



This is “Cross the Lines”, number 27 January/April 2006, the newsletter of the Women Peacemakers Program.

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Churches Overcoming Violence

What role does religion play in conflict today—and what role should religious institutions play in peacebuilding? These were only two of many questions asked at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 9th Assembly, held in February in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The WCC is one of the largest and most influential Christian organizations in the world.

“We can’t have peace only at the top—not with intra-state conflict so common. People are the center of our work. The people trust us, so the church has a responsibility to get involved,” Claudette Werleigh said passionately.

She was speaking at the workshop Rays of Hope: South-South Exchange on Peacebuilding, held during the Assembly’s parallel forum for activist groups. Werleigh, from Haiti, is head of the Conflict Transformation section of the Life and Peace Institute, a Christian ecumenical research center on peace and justice issues. She pointed out some essential elements of successful peacemaking, citing as an example peacebuilding in Somalia. “Start with research. You must have a good analysis of the conflict—who are the key actors? Why are they fighting? Whose interests support the conflict?” she said. Above all, peacebuilders must have, “Patience, patience, and patience. You must learn truly to listen.”

Pushing hate, not peace

Fellow panelist Louise Bakala of the Evangelical Church of Congo-Brazzaville, spoke on a successful collaboration for peace between churches and LPI in Brazzaville. After one successful seminar for journalists on Catholic and Protestant newspapers, “journalists realized they were pushing hate, not peace.” The newspapers began to cooperate on a peacebuilding campaign which spread to the grassroots. The media and peacebuilding seminars are continuing and now include workers from commercial newspapers.

The LPI workshop was one among many during the gathering that dealt with Christianity and peacebuilding. Similar workshops looked at churches’ roles in transitional societies involved in reconciliation; at the WCC’s Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (which trains international volunteers to accompany local human rights and peace activists); and at how churches should respond to human rights violations, taking as a case study the on-going abuses by the Indonesian military in West Papua. The WCC program the Decade to Overcome Violence featured interactive games and activities especially aimed at involving young people in reconciliation and peace work.

Stopping Violence Against Women, Inside and Outside Churches

Few of the peace-related workshops critiqued current gender roles as one pillar of support for cultures of violence. There were also no workshops specifically addressing the needs or experiences of women peacemakers. Some participants attributed this lack of a gender perspective to the male dominance still common inside church leadership. It was clear that many of the more than 4,000 Assembly participants shared a concern for gender equality and stopping violence against women, both in conflict situations and during peace time.

The concern was expressed by young women, leaders in the World Student Christian Federation, in their workshop on gender justice, and by a group of German churches who reconstructed the interior of a house, complete with kitchen and bedroom, at the Assembly’s venue. Between the dishes and television, however, were displayed chilling statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence: in the USA, three women a day are murdered by their male partners, a figure which rises to 38 women a day in Russia. In yet another example, from southern Africa, the Tamar Campaign, first launched in 2000, is encouraging churches to speak out against violence against women. Based on the Biblical story of the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22), one activist said that the campaign has “given many women a voice” and led to the involvement of young men who were “infuriated by the actions of the many men in the story who are accomplices in the rape of Tamar.”

Violence against women does not only happen outside the church, warned co-facilitator Fulata Moyo (Malawi) during the workshop Streams of Grace: Stopping Violence Against Women. Moyo has counseled women in southern Malawi, where the introduction of Christianity is creating an identity crisis for women, and

tension between traditional and Christian practices. In this area traditional rituals and dances celebrating female sexuality and rights of passage (e.g., puberty, birth of the first child) empower women.

Traditionally, “women treat their bodies as sacred, and as a symbol of beauty,” said Moyo. Male Christian leaders have condemned these rituals. Violence against women appears to be increasing. Most of the violence, Moyo noted, comes from church ministers themselves. She gave two examples: ministers travel wide distances to visit congregations. Houses are made available for their visits. The church appoints single women as housekeepers in these houses, where the women are sexually abused by the visiting ministers. In another example, ministers come together at a large Easter celebration, leaving their wives at home. Congregations are expected to provide sexual partners from their communities for the ministers. Ministers use a Biblical reference to Phoebe to justify the sexual abuse. “The contradictions are so great” between how the church is suppose to be and how the leadership act, said Moyo, that many women feel betrayed and traumatized.

