

EDITORIAL

With great pleasure we introduce *IFOR in ACTION* #50, "the Americas" edition. This issue focuses on *IFOR* actions and BGAs of the Americas. In using this new approach we take a closer look at the work being done in different regions of the world, and the challenges faced due to environmental factors.

The Summer issue of *IFOR in ACTION* will focus on Asia. We especially invite contributions from our members in Asia, we're sure they will be as plentiful. We now call on all our Branches, Groups and Affiliates to send their contributions by Friday, 1 May 2009 for inclusion in *IFOR in ACTION* #51.

— Stan Morris, Editor

**Women Left Behind in Colombia**

by Nina Vollmer and Karin Ekholm

*Edilbrando left the house to go to the university.  
"That was the last time I saw him..."*

Men are often the most visible actors and victims in a conflict, whereas women tend to remain in the background. This is both a misconception and a result of women taking on new roles: women engage in and against conflict, at the same time, the result of conflict tends to force women to become the head of household or affects them in other ways. These are the stories of Colombian women with very different lives and very different experiences, but they have all experienced the challenges of being a woman trying to achieve change.

Around two people disappear or illegally detained in Colombia every day, according to Asfaddes: an organization for family members of missing-detained people. A majority of those who have been and still are missing in Colombia are men; those who are left behind to cope are mostly women: sisters, mothers, wives and daughters. This is the story about one of them who became one of the founders of Asfaddes.

On the morning of one day in September 1982, Edilbrando left the house to go to the university.

"That was the last time I saw him," says Josefa.

It was not until much later she found out that those responsible for the disappearance of her son were people from the infamous F2: a section within the police which was later disbanded, because of its record of grave human rights abuses. But to this day, Edilbrando's remains have still not been found and Josefa has not been able to close this chapter of her life, so she keeps up the struggle to

have those responsible brought to justice.

Josefa hasn't been alone throughout the 25 years that she has searched for the truth and fought for the justice of her son. Together with other family members of missing students, she started going to meetings where they eventually decided to begin marching in remembrance of their loved ones and to demand justice. Then they were just a few people, today they are hundreds of family members around the country.

"We have achieved many things," Josefa says. Among them, a visit from the UN working group on disappearances, judgements from the Interamerican Court and Commission on the responsibility of the Colombian state in several cases of disappearances, and maybe the most important

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Pictures of Edilbrando, hanging in Josefa's living room.

Photo: Nina Vollmer & Karin Ekholm

*Women left behind...*

of them all: the approbation of a law that criminalises the act of kidnapping a person: a fight that resulted in threats against Josefa's life, forcing her and her family to go into exile for a couple of years.

"But I came back to continue the fight for justice for my son. They know me at the public prosecutor's office by now, and let me go right in to speak to him when I come." However, she has now left the active sphere in Asfaddes and handed her legacy on to others, who continue the fight that she started.

In the north eastern province of Chocó, populated mainly by descendants of African slaves and indigenous peoples, the conditions for women's involvement in social

*Photo: Nina Vollmer & Karin Ekholm*



*Josefa has been fighting for the truth about her son for 25 years.*

movements are radically different from those in the capital Bogotá. Here too, women and men are affected by the conflict in distinct ways and it is not unusual for women to have to carry the biggest burden in supporting their families. On top of that, there comes a strong culture of male chauvinism that is preventing women from engaging in political and organisational work. In spite of this, there are women who stand up for their right of expression and become engaged in the work of the so called "ethno-territorial organisations" that fight for Chocó's indigenous groups' right to their territory and a dignified life.

Early on, Maria Socorro was engaged in one of Chocó's biggest and most powerful ethn-oterritorial organisations: Cocomacia, which organises 125 rural afro communities in the central part of Chocó. When Maria started to get involved in the late 80's there were very few women who took part.

"I have always been interested in organisational work," says Maria Socorro. "It feels important to do your part to improve the living conditions of the afro-colombian population. So I went to meetings and training courses without my husband's permission. When I was elected president I accepted, although my husband threatened with divorce and moved to the provincial capital Quibdó. Since then I have continued to work at different levels in the organisation." To the question of why it is important for women to take part in the work of organisations, Maria replies:

"Women have to educate themselves and participate in organisational processes in order to achieve the knowledge with which they can claim their rights. Because of the political violence many women are left alone with their children, which they have to support. We have the same rights and capacities as the men, but if we don't educate ourselves we will never reach as far, get into the higher posts."

"Male chauvinism is strong in Colombia in general, and it is the strongest in the countryside. Chocoan women, both afro-descendants and indigenous, have a long way to go until they reach equality with men. The structures are, consequently, also to be found within the ethno-territorial organisations."

"Cocomacia has become much more equitable lately. There are men who have learned to value woman. On the board there are always two women (out of eight members), and even at the local level there are many female leaders. But male chauvinism is still strong and women are widely expected to take care of the household and the children. Some men would never allow a woman to represent them in the organisation."

Luz Meli, who belongs to the indigenous group Wounaan, is one of the few women who are involved in the indigenous organisation Asociación Orewa. She tells that the Wounaan women have the same problem.

"Male chauvinism is very dominant in our communities, even if there are some who have started to change their view on women a little bit lately. And we women don't always know how to defend ourselves in discussions with our husbands because we have very low self esteem and are ourselves trapped in the traditional gender roles. We have the biggest responsibility for the children, and household work takes a lot of time. Because of this, it is difficult for many women to get engaged in the organisation.

