

YO!TM - IFOR YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES #40

by Amy Hailwood

Special Edition: Live from IFOR Council 2010!

Amy Hailwood is our guest editor for this SPECIAL EDITION of YO!TM (IFOR Youth Opportunities). YO! Co-editor Nina Perkowski directed Amy in producing this month's youth newsletter, "Live from the IFOR Council 2010," a report from the IFOR Youth Group. Look forward to seeing more from Amy Hailwood in up-coming editions of YO!

The IFOR quadrennial council is finally here! Delegates from BGAs across the world have gathered in Baarlo in the Netherlands to share fellowship, reports of their activities at home and to discuss and debate the way forwards for IFOR. Most importantly for us, IFOR youth are here! This special edition of YO!TM is coming to you live from the council and records the thoughts, impressions and experiences of some of the 11 young people here (and one or two older members too!).

From Cambridgeshire to the Congo!

Delegates came by plane, bus and car to Castle SchloSS on Saturday. From Cambridgeshire to the Congo, branches of Fellowship of Reconciliation sent people to network, share and explore peace in a modern setting. The IFOR council mixes formal business with workshops to create a worldwide hubbub of peace. While only a few hours in, already we have had a chance to glimpse the inspirational stories that drove people to become active in the peace movement.

While the concept of building peace can be a busy, time consuming, affair, this sharing enabled us all to sit, listen and learn. What I learnt from this was how similar different experiences of different stories were. I couldn't help but be moved by the multiple people (currently counting 4 out of a group of 35) who have acted as conscientious objectors.

One refused to join their national service, another refused to join (in either country they were registered as national) and yet another joined then realised it wasn't for them. The most memorable testimony was from the Japanese delegation. Look into the Japanese constitution and you will find an amazing paragraph. It details the nation's commitment to peace. Painted onto black, a rendering of this sits over us, in the meeting, and provides a strong reminder of the need for peace. The reminder comes from a country humiliated in war and burnt to the ground with nuclear weapons.

I will never forget the testimony I heard today. In short, halting English it was delivered. This person had been enlisted into Japanese National Service. While serving in the 'self protection army' they began to question the very being of the Japanese Army. They couldn't square the country's commitment to peace with the existence of the army. They knew they had to leave. They made a commitment to pacifism, left the army and now support the Japanese Fellowship of Reconciliation.

As the chair of the conference reminded us, we can only look to the future if we ground ourselves in the past. The story of conscientious objection in the UK is heavily reliant upon the support given by FoR in the early stages before moving on to campaign about various issues, most recently about armed drones. It reminded me that FoR is about interpreting faith values to suit the modern age. Values that stand firm. Looking around the world all we can see is violence, bloodshed, anger and injustice. My faith drives me to stand firm and tackle injustice – environmental, social, economical and through this to push for peace.

—John Cooper, FoR England

What you get back is an unusual thing

Every one of us had to give something to be in Baarlo for the council. Whether it is money, time or work, but from my point of view what you get back is an unusual thing, it is a deep energy. You can receive this power from all these interesting people who are attending this council. I am very glad that I came here, because I can take a lot of power out of this energy given. Sometimes in my way of nonviolence in life I feel exhausted and kind of alone, but then I remember that there are these people with all these great ideas and views in them and so I can get energy out of the thinking of you all. You are doing a great job and you can take a moment and be proud of yourself. I know that a lot of people think that they can not be proud of themselves, because there is so much more to do, but I think that it

is just impressive to live this nonviolence life. My best wishes to all of us that we follow our ideas and recognise ourselves how great this actually is.

—Clara Hahn, FOR Germany

My home is Humanity

All of your hearts is my community
My faith is included in each of your spirituality
Your smiles and affirmation is my vitality...

I see God in your faces...
God's incarnation in your paces...
Reconciliation, interfaith and justice are the bases
For our fellowship to deal with all cases

Let me assure you how much I love the fellowship
Intergenerational gathering is proud of the ownership
All of us eager to the gathering whether come by plane, train or ship
Let us enjoy and celebrate our own differences in such vibrant companionship

Please don't be afraid of conflict and differences
You need not to be paranoid or strengthen your fences
We need always to bring about our conscience and senses
Productive and fruitful Council has emerged with new lenses
Our goals are high but not impossible
Transformation is not only required but also inevitable and possible
Let us try again go in the less travelled road, it should be feasible
Every step you take is counted and should be plausible.
—Zoughbi Zoughbi, Wi'am Centre - Palestine

