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# New Routes

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## Peaceful co-existence a faith issue

Dialogue in a  
critical setting

Just Peace: the right  
issue at the right time?

The work of overcoming  
violence has only begun

Towards a theology  
of Just Peace

LIVING LETTERS:

The human face of  
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No dialogue without  
religion, without  
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bodies in common  
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Religious leaders  
navigate new roles



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## NewRoutes

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## The essential coexistence

**IN ALL PLACES** where people exist they also coexist. With human coexistence comes always the risk of conflict and even violence. But where people live together, there is also a potential for peaceful coexistence in spite of differences and disparities.

The Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) was initiated by the World Council of Churches in 2001 and will be concluded in May 2011. One of the purposes of the DOV has been "to move peacebuilding from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church". A challenge, indeed. At the conclusion of the Decade, it is important to look back to see how its purpose has been fulfilled. There is also a need to look forward and set up new goals for the continued work against violence, as "peace on earth" still seems to be a distant dream for too many people. Four of the authors in this New Routes issue give their view on the DOV and reflect on its background, impact and follow-up.

Religion is sometimes blamed for fuelling conflicts, but it is a well-known fact that it can also work as a healer and bridge builder. In this issue of New Routes adherents of Christian, Muslim and Jewish belief relate their experiences of religion as a mediating or uniting factor.

The United Nations (UN) is not and will never be a religious organisation. Still, as religion is an integral part of most human life, and as the UN is built upon members states with human beings, it will always be influenced by and interact with religious bodies. This interplay is presented in one of the articles.

We hope that the dynamism between religion, peace and conflict will raise reflections and questions among you readers. If you want to share them with others, you are most welcome to get in touch..

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# Dialogue in a critical setting

Kajsa Ahlstrand

The advocates of inter-religious dialogue are often told that they are naïve idealists and that dialogue does not work when religious groups are set against each other, sometimes violently. Do Christians in Iraq – who see their homes and churches burnt down – stand to gain anything from religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians in other parts of the world? In what ways can inter-religious dialogue contribute to peace and justice? Hans Ucko, for many years responsible for inter-religious dialogue at the World Council of Churches, has often pointed out that dialogue is not a case of emergency care, but of prevention, and that it is important that there are inter-religious structures in place which last even when they are put under strain.

An important part of such work is to create inter-faith councils, locally and regionally, with people who are trusted within their respective religious communities. This should take place before conflict breaks out. The fact that such councils exist at all is a great advance, but there is a risk that the members meet only to exchange niceties or to voice religious demands towards secular societies. In order for them to fulfill a function in the event of conflict, it is important that the councils prepare tools for conflict management, for example by educating or establishing links to instructors of conflict resolution with ties to different religious traditions. These instructors can then conduct workshops in conflict management.

It is also important to increase the participation of women in inter-faith efforts. In many societies, women play a decisive role in passing on values to children and youth. If these values identify members of other religious traditions as enemies, there is a great risk that tense situations will escalate into open conflict. Therefore, it is important

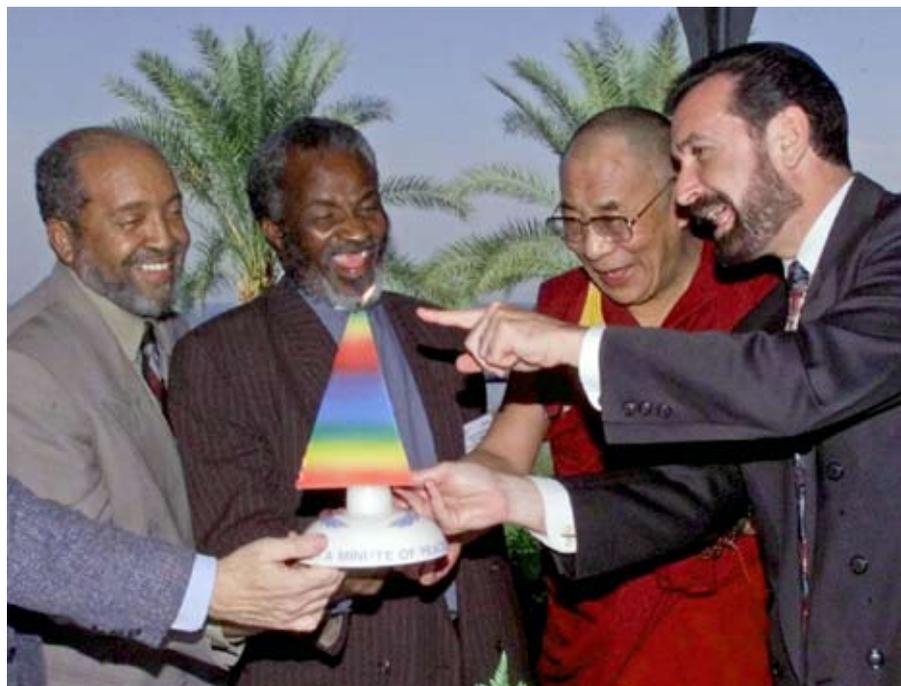


PHOTO: RUTH FREMSON/AP/SCANPIX

*At an interfaith gathering in Israel in 1999, religious leaders together lit a candle representing peace. From left, Imam Wallace Dean Muhammed, Archbishop Ngada, the Dalai Lama, and Rabbi David Rosen.*

to get to know members of other religions and to discover that friendship is possible. The different religions contain much that can provide an inspiration in the work for peace and justice. It is important to emphasise this and to show that a good Christian/Hindu/Muslim/Buddhist/Jew etc. is obligated to work for peace and to care for fellow humans. A concrete expression of this is the inter-religious presence, in conflict areas, of “accompaniers” and observers. The organisation World Conference on Religion and Peace/Religions for Peace has worked in this way for a long time.

Inter-religious dialogue in situations of conflict is still possible. However, it is important that fellow religious believers who are outside the conflict zone also act in a way that facilitates peacebuilding. This can be achieved if they:

- renounce violence;
- refrain from passing on unconfirmed stories;
- appeal to the laws of the country and to mutual agreements;

- support the legitimate exercise of authority;
- refer to the principles of international law and universal norms; and
- explain how a peaceful and fair solution benefits all parties and is in accordance with the central principles of the religion.

The credibility of religious representatives increases if they can demonstrate that instances of violence within their own religion have previously been condemned and that other religious communities have been supported when they have been subject to slander, discrimination, persecution, or other forms of violence. Religious dialogue, or perhaps rather constructive encounters between members of different faiths, needs to take place in all kinds of societies, locally as well as globally, so that it has the prospects of leading to a deeper understanding, both of one's own and other religions. 🌸

*Translated by Jakob Samuelsson*

*The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation is a kind of harvest of the Decade to Overcome Violence. It is an invitation to embark on a new ecumenical journey of peace. The convocation takes place in Kingston, Jamaica, 17-25 May 2011. At the heart of its forward-looking agenda is the concept of "Just Peace" and this article considers what new routes may lie ahead.*

## Setting the compass in Kingston: **Just Peace: the right issue at the right time?**

*Jonathan Frerichs*

The good news about the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) is that, as more and more people become aware of it, many see it as an international church initiative that is tackling the right issue at the right time. It is not hard to imagine why. As the meeting's key document points out:

[People of the early 21st century] are witnesses to prodigious increases in the human capacity to destroy life and its foundations. The scale of the threat, the collective human responsibility behind it, and the need for a concerted global response are without precedent. [...] Traditions that bind communities (and peoples) together are weakened. [...] Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace. [...] The widening socio-economic chasms within and between nations raise serious questions. [...] Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

*An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace,  
World Council of Churches, 2011*

Those who gather in Jamaica will explore what Just Peace has to do with such megatrends and what churches together are to do as a result. The IEPC will bring together about 1,000 leaders, thinkers and doers, mostly church-related but also from civil society groups and other world religions. The Just

Peace focus has a way of inviting people to see shared concerns and values in a fresh light. Participants in the lead-up to the convocation have quite often found themselves looking to the future on the basis of their faith and with an eye for the common good.

Inspired, some then ask where IEPC and the Just Peace orientation will lead (us). (It's especially encouraging if they use "us".) To hear what inspires them is to be reminded that Jesus was talking to people like us when he used the metaphor of ripening fields and of workers needed to bring in the harvest.

This article offers elements of answers already taking shape in, for example, the *Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* and other peace declarations and projects across the membership of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the final phase of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), 2001-2010.

Since peace work is inherently shared work, a credible answer to the question of what comes next will have to be shared as well – the more widely, the better. In fact there is the start of an answer: What comes next starts with those who catch the vision and rise to the task, people and partners, workers, leaders and 'networkers'. Some of the people seeking this future will have to be able to think 'big'; some will have to take actions 'without borders'. If churches are to help mitigate or manage any of the truly global challenges to peace, church-related advocates and organizations will have to practice new levels of collective and goal-oriented en-

gagement. Churches, related ministries and networks will also have to reach well beyond themselves if their goals are related to the broadest public goods.

Here then is the second part of an answer: Concerted Christian pursuits of peace will require broader, more robust and more purposeful cooperation than is the norm today. After Kingston, *International Ecumenical Peace Convocation* could, or should, gain a new meaning and stand for *Internationalizing Ecumenical Peace Collaboration*.

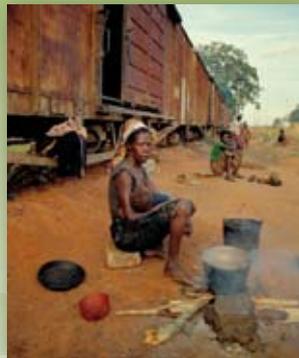
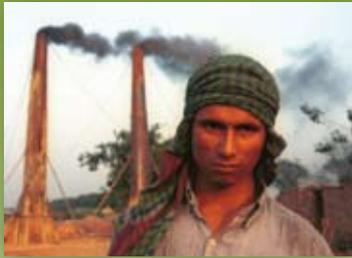
A third main element of what comes after IEPC is for those who work for peace together to see peace mainly as a journey that is shared. This is quite different from our individual views of peace as an indisputable goal. The WCC call and invitation to Kingston says, "The Way of Just Peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation, trusting that God will 'guide our feet into the way of peace' (Luke 1:79). It is a journey to which all are invited but that none is able to make alone.

### **Sharing a hopeful journey**

The 349 WCC member churches in some 120 countries comprise the broadest and most inclusive fellowship of churches in the world. Explaining the vision behind the IEPC to members of some of these churches gives hope about what will come afterwards. "Peace" is a word too big for most people's plans, but it is striking how many today feel a call to work for peace when it is understood as a journey that draws on different areas of human experience.

# International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)

May 2011, Kingston, Jamaica



Internationale ökumenische  
Friedenskonvokation (IöFK)  
Mai 2011, Kingston, Jamaika

Rassemblement oecuménique  
international pour la Paix (ROIP)  
Mai 2011, Kingston, Jamaïque

Convocatoria Ecuménica  
Internacional por la Paz (CEIP)  
Mayo de 2011, Kingston, Jamaica



World Council  
of Churches



Hence, two more points to note about the future: the fourth element being that a journey requires steps. Worn and tattered dreams of peace can be repaired and put to use if translated into steps that Christians individually and in community, ministries and church-related organizations can do something about. Fifthly, a journey needs directions. Groups begin finding direction when they examine the four themes of Just Peace being used at the IEPC. Each theme links peace with people and a place; each theme appeals to the sanctity of life:

Peace in the Community – so that all may live free from fear

Peace with the Earth – so that life is sustained

Peace in the Marketplace – so that all may live with dignity

Peace among the Peoples – so that human lives are protected.

Taking steps and choosing directions are ideas at the heart of the IEPC and where it will lead. Here are a few examples of how people are applying the IEPC themes in their own contexts and as citizens.

A group of young adults from a church much engaged in the DOV found many implications for their society and for their lives as Christians. Building a just peace in their communities, they said, would require much less emphasis on individual success and competitiveness. 'Peace with the Earth' made them ask themselves: 'Who is my network for change?' Linking that theme to 'Peace in the Marketplace', they discussed more responsible ways of living and the need for change to be on a mass scale. 'Peace among the Peoples' reminded them of how much their culture had taught them superiority rather than equality. The group took home new insights about their own connections to peace.

An IEPC planning committee was discussing biblical and church views of peace. A church leader broke the silence with a quiet question after the last comment. This person had just seen his country's leaders claim a bloody 'victory' as the answer to decades of violence and civil war. Justice itself was one of the casualties. His question was one that anyone could take home. 'Are we creating a movement?' he said, as if thinking out loud.

## Ancient wisdom in a new shape

Hearing the churches' plans for Kingston, a leader from another religion shared a generous hope. He led his community during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s and continues to do so during a long and difficult recovery. "A thousand years ago, a Chinese sage wrote the classic work 'The Art of War' and to this day every general reads it," he told an arms control conference. "But who is going to write the book 'The Art of Peace'?" If we [Muslims, Christians and others] would change our orientation from Just War to Just Peace, if we shift our engagement away from the art of war to the art of peace, I think we can make history."

What comes after IEPC will depend on Kingston participants and those they represent in the worldwide ecumenical community. It will depend on how they and those they join respond to challenges such as these:

*For Peace in the Community:* "Congregations must unite to break the culture of silence about the violence within church life and unite to overcome habitual disunity in the face of the violence within our communities."

*For Peace with the Earth:* "Many more 'eco-congregations' and 'green' churches are needed locally. Much ecumenical advocacy is needed globally for the implementation of international agreements and protocols among governments and businesses in order to ensure a more inhabitable earth not only for us but also for all creatures and for future generations."

*For Peace in the Marketplace:* "Churches must promote alternative economic policies for sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provisioning of clean water, clean air and other common goods.

[...] Human and ecological security must become a greater economic priority than national security.”

*For Peace among the Peoples:* “To respect the sanctity of life and build peace among peoples, churches must work to strengthen international human rights law as well as treaties and instruments of mutual accountability and conflict resolution. To prevent deadly conflicts and mass killings, the proliferation of deadly weapons must be prevented and reversed.” (From An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, WCC, 2011)

### Working in unity for peace

Will the carbon spent for Kingston be put to good use? Quite possibly, to the extent that practitioners there use the framework of analysis to develop new criteria for action and stronger networks. Quite possibly, to the extent that the theologians there find enough consensus to build elements of an ecumenical theology of Just Peace. Yes, if across the participants many begin to appreciate the fundamental shift in ethical practice that just peace embodies. Definitely, if participants find themselves listening together to God who hears all our cries for peace. Probably not, if energies are diverted into documents over and above the commitments, relationships and follow-up planning that bring them to life.

The call for Kingston and beyond invites its readers to exercise common faith and vision and to set out early milestones along the way of Just Peace. As a ‘Call’ it invites reflection and joint action from churches, related organizations and networks. It is supported by a Just Peace Companion, a resource with more extensive biblical, theological and ethical content, proposals for further exploration and examples of good practice. The IEPC version will be revised using material from workshops, seminars and other sessions there. Both the ‘Call’ and the ‘Companion’ draw on decades of ecumenical public policy on justice, peace, creation and ecology that is a living heritage of active discernment. The call and related resources will inform the future beyond IEPC to the extent that churches make use of them to respond to questions like these:

– What are three or four global challenges that churches committed to peace must face together in the sec-

ond decade of the 21st century? Given these challenges, what milestones will guide and focus churches globally, nationally and locally in joint pursuits of Just Peace?