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**Women left behind...**

Luz Meli is a member of the women's group in her village and her friend Virgelina is the group leader.

"I feel that the group is important because it gives the women in the village an opportunity to participate in the organisational work and to express their view and ideas," says Virgelina. "My husband thinks it is a good thing that I get involved in the women's group, and I have also started studying again after a five year break, now that my children are a little bit older."

According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, 90 000 people have been displaced from their homes in Chocó during the last ten years as a result of the armed conflict. Most of them are poor afro-colombian farmers. The indigenous peoples have to a larger extent chosen to stay in their reservations and resist the armed actors. In both cases women and men are affected in different ways. Because many men have either been killed, recruited to one of the armed groups or moved in search of employment, many women are forced to provide for a whole family by themselves.

"We women don't have much choice when the conflict is approaching," says Luz Meli. "If our husbands stay to resist, so do we. If they choose to flee, so do we. In 2006 the whole village was forced to run because of combat encounters between guerrillas and paramilitaries. We had to abandon our fields and homes to seek refuge in the nearest town. There it was very hard to find food for the children and many went hungry during the three months we stayed in the city. We prefer to stay in our reservations as long as we can and not be displaced, as it is very traumatic for us and our children."

"That is why also women have to participate in the ethno-territorial organisations," says Luz Meli. "Because our territory is the most important thing we have and we want to take part in defending it."

*Text and photos: Nina Vollmer and Karin Ekholm, Peace Observers for SweFOR in Colombia.*

*FOR Sweden sends volunteers to Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia, where they support local peace-building efforts and protect human rights defenders.*

*The Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation has a long history of working for peace and reconciliation through active nonviolence. We are a Christian, ecumenical member-based civil society organisation, founded in 1919. Our 2 500 members come from all denominations. SweFOR is the Swedish branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, IFOR.*

*FOR Sweden (Kristna Fredsrörelsen)  
Website: <http://www.swefor.org> ■*

**Tu Fu Comes to Washington**

A new leader has been called out by those enslaved by the old—a tyrant blind to his own heart.

My oldest boy's bones lie buried in a mound in Afghanistan. My wife and children have moved into the shelter in Cleveland, and so I've hitched to the Capitol, walking half the way.

Many sleep dreamless in the streets here jobless and hungry for hope, all of us conscripted to the banks or government. A heavy snow lies about avenues, a cold wind blows through the parks.

I rise from cardboard, stand in door fronts imagine the faces of my wife and children standing in line for oatmeal and bread.

No wonder we gather at shop windows to watch news of a leader risen among us. His face smiles with kindness, and yet in that sadness about his eyes lies our real hope.

(January 2009)

-Larry Smith

Imagine Peace  
Larry Smith  
Bottom Dog Press: <http://smithdocs.net>

A graduate of Mingo Central High School, Muskingum College, and Kent State University, Larry Smith is the author of six books of poetry, a book of memoirs, two books of fiction, two literary biographies, a life biography, and a book of translations from the Chinese. He is the director of the Firelands Writing Center and Editor -in-Chief of Bottom Dog Press, Inc.

## Barack Obama: Peace Community Reactions to the US Election

by Ruby Sinreich

*Commentary from the blog of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, FOR USA*

Now that the election is over, many peace activists are celebrating the Obama victory and looking ahead to a new administration. Many of us are full of hope, but many are also concerned. How will the new President deal with Iran and Israel/Palestine? Will he continue opposition to the Colombian Free Trade Agreement? What about the enormous military budget and questionable recruiting practices?

FOR's historic work for civil rights gives us a unique perspective on the election of the first Black president, as does our work on the pressing issues of war and peace that the Obama administration will address. We'd like to hear your thoughts about the election and it's implications for peace in the U.S. and the world.

See reactions to this post at <http://forpeace.net/blog/ruby-sinreich/peace-community-reactions-election>, here are a few of the comments posted:

### Excitement tempered with concern

Submitted by Ethan Vesely-Flad

As someone who has spent my life in multiracial households -- with white parents, African-American, biracial, and white siblings, Central American and Asian cousins, and a spouse of African-American and Caucasian parents -- President-elect Obama's election has incredibly important meaning to me. His ability to not "transcend" race but rather to embrace race and ethnicity, in all its diversity and history in our quilted nation, is for me a profound statement. I was struck by his comment yesterday at a press conference that he is "a mutt" when it comes to his background in that way.

Above my desk sits a framed poster of Nelson Mandela with his fist raised. I can not pretend to understand how powerful his election as president of South Africa was to the majority of people in that land. However, having spent a large part of my youthful years working to oppose racism in both my own country as well as that apartheid regime, I know how meaningful it was to me. The image of the voting lines that stretched for hours in South Africa in April of 1994 are an enduring memory, as is the moment several months later when I was privileged to attend President Mandela's first visit to New York City, and to see him in person.

I have been so moved by the voices of elder black Ameri-



Photo: FOR USA

cans, many of whom stood in similar long lines earlier this week to vote for a person who looks like them for the first time in their lives, and for whom Obama's election represents the moment and the shift in our nation that they could never have imagined seeing in their lifetimes. The number of tears that have poured out this week -- including in my household -- is to me a "watershed" moment that symbolizes the visceral sense of hope that the dream of "America" is not lost.

