 18, as many join the different sides for employment issues, rather than a cause. He is also part of a pool of lawyers that voluntarily offer their services for mediation in difficult situations involving youth and either the guerilla movement or the government army. For example he mediated with the guerillas to get food and medicine to villages that are controlled by the guerillas that use roadblocks to put pressure on the government. This example shows youth are working in very violent areas, he cannot stop the causes of the violence but he is helping to postpone youth's involvement in the conflict.

The peninsula of **Crimea** has had its share of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions, as it is the most ethnically diverse region in **Ukraine**. The extreme economic crisis, the drop in living standards and high unemployment has produced tensions that have seen the rise in xenophobia and intolerance. Nina is a youth that is part of UNOY and she works and coordinates many projects at the Center for

Ethnic and Social Studies in Crimea. It is an independent non-governmental non-profit think tank working mainly with youth. It aims to facilitate establishing inter-ethnic peace in Crimea. The center conducts research and surveys on ethnic and social policy; organizes trainings, workshops, conferences and round tables on conflict resolution, peace culture, and mediation and project management. In 2000 it established the Youth Information Center, which has conducted a number of trainings and public awareness events on peace building, including a Multi-ethnic New Year celebration. They hold annual Peace Camps for Crimean youth. This is an example of an area in a very volatile situation. Peace building is about building relations and this is the mission of this organization.

One of the prerequisites for a functioning multicultural society is sensitivity to cultural differences and intercultural communication. In **Strasbourg, France** there is a youth organisation called Association de Prevention Specialisee et D'action sociale a la Meinau. They are a multicultural, multidisciplinary team that works in a workers neighbourhood in Strasbourg, with a very high migrant population, where there are many different incidences of violence and racism. Their main objective is to promote social integration of young people with special attention to the most vulnerable. They do this through several activities including social interaction and work in the streets. They call this 'travail de rue' where they go and meet young people who hang out and try to get to know them. They have street parties, dinners and cultural activities; they mediate between families and the schools, between employers and young people and between the neighbourhood inhabitants and the young people. This is to build relationships at all levels. They hold workshops and training sessions and exchange and support projects related to the communities that young people come from for example with street children in Morocco. They use the word 'accompagnement' to describe their work; basically it means to be close to the people of the neighbourhood, to help them in a crisis.

I share with you this example because it is a simple way to bring people together. After the genocide in 1994, peace was starting to be rebuilt in **Rwanda** but this is being jeopardized by the constant clashes between Hutu demilitarized militia and the Rwandan army. Claude Shema put on an event called 'Play for Peace; Peace it Together', he used sport and leisure to promote a culture of peace between the different ethnic groups. He organised a 4 day sports event for children, promoting the value of clean competition. There were male and female football matches, cycling, marathons, and a

march for peace and beach volleyball. This is an example of young people working for children, not just for their peers.

Youth Crime Watch, **The Gambia** seeks to empower youth to *practically* prevent crime, drugs and violence and promote peace. In the past few years, student violence has dramatically increased with the focal point being a staged fracas during the annual inter secondary school sport meeting. More than 50 students have lost their lives to date at this meeting. Youth Crime Watch therefore launched 'Operation No Violence' to try and prevent this and to create a conducive and peaceful environment. They mounted a massive sensitisation campaign before the event. They also had 'youth wardens' all over the stadium to keep an eye on things. The youth wardens searched everyone coming into the stadium. During the operation knives, compasses, screwdrivers, spray sticks and other objects to be used as weapons were seized. At the end of the 6-day sports event, the violence had been minimal which was hailed to be due to Youth Crime Watch's campaign and search operation. This example can be viewed as a good first step, though addressing the consequences rather than the cause, it shows that young people were aware of the problem and worked out together how to act.

This example is a different type of peacebuilding as Sadhu Ram from **Nepal** is promoting peace in his community through using peace education as the basis to his schools curriculum. Moral leadership and peace education is the main focus in each activity; it seeks to develop the participant's self-confidence, profound love for humanity, eagerness and burning desire to serve mankind. In 2002 with a few friends he developed the idea of creating a school in his local community. They consulted the community, who all expressed their happiness at the idea. The goal was to provide value-based education with peace education at the core. Their aim was to help students become not only smart academically but also good socially. Covering the expenses of establishing a building and all that goes in to making a school was nearly impossible as there was little funding, therefore the community was consulted. Almost everyone consulted expressed their willingness to become shareholders. Sadhu reckons enthusiasm, dynamic efforts, teamwork, good networking, trustworthiness are the key elements to establishing an institution for enlightening the youth. The school was operational within 3 months. The school has come to be known as 'Abha English School'.

But what is peace?