– Who is addressing these key challenges in WCC member churches and ministries and in the wider Christian family? Who else could be mobilized?

 ***It is a journey to which all are invited but that none is able to make alone.***

– In a highly diverse world that is confronted by common threats to life, what kind of unity do churches need today to have a credible public witness for peace? The ecumenical movement began in part to resolve conflicts between churches. Can churches today find new momentum in unity for the sake of peace?

– Will more churches and related organizations prioritize collaborative advocacy on international peace and human security including ecological and economic justice, human rights, disarmament, humanitarian affairs, refugees, migration and public health?

– Will believers from different world religions build effective partnerships and alliances to meet major challenges to peace in our era?

### Theology and praxis in parallel

If there was a compass to use on the journey of Just Peace, the points above might be seen as settings. Where do they lead? May it be to faith in action that involves new levels of cooperation on certain priority areas within the framework of Just Peace. The issues are many, but we will only reach new ground with a comprehensive approach to the most-global few. May they lead us into an ecumenical theology of just peace that helps to build a new consensus on the tradition of just war, on pacifism, on the many faces of violence including those in the Bible and on the spiritual and ethical challenges along the Way of Just Peace.

What comes after Kingston might be described as just peace theology and praxis going forward in parallel. Thoughts, beliefs and actions must have the breadth to be global in scope, the depth to connect all levels of ecumenical responsibility – global, regional, national and local – and the clarity to focus on perhaps three critical goals that are truly global in nature, across countries and regions. Both theology and praxis must also rise to the challenge of achieving greater Christian unity for the sake of the peace that God offers to us.

The challenge beyond IEPC is lifted up in the convocation’s theme ‘Glory to God and Peace on Earth’. Making real more of the collective ecumenical potential to work for peace with justice, would give the glory that God may be expecting.

Change is within the churches’ grasp to the extent that those who share the commitment to peace translate it into working together in the service of others. The cooperation needed will be authentic if it relies not only on partnerships and alliances, but also on God’s grace and providence for all people. The changes sought will have to give witness to God’s love for the world. The God who is present “wherever two or three gather” in faith, will surely accompany those who undertake such a journey. 

*The post-Cold War and the post-apartheid situation made evident the need for new ways to address violent conflicts. Looking back at the Decade to Overcome Violence, initiated by the World Council of Churches, it is obvious that it has not achieved the expectations or fulfilled the hopes it gave rise to. Much remains to be done, and a large number of challenges lie ahead. Still the visibility of the peace issue has increased among the churches, and it has promoted countless initiatives for justice and peace.*

## The work of overcoming violence has only begun

Hans Ulrich Gerber

People often ask: "The Decade to Overcome Violence will soon be over – what has it accomplished?" I'd like to take a critical look at what has changed and moved during the Decade. It is not a systematic presentation of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), nor is it an analysis of its achievements or shortcomings. This article makes a number of observations followed by raising some challenges we face beyond the DOV, both for churches and for society at large. To be sure, and in response to the question above: the DOV was not a full success, nor has it reached its objective, which was to move the concern for justice and peace from the margins to the very centre of the churches. However, and that is what I point out to those who brush it away as a failure, it has significantly contributed to a shift in the right direction. I will point out below the substance of this shift.

The context of the DOV was remarkable. The end of the Cold War left hopes, expectations and possibilities, if not to say a vacuum. The end of apartheid made even clearer the dire need to address violence. The post-Cold War conflicts revealed in a frightening way that violence continues its rage when the core problem or original cause of conflict supposedly has disappeared.

Other efforts by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the ecumenical movement had preceded the Decade: The Programme to Combat Racism, the conciliar process on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, the decade Churches in Solidarity with Women, the Programme to Overcome Violence with its Peace to the City Campaign, all were expressions

of the WCC's agenda to promote peace and justice. One profiled project in this line is still going on and has widespread support within the churches: the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.

It is important to note here that the DOV was operating within the framework of the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. Both decades had the same time frame, 2001-2010. Both decades had raised significant excitement and expectation in international and ecumenical circles. Yet it is clear that neither the UN, who had delegated its decade to UNESCO, nor the WCC in sharp decline after the golden years of its most successful and at the same time most controversial Programme to Combat Racism, were fully equipped or actually determined to follow through on decade-long campaigns with all the implications of such an undertaking. The WCC's wish to have a decade that mobilised the grass roots and the church hierarchies alike was not really compatible with its institutional disposition nor its organisational patterns, not to mention its declining resources. Nevertheless, the DOV has moved a number of things and helped shift the ground in significant ways. Obviously some of the change happened because of the context and not directly because of the Decade. Still, that is part of the reality.

### The impact of the Decade

While the DOV has not managed to move the concern for peace, reconciliation and justice from the margins into the centre of the discourse and ac-

tions of the Church, these themes have clearly moved closer to the heart of the churches, both theologically and practically. Such an effort and process takes more than ten years. It is questionable whether churches have put peace higher on their agenda. But the quality of the concern has improved and its visibility increased.



**Churches can no longer escape the question of just peace.**

The DOV has helped the long-standing and creative work of countless initiatives for peace and justice to be recognised. In many churches and elsewhere there have been significant peace initiatives for a long time. Recognition of such work is important for its sustainability. One of the greatest weaknesses of the peace movement, in the church and generally, is its being scattered and uncoordinated. That is so much the case that the very movement has become nearly invisible and gone unnoticed. The DOV has helped improve that situation by beginning to raise the profile of peace work and by networking amongst such initiatives. The DOV has to some degree contributed to the motivation of initiatives at the grass roots level and to encouraging greater coordination. In this regard the annual foci were instrumental, in spite of their significant difference in receptivity and application.

The discourse on war, peace and violence has moved in the right direction: from a debate almost exclusively focusing on just war to a discussion on the meaning and practice of just peace. We are far from this agenda to be fully clarified, but its elaboration has become inescapable. Churches can no longer escape the question of just peace. At the same time the issue of justice is put forward in new ways, beyond the classical and somewhat worn-out discourse on peace with justice. Not only is justice to be pursued as a normative value in society. The very effort of keeping, making and building peace has to be just. This aspect has been explored particularly in the discussion around the Responsibility to Protect.

The DOV has helped reveal how imprecise, if not inaccurate, the general discourse on violence has been. The general complaint about violence through the DOV has given way to a more precise analysis and to more deliberate steps towards its prevention. The complexity of issues around violence has become much clearer, the discourse more differentiated. This development is to be credited largely to the solid work of the World Health Organization (WHO). It is the WHO that has carried out the most

significant and sustainable work on violence among the UN agencies during the DOV. The DOV has helped to spread the insights gained and lessons learned through the WHO's work on violence and thus contributed to more effective approaches to violence prevention. I am convinced that the churches would do well to apply the typology and follow the recommendations of the WHO, rather than insist on interpretations and appeals that are inaccurate or outdated and hardly understandable for people outside of church circles.

**“One of the greatest weaknesses of the peace movement, in the church and generally, is its being scattered and uncoordinated.”**

During the DOV I have over and over again been surprised to the degree that the basic premises of violence preven-

### **Justice must be built peacefully**

tion are ignored in church circles. For example, many people don't know that violence prevention is a public health priority and that this is mandatory for WHO member states. That approach implies a fundamental departure from a traditional approach geared exclusively towards criminal justice. This new development and its evolving potential should actually be of immense interest to churches. It uses a more holistic approach, keeping in mind the human being in its complex relational, social and cultural environment.

For some time now it has been said that justice and peace cannot be separated, that there cannot be peace without justice. In a way this has become common place platitude. Through the DOV this truth has become more refined and the programmatic approaches more pragmatic and differentiated. The term Just Peace may still be diffuse for many, but it points to such a differentiation. What needs to happen is more than simply creating justice to then make peace. Just peace needs to be promoted and facilitated. This means that justice can only be promoted and built peacefully, without weapons and military might. This concern has become the main thrust of the consultative process towards an ecumenical declaration or call to Just Peace.

The DOV has also repeatedly made clear that the path to a coherent and sustainable theology on just peace is long and demanding. That is true in two ways: on the one hand the appeals and statements made over decades need to be brought to a more practical and consistent approach and must be actually applied. The statement that war is no solution and in light of the gospel not defensible has been articulated for a long time, but the churches' practice over the decades has lagged behind this statement. Think for instance of the message of the WCC's founding Assembly in Amsterdam 1948: "War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. The part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man."

What we really need today are new partnerships with joint and practical commitments to give factual expression to such statements. On the other hand we still have much to do in terms of

theological work until we have reached the objective of the DOV that asks to "relinquish any theological justification of violence". The theological work, and in particular as it relates to Christology, ethics, and ecclesiology, has much homework to do in light of recent sociological and anthropological insights on violence and healing or rehabilitation.

**“Many people don't know that violence prevention is a public health priority.”**

At the same time, nonviolence has until now not really been part of the theological vocabulary and church liturgies, or only marginally. The DOV has helped to introduce this, for many, uncomfortable or unacceptable notion. This is a difficult undertaking, and ironically so when one considers how Jesus describes and lives his nonviolence (meekness) as a lesson for us burdened people – and that he adds: Thus you will find rest/peace for your souls (Mt 11:21).

Another topic significant in peace making and work on violence is the healing of memories. This applies both to individual and collective levels and is a relatively new field, with essential insights from South Africa, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, Bosnia and many other places, all with deep wounds from armed conflict in the post-World War II period. The DOV was a platform to pursue stories related to the healing of memories.

Finally the DOV has facilitated the development of some new directions in interreligious encounters towards closer cooperation for peace. I have in mind a number of interreligious seminars at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey during the first half of the DOV, and several interreligious events in the last few years.

### **Challenges growing out of the DOV**

The goal and process towards having just peace, the healing of memories and reconciliation at the very centre of the churches needs to be vigorously pursued beyond the DOV by the churches at all levels. That process will best be helped by ecumenical and inter-



*The 8th General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998 was a jubilant celebration of 50 years in fellowship since the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. The Harare Assembly issued a proposal for a Decade to Overcome Violence*

religious efforts and cooperation. Preventing and overcoming violence can be done meaningfully and sustainably only in cooperation. Such cooperation is indispensable among churches, but that is not sufficient. Churches need to team up consistently with the actors of civil society and of other religious communities.

The threat of the human family by direct and indirect violence against nature was not taken into consideration sufficiently by the DOV, especially in its beginning. The subject has been brought to the table only late, while its urgency has drastically increased. While the urgency of the matter is being vigorously discussed in many circles, it calls for immediate action.

The theological discourse still works basically from the assumption that violence essentially originates from conflict and that conflict, if not stopped, inevitably leads to violence. This theological and cultural mentality, however, is in contradiction with recent human

science. Violence, sociologists suggest, is not the continuation of conflict, but rather its opposite. The confusion of conflict and violence, very common in the news media, is fatal for the ministry of reconciliation and for building just peace. The linear connection of cause-and-effect, which dominates the thinking and approaches, even within the peace movement, is a hindrance to sustainably overcoming violence.

It is precisely for this reason that close collaboration between theology and sociology/anthropology and a consistent interdisciplinary approach between churches, civil society and the scientific community is essential. We see such cooperation growing within the Violence Prevention Alliance, which was initiated by the WHO. Related to that, there is still much theological work to be done towards fulfilling the DOV objective to "relinquish any theological justification of violence". Such work is imperatively ecumenical and interdisciplinary and needs to revisit

some common assumptions on atonement and redemption.

Nonviolence beyond the negative sense of the term as abstention from the use of force (nonviolence), as a way of life and of approaching conflict, must be pursued as a spiritual value that is beautiful and practical. In a way, non-

**Justice can only be promoted and built peacefully, without weapons and military might.**

violence needs to be rehabilitated in church and society as realistic and faithful to the human destiny, regardless of religion or creed. If, anthropologically speaking, violence was a founding factor for social community, and a saving one for sacrificial religion, then

today we are faced with the reality that violence works the opposite: it breaks communities and it binds people rather than liberating them! The alternative is nonviolence, which means respect and love, or loving kindness. Isn't that how God is revealed in Christ?

Finally, churches have paid little attention to the fact that militarism, and world military spending, goes largely unchallenged among the churches. The DOV has not managed to mobilise churches on this. But how can the Christian Church not speak out against the totally disproportionate and still growing military spending?

### Need for a spiritual journey

By now it is fully clear that theologically and ecclesially speaking there is a lot of work to be done. At the end of the 20th century there was a lot of discussion about a paradigm shift in Missions. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, and a little over ten years after churches have begun to talk about violence, we can speak of something of a paradigm change in regard to peace,

violence and justice. First of all there is, as mentioned above, the change in discourse and attention from just war to just peace. But that is not the full picture. The biblical testimony speaks of reconciliation as the place where peace, justice, mercy and truth meet.

*“There are far too many lies and far too much protection of half truths in institutional religion.”*

Yet there are far too many lies and far too much protection of half truths in institutional religion, in spite of all the talk about peace and justice. The ecclesial context, parallel to the political and economic context, has a culture where transparency and truth are not always honoured. That may, however,

be a spiritual rather than a theological problem. It points to the reality that general culture, respectively its distortion, is a stronger influence on people than theological or dogmatic premises. That is why the importance of a paradigm shift in terms of not only a theological or ecclesial but a spiritual journey, should not be underestimated. People today are far more interested in authentic spiritual insight and experience than in theological or creedal debates or statements. There is a quest for real community, for authentically human, truthful and just responses to the imminent threat of deadly violence from conflicting parties, official and paramilitary.

In summary, the DOV may not have accomplished very much in measurable programmatic terms. However, it has facilitated or contributed to the facilitation of an essential shift in a lasting and sustainable way. It has increased awareness and more differentiated consideration. It was just a beginning, and now it is up to us all to continue the work. 🌿

PHOTO: PAULINO MENEZES/WCC



*A dance group from New York, led by Melvin Miller, made a performance for peace, against war, during the 9th World Council of Churches General Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.*

*With the conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence the experiences of transforming a “culture of violence” into a “culture of peace” will be highlighted. Preparations are made to follow up this initiative with a theology of Just Peace. For a long time, “Justice and Peace” has been on the agenda of the World Council of Churches, and the intention is that the General Assembly in 2013 will reach an ecumenical consensus on the more recent concept Just Peace.*

## Towards a theology of Just Peace

Konrad Raiser

The World Council of Churches (WCC) together with its member churches and ecumenical partners marked the beginning of the new millennium with a Decade to Overcome Violence. The decade with the sub-title “Churches seeking peace and reconciliation” was intended to move the concern for peace from the margins to the centre of the life and witness of the churches. The insights gained during these ten years and the experiences of churches in seeking to transform the “culture of violence” by building “cultures of peace” will be brought together and exchanged at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to take place at Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011. The motto of the convocation “Glory to God and Peace on Earth”, which is taken from the proclamation of the angels to the shepherds in the fields at Bethlehem in Luke’s gospel, is meant as an affirmation that the promise of peace belongs to the centre of the gospel message. Peace is God’s gift to the world in Jesus Christ.