With all that optimism, however, I am also filled with concern about the incoming Obama administration's foreign policy objectives. I was interviewed yesterday by the "Journal News," the newspaper of New York's lower Hudson Valley (Westchester, Rockland, and Putnam Counties) for an article that will appear today or tomorrow. [It's not online yet, so I'm hoping it will appear in their big Sunday edition.] The piece is focused on reactions from various groups in our region to Obama's election in terms of ending the war in Iraq -- the journalist was interviewing peace voices as well as military veterans.

I stated three reasons that my hope for ending the war is tempered with caution. First, that President-elect Obama stick to his commitment to not only remove our troops from Iraq within the timetable he's set, but to ensure that there are no permanent U.S. based in Iraq. Second, that leaving Iraq should not be a pretext for increasing our military presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama's comments during the debates and the campaign about "taking out" rebels in those country represent a bellicose military strategy that we have seen in recent days to be counter-productive (the bombing of the Afghani wedding; the call by Pakistan's president that the U.S. not do anything on our own). Third, that Obama has stated that while the national and global economic crisis means that spending will have to be cut in virtually every area of government, he is committed to increasing military spending as he chooses. This

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**US election reactions...**

is absolutely the wrong decision, with our federal budget already devoting an unprecedented estimated 50-58% of every tax dollar to military purposes!

My great hope in terms of foreign policy is that Obama will move swiftly to engaging in dialogue with leaders from ALL nations about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other global crises. That sense of shared responsibility and of mutual respect is what can help us move through these challenges more than anything, I would argue.

So while I take joy and hope at many levels, both personal and professional, in the election of this new administration, I recognize there are a multitude of reasons that the work

I do for peace and justice is needed now as much as ever. Good luck and godspeed, Mr. President-elect -- I and others will continue to call you to accountability as you move forward into this position of immense responsibility.

**Skeptical mind, open heart**

Submitted by Tom Morrison

I must be totally out of touch with my country and without any rudimentary grasp of political science. The fact that an African-American with an Arab-sounding name has become president-elect is beyond my ability to fathom. That this happened in a country that not so long ago was ready to round up Muslims on the flimsiest of pretexts and that has a long history of racial backwardness, I classify as a miracle.

That said, my name is Thomas, the doubter. I observe friends around me celebrating and cannot partake. Maybe Obama was one of the few prescient candidates on the stupidity of the War on Iraq, and for that I can extend a hurrah. But ever since he proclaimed early in his campaign that he would increase the Defense Budget, which regularly throws trillions down a black hole as well as sponsoring worldwide conflagrations, I said to myself, and to others, "He talks of change but avoids the most basic way to bring it about." Before that, during his rise to stardom at the 2004 Democratic Convention, he joined the mad dog chorus of those wanting to bomb Iran. More recently, during the campaign, he talked of raids into Pakistan and of intensifying the war in Afghanistan, where, according to today's news, yet another wedding party has just been bombed. And, concerning the linchpin to Mideast peace, the degree to which he and his running mate in their speeches pandered to the hardline Israelis has been, to use his term, audacious.

I am Caucasian. Maybe if I were black, the ascendancy of an African-American to the presidency would trump all other considerations. I remember giving George W. Bush an open mind when he took office. It took about a week if

that much for me to see via the unsigning of disarmament treaties that we were indeed in for a treacherous ride. I will endeavor to open my heart and mind to Obama as well, and hope that he happily surprises me, and that I may be able to join the joyful ones.

**President Elect Obama**

Submitted by Nancy Jarmin

The world is excited, hopeful and sending prayers and their wishes for President Elect Obama; our own citizens have difficulty putting into words their immense feelings of relief at the outcome of this election and their hope for nation's recovery.

Mr. Obama inspires and comforts, relates to those who have been and/or felt marginalized, speaks of hope and solutions to the vast problems we face.

We are all anticipating and expecting great things from this eloquent young man and those around him; he and his staff cannot do this alone. We worked for his election and we look forward to the change of which he speaks. The change began when we endorsed him and worked to bring him to the presidency. Now we must continue as if the campaign has not ended. Now we must continue the work to bring about the change we need and yearn for.

Let us join together, as small groups across the nation, to communicate with each other, to send encouragement and advice to President Obama and his staff. Let's continue the conversations and the outreach in our neighborhoods that will develop community, introduce, support and encourage our neighbors and enrich our local economies. On a small and local scale, these are the basics of the "change" of which Mr. Obama speaks.

Just as the millions of small donations to Obama's campaign provided him the money he needed for the campaign, so will our local, regional and yes national efforts provide him the support he needs to bring about the change this country must experience.

How shall we approach this? Let's talk.

*Ruby Sinreich, "a progressive activist, local politico, professional organizer, and compulsive blogger," is Communication Co-coordinator at the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the United States. She is also the founder and editor of OrangePolitics.org, a progressive multi-author weblog with a vibrant community discussing local issues around her hometown of Chapel Hill, NC. She blogs about local issues, and about everything else (including nonprofit technology, online politics, and Second Life) at lotusmedia.org.*

FOR Peace blog: <http://forpeace.net/blog/ruby-sinreich/peace-community-reactions-election> ■

## Letter to Barack Obama

by Kyoko Iitaka

*Members of JFOR WPP send a letter to US President Barack Obama*

February 8, 2009

**Mr. Barack Obama**  
**President of the United States of America**

**Subject: An Appeal for Reconsideration of Sending More Troops to Afghanistan**

Photo: Berea College, Kentucky



e-newsletter

Dear President Obama,

Congratulations for being inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States of America! We are the Women's Group of Japanese Fellowship of Reconciliation (JFOR). JFOR is a branch of IFOR (International Fellowship of Reconciliation, with a head office in Holland). We have earnestly prayed to God and worked hard daily to realize the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)" adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in November 19, 1998 (Resolution 53/25). Since the 9.11 Attacks on September 11, this Decade has changed into "a Culture of War and Violence". We, as the citizens of the same era, especially as mothers who gave birth and brought up children, endeavor to achieve the realization of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence within these two remaining years (2009-2010). It is our mission and responsibility of prime importance.

