

*The first time they ever held a pencil*

By: Anonymous - Niger

"I have been living with the Tuareg communities in Niger, Africa. Some Tuareg still lead a nomadic lifestyle while others are farmers.

One woman from Ebey, a farming village, asked me to organize an activity for the village because she was having problem educating them. I decided to help because she was really committed to her work. I was warned by a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) that, "You don't know the reality here; it's not worth doing any activity for them."

I found a woman doctor who started to support me by providing translation. The local women only spoke their traditional language. I started to organize the activity. To reach the village we rented two automobiles and drivers. It was the windy season so sand was everywhere. We held the activity in a hut, which was not big enough for the 80 women, and children, who came. This was the first time they were getting together at an activity someone had organized just for them. I asked them to identify and discuss whatever problems they were facing. They were enthusiastic, smiling and laughing because it was the first time they had ever held a pencil.

At the end of each day we "talked" together, although we couldn't speak the same language. But with their faces and simple words they expressed their joy. I was so touched. Empowering woman means organizing activities where they can express themselves, where they can feel important and so build their self-confidence. Self-confidence is the basis of nonviolence because self-confident people can treats others with respect, not as inferiors or superiors.

To build self-confidence means to build peace. To build peace we need to listen to others, to be humble and to give space to the relationship with the others. The women's eyes, their smiles and words of those women made me think about my life. I have decided to stay with them for at least two years."