Anticipating the conclusion of the decade, the WCC assembly at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006 recommended that a process of wide consultation be undertaken towards developing an ecumenical declaration on “just peace”. An initial statement towards such a declaration, prepared by a small drafting group, was circulated widely in 2009. This substantial document included basic biblical and theological considerations on the God of peace and the peace of God, developed ecclesiological and pastoral observations on the churches as communities and agents of peace-building and addressed the crucial ethical challenges on the way towards just peace. A large number of responses and

reactions to the initial statement were received.

This prompted the formation of a second drafting group with the mandate to evaluate the responses and prepare the draft text of a declaration to be submitted to the Central Committee at its meeting in February 2011. As a result of its work, the drafting group has presented a short text entitled “An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace”, accompanied by a longer background document. These materials, which have been received by the Central Committee and commended for study, reflection and collaboration, will be presented at the convocation for discussion. In the preamble to the “call”, the hope is being expressed that, together with the commitments arising from the convocation, these materials will assist the forthcoming assembly of the WCC at Busan, South Korea, in 2013, to reach a new ecumenical consensus on justice and peace.

Why do we need a “new consensus” based on a theology of just peace? While justice and peace have been central concerns in the ecumenical movement since the beginning, the concept of “just peace” has entered the discussion relatively recently. To be sure, there was the “Commission for a Just and Durable Peace”, formed by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the USA to consider the foundations for a new international order after World War II, but initially the ecumenical movement felt challenged to consider peace primarily against the background of the reality of war. Under the heading “War is contrary to the will of God”, the Amsterdam assembly of the WCC affirmed in 1948: “War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with

the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. The part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man.” However, the assembly was divided over the question: “Can war now be an act of justice?” Since then the ecumenical witness and action for peace has struggled with the tension between the position

**Peace cannot be built on the foundations of injustice.**

of Christian pacifism in the tradition of the Historic Peace Churches and the ethical theory of the “just war” maintained by the majority of the main-line churches.

### Churches for disarmament

In the decades since Amsterdam, a relative consensus was reached that the production, deployment and use of weapons of mass destruction, especially of nuclear weapons, must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds as a crime against humanity. The Nairobi assembly of the WCC in 1975 had issued the appeal: “The churches should emphasise their readiness to live without the protection of armaments, and take a significant initiative in pressing for effective disarmament”, and the Vancouver assembly in 1993 added: “We believe that Christians should give witness to their unwillingness to participate in any conflict involving weapons of mass destruction or indiscriminate effect.”

The relative consensus is best summarised in the statement on “Peace and Justice” adopted by the Vancouver assembly. Beyond the affirmations just mentioned, the statement underlined the basic conviction that there can be no peace without justice. “The peoples

**“The achievement of justice must be considered as the necessary condition for peace.”**

of the world stand in need of peace and justice. Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace cannot be built on the foundations of injustice. Peace requires a new international order based on justice for all and within all nations, and the respect for the God-given humanity and dignity of every person. Peace is, as the Prophet Isaiah has taught us, the effect of righteousness ... The ecumenical approach to peace and justice is based on the belief that without justice for all everywhere we shall never have peace anywhere”.

This re-appropriation of the inseparable and complementary relationship between peace and justice, reflecting the biblical understanding of *shalom*, placed the ecumenical consensus on a new level. However, in the course of the conciliar process of justice, peace and integrity of creation (1985-1990) and under the impact of the process of globalisation, the primary emphasis shifted to the struggle for justice. The ecumenical discussion was guided by the conviction that the achievement of justice must be considered as the necessary condition for peace, as had been expressed already in the Vancouver statement just quoted.

However, this conviction was challenged by the experience of the “new wars” after the end of the Cold War and the urgent concern for the protection of populations in situations of armed violence. The active witness of the churches for peace could no longer be made dependent on the prior establishment of justice. Increasingly we face situations where efforts aimed at the cessation of armed violence are the necessary condition for addressing the issues of justice. The Vancouver affirmation “no peace without justice” has

to be supplemented by the insight that there can be no real justice without peace.

It was against this background that the Central Committee of the WCC in 1994 initiated the “Programme to Overcome Violence” which was subsequently broadened by the Harare assembly in 1998 to the “Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010 – Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace”. These initiatives, based on the biblical call for non-violent means of conflict resolution, are an indication that the ecumenical community has begun to leave the traditional positions of a just war and pacifism behind and to focus its attention on the vision of just peace. In fact, it was in this context that the concept of “just peace” entered the ecumenical discussion.

#### **Need for justice**

The Programme to Overcome Violence was established by the Central Committee in 1994 “with the purpose of challenging and transforming the global culture of violence in the direction of a culture of just peace...” The Central Committee declared, “that, in view of the need to confront and overcome the ‘spirit, logic and practice of war’ and to develop new theological approaches, consonant with the teaching of Christ, which start not with war and move to peace, but with the need for justice, this may be a time when the churches, together, should face the challenge to give up any theological or other justifi-

**“The ecumenical community has begun to leave the traditional positions of a just war and pacifism behind.”**

cation of the use of military power, and to become a *koinonia* dedicated to the pursuit of a just peace ...”

When the Central Committee of the WCC, newly elected at the Harare assembly, met for the first time in 1999, it issued a message to member churches regarding the proposed decade. The message describes the decade in the following terms: “We offer with the Decade to Overcome Violence a truly

ecumenical space, a safe space for encounter, mutual recognition, and common action. We will strive together to overcome the spirit, logic, and practice of violence. We will work together to be agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in the political, social and economic structures at global level. We will co-operate to build a culture of peace that is based on just and sustainable communities. The Gospel vision of peace is a source of hope for change and a new beginning. Let us not betray what is promised to us. People all around the world wait with eager longing that Christians become who they are: children of God embodying the message of justice and peace.”

When the WCC assembly met at Porto Alegre in 2006, it issued a “Call to Recommitment” at the mid-term of the decade. The call affirms: “The goals

**“Peace is God’s gift to the world in Jesus Christ.”**

of overcoming violence and building a culture of peace imply spiritual, theological and practical challenges for our churches which touch us in the centre of what it means to be church.” After reviewing the experiences and insights gained during the first half of the decade, it states: “Our goal remains to move the search for reconciliation and peace ‘from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church.’ Peacebuilding in non-violent ways is a Christian core virtue and an imperative of the gospel message itself. We are determined to become what we are called to be: ‘ambassadors of reconciliation’ (2 Cor.5) [...]”

The ecumenical fellowship of churches strongly manifests the conviction that the communion of all saints, which is a gift from God and rooted in God’s triune life, can overcome the culture of enmity and exclusion which continuously leads into the vicious circles of violence. It has become in itself an image for the possibilities of reconciled living together while recognising continuing diversities. If this community becomes an advocate of reconciliation for all people in all places who suffer from violence and presents active non-violent ways of resolving conflict, we

will indeed become a credible witness for the hope that is within us, building a culture of peace and reconciliation for all of creation.”

This brief survey of the recent ecumenical discussion regarding peace and justice shows that the ecumenical movement has passed beyond earlier positions and that basic elements for a new consensus are at hand. In particular, it has become clear that peace-building is not only an ethical and practical challenge but that the concern for peace is fundamentally a theological issue which is intimately related to our confession of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Peace is God’s gift to the world in Jesus Christ and the Church, as the Body of Christ, is called to live and share this peace with the world. As the “Call to Recommitment” clearly states: the calling to be peacemakers touches the churches in the centre of what it means to be church.

### Comprehensive vision

Further, the concerns for peace and reconciliation reach beyond the resolution of violent conflict; they are fundamen-

tally related to the task of shaping just and sustainable communities. In fact, peace and justice are intimately related as dimensions of the biblical understanding of shalom. Both point to right and sustainable relationships, not only within and between human communi-

*Peace and justice are intimately related as dimensions of the biblical understanding of shalom.*

ties, but also with the earth as God’s creation. This comprehensive vision of just peace, which we receive through the life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is both an eschatological promise and a gift to be lived and shared out today as in the lifetime of Jesus.

Against the background of these insights which have emerged in the course of the Decade to Overcome Violence, it is clear that a new consensus on peace and justice has to be grounded in a theology of just peace. The process of consultation which was initiated with the “initial statement” has begun to clarify the concept of just peace and to unfold its potential for guiding the churches in their ministry of peace-making and reconciliation.

However, after having considered the reactions to the initial statement, the second drafting group has come to the conclusion that more reflection and dialogue within and between the churches is needed before a new consensus can be expressed in the form of a theologically grounded “ecumenical declaration on just peace”. Such a declaration might be formally adopted by the forthcoming assembly of the WCC in 2013.

On the proposal of the drafting group, the Central Committee of the WCC has therefore issued An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace as an invitation to the churches and the wider human community to join the Way of Just Peace. After indi-



PHOTO: PAULINO MENEZES/WCC

A march for peace took place during the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006, the mid-term of the Decade to Overcome Violence.



PHOTO: WCC

The World Council of Churches has always been involved in peace concerns, right from its founding assembly in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 1948, where it was declared that “war is contrary to the will of God”.

cating briefly the biblical foundations of just peace, the call tries to describe the dynamics of the way of just peace, “which requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey [...] Non-violent resistance is central to the Way of Just Peace. Well-organised and peaceful resistance is active, tenacious and effective – whether in the face of governmental oppression and abuse or business practices which exploit vulnerable communities and creation [...]

The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of ‘just war’ and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.” Aware that just peace as a gift from God “surpasses all understanding”, the call proposes “that

Just Peace may be comprehended as a *collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation*” (Nr. 8-II).

This exposition of the concept of just peace and its further development through the metaphor of the “way” or the “journey” is followed by a more pastoral section which tries to name encouraging and confusing or contradictory experiences on the way of just peace and how to respond to them. A third part develops the image of the way by indicating signposts which point to basic tasks and challenges on the way, like the task of conflict transformation, the question of the limits of the lawful

use of coercive force e.g. by police, the fundamental significance of human rights, the use of natural resources, the building of cultures of peace and the task of education for peace. The text closes by giving examples of specific directions for action in seeking and pursuing peace together. They reflect the four thematic areas in the programme of the peace convocation.

This “call”, together with the companion document, will be presented at the peace convocation in May 2011. It is hoped that the discussion and the resolutions accepted there will encourage and enable the churches to prepare the ground for a common “declaration on just peace” at the WCC assembly in Busan. 🌿

*Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn and share experiences. The Living Letters have a history within the World Council of Churches: during the decade Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-1998, some 75 teams visited more than 650 communities. Within the Decade to Overcome Violence the Living Letters provide an opportunity for people to meet in local contexts around issues related to violence prevention, peace making, justice and nonviolence.*

## Living Letters: The human face of solidarity

*Semegnish Asfaw*

*You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3).*

Living Letters are the human face of the ecumenical family. By coming together under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC), these small international delegations of ecumenical “ambassadors” represent the Living Church and mirror the diversity of our Christian denominations. As is often said by many who are visited, Living Letters delegations are by far the most visible and concrete forms of expression of ecumenical solidarity.

To be a Living Letter means to visit a country to listen, learn, and share approaches and challenges in overcoming violence and in peacemaking. It is an opportunity to demonstrate oneness with churches – and with peacemakers of other faiths, to identify with the local realities and struggles that are experienced by those who receive us. It is a concrete expression of solidarity with churches living in particularly painful contexts of violence and to the peace work they engage in daily, a sharing of insights and helpful approaches in finding creative and peaceful new ways to overcome violence, and a deepening of contacts with the churches, national councils of churches and related networks.

A delegation usually consists of four to six women and men from around the world and from different Christian denominations who have themselves witnessed violence in one form or an-

other and are engaged in their respective contexts in working for lasting justice and peace. For each visit, members of the delegation are strongly encouraged to bring along with them solidarity prayers and letters or messages of hope from their church that will be conveyed to the heads of the receiving churches.

When the churches that gathered in 2006 at the 9th Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil, encouraged such visits as part of the process leading to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) that will take place in Kingston, Jamaica, in May this year, they were convinced that it is through such visits that peace, nonviolence, justice and compassion could be given human faces and real stories. Peace and justice being concrete and tangible outcomes, they are best experienced by brothers and sisters who come from afar to know, learn and understand the struggles, joys and suffering of their fellow beings.

### **From global to local**

During a visit to a country, meetings with the Living Letters delegation in most cases create the space for people to have safe encounters in local contexts around issues relating to violence prevention, peacemaking justice and non-violence. As all churches are faced with violence in various forms, encountering people from other contexts with similar experiences is a way of supporting one another, and of saying “you are not alone”. Such visits are occasions when the global reaches out to the local, thus showing the interconnectedness and

interdependence of threats and issues. It contributes to the sharing of experiences and finding new approaches to overcoming violence. To cite one example, my colleagues who were part of the Living Letters visit to the Pacific shared with me that the receiving churches were very happy to meet among the members of the delegation a person coming very far away from Greenland, yet who is also struggling with the same issues, i.e. the rising of the sea level and climate refugees.

Living Letters visits are also an opportunity to bring issues that the people from the receiving country are wrestling with to the attention of the international community. During the Living Letters visit to the Philippines, members of the delegation had the opportunity, among other groups visited, to visit 43 health workers – the Morong 43 – who were detained by the military, and then by the government, under false accusations. The delegation also met with the Secretary of the Department of Justice who expressed her sincere wish to have the detainees released on 10 December, i.e. the United Nations International Human Rights Day, or before Christmas at the latest. During a press conference where journalists from various newspapers from the Philippines and other parts of Asia were present, the delegation had the opportunity to share their concerns about these 43 prisoners. This led to the release of 35 of them. Although we can of course not credit their liberation to the presence of the Living Letters delegation, we can still humbly affirm that the presence of such an international



PHOTO: JOHANNA DE LA CRUZ/WCC

During their visit to the Philippines in 2010, the delegation from the Living Letters opposed to the detention of 43 health workers. Soon afterwards 35 of them were released.

delegation had at least a minimum impact on the positive outcome of the situation.

### Enriching encounters

Since 2007, I myself have had the privilege to be part of three Living Letters visits: to Sri Lanka, Uganda, and the Philippines. Each visit has been a unique and precious experience where I felt challenged in the face of sorrow and despair, encouraged and invigorated by the resilience and the passion for justice of the people I got to meet, humbled by the wisdom and endurance of victims who seek peace and reconciliation despite all the atrocities their loved ones have experienced.

Let me cite an example from my visit to Uganda. When visiting the Ongako Internally Displaced People's Camp 30 kilometers west of Gulu, we had the opportunity to meet and discuss with some young people who once were abducted. Most of them were around 13 to 14 years old when abducted on an ordinary day as they were coming back from school. It was difficult for them to share with us what they went through during their several years of captivity. As prisoners of the rebels, they were forced to turn into soldiers if they wished to remain alive, which of course implies that they had to commit atrocities as a matter of survival.

Although it was hard for them to share with us explicitly what they had been through, it was easy to realise the horrendous situations they had to face until the day when they finally man-

aged to escape from the rebels. Some of their friends who tried to escape but did not succeed were killed on the spot and shown as examples to anyone who wanted to run away from the rebels. Although I was aware that child soldiering is a common practice for the Lord's Resistance Army, it was very moving and humbling to speak to these young adults whose lives have been irreversibly changed, and who will spend the rest of their lives with an indelible scar in their minds.