Peace is a very common word but there is little agreement as to its meaning because it means different things to different individuals. Generally speaking "African Cultures" stress peace and reconciliation; "Eastern Cultures" stress the importance of inner peace as a basis for peaceful action and "European Cultures" emphasis peace and justice as inseparable aspects to build a peaceful world. It is dynamic, participative and a long-term process, based on universal values and everyday practice at all levels – the family, the school, the community, as well as nations. It is up to the individual to create a world of peace and tolerance.

All these traditions agree that peace is more than simply the absence of war/ or any other form of direct organized physical violence such as terrorism. We can accept Dr Gultang's definition of peace that it is "the absence of structural violence". 'Structural violence is the in-built violence that exists in inequalities of social structures; where there are such gross power imbalances people's chances of life actually vary substantially. Uneven resource distribution, access to medical supplies, hygiene, education, income and of course political power are a result of structural violence', Violence includes all things that stand in the way of developing the full human potential.

Peace building involves the changing of relationships to those based on cooperation and reconciliation. This creates tolerance and understanding which will lessen the acts of violence when there is conflict. Peace-building is about starting at the lowest level, starting with yourself and working outwards. Therefore understanding and acting in a positive manner to conflicts of your own, is your first step as a peace-builder. This is because conflict is inseparable from human relations. We interact with other persons, with whom we are bound to have differences of opinion and whose interests and needs will often be opposed to our own. However, we should see conflict as positive. Diversity and difference are valuable in themselves. Conflict is an opportunity to learn. If conflict is something inherent in human relations, learning to act upon conflict has to be equally fundamental. The challenge is how to learn to confront and resolve conflicts in a constructive, non-violent way.

How does youth fit into these issues?

The youthful population of the world has been growing rapidly but despite their enormous potential, they still suffer exclusion, marginalization and, with women and children, are the most affected by violence. Young people are vulnerable as both victims and perpetrators of violence. It is also often the case that it is young

people whose opportunities and development are most damaged by violence. Young people inherit prejudices and stereotypes; they have too often been represented as dangerous, criminal or a threat to society, part of the problem in violent conflict. However, they are rarely taken into account as part of the solution. Both development programmes and peace literature do not treat the youth as an important and potential actor in building peace. The Young are not a single, homogenous entity either globally or locally. They are the most dynamic group in society encompassing ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class so youth together can play crucial roles in transforming violent conflict situations. However, they lack support, resources, knowledge, training, skills and the opportunities to meet, share experiences and acquire knowledge on how conflicts affect young people and how to deal with it. The experience of UNOY is that an increasing number of young people are rejecting violence and becoming involved in peace-building efforts at the grassroots, national and international level.

The **United Network of Young Peacebuilders** was established in 1989 by a group of concerned young people from around the world as an International Youth NGO with an aim of 'empowering youth to become agents of positive change'. Our goal is to empower young people's local capacities for peace and increase their effectiveness through

- Organizing peace conferences and on-line and face-to-face training seminars;
- Training young people, in particular youth leaders and multipliers, in the field of peace-building, conflict transformation and reconciliation;
- Developing global and regional networks of young peace-builders to share experiences, skills and create friendships;
- Advocating for stronger and more meaningful partnership of young individuals and youth organisations with the United Nations system;
- Campaigning for a Culture of Peace.

Our main campaign at the moment is called **Peace It Together**. We encourage youth peace-builders to share their experiences, knowledge and skills with others to raise awareness and promote the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the children of the world. Our overall aim is to collect 10,000 actions from youth peace-builders and present this to the UN assembly in 2010, to show what we, the youth, have done for the decade. This is where you come in. You come from all over the world where youth are doing

actions for peace. UNOY can help you find these youth so that you can support them, encourage them, partner with them to do actions for peace. Then encourage the youth to write to us about these actions so we can put them in the project bank on our website. This collecting best practices of youth has never been done before, it's to show that youth are positive agents of change and are out there doing many things for peace.

The key to the prevention of violence is the education of non-violence, multi cultural dialogue and understanding, tolerance and conflict transformation. I have given you just a few examples of youth to prove that they are a positive force in building peace. There are still lots of questions on how better to organise youth: How can and do they want to be included and empowered? How can they develop their potential? How can they coordinate and sustain their ideas and activities for positive change? As Janny Poley from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated 'youth development presently needs the same special attention and resources that women issues received over the last decade.' Youth are not just the future they are the here and now and recognising their positive role in creating a better world, will give more youth inspiration to involve themselves in peace building activities. Please visit our website www.unoy.org for more information and examples. I would like to end with this quote 'Wars begin in the minds of men therefore it is the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed'.

Build the foundations for peace; Let peace begin with you.

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