Fortunately, right after your presidential election, you made a proposal as "Vision and Pledge" to the world that you would strive for America as "a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity." You realize that "power alone cannot protect us... our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause,... the tempering qualities of humility and restraint." Your New World Peace depends on "no war, and no weapon of mass destruction." It has been our long dream to bring about Peace, thus we sent you a letter of support on November 6, 2008 in the name of JFOR.

After then, we eagerly listened to your inaugural address on January 20, 2009 about from where to where you will "change" and how you will overcome the former president Mr. Bush's faulty policy. Now we are disappointed a little because you are going to send more troops to Afghanistan from Iraq. Your country repeatedly experienced that no massive military power and weapon could

bring about the peace and safety of Iraqi society. Please reconsider this strategy for the sake of the world's dream and hope for your Administration to be kept alive.

**"If you would open your grasped fist, we will give a helping hand to you in need"**

In the inaugural address, you so spoke to Islam related to "groping for a new way based on mutual advantage and respect". A few days later, you admitted Israel's attack to Gaza as "the right of self-defense". However, these include "massive bombing including United Nations Building, tank attack against civilians, and economic blockade" which lead Palestinians to accept Hamas' violence. We, women of Japanese Fellowship of Reconciliation, could not admit any strategy of pre-emptive attack for self-defense, because it could mean annihilation of the whole human race by nuclear war.

We believe that the core of "Change" is to be "Reconciliation", not "Revenge". A positive conception of peace will be needed as well, one which can provide a new "Social Contract" (Rousseau) for a new generation towards the third millennium since the 21st Century. We hope you will reread the Bible used regularly by Abraham Lincoln and listen to the voice of our God, Sovereign of Peace. Jesus said "But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ..., pray for those who abuse you.... (Luke 6:27-30)". As for "Revenge", we believe the words written by Paul, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' (Romans 12:19)."

**After the Withdrawal from Iraq, Why More Troops to Afghanistan?**

If you would require "terrorists to open their fists," why not open your own fists before or at the same time? You have promised in your campaign pledge that you would

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Letter to Brack...

take the lead in "Disarmament" and "No Nuclear World". We hope you will practice these pledges immediately and furthermore, improve and reform the serious social and economic conditions which are hotbeds of terrorism.

The first step of international contribution needed by the developing countries is not "Peace Keeping" but "Peace Building". We support Mr. Herve Morin, the Minister of Defense of France, who denied the request from your country to send more troops to Afghanistan. We, Japanese people who have Article 9 of our Peace Constitution hope that our government also will not follow your request to cooperate and contribute actively to solving the Afghan problems by increase of military power. "Green New Deal Policy" proposed by you will need an enormous fund. The globalization of this policy is needed by all people of the world and your country is to have no margin to waste for a huge military budget under the global financial and economic crisis today. Therefore, we urge you to reconsider the plan to send more troops to Afghan from Iraq.

An earnest wish of Japanese Women  
Our country made a surprise attack to Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and began World War II. The Japanese government had the plan for enriching the nation and strengthening the military since the Meiji Restoration begun in 1868. We colonized Korea, Taiwan and China, and also repeated aggressive wars and assaulted innumerable people of neighboring countries in Asia. However, until now Japan does not truthfully and sufficiently apologize and compensate for the past crimes. We, as Japanese people, apologize sincerely to you and people in the rest of the world from all of our hearts.

The atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima (August 6) in 1945 and Nagasaki (August 9). It was the first calamity in our human history in the world. A great many people were killed. The survivors are still suffering agony for the sequel of irradiation. The survivors do not say "Remember Hiroshima!" They have not uttered any word of revenge and have never thought of it. "Let me be the last person who suffers from this hell of agony" has been their cry in all. They do not claim "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" and do not ask for revenge by nuclear weapon. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution provides for renouncing war, not maintaining of weapons, and disowning the right of belligerency. This is the will of the nuclear victims and all of Japanese people.

So, for over 60 years after World War II, we Japanese have been keeping our Constitution, Article 9, and sharing its spirit with the rest of the world. We have been practicing non-violent ways of life, abolishing nuclear weapons and war itself locally, nationally and globally. This may be

a common wish of people in the world and particularly, an earnest wish of us women. Unfortunately, our successive governments have grown the Self-Defense Forces into one of the leading military powers in the world. They are now going to change Article 9 to be able to send troops overseas as Self-Defense "Army", not "Forces" by amendment of the Constitution through interpretation, legislation and finally provision.

After World War II, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was concluded, as you know, and since then US military bases have been remained in Japan. A huge cost for their stations and operations have been expended by us all these years. Okinawa prefecture has many bases, 75 % of all the US military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa Islands and 19 % of the mainland of Okinawa is occupied by the bases. Local people there suffered seriously and become more oppressed under the reorganization policy of US armed forces.