**As prisoners of the rebels, they were forced to turn into soldiers if they wished to remain alive.**

### Hosted by local churches

The request for a Living Letters visit often comes from the churches of the receiving country, although not always. The programme of each visit is carefully designed and crafted by the local churches. Most of the time, this translates into partnership with the National Council of Churches. As we come from different horizons to experience in all humility the grievances and struggles of the local people, it is our understanding that the churches are the ones who are best placed to guide us in their own land and bring to our attention the

burning issues that are at stake. This being said, even when the visit is initiated by the WCC, due to a major natural catastrophe or a sudden human crisis, the programme of the visit is still taken care of by the local churches. The primary reason behind this procedure is to empower the local churches when dealing with issues that are close to their heart, and with which they wrestle on a daily basis.

As for the selection of the members of the delegation, several criteria come into consideration. We strongly welcome delegations in which there is an equal representation of men and women, and also where there is a youth presence. As for confessional diversity, we make sure that several Christian denominations are present, with at least one person from the Orthodox family. This being said, the primary criteria that we refer to is the qualification and competence of participants: the team must be composed of people who are either engaged in peace work in their local contexts, or who are experts on the theme of the visit. The main reason behind this criterion is to ensure follow-up work after the visit. Indeed, it is not enough to visit a country that is facing violence. Members of the delegation must also agree to follow-up on the matter in their own respective contexts, either by raising awareness about the situation in their country (for instance, by writing an article in a widely distributed church newspaper) or by connecting the visited churches and civil society members within their networks who deal with the same issue. In addition, every effort is made to ensure and maintain proper follow-up in WCC programmatic work, within the scope of the available capacity, i.e. both in terms of human resources and financial provisions.

In some instances, receivers of such visits themselves become members of another Living Letters delegation. This was for instance the case of James Macharia, a young man from Kenya. This is his testimony:

*Having experienced a Living Letters' visit in my own country, Kenya, during the 2007 post-election violence and being one of the Living Letters to Uruguay and Bolivia, I feel humbled and privileged. I can confidently say the Living Letters Programme is a reservoir of hope. It is one of the best ways of WCC to express its solidarity with its membership. This is because Living Letters reaches out to the people or communities at*

the grass roots level. They identify with those who experience hardships, mostly in conflict or post-conflict countries, e.g. children, women, youth, marginalized groups, indigenous people etc. This for me forms part of the strongest points of Living Letters.

### Standing up for justice

The Living Letters have been gathering stories of hope from churches or other groups' efforts in peacemaking from the places they visited. They are an ecumenical way of advocating peace in the world and highlighting the impact of conflict and violence on populations. Here are some excerpts from reports of such visits.

*We became more aware of the reality of various forms of violence, especially as we tried to enter into the life-worlds of the Dalits, tribals and women. We have learned that those communities have been the objects of discrimination, exploitation and oppression that is systemic and legitimised. This is found not only in the Hindu communities, but in all of society and even in the churches. Physical violence is just one form*

*of violence against these groups; others are: exclusion, being confined to certain types of jobs, discrimination in the educational system. (From the visit to India)*

*Jimmy Johnson from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) shared with us his organization's involvement as a nonviolent, direct-action secular peace activist organization of Israelis involved in active resistance to the demolition of Palestinian homes, land expropriation, the expansion of illegal settlements, construction of "settler by-pass roads", and the uprooting of olive and fruit trees. He explained how ICAHD's activities have centred around three inter-related areas of (i) protesting and resisting alongside Palestinians in the Occupied Territories; (ii) trying to inform Israeli society of the high human and financial costs to both sides of the continued occupation; and (iii) encouraging the international community to become more actively involved in implementing a just, sustainable peace with security, dignity, freedom and economic opportunities for all. (From the report of the Living Letters visit to Palestine/Israel)*

*We have realized that the countries we have visited have used existing ethnic, religious, social and political diversity to justify terrible and profound existing economic and social inequalities.*

*It is a scandal that one third of the Uruguayan population live in a situation of extreme poverty, or that in Bolivia, those who have economic power pretend to ignore the laws related to the rights of indigenous and aboriginal people, going as far as threatening to divide the country. This situation has encouraged a significant number of Christians and churches to denounce and ask governments to work for the common good. There is no bigger scandal than to keep silent or do nothing against such a situation.*

*We, Christian women and men, recognize and respect the diversity of our origins, beliefs, choices, which make us unique and shape our faith. Diversity and difference are not to be taken as synonyms for inequality and exclusion. (From the Living Letters visit to Uruguay and Bolivia)*

Every Living Letters visit is a revelation when the visitor and the receiver become one. 🌿



PHOTO: WCC

Living Letters delegation visiting Uganda in 2008. From left to right: Fredrick Nzwili, Janejinda Pawadee, Timotheus Kamaboakai, Semegnish Asfaw, Mbari Kioni, Sydia Nduna, Rev. Keith Briant, George Hazou, and Canon Joseph Oneka.

*In the efforts to create peaceful co-existence in diversified communities, great caution has to be observed when it comes to the use of language. Concepts that in a Western context are very useful in the aim to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding may have an adverse effect in another context. One such word is 'tolerance', which among many Muslims has a too limiting meaning, whereas "ta'aruf" implies embracing the other as an extension of yourself.*

## Ta'aruf: Islam beyond "tolerance"

A. Rashied Omar

Since the abominable attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States of America there has been a vociferous public debate concerning the relationship between Islam and tolerance.<sup>1</sup> A number of public intellectuals, such as Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis, have raised questions about the compatibility of Islam and toleration, and Muslims have been told time and again that their task as global citizens is to increase tolerance towards people of other religions and to achieve more tolerant societies.<sup>2</sup> Some Muslim scholars and activists have responded positively to this challenge and have emphasized the great strands of tolerance and coexistence in Islam and Muslim history.<sup>3</sup> Emblematic of this trend is the popular monograph, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, edited by the Californian based scholar of Islamic Law, Khalid Abou El-Fadl.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the many invaluable insights contained in this and other works on Islam and tolerance that are flooding the market in the post-September 11 period, in my view, the project of articulating an Islamic validation of the Western concept of tolerance is not at all helpful in promoting mutual understanding, and it certainly is not the panacea to overcoming extremist tendencies within the house of Islam. While I fully appreciate the fact that these efforts of promoting a more "tolerant" version of Islam takes place against the backdrop of a belligerent post September 11 context, in which Islam is constructed as inherently intolerant and predisposed to violence, I believe that in a longer-term vision, the tolerance project is limited. I contend that the persistence of Western

scholars, policymakers, journalists and indeed interreligious activists in using tolerance as a cross-cultural category does not inspire us to reach the highest ideals of our respective religious traditions. In fact, the "tolerance paradigm" limits our visions in the critical task facing the world in the aftermath of September 11, namely that of "building bridges of understanding" between and across religious communities. I propose an alternative vision for interreligious peacebuilding which I would like to call "*Ta'aruf*: Islam beyond tolerance."

### The hegemony of language

It might be expedient to begin with the question of language and terminology. One of the most critical challenges in interreligious dialogue is the question of language, in both its *literal* and its *symbolic* forms. Global realities dictate that we live within the hegemony of the English language, which inevitably privileges those who are more proficient in English and disempowers less proficient or non-English speakers. This illustrates the power dynamics and partiality of hegemonic contemporary discourses on interreligious peacebuilding. In order to meet the subtle but powerful pressures on non-Western traditions to conform to prevailing discourses of "civility," non-Western scholars often inadvertently shore up concepts and texts from their own traditions that appear to correspond to "fashionable" Western concepts.

Applying this challenge of asymmetries in language and conceptual categories to Islam, the Muslim feminist scholar, Riffat Hassan, has pointed

out that the popular Christian concepts such as "salvation" or "redemption" do not have Islamic equivalents. She has lamented this iniquitous dimension of interreligious dialogue by observing that "it has been the common experience of Muslims who participate in interreligious dialogue in the West that such dialogues are dominated by Christian concepts and categories, and Muslims are required to 'dialogue' in terms which are not only alien to their religious ethos but may even be hostile to it".<sup>5</sup> Taking this debate about language and categories as a point of departure, I was curious to discover to what extent the concept of tolerance resonates with the Islamic tradition.

### Tolerance in Islamic source texts

The Jewish scholar of Islam, Yohanan Friedman, has correctly demonstrated in a recent book, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, that there is no precise Qur'anic equivalent to the term tolerance.<sup>6</sup> In fact its linguistic equivalent, *tasamuh*, and its verbal derivative *samaha* are not found in the Qur'an. He has furthermore shown how modern Muslim scholars have adduced proof-texts for the existence of the term tolerance (*tasamuh*) from the second most sacred source of Islamic guidance after the Qur'an, the *hadith* literature, commonly called the prophetic traditions. The interpretation of these prophetic traditions, Friedman argues, departs from earlier understandings of its meaning. For example, a prophetic tradition that has been used to provide textual proof for the existence of the concept of tolerance in Islam reads as follows: "The religion most beloved to God is the kindly

upright religion (*hanifiyya*)” (*ahabbu al-din ila Allah al-hanifiyya al-samha*).<sup>7</sup>

Because of the linguistic affinity of *samha* with *tasamuh* or *samaha*, the modern Arabic terms for tolerance, these prophetic traditions are understood by modern Muslim scholars as being supportive of the idea of Islamic tolerance toward other religions. In earlier commentaries, however, the same prophetic tradition was understood to mean that Islam is a lenient religion which does most impose hardships on its followers, not in reference to Islam’s attitude to other religions.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that there is no linguistic equivalent for the term tolerance does not, however, imply that Islam does not accept the existence of other religions. On the contrary, the Qur’an stresses that the differences in beliefs, views and ideas of humankind is not incidental and negative but represents a God-willed, basic factor of human existence. A denial of the right of others to hold beliefs and views that are different and incompatible to one’s own is tantamount to a denial of God himself. Among the verses of the Qur’an that

supports such a contention is the following verse 99 from *Surah al-Tawbah*, chapter 10: “If your Lord had so desired, all the people on the earth would surely have come to believe, all of them; do you then think, that you could compel people to believe?”

The above verse establishes the principle of freedom of belief and thought in Islam. According to some Qur’anic exegetes at the conclusion of the verse, the prophet Muhammad is himself reproved for transgressing this principle by being over-enthusiastic in convincing others with regard to the truth of Islam.<sup>9</sup>

I maintain that this Qur’anic concept of seeing religious differences as an expression of the will of God is more vital than that of merely tolerating differences in religious traditions. But words are powerful vehicles in shaping our thoughts, and there are often many layers of meaning embedded in words, not least the popular English word tolerance. The Muslim scholar and editor of the volume *Progressive Muslims*, Omid Safi, has pointed out that the connotations of the word “tolerance” are deeply

problematic.<sup>10</sup> In support of his contention he points out that the root of the term “tolerance” comes from medieval toxicology and pharmacology, marking how much poison a body could “toler-

**“Muslims have been told that their task as global citizens is to increase tolerance towards people of other religions.”**

ate” before it would succumb to death. After confronting this definition of the term tolerance, Safi rhetorically asks:

“Is this the best that we can do? Is our task to figure out how many “others” (be they Muslims, Jews, blacks, Hindus, homosexuals, non-English speakers, Asians, etc.) we can tolerate before it really kills us? Is this the most sublime height of pluralism that we can aspire to?”



PHOTO: TORE SAMUELSSON

The International Peace Colleague in Southern Africa (IPSA) in Cape Town, where the author is engaged in research and teaching, is a move to promote higher Islamic education in the region. Members of faculty, including the Principal of IPSA, Professor Salie Abrahams (second from left), in dialogue with Professor Hans Engdahl from the University of Western Cape (to the right).

The answers to these critical questions is of course an unequivocal *no!* We don't want to merely "tolerate" our fellow human beings, but rather to engage them at the deepest level of what makes us human, through both our phenomenal commonality and our dazzling cultural and religious differences. In short, according to Safi, progressive Muslims, and I would add all other Muslims, should not wish for a "tolerant" Islam any more than they should long for a "tolerant" American or European society. Rather, they should seek to bring about a pluralistic society in which we respect, honor and engage each other through our differences and our commonalities.

### "Soft" tolerance

Other scholars, such as the contemporary Muslim ethicist on war and peace, Sohail H. Hashmi, are also acutely aware of the difficulty with the meaning of the word tolerance, but they have persevered with the term and attempted to nuance it by distinguishing between soft and hard tolerance and minimalist and maximalist definitions of tolerance.<sup>11</sup> Such scholarly efforts are however ineffective, since they do not correspond to the reality on the ground.

The reality of tolerance in my own experience living under the racist apartheid system in South Africa is what Hashmi and others have dubbed soft or minimalist interpretations of tolerance. The mere possibility of soft and minimalist interpretations of the concept of tolerance has lent itself well to being abused in this context. In the case of the apartheid regime, soft tolerance was used to justify a policy of separate development of people on the basis of pigmentation of skin. In the racist apartheid perspective of tolerance, it meant that groups of people were encouraged to live separately and apart from each other in enclaves and so-called townships or "ghettos." Ironically, under this Calvinist dominated regime, the government was willing to build mosques for Muslims and temples for Hindus as long as they were willing to "tolerate" the so-called racial or religious other by living apart from them and minimizing their interactions. It was euphemistically called separate but equal development. The system of apartheid was anything but equal. It was rather a policy of racism and bigotry justified by the idea of tolerance through separation. In my view the apartheid crime against

humanity represents an instructive case for teaching us about the inherent weaknesses and difficulties of the concept of tolerance.<sup>12</sup>

### Embracing difference

Is there an alternative and higher vision of interreligious and intercultural harmony that goes beyond the limitations of the idea of tolerance? I believe that such an alternative vision does indeed exist within all of our religious traditions. From the Islamic perspective I would like to offer the Qur'anic concept of *ta'aruf*, which literally means getting to know "the other," or, as I have interpreted it, embracing "the other" as an extension of another self. This idea is eloquently captured in *Sura al-Hujurat*, chapter 49, Verse 13, of the Qur'an: "O Humankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and fashioned you into tribes and families, so that you may know each other/recognize each other [*li ta'arufu*] (not despise each other); surely, the most honorable of you with God is the best in conduct. Lo! God is Knower, Aware (of all things)."<sup>13</sup>

This Qur'anic verse enjoins human beings to celebrate gender, cultural and other forms of diversity through *ta'aruf* (recognition/affirmation) of each other through intimate knowledge, and not mere toleration. Through this verse the Qur'an teaches that differences among humankind are not incidental and negative, but rather that human diversity represents a God-willed, basic factor of human existence. The Qur'anic concept of *ta'aruf* is an alternative vision to that of the tolerance paradigm and represents for me the litmus test of good religion: not how much I can tolerate "the other" but rather the extent to which I am able to embrace "the other" as an extension of another self.

### An alternative vision

The Islamic paradigm of *ta'aruf*, intimately getting to know one another, is a pathway to embracing "the other" as another self, whether they may be Jewish, Christian, or of no faith. I believe that such an alternative vision can make a major contribution to a more peaceful and just world.