Breaking the silence around violence within church communities remains a challenge. At the same time many women and men find their work for peace and justice fueled by their Christian faith. Dr. Mireya Baltodano, of Costa Rica’s Latin American Bible University, saw a close link between gender justice and the Gospel’s social vision. “Jesus’ mission, at its center, had the notion that all people are of equal value,” she said during the workshop Transforming the World—Men and Women Together. Looking at the Bible through a gender perspective provides new insights into “what Jesus wanted to say in his teachings.” A workshop co-facilitator, theologian Larry José Madrigal Rajo of El Salvador, agreed, adding that many men are discovering alternatives to the model of hegemonic masculinity. This model portrays men as always strong and rational, with no feelings. A new model is needed if men and women are to “develop a deeper relationship—and Jesus offers an alternative model of masculinity.” Questions about the role religion plays in conflict and in peacebuilding—and whether religion empowers or disempowers women peacemakers—have no easy answers.

Life and Peace Institute (LPI), PO 1520, SE-751 45 Uppsala, Sweden. Tel. +46 (0)18 169500. Email: info@life-peace.org. Web: www.life-peace.org. Queens without Crowns: Somaliland’s Women’s Changing Roles and Peace Building, by Amina Mohamoud Warsame (90 pages, €15, USD20, available in French or English) is one LPI publication in its Horn of Africa series; LPI also publishes a Women and Nonviolence series.

World Council of Churches, PO Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 791 6111; fax: +41 22 791 0361. The WCC’s Women’s Program has

published a 90-page dossier on the ways churches around the world are confronting violence against women. The resource book is called Streams of Grace and can be downloaded from www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/women. For more on the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) see the website www.overcomingviolence.org or email: dov@wcc-coe.org

For current research on the role of religion in conflict see www.religionandconflict.net

News

Women for Peace in Nepal

Shantimalika, a women's peace network, has been staging demonstrations to protest Nepal's 10-year long war. A weekly silent vigil is held in Kathmandu, and in early February a peace rally was organized, where "we decided to wear blue clothes and blue arm bands as a protest against human rights violations, and for democracy, justice, equality and a peace dialogue." Shantimalika includes groups such as the South Asia Indigenous Women's Forum and the National Indigenous Women Federation. (For background into the conflict see the recently published swisspeace working paper Social Exclusion and Conflict Transformation in Nepal: Women, Dalit and Ethnic Groups by Alexandra Geiser, web: www.swisspeace.org).

International Women's Day

March 8, International Women's Day, was celebrated by the Women Say No To War Campaign by collecting signatures demanding an end to the US war in Iraq. US and Iraqi women delivered the signatures to US leaders in Washington DC while activists delivered signatures to US embassies around the world (www.womensaynotowar.org).

In Australia, a Women's Wailing was organized with poetry readings and women wailing at the loss of lives in the war in Iraq. In Jerusalem, Israeli and Palestinian women marched to military checkpoints, calling for a resumption of peace negotiations. In Germany, Iranian women and supporters marched from Frankfurt to the Hague, the Netherlands, to demand an end to misogynic gender-based legislation in Iran, such as restrictive divorce laws and impunity for honor killings.

International Museum of Women

The International Museum of Women (IMOW) launched its global project Imagining Ourselves: A Global Generation of Women on March 8. Imagining Ourselves consists of an online exhibition and global dialogue, a series of global events, and the stunning published anthology of essays and art by 105 young women from 57 countries (New World Library, 2006, 240 pages, USD26.95). The

project runs through 30 June and invites young women to join together to create positive change in their lives and communities. For more information see www.imow.org. IMOW, PO Box 190038, San Francisco, CA 94119, USA. Tel. +1 415 543 4669; fax +1 415 543 4668.