We hope you will come to Okinawa and see their lives and the increasing crimes committed by US soldiers. We also have a dream that you would come to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and attend the Peace Commemorative Ceremony held annually on August 6th and 9th . Please confirm the historical facts and the actual conditions by your own eyes, ears, and heart.

In summary, we earnestly hope you would reconsider the strategy to send more troops to Afghanistan and withdraw them from there as soon as possible. Please, please do not sacrifice mothers and their embryos and fetuses, babies, and infants, children particularly girls and soldiers any more.

Finally, please send our best regards from us mothers to the First Lady, Mrs. Obama, a wonderful wife and mother. We keep you and your family in our daily prayers, for asking God's guidance and protection as you toil on these very difficult but challenging tasks.

Sincerely yours,

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## IS IT THE BATTLE OR THE WAR?

by Makios Phiri

### *A peacemaker's perspective in Zimbabwe*

The language does not sound right. As peacemakers words like battle and war are not the best of words, but like it or not, our televisions, radios and newspapers are full of them. It makes me wonder if our existence as peacemakers is visible, let alone relevant.

The argument has been, and is still, are we are doing our best in our local communities. I believe that we are, because for the past 16 years I have been, and still am doing my best in my local community. The results may be encouraging from a very local perspective, but every time I raise my eyes beyond the immediate local environment and focus on the national level, I get disappointed. The disappointment gets worse when I go further to the regional levels, not to mention the international arena. The idea I believe is not to win local battles, but to win the war.

We have celebrated small, although important, victories here and there. We have seen peace makers and nonviolence activists rising up here and there, but admittedly our influence and relevance appears to be diminishing globally, and it appears we are in a state of denial, as peacemakers worldwide, regarding our diminishing international influence. Until we move from such denial and admit that we need a strategic and decisive plan of action, the whole peace and nonviolence movement may eventually become very noisy, but very ineffective and practically irrelevant.

What comes foremost to mind is the large number of peace and nonviolence groups and movements worldwide. Our numbers are very encouraging, but our effect does not correspond with our population.

Yes we are doing our very best, and some of us are in very dangerous and insecure environments. I thank God for the testimonies I hear worldwide by peace and nonviolence groups who are doing well, but all the joy gets drowned by the sad reality that violence, oppressions and abuses are day-by-day on the increase.

Is it now time that we must deliberately make an effort to unite, work together and have one powerful voice that can even have an impact on policy makers? These sporadic victories we are having now in our local communities do not make much impact on the global environment.

My dream is for all active peace and nonviolence groups and movements to come together and develop an international network of serious peacemakers, nonviolence prac-

tioners and activists. With our numbers, our united voice, actions and resources we can make a difference.

It is a dream coming out of 16 years of peace and nonviolence work, a dream that goes beyond selfish interests, a dream that goes beyond mobilizing resources only for local efforts, a dream based on the realities that you and I are facing day in day out, a dream propelled by the question, "can't something better and more effective be done?"

It is a dream coming out of a frustrated experience of seeing countries like the one time beautiful and prosperous Zimbabwe coming down to its knees, resource rich countries like Democratic Republic of Congo never enjoying their God given natural wealth. Where bombs are exploding and gun toting soldiers are everywhere, and where policy makers are opting for the gun, and where the corporate world is thriving on wars and chaos.

The most painful realization is that when all the military leaders have been heard, when all the politicians have been heard, and when all the business community has been asked their opinion, there is a frightening and disheartening absence of the peacemakers' voice.

A soft peacemaker's voice may be heard in a local community, but that faint and soft voice is drowned by the louder and more audible voices of the military, the politicians and the business tycoons. I dream of a day when the voice of the peacemaker is powerful enough to remove oppressive regimes, is powerful enough to shift policies, is powerful enough to stop wars and break impasses.

I believe that you and I can deliberately make a commitment to work as brother and sister, united by a common cause of creating a culture of peace and nonviolence as a way of life and a means of transformation. Sporadic uncoordinated victories in small scattered battles are not enough to make us win the war, otherwise we may end up irrelevant and lose our focus.

My fear is that peace and nonviolence groups and movements may end up being development agencies, a very noble cause indeed, but the vacuum left will take its toll. I am inviting you for a serious engagement and talk on networking serious peacemakers, nonviolence activists and practitioners. The dream may not be realized now, but can be realized. The encouraging thing is that it can be realized.

**YOU AND I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE !!**

*Makios Phiri is a pastor with a local church in Harare, Warren Park and a coordinator of Fellowship of Reconciliation-Zimbabwe's Nonviolence Education and Training Program. Website: [http://ifor.org/branch\\_Zimbabwe.html](http://ifor.org/branch_Zimbabwe.html) ■*

## Rebirthing King, Rebirthing America

by Ruby Sinreich

*Martin Luther King, Jr. event organized by Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership*

When Barack Obama was elected as our country's first African-American president in November, many peace activists raised our voices in celebration. On the FORpeace blog, we discussed our reactions - a lot of joy mixed with some skepticism - about what changes this might bring to Washington, D.C. and to the nation. On January 19th we

Partnership and FOR USA the next day in Washington.

People across the U.S. celebrated this milestone in their own ways, and reflecting on the broad implications for civil rights and social justice both at home and abroad. Wherever you are, will you join us in sharing your own thoughts about the Obama inauguration and what would have been Dr. King's 80th birthday? Please visit the Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership blog and help start a conversation about peace in the next Presidential administration.