The challenge for Muslims is how this core Qur'anic teaching on *ta'aruf* may be reinvigorated so that it becomes a central part of the fabric of contemporary Muslim culture. In particular, Muslims need to assert the concept of *ta'aruf* as an alternative to the concept

of "tolerance" in interreligious dialogue and solidarity. This also imposes a challenge on all interreligious peacebuilders to go beyond a paradigm of tolerance to one that encourages the recognition and affirmation of "the other" through intimate knowledge, and not mere toleration.

Muslims should not wish for a tolerant Islam any more than they should long for a tolerant, European, South African, American or Indian society. Rather, they should seek to bring about a pluralistic society in which we respect, honour, and engage each other through our differences and our commonalities. 

1 Emblematic of this trend is Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2 Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells have usefully shown how particularly after September 11 2001, Islam has increasingly been defined as an inherently intolerant religion. *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). An example of this is, Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations", *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3: 1993, 22-25. Huntington subsequently went on to develop this thesis further in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the Modern World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

3 See Asma Afsaruddin, "Tolerance and Diversity in Islam", *Peace Colloquy* Issue No. 2, Fall 2002 (The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame).

4 Khalid Abou El-Fadl ed., *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Beacon Press, 2002). This volume began as a series of debates in the Boston Globe after September 11, 2001.

5 Riffat Hassan, "The Burgeoning of Islamic Fundamentalism: Towards an Understanding of the Phenomenon", *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within; A Response from Without* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 151-171.

6 Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

7 Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab al-Iman*, 29.

8 Friedmann, *Tolerance*, 5.

9 Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, Vol 5 (Cairo: Dar-al-Kutub al-Islami).

10 Omid Safi ed., *Progressive Muslim* (Oneworld Publications, 2003).

11 Sohail Hashmi, "A Response to the Place of Tolerance in Islam", in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Beacon Press, 2002).

12 I have discussed my experience living as a Muslim under apartheid toleration elsewhere; see "Islamic Experience of Religious Freedom in the South African Context" in *Religious Freedom in South Africa*, ed., J. Killian (University of South Africa, 1993).

13 All translations of the Qur'an are my own and have been informed by the plethora of English translations that exist.

*While the Israeli-Palestine conflict should not be seen as a religious conflict per se, it is also true that the imprints of history and the sacred texts on religious traditions and conceptions among Jews are an integral part of their identity. When interpreted tendentiously, this 'identity' leads to the exclusion of others from land and rights, whereas the religious tradition also has the potential to contribute to the mitigation of conflict and to promotion of mutual respect*

# No dialogue without religion, without dialogue no peace

## A Jewish perspective on the Israeli-Palestine context<sup>1</sup>

Ophir Yarden

A caricature in the *Haaretz* newspaper<sup>2</sup> during the El-Aqsa Intifada which bore the caption "No God, No Terror," demonstrated the popular (mis)conception that the conflict has religion at its root.

That the Israel-Palestine conflict is not inherently a religious conflict, but rather a national-territorial conflict, is taken as an axiom which is beyond the scope of this article to prove.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, religion has the potential – often realized – to exacerbate the conflict, as well as the capacity – perhaps less often observed – to contribute to its amelioration. In this article we shall explore this bivalent nature of religion in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mostly from the Jewish perspective.

Religion knows how to use the language of absolutes and religious narratives easily yield the perspective and chauvinistic claim "it's mine" and "we are superior" in a variety of phrasing:

It was promised to me (first)  
It was mine in the past  
We are more deserving and entitled  
We are God's chosen; ours is the right path

We shall present some examples of Jewish religious attitudes and their relevance to the conflict.

### Land and history

The Land of Israel, *Eretz Yisrael*, holds a central place in Jewish thought and religious practice. Ever since the first Jews were exiled from the land, they



have lamented and hoped: "By the rivers of Babylon / there we sat and wept / as we thought of Zion ... If I forget you, O Jerusalem / let my right hand wither / let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you / if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory / even at my happiest hour."<sup>4</sup>

Jews understand the biblical book of Daniel to teach that even in the days of the Second Temple the Jewish *qibla*, direction of prayer, was Jerusalem: "Daniel ... went to his house, in whose upper chamber he had had windows made facing Jerusalem, and three times a day he knelt down, prayed ..."<sup>5</sup>

After the Temple's destruction, in 70 C.E., the Rabbis taught: "Those who are in the land of Israel turn toward Jerusalem. Those who are outside the land turn toward the Land of Israel ... Those standing in the north face south, those in the south face north, those in the east face west and those in the west face east. Thus all [the people of] Israel pray towards one place."<sup>6</sup>

The content of Jewish prayer focused on Jerusalem and the Land of Israel as well. For approximately 2,000 years Jews have recited the following – and much, much more – three times each day:

[G]ather our exiles ... from the four corners of the earth.

Return to Jerusalem, Your city, in compassion and reside in it as You have said and [re-]build it speedily in our days for eternity ... Blessed are You, builder of Jerusalem.

The narrative of the Promised Land is well known. The book of Genesis tells us that God told Abram/Abraham: "I shall give all the land you can see to you and your descendants forever." (Gen. 13:15) An example of this attitude, as applied to Jerusalem, can be seen in the following traditional Jewish text: "This is one of three places which the nations of the world cannot defraud the people of Israel and say to them 'this is stolen property', and these are they: the tomb of the Patriarchs, the Temple site and the burial site of Joseph. The tomb of the Patriarchs, for it says 'Abraham paid out to Ephron the money ... four hundred shekels of silver', (Gen. 23:16), the Temple site, for it says 'So David paid Ornan for the site 600 shekels' worth of gold' (I Chron. 21:25), and the site of Joseph's burial, for it says 'and he purchased the parcel of land ... for one hundred kesitas'.<sup>7</sup>

The second site mentioned in this text, the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sherif, is often cited as the ground-zero of

the conflict. Discord resounds from the very fact that the site has two names.

History, especially history as recounted in the Bible, is the handmaiden of religion. While many religious Jews feel that the Jewish people's connection to the Land of Israel is firmly grounded on

**History, especially history as recounted in the Bible, is the handmaiden of religion.**

a religious basis, others turn to history. The Zionist idea of the Jews' return to their historical home, where Jewish history took place, is powerful for many. These ideas lead some Israeli Jews to feel that Judaea and Samaria, including all of Jerusalem, are inalienable parts of the national patrimony and should not be ceded to the Palestinians. Others go even further. Turning from ideology to activism they choose to make their homes in these territories. A recent campaign by YESHA, the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judaea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, took "Judaea and Samaria: The Story of Every Jew" as its motto. Posters and bumper stickers widely visible in recent years proclaimed the bond between *historia sacra* and *geographia sacra*, sacred history and sacred geography.

Clearly religiously based ideas, traditions, texts and ideologies such as these serve to buttress the uncompromising, intransigent political voices on the Israeli political horizon. But our purpose was not to demonstrate that "the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose".<sup>8</sup> Religious Jewish voices which give priority to the texts and ideas we have presented are authentic and grounded in Jewish tradition. There are, however, other texts and other readings of some of the same texts which can yield significantly different stances on the political issues at hand in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Having amply established the potential and modalities of religion fanning the flames of the conflict we will now turn to the dimensions in which religion can be a force for peace and reconciliation.

### **Religion: the good news**

Religion is deeply part of societies in Israel-Palestine and its boundaries are

vague. As we have already noted, traditional religious history as portrayed by the Bible is deeply ingrained in the Israeli Jewish consciousness. The findings of academic research, which sometimes contradict the traditional narrative, have not trickled down to the general public in any significant way. Even non-religious public figures often speak of the biblically promised land.<sup>9</sup> Israel's foremost religio-historical site, the Western Wall of the Temple Mount,<sup>10</sup> functions as a national site at which, *inter alia*, Israel's Memorial Day ceremony for fallen soldiers takes place.

The fact that the conflict is not fundamentally a religious conflict is good news. Religion speaks in terms of unique truths, absolutes and eternity; there is not much room for compromise. A political-territorial conflict can be resolved by flexibility and compromise – traits not necessarily at the heart of religious worldviews.

Better news comes from the fact that while religion is not the essence of the problem, it even has something to contribute towards its solution. We shall now explore religion as content and as structure in regards to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

**The Land of Israel, Eretz Yisrael, holds a central place in Jewish thought and religious practice.**

### **Jewish values other than land**

We have amply demonstrated that Jewish religious positions buttress intransigent political stances among some Israelis. But these are not the only religion-based postures available to Israeli Jews. One way of portraying Judaism is through the triad:

Torah of Israel  
People of Israel  
Land of Israel

While the borders may be somewhat ambiguous, the term "Land of Israel" is relatively clear. "People of Israel" naturally refers to the Jewish people and highlights the relations, affinity, history, destiny and sense of mutual responsibility found among Jews. The term "Torah of Israel" denotes not only the Five Books of Moses but all of tra-

ditional Jewish literature and thought. While this body of Jewish philosophy certainly holds the "Land of Israel" to be of cardinal centrality, it is well aware that there are other values incorporated in Judaism.

As we have seen, many religious Jews feel that the value of the "Land of Israel" trumps all others. Those who disagree emphasize Jewish values which include both universalistic and particularistic concepts. Among the universalistic we find: (1) the common humanity of all descendants of Adam and Eve; (2) the responsibility to behave as those created in God's image; (3) the commonality of all who worship the same, one, God – albeit in different ways.<sup>11</sup> In the realm of values particular to "Israel" (i.e. the Jews) we find (1) the notion that one is commanded to be sensitive to neighbors who are unlike oneself "for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt";<sup>12</sup> and (2) the obligation to care for one's non-Jewish neighbors in the same way as one cares for one's Jewish neighbors, *mipnei darkei shalom*, for the sake of the paths of peace.<sup>13</sup>

These precepts and concepts may be summarized in the Biblical verse "All [the Torah's] ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace".<sup>14</sup> These values are at the heart of Jewish religiously-based peace and reconciliation groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights<sup>15</sup> and *Netivot Shalom* (Paths of Peace). The latter (which actually takes its name from the aforementioned verse) presents itself as: "the only religious Zionist peace organization of its kind ... to counter fundamentalist and extremist political arguments that have erroneously placed the value of the Land of Israel ahead of human life, justice, and peace – concepts which have always been central to Jewish law and tradition".<sup>16</sup>

We have looked at what might appear to be some of the obvious, universalistic, Biblical texts which can be drafted into conflict amelioration. I shall close this section by demonstrating the power of a traditional Jewish text to go further and to actually counter other chauvinistic Jewish texts. In contrast to the text cited above (note 7) which made a case for Jewish ownership of the tombs of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Hebron, we can present the following: "Take note of Abraham's humility! He was promised by God to inherit the land for his descendants forever, and now, when looking for a place to bury

his wife, he must pay an extraordinary price to buy it. In spite of that, neither did he doubt nor did he challenge God. Not only that, but he even spoke to the people in humility.”<sup>17</sup>

Here we see an example, in a traditional religious text, of humility and neighborliness overtaking the value of the divinely promised land.

### Religion as means<sup>18</sup>

Thus far we have examined the positive content of religious texts and teachings and their impact on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Now we shall conclude by turning our attention to religion as a modality for creating and structuring dialogue about the conflict. While some feel that religion impacts the conflict in an exclusively negative manner, I count myself

“Traditional religious history as portrayed by the Bible is deeply ingrained in the Israeli Jewish consciousness.”

among those who are committed to the positive potential of religion to contribute to the amelioration of the conflict. I take issue with those who call for religion to be left out of the dialogue, as religion is so deeply ingrained in society that it cannot be ignored. Others call for religious dialogue to be exclusively theological and devoid of politics. This too I reject as irrelevant and impractical. One cannot ask participants in an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue group to have frank, candid and robust interchange whilst censoring an entire ambit of their lives, beliefs and culture. Robust dialogue must allow the participants to bring all aspects, national and religious, to bear when they encounter one another. Such a dialogic situation mimics the complex reality in which we live, where each individual possesses both national and religious layers of identity.

In our work we have also found that a religious structure can impact the interaction of participants in a dialogue group. When, for example, a group is comprised of Israelis and Palestinians one would expect to find equal numbers of the two groups. When we construct a group according to religious lines incorporating Jews, Muslims and Christians

we can easily find ourselves in a situation in which the Jews become a minority. This minority status – the opposite of the reality in which we live – has been observed to function as a catalyst accelerating dialogue and enabling thoughts and feelings which might otherwise be absent to surface and affect the feelings and perceptions of the participants.

Lastly, we have regularly observed that when interreligious groups are formed and conversations address religious issues and religious aspects of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the outcome is not necessarily a drawing of lines according to religious group. Often the conclusion reached by those involved in such conversations is that our conflict is not one of (religious) civilizations as Huntington has argued.<sup>19</sup> Rather than reinforcing a sense of clash between civilizations, religiously-oriented encounters in the Palestine-Israel context often yield a feeling of commonality. Often participants reach the conclusion that the tension is not between religious groups but rather between the moderates and the extremists in each religious tradition.

Paradoxically, structuring dialogue along religious lines can lead to a re-drawing of the lines themselves in which those willing to meet, study, discuss, explore and become acquainted with the other are united in contradistinction to those who remain entrenched in their positions and in their demonization of the other. When this takes place we see the religious aspect as a distinctly positive contribution to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. 🌿

different religions (Palestinians include Muslims, Christians and Druze), religious differences are not the cause of the conflict. It is essentially a struggle over land.” Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, *Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*, Middle East Research and Information Project. [http://www.merip.org/palestine-israel\\_primer/intro-pal-isr-primer.html](http://www.merip.org/palestine-israel_primer/intro-pal-isr-primer.html). (Accessed 3 February 2011).

4 Psalm 137:1, 5-6

5 Daniel 6:11

6 Tosefta Berakhot, 3:15

7 *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* (Albeck edition) 79:19

8 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3

9 One example is the speech of then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the U.N. General Assembly Sept. 15, 2005 in which he said: “The Jewish people have a long memory, the memory which united the exiles of Israel for thousands of years: a memory which has its origin in God’s commandment to our forefather Abraham: “Go forth!” and continued with the receiving of the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai and the wanderings of the children of Israel in the desert, led by Moses on their journey to the promised land, the land of Israel.” [http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Sharon\\_UN.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Sharon_UN.htm) (Accessed 6 February 2011). Works which question the biblical narrative, such as Israel Finkelstein, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*, are popular among the slayers of sacred cows – of which there are many in Israeli Jewish society – but have not deeply affected public discourse.

10 Palestinian denial of the historicity of the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sherif site is an example of the intermingling of religious and historical aspects of the conflict, but beyond the scope of this article. See note 1 supra and Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar, eds., *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade* (Jerusalem and Austin, Texas, 2010).

11 Prof. Jesper Svartvik has argued that “taking monotheism seriously” is one of the teachings of the late Bishop Krister Stendahl. Stendahl contended that true monotheism does not hold that one worships *one* god (monolatry – O.Y.) but that one – and others who worship one God – worships the *only* God. Jesper Svartvik, lecture to the Jerusalem Rainbow, Jerusalem, 2 Feb. 2011.

12 Deuteronomy 10:19. I have deliberately rendered the verse “those not like you” rather than strangers so as not to suggest that Palestinians are strangers or aliens in Israel/Palestine.