New Award for Women Peace Activists

A Women in Conflict Situations and Peacekeeping Task Force was set up in the Netherlands several years ago to ensure Dutch compliance with the pioneering United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The Task Force announced plans recently for Award 1325, in honor of the Security Council Resolution.

The award includes a € 15,000 prize and a speaking tour of the Netherlands. It will honor the work of one woman peace activist or peace organization that has developed groundbreaking and effective initiatives to promote the rights of women in conflict situations.

The deadline for nominations is 15 July 2006. Nominees must be from conflict areas and work to resolve conflict in their country. Nominations are accepted only from Dutch or international organizations. For more information and a copy of the nomination form see www.1325award.nl or write to 1325 Award, c/o PSO, Scheveningseweg 68, 2517 KX the Hague, the Netherlands. Email: question@1325award.nl. For more information on UN Resolution 1325 (including translations in 70 languages) see www.peacewomen.org

Feminist Conscientious Objector

Idan Halili, 19, is a Jewish Israeli conscientious objector. In a statement outlining her reasons for refusing to serve in the Israeli armed forces she wrote: "...sexual harassment is endemic to a patriarchal and hierarchical organization like the army. The demand that a woman enlist is tantamount to demanding that she cope with sexual harassment within an environment that encourages such harassment. ... I as a feminist, feel I must avoid military service and act to limit and reduce the influence of the army on civic society. ... When men spend a formative period of their lives in the military they are likely to receive positive reinforcements for the use of brute power and violence, and to develop an indifferent attitude to the use of "mild" forms of violence... I cannot join an organization which, either directly or indirectly, encourages violence – of any form and kind – against women...." Groups such as New Profile, the High School Seniors, the Feminist Women's House and the Refusers' Parents' Forum are calling on Israeli authorities to uphold Idan Halili's human right to freedom of feminist conscience.

Muslim Peace Network

The annual conference of Muslim Peacebuilding, Justice, and Interfaith Dialogue (MPJID), hosted by the Salam Institute of Peace and Justice

(www.salaminstitute.org) is an opportunity for Muslim organizations and individuals to share their work on interfaith dialogue, development, peace, and justice. Contact: mpjid@salaminstitute.org, or Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, MPJID Conference, 4545 42nd Street, NW, Suite 209 Washington, DC 20016, USA.

Resources

The May 24 International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament action pack for 2006 is out. This year's theme is Women Resisting Violence. The pack includes articles from Russia, Georgia, Serbia and the Czech Republic, plus suggestions for action, a list of relevant websites and an updated international directory of women's peace groups. Contact the WPP address for a copy.

Media & Gender Monitor is the bi-annual newsletter of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). The latest issue reports on the international initiative to improve current representations of women and men by media called 'Who Makes the News? Three Weeks of Global Action on Gender and the Media'. The initiative will conclude on 8 March—International Women's Day (www.globalmediamonitoring.org). The newsletter is available in English and Spanish. WACC's Women's Programme, 357 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5QY, UK. Email: at@wacc.org.uk Web: www.wacc.org.uk

Great Ancestors: Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts, by Farida Shaheed with Aisha L.F. Shaheed (Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Shirkat Gah, 2005) is a training kit on women's rights activists from the 8th to the 20th century designed to challenge the myth that women's right struggles are alien to societies that embraced Islam. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, PO Box 28455, London N19 5JT, UK. Email: pubs@wluml.org Web: www.wluml.org
Faith-Based Peace-Building: Mapping and Analysis of Christian, Muslim and Multi-Faith Actors, by Tsjeard Bouta, S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Mohammed Abu-Nimer (152-pages, 2005), looks at the core values underpinning Christian and Muslim peacebuilding; at mapping Muslim, Christian and multi-faith peacebuilding actors; and analyses the challenges, contributions and pitfalls of faith-based peacebuilding. Includes a directory of faith-based peace groups and bibliography. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, PO Box 93080, 2509 AB the Hague, the Netherlands. Tel. +31 70 324 53 84. Web: www.clingendael.nl

"Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security" is the theme of the Women's Assembly, a gathering of over 100 religious women leaders from major faith traditions that meets August 24-25 in Kyoto, Japan. The Assembly is organized by the World Conference on Religions and Peace's women's program, which published Religious Women, Children, Armed Conflict: Multiple Challenges, Unique Opportunities (124 pages, 2002). Other publications include A Woman's Place—Religious Women as Public Actors; Global Directory of

Religious Women's Organizations; and Women of the Book: A Jerusalem Collage, (106 pages, 2005, in Hebrew, Arabic and English) which is the result of a three-year long dialogue workshop among Jewish, Muslim and Christian women in Jerusalem. (For more information on this interactive workshop contact Sarah Bernstein at iccijeru@icci.org.il).

Calendar

May 5-15: 14th annual international conference on conflict resolution (with parallel youth conference on "The Ecology of War and Peace), St. Petersburg, Russia. Followed by International Training in Trauma Treatment. Common Bond Institute, 12170 S. Pine Ayr Drive, Climax, Michigan, USA 49034. Tel/Fax: +1 269 665 9393. Email: SOLweean@aol.com Web: www.cbiworld.org

June 12-16: INCORE international summer school: courses on management of peace processes; evaluation and impact assessment of peacebuilding programs, reconciliation, University of Ulster, Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland. UNU/INCORE Communications Officer, Aberfoyle House, Magee Campus, University of Ulster, Londonderry BT48 7JA, Northern Ireland. Tel: +44 28 71375504. Fax: +44 28 71375510. Web: www.incore.ulster.ac.uk

June 23-28: World Peace Forum, including International Peace Education Conference (June 25-27), Vancouver, Canada. For information on the World Peace Forum see www.worldpeaceforum.ca. For information on the peace education conference see www.bctf.ca

June 26-30: International conference Mediating Cultures in the Pacific and Asia, University of the South Pacific Suva, Fiji. Includes workshops on gender and mediation, traditional mediation, mediating family disputes. Email: laura.seurnyck@usp.ac.fj. Web: www.usp.ac.fj/apmf

July 4-14: International Retreat for Lesbian Activists, Chiang Mai, Thailand. International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice, PO Box 3, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai, Thailand 50180. Tel/fax +66 53 376 103. Email: info@womenforpeaceandjustice.org. Web: ww.womenforpeaceandjustice.org

July 24-August 3: workshop Women Allies for Social Change: Buddhism and Peacebuilding. Also September 7-11: Mindfulness Meditation Retreat for Activists, Thailand. International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice (see above).

July 23-27: Globalising Nonviolence conference, Paderborn, Germany. War Resisters International, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, UK. Tel. +44 20 7278. Fax +44 20 7278 0444. Web: www.globalisingnonviolence.org

July 30-August 12: Summer school on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Justice, University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Email: l.vriens@fss.uu.nl or annukka@vanderborch.com

August 23-26: Know How conference on Weaving the Information Society: a Gender and Multicultural Perspective, for women's information services and centers, Mexico. J. Félix Martínez Barrientos, Torre II de Humanidades, piso 7, Circuito Interior Ciudad Universitaria, Coyoacán, DF, CP 04510 Mexico. Tel. +56 23 00 17 / +56 23 00 20 al 23. Fax +56 23 00 19. Email: felmar@servidor.unam.mx. Web: www.knowhow-pueg.unam.mx

October 26-29: International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns, Woltersdorf, Germany (near Berlin). Web: www.cpti.ws

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The Women Peacemakers Program is an initiative of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). For more information about IFOR's Women Peacemakers Program, contact Shelley Anderson, IFOR, email: s.anderson@ifor.org), website: www.ifor.org/WPP or please contact the IFOR International Secretariat.

IFOR (International Fellowship of Reconciliation)
Sporstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, the Netherlands
Tel. +31 72 512 3014. Fax +31 515 1102
Email: office@ifor.org
Website: www.ifor.org