I want my friends to open their eyes

Since the council in Tokyo in 2006 I've started to get involved in FOR Japan. Before that I have never thought about peace because I don't have to think about it. Most young Japanese people do not care about anything what's going on in this world even in their own country. I was just interested in international meetings where people come from many other countries. I just wanted to make friends from different countries. But through the council in Tokyo my eyes were opened to think and learn more about this world and also my own country. And I could come to know that Japan has a wonderful constitution of peace which is article 9, this promised us to never fight in violence or war with other countries. Because of this article 9 Japanese people has been at peace, not having any fights in almost 65 years. But for some reason the government wants to change this article so that they can fight if needed. I was just afraid and felt the crisis that what if I will be needed to go to war. I don't want any war! That is my first opinion about this and I started to think what can I do to stop this bad movement? That is the reason why I'm involved in FOR. Now this is the 2nd time I have attended IFOR council and it is an honor to be here. I would like to encourage many of my friends in Japan to open their eyes to see the problems and help them to work together for making the peace in the world.
—Takashi Watanabe, MIR Japan

On spirituality, religion and faith

Spirituality: Those practices and behaviors that guide the conscious connection between ourselves and the world which we manifest.

We may say that it is the process of enlightenment along our paths -either chosen or given. Spirituality does not require the belief nor the acceptance of a God or Gods. In fact, living outside of such a paradigm requires a set of practices and behaviors similar to those who practice with Gods. This leads me here; spirituality does not require membership in modern religion. Likewise, acceptance and support of religion in this era, is not a factual indication of spirituality. One may, however, practice their spirituality through subscription to religion and vice-versa, one may choose religion and be spiritual just the same.

It is also true that religious spiritual practice does not necessitate the frequenting of a building/institutional space made of brick and mortar. Although many religions strongly suggest –

require according to some interpretations – that in order to practice, one must attend collective activities in the physical structure of that particular religion. Here, again, there is a link between spirituality and religion in the acknowledgement of the connection between an individual and the collective. That said, spirituality and religion, though consisting of similar concepts, do not manifest for everyone as connected realities with the same requirements. For some people, religion is only truly manifested through spirituality.

One may wonder where the language of action and sacrifice lives in this understanding. Many of our cousins refer to these concepts as savior or martyr and suffering or expanding respectively. Some suggest that things are as they are and the human responsibility is to acknowledge and move forward. Perhaps this is the action component that people may seek – the action of moving forward.

Each of these distinctions is found across generations, in many ethnic groups and beyond class measures though certain social classes can be found to identify as either spiritual or religious more than the other. Either way, the differences and similarities may balance enough that one is called to believe and act in the belief that each is a personal choice. A personal choice that has great potential to move us toward fulfilling fellowship in a just world. The choice to move forward, with visions and beliefs in something greater, in a world filled with questions is an act of faith. Faith, the belief and vision of something greater than the now belongs to no one and all of us just the same.

—Shauen Pearce, FOR USA

IFOR Council 2010

There are so many things I already can take with me from the IFOR Council – inspiration, friendship, open mindedness, reinforced knowledge

I'm wondering what the following days will bring me.

I could say so much about the people, the things they do (small or big) and the inspiration they gave me. But my words would never be enough to explain to you how this feels. That's why I will leave you with one sentence I heard this day, which definitely sums up how and why we're here.

WE ALL ARE EQUALS IN DIVERSITY

—Jantine Huisman, Kerk en Vrede - Netherlands

Peace, Happiness, Love

Throughout the council, Meltem Basara has been working diligently as a volunteer, supporting the council with her positive approach and lots of translation! She also asked several people at the council to share their personal understandings of the words peace, happiness and love. This is how they responded:

“Work, live and struggle against every kind of oppression. Nothing can stop your liberty/freedom. To be a prisoner of the flow of the world.” —Gustavo, SERPAJ

“Happiness is peace and liberty, that means love.” —Maria, MIR Italy

“Peace: free and happy! The happiness being being together! The freedom to sing!” —Francoise, MIR Switzerland

“The interior freedom lived at the moment.” —Jean-Pierre, MIR Congo

Do you have an article to submit? Or information to share about trainings or events for young people? Please get in touch.

You can contact us via ywg.ifor@gmail.com or by contributing to our brand new facebook group – simply search for “IFOR Youth Working Group” on facebook!

Amy Hailwood, our guest editor for this SPECIAL EDITION of YO!, is Education & Campaigns Officer for the The Fellowship of Reconciliation, England. I'd like to extend my appreciation to Amy and to YO! Co-editor **Nina Perkowski**, who directed Amy in producing this month's youth newsletter. Both Amy

and Nina are members of the IFOR Youth Working Group. I must also sadly announce that as of this month Nina is leaving us after many months as Co-editor of YO! I will surely her and wish her much success in her career. Look forward to seeing more from Amy Hailwood in up-coming editions of YO!
—Stan Morris

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