13 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 61a

14 Proverbs 3:17

15 <http://www.rhr.org.il/index.php?language=en>

16 <http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il>

17 *Midrash HaGadol, Hayei Sara* 23:4 (Margoliot ed., p. 382)

18 In this section I draw on my experience and that of my colleagues at The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (icci.org.il). See Ron Kronish, “Interreligious Dialogue in the Service of Peace,” *Crosscurrents*, Summer 2008, pp. 224-246.

19 Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996

1 Some of the ideas in this article were developed in O. Yarden, “Religious Self-Restraint as a Positive Contribution to Easing Tensions in Jerusalem,” in M. Dajani ed., *Religious Narratives on Jerusalem and their Role in Peace Building* (Jerusalem 2010).

2 Drawn by Dudu Geva and published on or about 10 March 2002.

3 The consensus on this point is widespread as is evidenced by both the Israeli and Palestinian panelists at the Woodrow Wilson Center’s discussion of “Religion and the Israel-Palestinian Conflict” which took place on March 8 2010. [www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event\\_summary&event\\_id=601759](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=601759) (Accessed 3 Feb. 2011).

We may also note the pronounced Christian role in Palestinian nationalism as evidence that one side is Arab rather than Muslim. “The conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Jews is a modern phenomenon, which began around the turn of the 20th century. Although these two groups have

*In recent years, interest and engagement with religion in the United Nations context have been on the increase. In spite of many differences concerning structures, traditions and aims, United Nations and religious organizations are likely to benefit from interaction in certain spheres. Multi-religious and representative bodies like Religions for Peace are well suited to instill spiritual experiences and humanitarian realities into the veins of the UN.*

## The UN and religious bodies in common search for peace

*Bud Heckman and Stein Villumstad*

Towards the end of the tour, the group visiting the United Nations headquarters all squeezed in close around their culturally costumed docent and took in two large maps before them. The difference between the two was stark. The first map showed a heavily colonized world before 1945 with, for example, Somalia being labeled as “Italian Somalia”. Each country was illuminated with special color codes to show their corresponding “mother” country. “Look at all these colonized nations still controlled by other countries at this point. Now look at the map on your right. How many countries are controlled by other countries after the advent of the United Nations?”

UN docents are highly adept at skirting their conversationalists’ politically barbed questions. Before anyone could offer as much as a sigh, the docent answered herself, “Only 13 now – mostly small islands – and all controlled by the United States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain”. The group was quickly directed to the next exhibit, leaving the tour group to piece together – quite wrongly so – that the UN is somehow causally responsible for ending the legacy of colonization.

To the enlightened tourist, such a presentation only begs for explanation. In 2011 after all, nation states don’t seem to have control of much anymore, or so it may seem. Territory and tyrants have given way to technology, trade, and terrorism. Corporations, global markets, 24/7 media, and other non-state actors are stealing the show today.

The UN can at times look all the part of a stressed out mid-life parent – caring for aging parents, paying heavy bills, and minding a gangly mess of kids all at once. All work, little appreciation. Few organizations have more expectations laid on their doorstep than the UN, all while running on a budget that is roughly comparable to that of the municipal Tokyo Fire Department. A tough act, indeed.

Now enter stage left a seemingly unwieldy lot of religious actors and one can imagine why the UN might simply be tempted to roll its eyes, or, more politely, like the flanking docent, simply smile, say something nice beyond the bounds of the subject of the question before them, and move on.

### **UN a young organization**

But religions are not like any other force in the UN orbit. An organization that is merely 60-years old has to grant some respect, after all, to enduring faiths that are 600, 1,600, or 3,600 years old. In fact, religious actors were instrumental in forming the UN and in breathing life into its founding declarations and principles.

Religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were among the first to be granted the coveted “general consultative status” with the Economic and Social Council at the UN, a member-body council that advises on things such as development and human rights. And to virtually guarantee their ongoing physical presence, the United Methodist Women built a 12-story center for religious NGOs,

which is now enveloped in the heart of the UN complex of buildings. It is a hub for an active network of religious NGOs interacting with the UN.

Since even before they broke ground on the UN, people have been thinking either about how religions could have a place or voice within the UN’s complex

“**Territory and tyrants have given way to technology, trade, and terrorism.**”

structures or how they could create their own parallel “spiritual UN”, as it has often been dubbed. A Religion Counts report in 2002 titled Religion and Public Policy at the UN found three overarching facts: “1) religion is indeed present at the UN; 2) religion’s role at the UN is unclear to many; and 3) religious individuals and groups at the UN do not have a unified perspective on either the issues before the UN or the appropriate role of religion at the UN.”

Ten years after this first-of-its-kind research and all three points are still true. But a fourth observation should now rightly be added. Fueled by the interests of key member states, UN agencies and leaders are now trying several different models and methods for religions to be in relationships with the UN. There is a strong air of anticipation and possibility.



Different models of relations between the UN and religions are being explored at present. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) meets with Samuel Kobia, General-Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

But an important distinction should be made here. The UN has an operational side and a political side. The operational side of the UN has long enjoyed partnerships with religiously affiliated actors to mobilize action around specialized areas where the two parties have shared concerns and mutually enhancing capacities and interests.

#### **Bridging the operational with the practical**

*Religions for Peace*, for example, has enjoyed partnerships over a period of more than three decades with more than a dozen UN agencies, delivering the capacity of multi-religious cooperation to challenges such as HIV/AIDS, violent conflict, and climate change, among others. Pragmatically speaking, religious communities offer the hope of enabling efforts like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reach a proper scale. Advocacy in favor of the MDGs is an example of an activity that bridges the operational experiences of the humanitarian and developmental faith-based organizations,

being arms of their religious communities, with decision-making processes on high levels within the UN. *Religions for Peace* is in this respect facilitating

“ **Some of the member states have religious DNA, if you will, such as the Holy See, Israel, and a multitude of Islamic countries.** ”

a Multi-religious Humanitarian Advocacy Forum, which brings practical experiences from the humanitarian realities of religious communities and their operational arms to the corridors and meeting rooms of UN member states and the UN itself.

This effort approaches the political side, which is more of what the UN officially does on a large scale. This has

always been a bit more of a problem, as far as the religious imagination goes, in part because some of the member states have religious DNA, if you will, such as the Holy See, Israel, and a multitude of Islamic countries, to mention just a few examples. In other words, different countries draw the relationship between religion and state very differently. Further, religion is already at the UN and is an intractable part of its business.

Think about the controversy over the Danish cartoons as just one example. Islamic states and democratic Western states can demonstrate widely differing religiously framed viewpoints, in this case, living out the tension between freedom of religion and belief and the responsibility to confront discrimination and defamation. The different emphases and interests around such issues make it very difficult for parties to agree on the proper role for religion at the UN.

To the collective human psyche, the dominating characteristics of religiously affiliated global terrorism, however, have been a game changer in reconsid-

ering the role of religion. It has made many member states of the UN rethink cooperating with religious communities, testing different pathways for doing so, and affording religiously affiliated actors more space within and around the UN. The idea is that if religion is part of the problem, or at least perceived to be so, it must also be a part of the solution to reach a successful resolution. Therefore, there is an openness of spirit to testing new things with regard to the relationship between the UN and religion.

### Religious initiatives among member states

So what is percolating? A number of initiatives are currently being entertained or implemented by different UN member states and religious NGOs. They include, among others:

*Russia* has been promoting an advisory mechanism on religious issues under UNESCO, after having earlier suggested the creation of a similar mechanism in

relation to the Secretary General or the General Assembly. Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council.

“**Few organizations have more expectations laid on their doorstep than the UN.**”

His Majesty King Abdullah of *Saudi Arabia*, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, launched an interfaith initiative through two initial meetings in Mecca and Madrid. This was followed up in a special session of the General Assembly in 2008. The King’s personal leadership, bolstered by his paramount position in the Muslim world, bodes well for the success of this initiative, particularly in capturing the aspirations of predominately Arab and Muslim member states.

*The Philippines* and *Pakistan* were two of the first governments out of the gate, spearheading a multi-country initiative known as the Tripartite Forum of Interreligious Cooperation for Peace. Though the Forum has not yet gained the political weight needed to be the primary political engine in the UN, and, in fact, is not an officially recognized part of the UN, it does foster healthy exchange through an informal structure coordinated between UN member states, UN agencies/bodies, and UN-recognized religious NGOs.

*Kazakhstan* has hosted a global conference every three years for “leaders of world and traditional religions”. It has been offered by Kazakhstan as a UN partner event, but the UN has not yet formally adopted this effort into their agenda.

Together with the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the Alliance of Civilizations was launched as a joint effort of the governments of *Spain* and *Turkey*.



PHOTO: WCC/MARK BEACH

Participants in the opening worship service at the World Council of Churches’ United Nations Advocacy Week in 2008 placed stones on the altar as a reminder of those who struggle for just peace. Then they broke bread together.

With around 100 countries and organizations as “friends of the Alliance”, it holds great promise. At present there is no unanimity of agreement among its “friends”, however, about religion being a focal point for the Alliance. As a result, the Alliance has thus far leaned more toward the cultural and civilizational aspects of human difference.

*Jordan* initiated a General Assembly resolution in 2010 that established the Interfaith Harmony Week to be celebrated every first week of February. The Alliance of Civilizations has taken up this idea and offered a number of ideas for how a week can be focused on initiatives that ask for interfaith dialogue and action. The ambition is to promote interfaith harmony from the most local to the global level. The first Interfaith Harmony Week was celebrated in February 2011.

*The UN Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding, and Cooperation for Peace.* A plethora of General Assembly resolutions and events in recent years have paved the way for considering an official decade dedicated to religious cooperation at the UN. To be sober about it, the hurdles are many – and some rather high – for getting the concept of such a decade passed. Nonetheless, the Coalition for the UN Decade, currently with about 70 member organizations, has strong support across the religious NGO sector and will give rise to activities regardless of whether or not it is owned by the UN.

### Three types of approaches

These efforts are multifold. We are now past the wistful and quixotic age of religious structures being postured for the UN. Well-heeled Episcopalians and the like who have tried for so many decades to build a parallel structure, a spiritual UN, have now largely folded their energies into the multi-pronged and more pragmatic approaches outlined above.

It is fair to say that religion has come to the UN in a new and forceful way. But there is no clear overarching approach and there is no emergent superstructure. The different initiatives above have different underlying assumptions or approaches. To simplify, the initiatives in our analysis might be grouped in three categories.

1) One approach is to see religion as an integral part of the concept of “civilizations”. Frequently used phrases like

“Islam and the West” begin to imbue the discourse with confusingly blended markers for religious, cultural, and civilizational characteristics.

The Alliance of Civilizations approaches religion as one aspect of negotiating new forms of alliances. Religious actors come onto a stage that has been set by others, for example, the reconciliation agenda set by governments. An unfortunate result of this approach is that religion can be approached in a utilitarian framework, as an aspect or instrument of the broader rubric of civilizations.

**“The UN is not mandated to organize religions. Religions are not mandated to be a part of the United Nations.”**

2) Another approach would be to associate religion as a subset of culture. In most UN General Assembly resolutions which include religion and which were issued during the last few years, religion has been intrinsically linked to inter-cultural understanding. In this instance, religion can too easily become a subset of the broader rubric of culture.

UNESCO, as the major specialized UN agency working on culture, has at times overtly and often implicitly promoted this approach. As a result, religion is rarely approached as a stand-alone framework or concept. Religion tends to be viewed as merely a set of ideas and their cultural expressions, including physical structures.

3) Religions and religious bodies want to be dealt with as religious bodies per se. Religious communities and leaders are given their mandates from their respective institutions, scriptures, and traditions, not from something that fits within some secular rubric.

Religions are organized according to their own mandates and historic traditions, and they are guided by the decisions of their constituencies and even divine governance. Some

religions are centralistic in their structure, while others are quite decentralized and loosely connected internally. Most religions are organized independently of national borders, and, therefore, it would defy understanding that nation states or inter-governmental bodies would govern them.

### Mutual benefits

The UN is not mandated to organize religions. Religions are not mandated to be a part of the United Nations. Yet, in these times, both are finding that they are increasingly benefiting from working together.

Is a multi-religious counterpart to the UN coming into being? Is a religious UN being born? Not so far, nor perhaps can there be, despite how some might romanticize about it. Religions need to organize themselves and on their terms, and both the UN and religious communities are best served by maintaining their distinct roles.

Of course, with regard to the operational side of the UN, we are likely to see an increase in the sorts of engagements that religious communities have with UN agencies and programs, because of a growing appreciation of the capacity and assets of religious institutions. The opportunities for *Religions for Peace* to partner with UN agencies have, for instance, increased dramatically in the past ten years.

On the political side of the UN, no overarching rubric for how religious communities might relate to the UN is emerging as the clear winner. The seven different initiatives mentioned above do not yet have enough consistency or broad footing to bring religions and religious institutions properly and fully to the table at the United Nations, either from within or from the outside.

Founded in 1970, *Religions for Peace* is constituted and organized as the largest global representative coalition of religious leaders and communities, and it is the closest we have come so far to “a religious UN”. But *Religions for Peace* and its member bodies in no way wish to be seen as a religious UN, for the very emergence of such terminology confuses the roles of both bodies. The two bodies have different mandates, entirely relevant to each other, but which should be kept distinct. Neither can be subordinate to the other’s interests, but both can benefit each other. 🌸

*Religious leaders interfering in or affiliating with one or the other side in a political conflict is nothing new, rather an age-old tradition, at times taken for granted, at times strongly questioned and debated. Our time is experiencing a paradigm shift where a potential for new roles of traditional religions and their leaders is evolving in conflict resolution and reconciliation.*

*Another factor promoting the involvement of civil society groups in the prevention and resolution of conflicts with a religious undertone are the new social media that facilitate the spread of opinions, trends and manifestation of solidarity at a speed and scope never seen before.*

The global stage of interfaith relations:

## Religious leaders navigate new roles

*Andrea Bartoli and Diana Smith*

On New Year's Day 2011, major world newspapers carried stories of both the bombing of a Coptic Orthodox church in Alexandria, Egypt, and the announcement of Pope Benedict's decision to host an ecumenical and interfaith summit of world religious leaders in Assisi, Italy, later in the year to discuss how they can promote world peace. Faded are the post-modern voices predicting that religion will lose its relevance in global affairs, but not those who misunderstand, malign, or caricature religions and religious individuals as being irrational, or those who suggest that religious leaders ought not to concern themselves with political issues. The current political, ideological, and religious landscapes make it even more essential than ever that religious leaders do not remove themselves from the public sphere, but rather meaningfully participate in conversations regarding conflict resolution and reconciliation.

It is important to consider the historical context where both the discourse and the socio-political events are occurring, to realize that this particular conversation about the role of religion and faith leaders in conflict resolution would not have been possible even fifty years ago. The major world religions have remained the same and their key tenets are consistent, but we can identify two significant shifts that alter the scene: the key political players and the distribution of their power, as well as the growth in technology and its impact on cultural exchange. This article looks

at both of these relationships, especially in light of how religious leaders in particular engage in conflict resolution in this context.

### Politics and distribution of power

In the 1960's when Western intellectuals and society at large began to gradually disassociate themselves from a majority of traditional religious affiliations, either by experimenting with other spiritualities or preferring non-affiliation, the political world was just entering the Cold War. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States (US) rose as the two dominant poles of global power as Europe recovered from World War II. The major contention was economic and political ideology, and the super powers used their foreign assistance money to reward loyalties and affections of other political actors, making the gifts contingent upon the willingness of the recipient countries to act out the political interests of each of the two super powers, until a spate of proxy wars birthed the Non-Aligned Movement.