Blog: <http://olivebranchinterfaith.org/>

# e-newsletter



observe Martin Luther King Day on the cusp of Obama's inauguration, and the juxtaposition of these two events couldn't be more powerful.

To honor this civil rights milestone, FOR has been working for several months with a broad coalition called the Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership to organize a celebratory service in our nation's capital that emphasizes Dr. King's teachings on the "three evils" of Racism, Militarism and Materialism. **Rebirthing King, Rebirthing America** was held at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. Those attending were also invited to attend the inauguration with the Olive Branch Interfaith Peace

Thank you for helping FOR keep the dream of the Beloved Community alive. Your support is what makes this work possible.

### Photos of Rebirthing King, Rebirthing America:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/forpeace/sets/72157613063455858>

Photos taken at our inauguration eve event Rebirthing King, Rebirthing America, browse the album at Flickr, or enjoy a slideshow on the Olive Branch blog.

Blog: <http://olivebranchinterfaith.org/> ■

## Revenge is not a Solution

by Amos Gvirtz

*“one feels the palpable hatred, anger and revenge in people’s response”*

*Israel’s three-week war in Gaza last month ended with unilateral ceasefires on both sides, but militants continue to fire rockets into southern Israel and the Israeli military continues to launch strikes inside Gaza. (The Guardian)*

The IFOR Secretariat asked Amos Gvirtz, founder of “Israelis and Palestinians for Non-Violence,” to give his view point from the perspective of one living in Israel. Amos, as always, was quick to respond...

The hour of revenge has struck. After years of Qassam rocket attacks and retaliatory measures against Gazans, both combatants and civilians, the Israeli army has launched a full-blown war against the Hamas and other resistance organizations in Gaza. The army, armed with the most state-of-the-art weapons is going for organizations equipped with primitive arms. And the results reflect this. Hundreds have been killed, and thousands wounded by the bombings of Gaza from the air, in a matter of just a few days, and horrific destruction sown – versus a small number of dead and wounded in Israel.

The ground offensive has only added to the carnage among helpless civilians in Gaza. When one tries to talk with one’s Israeli friends about the horror of this war and the urgent need to stop it, one feels the palpable hatred, anger and revenge in people’s response. These blind one’s moral judgment and rational thinking. After all, even if Israel does achieve its objectives in this war, Gaza with its hundreds of thousands of refugees, with its dire poverty, will go on demanding a solution to its unbearable situation. If we do not address this, sooner or later, Gaza will lash out at us again.

But the problem is not just Gaza. The Gazans are an integral part of the Palestinian people. Most of them are 1948

refugees who lost their homes, their lands and their country. Since 1967, dispossessing the Palestinian people of the remains of its territory continues in full force. During its 41 years of Occupation, Israel has robbed about 52% of the land in the West Bank, and demolished close to 19,000 houses in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Furthermore, Israel has continued exiling Palestinians from their communities. The Oslo Accords only hastened the process of dispossession instead of putting a halt to it. For the seven ‘Oslo years’, Israel robbed about 160,000 dunams of land, demolished about 1000 houses, and conducted two expulsions. The number of Israeli colonists in the West Bank rose from 110,000 in 1993 to 204,000 in 2000. The Intifada broke out because Palestinians could no longer bear Israel’s exploitation of the so-called peace process for hastening the process of dispossessing them of their land.

In Israel, the dispossessions, the demolitions and colonization are presented as legal bureaucratic measures, while the Palestinians see them as a unilateral war conducted against them by Israel. These are the means to dispossess them of all that remains of their land. They cannot possibly compromise over this. As long as Israel continues to dispossess Palestinians of their land, the war against us will not cease. Even if military ‘victories’ create lulls in the warfare.

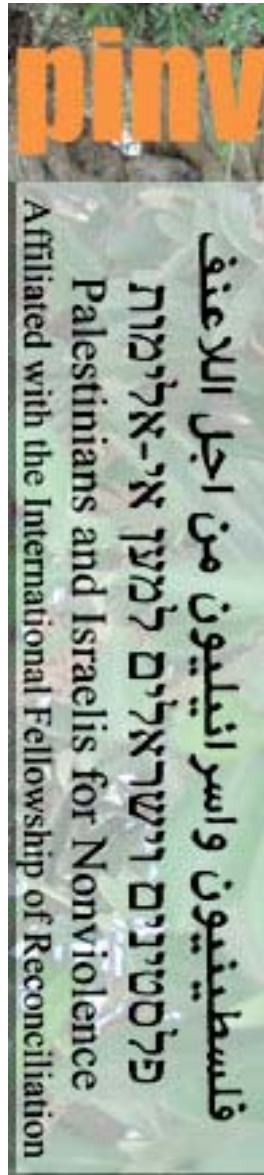
No doubt the Israeli army will ‘win’ this war. But if we pursue the way we have chosen so far, war will be back. The Israeli army is now busy creating the next generation of people who hate us and will one day come out to avenge themselves for what the Israeli army has done to them...

*Amos Gvirtz is a founder of Israelis and Palestinians for Non-Violence, former Israeli representative of International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and chairperson of the Committee Against House Demolitions.*

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*FOR Israel (Palestinians and Israelis for Nonviolence) is a member of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)*

*Website: <http://pinv.org/> ■*



**Secretariat UPDATE!** *We are happy to announce a new column called the "Secretariat Update." In this section you will learn from IFOR's Executive Director John Schot more about what's happening at the IFOR Secretariat in Alkmaar, NL.*



By John Schot

It was a busy month for the IFOR Executive Director (ED), as a result of courtesy visits and proposal writing. The ED visited FOR Sweden (Kristna Fredsrörelsen), FOR Switzerland (Forum fuer Friedenserziehung, German Branch) and EIRENE (Bonn Germany). IFOR is one of the founding fathers of EIRENE. Most of the visits were focused on programme development. Swe-FOR and IFOR are working on a joint initiative with the Polish branch Tolerancia and FOR Sudan on a European Commission budget line. Our aim is to create national action plans for the prevention of armed conflicts. FOR Switzerland would like to continue its Non-violent Education program (NVE) in seven European states, along with its Long Life Learning (EC) program, after already securing a UNESCO grant. EIRENE needed the ED's involvement in an effort to make major changes to its constitution.

The office runs well, although the financial prospects are still not good and most of the branches continue to not pay their annual contributions. The International Secretariat asks your urgent cooperation in this. Staffers are working hard on financial and narrative reports, and new initiatives are taking place. A priority for us this month will be participating in the European Branch meeting (European FOR) in Poland. ■



**SweFOR**

Swedish Fellowship of ...



e-newsletter

**CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: IFOR in ACTION**

IFOR in ACTION #51 will appear in June of 2009, a special edition on peace and nonviolence initiatives in Asia. We are looking for contributions in the form of articles, interviews, upcoming events, recent activities organized, resources, photos, important dates, and absolutely anything else you wish to share with the rest of the IFOR movement. The International Secretariat warmly invites you to contribute to the next issue of IFOR in ACTION. We especially hope to hear from Branches, Groups and Affiliates located in Asia.

**Contact Stan Morris, Editor ([s.morris@ifor.org](mailto:s.morris@ifor.org))**

BOOK WATCH

## Marked for Life: The Story of Hildegard Goss-Mayr

by Richard Deats

Review by Rev, John Dear S.J.

Who might be the greatest living peacemaker? I acknowledge the question is a bit impertinent. It conjures competition, while by its nature, the word "peacemaker" bespeaks humility, equality, warm humanity. Even so, for the title of greatest I place my money on Hildegard Goss-Mayr of Vienna. If you don't know of Hildegard, I urge you to get the first biography ever written of her, *Marked for Life: The Story of Hildegard Goss-Mayr*, written by Richard Deats, published by New City Press.

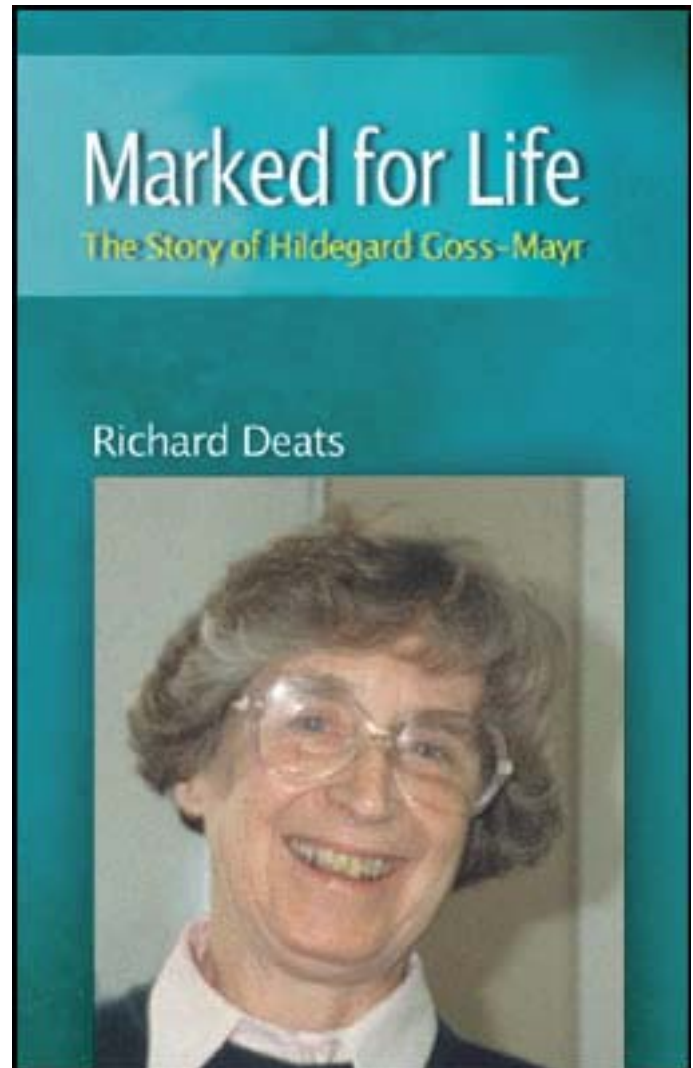
She was born in Austria in 1930, and grew up in an unusual Catholic family dedicated to peace, even while under the Nazi regime. Early on, she studied the philosophy and practice of nonviolence, and with husband, Jean Goss, became an apostle of nonviolence.

Her fingerprints are on many of the great historical events of the past half century -- from easing Cold War tensions to supporting struggles against colonialism, from lobbying the Second Vatican Council to fostering breakthroughs in interfaith understanding. No one else has shown such breadth. Hildegard is in a league of her own. I met her in 1986, during a retreat she led, and all these years I've kept in touch. Later, during my tenure as director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, she and I cooperated on various projects.