Fifty years later, power is much less centralized and fluctuates with economic inter-connectedness. To call it multi-polar might falsely imply that there are several poles of equal strength, which would belie the fact that most people agree that the US is the dominant political power. Yet power is not centralized in the US the way that it was between the US and USSR during the Cold War, as it is much harder

to try and control global politics. The events of the past decade have shown that even individuals are able to access the power to rewrite history and alter the political discourse around the world. So have the voices of religious leaders and ethicists shifted accordingly over the past fifty years? In the 1960's many religious leaders and ethicists like Karl Barth and Hannah Arendt were looking internally, reflecting on the experiences of their own groups, and considering group identity issues. In the less centralized and more volatile world today many religious communities are more externally focused than previously, either collaboratively or defensively. This can be seen symbolically in the hyper-coverage of Terry Jones, the American pastor who threatened to burn the Qu'ran, and the many religious leaders who felt the need to speak out against his actions.

There are a number of solid, well-known examples of religious leaders who are taking tangible steps towards engaging their communities for conflict resolution, individuals who insist that there can be reconciliation, and not simply a mutual monitoring. Leymah Gbowee gathered Christian and Muslim women in Liberia to form the Women in Peacebuilding Network, uniting women to pray and to rally their religious leaders to bring about an end to the second Liberian civil war in 2003. The High Council of Religious Leaders in Iraq is able to bring together some of the most influential Iraqi religious lead-

ers that may be enemies, but are willing to meet together and talk about issues that are negatively impacting their communities. In 2008, they created the first joint Sunni-Shia fatwa against violence in the known history of Islam, which condemned terrorism and violence and recognized the rights of both ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq. Says Canon Andrew White of the Council, "If they can work together, they have the power to bring peace. If not, the situation in Iraq will only get worse."<sup>1</sup>

In Nigeria, after years of fighting in religiously affiliated militias themselves, Muhammad Ashafa and James Wuye founded the Muslim-Christian Youth Dialogue Forum, which has helped facilitate significant peace accords and worked extensively in communities to answer practical problems like access to latrines as well as to provide skills training, trauma counseling, and election violence monitoring. More on the story of 'the Imam and the Pastor' is covered later in this article.<sup>2</sup> Each of these inspiring stories demonstrates a desire to respectfully engage with "the other side" and work together to provide alternatives to violence.

### Technology and cultural exchange

In the 1960's a good deal of research and development was being put into satellites, mobile phones, and the auspices of the Internet, but the largest public technological shift in the Western world was

the introduction of touch-tone phones for home usage. While telegrams had been used for almost a century, a fully operational transatlantic telephone line was not installed until the late 1950's, and so the limitations of transatlantic and transpacific communication meant that international communication was primarily letters or telegrams for most people. Cultural exchange was still largely connected with physical migration. Ongoing immigration patterns continued to bring greater diversity in many countries and improvements in the field of aviation made visiting, living and working abroad more widely available than in the past.

Yet this widening of cultural exchange in the 1960's is dwarfed in comparison to the current rate of exchange in the Digital Age. The social media sites and blogs on the Internet and messaging capabilities through mobile telephones have greatly expanded communication and increased interactions, opening creative possibilities for social impact. After the New Year's bombing in Alexandria, a Facebook based movement, *I'm an Egyptian against terrorism*, gained huge popularity among Egyptian youth, who could denote their affiliation by choosing a profile picture that featured a cross and crescent and the words in Arabic. This movement began in computer-based interactions but resulted in the physical manifestation of several thousand Muslims, in-

cluding movie actors, political leaders, and prominent Muslim leaders, acting as human shields to protect various churches in Egypt on their Christmas services held on January 7.

So how are religious leaders monitoring the changing cultural milieu and allowing their voices to encourage the use of technology for conflict resolution? While not generally the avant garde of technological advancement, religious leaders are increasingly utilizing blogs and podcasts. While arguably the preponderance of these messages are internally focused on one's own religion, there are a few programs, such as the World Council of Churches' *Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation (IRDC)*, an umbrella platform for several online discussions and practical assistance programs that encourage greater awareness and facilitate broader dialogue. Some of IRDC's programs deal with the identity issues of self-understanding, which for individuals often precedes a meaningful cooperation with others outside of one's group. Worth noting in a precautionary way is that there could also be other stories highlighted where religious leaders use technology to antagonize opponents or exacerbate conflicts. We mention this to articulate that the shifts in technology do not inherently improve contested conversations but merely increase their frequency, a reminder of the importance to highlight that merely engaging in conversation is insufficient, that the tone and message of the leaders is equally important in the messy work of fostering reconciliation.

### Ecumenical and inter-faith exchange

Today there are a number of institutions set aside for the very purpose of observing the way religions interact with macro-level issues: The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, the Institute for Global Engagement, and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, to name a few. It is interesting to consider the way that this conversation has become normative, as opposed to the 16th and 17th centuries when it was normative for Catholics and Protestants to kill one another, whether in France, England, or in other parts of Europe. The ecumenical conversations building to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, ending thirty and eighty years of warfare, began with the admission that the ongoing brutality was an absurdity. The Community of Sant'Egidio, a Cath-



An interreligious peace march in Davao in the war-torn southern Philippines region of Mindanao in 2003 engaged plenty of participants.

olic lay people association committed to ecumenism, dialogue, and conflict resolution, and of whom one of the authors is a member, has been meeting regularly for the past forty years, and helping broker peace in many difficult situations around the world. They have also hosted inter-religious meetings for the past twenty-five years, committed to respect the differences between religions but to consistently oppose every abuse of religion as a pretext for violence.

Religious leaders can and should meaningfully participate in both macro and micro-level conflict resolution and reconciliation conversations by being willing to listen, eager to prevent violence, and humble enough to change or disagree amicably. Let us quickly caveat, as a Catholic and an Anglican, that by advocating humility to change we are not suggesting that religious leaders give up tenets of their faith or deny history, but rather that they opt for an attitude that begins to entertain new ideas of interacting outside of the established patterns of engagement and avoids belligerent stereotyping. Such an attitude requires the ability to orient one's thinking towards the future, highlighting the potential changes in relationship, rather than dwelling on the past or entrenching oneself in the present.

*While not generally the avant garde of technological advancement, religious leaders are increasingly utilizing blogs and podcasts.*

There is obviously some risk that leaders who recommend engaging “the other side” in dialogue might be misinterpreted by those in their community who feel that any sort of collaboration is a compromise of purity and commitment to Orthodoxy. In any difficult decision in leadership there is always some risk of being misunderstood or misconstrued, but if they can lead people past that, there are two meaningful ways that religious leaders can

mobilize the networks who respond to and follow them and turn the tides in conflicts. They may either participate in a dialogue as a party to the conflict themselves, or by hosting or facilitating the exchange as respected third parties to the conflict. That is to say, they would be considered as parties to the conflict when the conflict is religious in nature or as alternate voices when the conflicts are ethnic, regional, or political in nature.

#### **A model of interfaith dialogue**

The story of the Imam and the Pastor is worth examining here in greater depth as an example and a replicable model of interfaith dialogue leading to real conflict resolution. In the midst of the con-

*Now is indeed the time for religious leaders not to shrink back but to lead by example in speech, life, love, and faith.*

flict in Nigeria, Imam Muhammad lost two uncles and Pastor James lost his arm. Upon consideration of the great personal loss that he had suffered, each of these religious leaders recognized that fighting was not the solution they were hoping for. Initially the Imam and the Pastor, who met by the introduction of a mutual friend, began working jointly with the Nigerian militias with whom they had relationships as militiamen before they became peacemakers, listening to their frustrations and inviting them into collaborative solutions. While some of the youth viewed them as traitors, they were able to de-escalate several crises because of dialogues between youth leaders.

They used the local media to promote peace campaigns and supported community reconstruction efforts, particularly for mosques and churches, and eventually established the Interfaith Mediation Center (IMC). The IMC has mediated between competing religious organizations, provided counseling, supported neighborhood peace associations, and facilitated the signing of significant peace accords. As the organization grew, they worked closely with political as well as religious

leaders: educating, empowering, advocating, mediating, and providing the steady witness of a concerned observer. At an even deeper level, they worked to heal the underlying grief as much as possible in order to break the cycles of revenge that “justify” aggression and violence.

Intrafaith conflict (Christians fighting each other, Jews resisting other Jews, and Muslims contradicting one another) reveals the fundamental importance of ecumenical dialogue and peacebuilding, whether to resolve the conflict itself, such as in the case of Northern Ireland, or in order to know who may effectively dialogue or negotiate representatively in interfaith collaborations. It is almost as if there must be a purification of religious identity, a resolution to the internal tensions, before conversations with others outside of one's faith can be considered.

Cynics could criticize ecumenical and interfaith efforts to prevent violence by pointing out that there is still violence – and a lot of it – around the world, such as the New Year's bombing in Alexandria. But what that argument fails to see is how much violence has been prevented by the efforts that these groups are initiating, ignoring the hopeful part of the story, where thousands of Muslims gathered to make sure that Egyptian Christians could celebrate Christmas peacefully.

In this current political, ideological, and religious landscape, it could be very possible that religious leaders and concerned individuals would retreat from conflicts and criticisms, turning to inward concerns. Now is indeed the time, with the constantly shifting global power structure and increased cultural and technological interactions, for religious leaders not to shrink back but to lead by example in speech, life, love, and faith, committed to loving even their enemies and bringing about true reconciliation. Not a reconciliation that suggests that all ideas are the same or differences nonexistent, but one that sees and values differences of opinions and can enable honest resolution at the heart of the conflict. 🌿

1 <http://www.rte.ie/news/2011/0111/iraq.html>

2 See also the article From rivalry to brotherhood by J Wuye and M Ashafa, *New Routes* 2005:4

# LPI News

## Kenya: New Conflict Transformation projects

A conflict transformation project in the Tana River Basin, eastern Kenya, has been designed and initiated by LPI and its partner the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK). A similar project with the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) regarding a complex conflict in Marsabit in the North-Eastern Province, is being developed. NCCK and IRCK are new partners with LPI in the Regional Peace-building Programme, administered by the office in Nairobi.



## Lederach – LPI collaboration for practical Somalia research

A renewed interest in the developments in Somalia has resulted in collaboration between LPI and Professor John Paul Lederach at the Notre Dame University in Indiana, USA. PhD students at an interdepartmental course on peacebuilding and conflict resolution will be faced with a practitioner's perspective. The idea is to come out with 5-7 page research products that could be used for peacebuilding, including policy work. The students will work on research focused on Somalia "here and now", including questions that touch on current developments, consequences of the War on Terror for peacebuilding engagement (blacklisting of organisations and individuals) and local processes.



## DR Congo: LPI and local partners in UN Pooled Fund project

LPI and its partners Action pour la Paix et la Concorde and Réseau d'Innovation Organisationel have implemented a UN Pooled Fund financed project from July 2010 to January 2011. The project's overall goal has been to reinforce local mechanisms for the peaceful handling



PHOTO: PIETER VANHOLDER/LPI

*Young boys try to earn some money looking for minerals in the UN Pooled Fund Project area in South Kivu*

of conflicts between host communities and internally displaced persons in the territories of Kalehe and Mwenga, South Kivu. This, for LPI, rather unusual short-term engagement emerged in the volatile context in Eastern DRC where the presence of armed groups (such as the Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Rwanda) and military operations cause internal displacement on a large scale. Conflicts between displaced and host communities, especially related to mining, are common.

By creating eight dialogue and mediation committees, bringing together representatives from both host and displaced communities, the project aimed at contributing to a more peaceful cohabitation of these populations. LPI and its partners are currently conducting an internal evaluation in order to learn about the effectiveness of the established mechanisms as well as their sustainability.



## Evaluation of peacebuilding

LPI has been contracted to evaluate the Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA) thematic priority: 'Religions for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuild-

ing' between 2005 and 2009. The evaluation will take place during spring 2011 and will be concluded mid-May. Although it is on the global level, it will include two field studies, one on NCA's work in Ethiopia and one on their work in India/Pakistan. The evaluation team consists of Charlotte Booth and Malin Brenk from the LPI head office in Uppsala, Hannah Tsadik in Addis Ababa and Nicklas Svensson from Stockholm Policy Group who is subcontracted by LPI.



## LPI shares new planning tool

Since the beginning of 2008, LPI has embarked on a process of strengthening its Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PME&L) system, beginning with the development of a tool describing the key steps in PME&L and building on insights in the field of peacebuilding evaluation and results-based management (see also New Routes 3/2008). The methodology is being applied in LPI's conflict transformation work in the field and will be continuously developed. The tool will now be published as a working draft for application in order to share the toolkit with other peacebuilding organisations and LPI's stakeholders.



## Funding and projects

In order to plan an appropriate future resource mobilisation policy, LPI has embarked on a global pre-study. Apart from a desk research and mapping of current changes and trends in Europe and Africa, the project includes a workshop in Nairobi with selected local partners from DRC, Somalia and Kenya. The future policy and fundraising strategies will be developed in line with LPI's long term strategic plan focussing on conflict transformation and capacity building with local partners in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region. The study is receiving

financial support from the Swedish Mission Council.

LPI has received additional funding for its work in Somalia from the government of Norway. The funds complement current funding from Swedish Sida, the EU, the government of Switzerland and the Church of Sweden.

### PeaceNexus expands support to LPI

In order to further develop LPI's capacity in the area of policy advocacy, the ongoing collaboration and coaching by the Swiss-based organisation PeaceNexus will be expanded. The agreement originally aimed at supporting an assessment and initial planning steps in the project over nine months. Following a successful start and significant progress, including training workshops, the two organisations have now decided to expand the capacity building project to also include two pilot projects. The project now runs until October 2011.

### Staff changes

#### UPPSALA

In January 2011, **Dr. Nikki Slocum-Bradley** began working in the Uppsala office as Programme Advisor with a focus on Research. Prior to joining LPI, Nikki held positions as a Research Fellow at the United Nations University's centre for Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in Belgium, where she remains an Associate, and at the Institute for European Studies (IES) Programme on Migration and Diversity. She was head of the UNU-CRIS office in Brus-



*Raj Rana from PeaceNexus, Malin Brenk and Peter Karlsson Sjögren from LPI at a workshop in Bukavu, DR Congo, within a capacity building project on policy advocacy in LPI.*

sels, a representative position in which she acted as liaison with UN, EU, and other institutions. Her professional experience includes various positions as a lecturer, and she has also given guest lectures and seminars for audiences of academics, policy-makers and practitioners around the world.

In addition to a variety of academic publications, Nikki has written expert background papers for various policy forums. Her experience with philosophies and methodologies of social science and their application to conflicts will support LPI's work linking theory/research and practice within LPI's peacebuilding programmes in Eastern and Central Africa.

**Ruxandra Bujor** is the intern in LPI's Uppsala office for the spring term up to June. She comes from Romania,

holds a Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Research from Uppsala University and is currently taking a Master's course in Communication and Development through distance from Malmö University.

#### SUDAN

**Jody Henderson** has been employed as Resident Representative for LPI's Sudan programme. She begins working from 1 March in Uppsala and proceeds to Khartoum in April 2011.

**Dr. Yasir Awad Abdalla** has joined the LPI programme in Sudan as part time Senior Research Advisor. Based at the University of Khartoum within the Department of Political Sciences, he has previously served LPI on a consultancy basis.



*Nikki Slocum-Bradley*



*Ruxandra Bujor*



*Jody Henderson*



*Yasir Awad Abdalla*

# Reviews and resources

## The encounter of two faiths

*Islam and Christianity in the Horn of Africa* by Haggai Erlic.  
Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010

In this book, Haggai Erlic weaves an interesting analysis of Christian-Muslim relations in the Horn of Africa from the earliest times when the two religious traditions came into contact with each other. He reminds the readers that encounters and relations between these two faiths occurred in Africa at the beginning of Islam and that it is Africa that first gave refuge to Islam when Muhammad sent a small group of his followers to the land of a Christian King in Ethiopia, where they were well received. Though this is not new evidence of Christian-Muslim relations, a reminder of the historical legacy in the context of the rising militant Islamism in this part of Africa is an important contribution to the much needed sources about the region. It is also an important contribution to the studies of a region whose histories and identities have been shaped by Christianity and Islam.

The author gives detailed analysis of religion and politics in and among the three countries of the Horn: Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. Descriptions of alliances and counter-alliances, confrontations and friendships among the rulers and leaders provide insights into the background to some of the current trends in the region, for instance the situation of the Muslim population of Ethiopia vis-à-vis the Christians and the relations between Ethiopia and Somalia on the one hand, and between Sudan and Ethiopia on the other. Through a historical approach, he examines the "old religious legacies" in the Muslim-Christian engagement, including the struggle of Mohammad Abdalla Hassan to free the Somalis from the British, Italian and Ethiopian occupiers.

Focus on the return of political Islam is an important aspect, and the question of "Arab" and "African" Islam is relevant in view of the religious developments in the region under scrutiny. The author also describes the more recent religio-political developments, including the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, and the invasion by Ethiopian forces. The Islamic Courts Union was linked to global radicalism and tried to impose a puritan legalism aimed at a comprehensive religious and national revolution. The invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia is considered to be "exceptional", as it was the first time since the emergence of modern Islamic radicalism that Ethiopia, which is seen as Christian-led, invaded an Islamic state. Again reference is made to the demonisation of Ethiopia in the story of the Ka'ba at the beginning of Islam.

However, the suggestion that the ethnicisation of Ethiopia by the current administration is "meaningful", can be challenged for a variety of reasons and facts. Also one may not agree entirely with the author that since the beginning of the 1990s, when religion returned to the forefront, "Ethiopia was re-defined" and Christians and Muslims became "equal partners". Many mosques may

have been built in recent years, but this does not indicate an increase or equality in status of Christians and Muslims in this country with a long history of both religious traditions.

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## Islamic peacemaking

*Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam.*  
Edited by Qamar-ul Huda. Washington, DC: United States  
Institute of Peace Press 2010.

The end-product of a conference of peace scholars and practitioners, this volume is a richly documented, welcome addition to a much-needed and steadily growing literature on Islamic peacemaking. The collection of ten wide-ranging articles, bound between Qamar-ul Huda's helpful introduction and conclusion, covers the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, Islamic values and principles, economic development initiatives, human rights, Islamic peace education, current capacity-building needs, and Muslim women as agents of change.

The book includes a set of four appendices including The Amman Message and A Common Word, as well as a glossary of peacebuilding terms in English, and nearly 150 terms in Arabic.

The editor's introduction notes the ultimate futility of attempting to counteract extremism with military force, the multiple challenges to effective Islamic peacemaking, the need for constructive engagement with Muslim leaders, and the importance of drawing on Islam's own traditions and resources for peace. The conclusion acknowledges serious causes for concern, but notes promising work for peace and development. Finally, it recommends programming for socioeconomic and human development and a culture of peace, working at different levels of society, addressing structural inequities, training religious leaders, networking with international peacebuilding organizations, better engaging Muslim civil society to "neutralize extremist ideologies and resist violence", developing peace education curricula, and supporting transitional institutional mechanisms such as justice and truth commissions.

Much of the content in this collection is theoretical and philosophical. Some readers will hunger for more in the way of practical experiences and case studies, though there is a concrete piece on peace education in Aceh, a fascinating biographical account of the modern Turkish advocate for non-violence, Said Nursi, and specific examples of Muslim women peacemakers in Afghanistan, Thailand and Kenya.

A great deal of the book's focus, finally, is on how conflict can and should be dealt with in "Muslim communities" or predominantly Muslim communities. While this is very significant, it would have added to the volume's appeal if an article or two had addressed faith-based peacebuilding in

religiously divided communities such as those in Nigeria, or in the context of dominant Western modernities. Perhaps we will learn more about such additional issues in future work by this accomplished scholar and others.

*Tom Bamat*

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### From colonialism to development aid

*Empire, Development & Colonialism. The Past in the Present. Mark Duffield/Vernon Hewitt (eds). Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2009*

The focus on the security-development nexus as a guiding principle both for shaping domestic policies in individual states and as a paradigm for global policy motivating political and humanitarian interventions is a relatively new one. This volume adds to a recent debate that revisits the concepts and notions of development rooted in the 'civilising mission' during the colonial era. Hence it explores a hitherto largely ignored, or at least neglected, link concerning the continuity of the 'colonial mind' in international relations of today.

The chapters in this volume are mainly the result of a workshop at the University of Bristol held in September 2007. They seek to "explore interests in the similarities, and differences, between contemporary debates on socio-economic development, humanitarian intervention and aid, and the historical artefacts of European empire" (p. 1). The case studies of colonial settings at different times and places under various forms of external rule testify to the need to further reflect upon the legacies.

Investigations present political-ideological premises of colonial administrative rule and the politics on the ground in Jamaica, Bombay, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan. More general chapters on the ideological history and political practices within the rule of empire focus (often with reference to empirical cases) for example on the notion of 'good government', the British responses to poverty and famine, a policy towards 'fragile states', the role of NGOs in securitisation as a form of global governmentality, as well as the colonial policy principles of British social democracy.

The blend between empirical and theoretical elements of the analyses is a stimulating effort. While there is an obvious bias towards British colonial thinking and practices, it also serves as a provocation for related colonial practices and the lasting effects these have in post-colonial settings elsewhere. Unfortunately, the introduction misses an opportunity to take the results a step further towards a more coherent new thinking on the basis of the evidence presented in the subsequent chapters.

Among the important insights presented in the individual chapters is the assumption that "colonialism was always in part about social transformation" (p. 102) and hence not oriented merely towards maintaining a status quo, in which certain forms of externally guided exploitation and its structures would remain cast in stone. These continued to survive in modified structures even after formal colonialism had officially ended.

The volume adds to a very timely, often troublesome stocktaking exercise, which is in many instances inspired by

the theories of Michel Foucault on disciplinary society and bio-political social engineering. It is of no comfort to become aware how little the current discourses and the practices of development aid, or humanitarian intervention guided by them, differ from the earlier stages of a 'civilising mission' under the formal colonial rule of European powers.

*Henning Melber*

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and Research Associate with the University of Pretoria*

### The art of mediation

*The Go-Between. Jan Eliasson and the Styles of Mediation by Isak Svensson and Peter Wallensteen. USIP: Washington D.C., 2010*

Ambassador Jan Eliasson worked for the last three decades as a mediator in several conflicts and humanitarian crises around the world. This book casts an academic analytical look on the styles of Eliasson's mediation. The authors aim to narrow the gap between the theory and practice of international conflict mediation. Using the Swedish diplomat Eliasson's experience as a focal point of the analysis, the authors "explore the styles of mediation" (p. xi) through interviews and diary entries of Eliasson by relying on six cases. In contrast to most scholars, Svensson and Wallensteen look particularly closely at scope, method, mode and focus of the mediation processes to identify "overarching approaches" that a mediator applies in regard to different processes (p. 16).

For the analysis, the authors divide the mediation process into five stages beginning with the "going in" and ending with the "going out". Each section draws insight from the cases in which Eliasson worked actively as a mediator for the UN or OSCE. In Iran-Iraq Eliasson worked beside Olof Palme (1980-86), where he mediated again in 1988-91, Burma/Myanmar-Bangladesh (1992), Sudan (1992), Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) in 1994, and from 2007 to 2008 in Sudan (Darfur). In their analysis, Svensson and Wallensteen highlight the importance of the mandate that is given to the mediation mission. In other words, the scope of the mandate will have a particular impact on the style applied by the mediator, and thus confines the process already from the set-up. Finally, the theoretical findings are complemented with some policy relevant lessons for mediation and research.

Both scholars have contributed widely to conflict resolution and conflict mediation literature, making the eight chapters of the book well structured. The non-academic reader might struggle with the first pages of chapter one while fighting her/his way through extensive footnotes, but will be rewarded by getting a good overview and introduction to the debate on international mediation. In addition, the book gives interesting empirical insight to some of the less popular mediation cases, which is valuable for both practitioners and academics. The new theoretical approach chosen by Svensson and Wallensteen reveals the importance of the mandate given to mediators, and thus opens up for new important questions.

In closing, the contribution and utility of the book has to be seen through the eyes of the intended audiences. On the one hand, for practitioners and non-academic readers, the book provides a unique and uncomplicated introduction to

the complex academic debate and contrasts Eliasson's experiences in the analysis with other relevant mediation processes. On the other hand, the authors contribute a new theoretical approach to the study of mediation styles. In addition, academia is provided with a unique source of "mediated" empirical insight that stretches beyond the usual biased and too often self-flattering biographies of former diplomats.

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## A common future for Southern Africa

*Southern Africa: 2020 Vision. Public Policy Priorities for the Next Decade. Report edited by Mark Hannam and Jonathan Wolff. London: e9 publishing in April 2010.*

This is a report from a conference, held in August 2009 in Windhoek and organised and published in corporation with the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Namibia Institute for Democracy. It aimed to draft a scenario of the further development in various areas in the SADC-region until the year 2020: economic development, healthcare, democracy and governance and legal and civil rights. Although the fifteen countries within the SADC-region are not homogeneous, it is reasonable to expect that these countries will share a common future. Academics, civil society activists, business people and politicians from Namibia, South Africa and Europe partook.

Some examples deserve to be highlighted. Under Economy: Namibia has been a success story after liberation, being politically stable, with a functioning democracy and a growing economy. Like South Africa, however, it remains one of the most unequal societies in the world (Katjavivi, p. 3, Melber, p. 12). The main challenge is to address these inequalities. Melber points out that some "dominant and unquestioned growth based models [...] become increasingly dubious and come at a far too high price for the majority of the people" and could be termed "a pact among elites", transgressing national, regional and continental boundaries".

An interesting question asked by du Pisani under Democracy and Governance is whether the standard model of liberal democracy is the best way forward for the development needs of the peoples of the region. "The 'democratic label' is decidedly problematic. In many of the so called 'new democracies' in Southern Africa – Angola, Zambia, Malawi, the DRC, Lesotho and Zimbabwe – their transitions actually have not transferred meaningful power to the citizenry" (p. 84).

Can conferences like these make any difference? According to Hoffman (Allgemeine Zeitung, 28 August, 2009), "the public discourse on burning issues is kept alive". Also there is a need for SADC countries to "define a comprehensive and integrated economic and development agenda for the region" (Duddy, The Namibian, 28 August, 2009). Katjavivi points out that it "could not have come at a better time than this, when our economies are reeling under the economic pain caused by the global, financial crisis emanating from the developed world." (p. 2).

The report provides useful background information and will certainly serve as an interesting reference for further studies of the future in Southern Africa. Most focus is naturally on Namibia, as eleven of the seventeen participants have a Namibian background. There is an exemplary summary of the expert papers in the introduction, which makes the report easy to grasp for the average reader.

Marianne Svanström

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## New report: Fewer conflicts, fewer victims

*States in Armed Conflict 2009. Edited by Therése Pettersson and Lotta Themnér. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2010*

The annual number of active armed conflicts is no longer increasing and the number of fatalities has seen a radical decline since the beginning of the 1990's. This is shown in the recently published annual report States in Armed Conflict 2009, compiled by researchers at the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, UCDP ([www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php](http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php)).

– New data show that the number of people killed in war has decreased by 85 per cent between 1990 and 2005, says Professor Peter Wallensteen, director of the program.

In the last five years, the UCDP has seen an increased number of conflicts. In 2003, 29 active conflicts with governments involved were registered. In 2008, the number had risen to 37. In 2009 a slight decline in the number of conflicts was seen, with 36 active conflicts recorded.

– Even if this is only a small decrease, it might hopefully be a break in the trend, says Professor Wallensteen.

However, Professor Wallensteen stresses that these results should be treated with caution, adding that there are still a large number of conflicts active worldwide, six of which are classified as wars.

The 2009 report also includes a special chapter on so-called non-state conflicts. Examples of this type of conflict are when two rebel groups or two ethnic groups fight each other. The information presented here is quite new and unique.

The number of non-state conflicts increased in the latter half of the 1990's but then decreased in the first decade of the 21st century. This trend was broken in 2008, when a 100 per cent increase in the number of non-state conflicts made that year one of the most violent since the end of the Cold War.

As with other types of conflict, democracies seem to be less affected. Also very authoritative states see rather little of this type of violence. Researchers found that the situation is worst in so-called anocracies that are neither democratic nor authoritative. However, the number of victims seems to have declined in these cases too.

74 per cent of the non-state conflicts since the end of the Cold War have taken place in Africa. Among the hardest hit countries are Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Press release from the DPCR

Adapted and translated by Kristina Lundqvist

## Peace Sunday Sunrise Vigil

On 22 May 2011 at dawn, during the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, youth groups and communities are invited to begin the day with a vigil. This sunrise vigil can be anything from a prayer meeting, a bible study, singing of songs or silent meditation. As the sun rises, over the world – may there be peace.

## Prayer of intercession

*O God replenish your peace in the midst of all your people*

*Lord, we pray for*

*Peace for those who weep in silence*

*Peace for those who cannot speak*

*Peace when all hope seems to disappear.*

*In the midst of rage, of violence and disappointment,*

*In the midst of wars and destruction of the earth,*

*Lord, show us your light in the darkness.*

*Lord, we pray for*

*Peace for those who raise their voices to demand it,*

*Peace when there are many who do not wish to hear of it,*

*Peace as we find the way to justice.*

*O God replenish your peace in the midst of all your people.*

## LPI AND ITS PERIODICALS

**Life & Peace Institute**, (LPI) is an international and ecumenical centre based in Uppsala, Sweden, that supports and promotes nonviolent approaches to conflict transformation through a combination of research and action, and hence contributes to the prevention and mitigation of violence as a precondition for peace, justice, and nonviolent coexistence.

LPI's operational focus is on Africa, and more specifically on the Central Africa and Horn of Africa regions. In addition to the head office in Sweden, LPI has programme offices in Nairobi (Kenya), Bukavu (DRC), and Khartoum (Sudan) and staff working with the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia.

LPI publishes two periodicals: the quarterly electronic journal **New Routes** and the bi-monthly electronic **Horn of Africa Bulletin**. Both are free online publications but can also be provided as hard copies on payment of a subscription fee.

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