As I got to know her, I found her to be a medley of contrasts. She is gentle, quiet, thoughtful and peaceable. Yet she dynamically stands behind most of the world's movements for nonviolent change. On the one hand, she stands vulnerable before world leaders. On the other, she expects a full hearing -- and gets it. One thrills to think of the bloodshed she's averted.

Deats, her biographer, writes: "Hildegard is one of the preeminent teachers of nonviolence in our time. A pioneer, teacher and visionary, she has helped forge a new path for humanity.... Her place in history will grow as her seminal role in constructing a peaceful future is discovered."

She set her course when she was twelve. The Third Reich in full swing, she stood along a crowded street in Vienna as Adolf Hitler, standing tall, chest out with smug bravado, rolled along in an open car. Tens of thousands pressed close along the route and raucously cheered and



waved--everyone but Hildegard. She refused to raise her arm, to join in the thunderous chant: "Heil Hitler." Here was a page right out of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar garnering worship, and an impertinent knee refusing to bend.

She said, "I felt a huge force pressing on me, which swept everyone away, and I said to myself, 'You have to resist, you can't let yourself be caught up, don't raise your hand even if they lynch you!'" It was an experience that marked her life.

It was later, as the war raged, while hunkering for hours in bomb shelters, expecting a sudden death, that Hildegard committed her life to nonviolence. "Such a situation forces you to make a basic decision: either to submit to the forces of death...and the spirit of revenge -- or to...seek the forces of life that are able to overcome evil at its root.... It was out of this experience that the conviction grew in me that I could not go on living unless I dedicated my life to peacemaking through the power of nonviolence. Later I

*...cont. on next page*

*Marked for Life...*

found in the message of the universal self-giving love of Jesus the inspiration for this path.”

Since the 1950s, Hildegard has circumnavigated the globe teaching on the methodology of nonviolence. Her first trip was to Poland, and from there, to nearly every other communist nation, danger and surveillance always close behind.

During the Second Vatican Council (which opened in 1962), she led a peace lobby that included Dorothy Day, Jim Douglass, Gordon Zahn and Eileen Egan. They fasted, met with bishops, drafted documents, and did everything they could to ensure the church did not come out in support of war and nuclear weapons. Their efforts were not altogether in vain. The Council agreed to condemn the bombing of civilians and cities.

In the early 1960s, Hildegard turned to Latin America. She and Jean moved to Brazil, led trainings, and converted Archbishop Dom Helder Camara to the work of peace. Said Camara: “If the Nobel Peace Prize were mine to give, I would give it to Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr.”

In the 1970s, their work in Argentina inspired artist Adolfo Perez Esquivel to give his life for peace and nonviolence. When he was arrested and tortured by the junta, the Goss-Mayr’s campaigned for his release. The following year, Esquivel himself was awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

In the 1980s Hildegard and Jean set their faces toward the Philippines. There they taught nonviolence to thousands of priests, nuns, and activists. It was the groundwork that gave rise to the People Power movement, which ousted the Marcos regime. Non-violently. In three days.

“Hildegard Goss-Mayr is my candidate for sainthood,” wrote the great Trappist, Thomas Merton.

“Everywhere she went,” writes Nobel laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire in the forward to the book, “she joined in solidarity with people, sharing her belief and truth that killing is not in the spirit of true love, that all faiths can join together in spreading this truth, that every human life is sacred and the spirit of God lives in all men and women.” Even to those she disagreed with, Mairead writes, “there was a deep respect and reverence for their point of view.”

Hildegard is a profound role model -- one of humility yet of strength, one of weakness yet of successes. “It is sometimes discouraging to see how small the Christian peace movement is,” Merton wrote to her in 1962. “But...spiritual work is done with disproportionately small and feeble instruments.” It is a paradox woven into the

nature of things.

Hildegard lives it. She shows us how to face it and not recoil. She assures us that ordinary people can have a tremendous impact. She shows that any of us can become apostles of peace. We too can make a difference if we stay faithful to the mission. And so I urge you to get the book, *Marked for Life: The Story of Hildegard Goss-Mayr*. Study it in your parishes; discuss it among your friends. Let it embolden you to make peace.

About the Author:

Richard Deats worked for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) from 1972 until his retirement on June 30, 2005. A United Methodist minister, Deats taught social ethics at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines from 1959 to 1972. Deats served FOR in different capacities: He was executive secretary, director of interfaith activities, and editor of Fellowship magazine and coordinator of communications. He taught workshops and lectured on active nonviolence in over a dozen countries, including South Africa, Bangladesh, the Philippines, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, Haiti, Kenya, Lithuania, Russia, Colombia, Palestine and Israel.

He led numerous Journeys of Reconciliation to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Deats was part of an FOR peace effort in Iraq and he met with the PLO in Tunis, with Burmese liberation groups, and with indigenous movements in Ecuador. In 1986, he was part of an IFOR nine-week training project that contributed to the “people power” revolution in the Philippines.

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- # Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces

“Marked for Life: The Life of Hildegard GossMayr” is available at FOR USA ([bookstore@forusa.org](mailto:bookstore@forusa.org)), \$13.95 plus postage; or order online at The FOR Online Store <http://www.forusa.org/>.

About the reviewer:

*John Dear is a Jesuit priest, peace activist, and the author of more than 20 books. He has served as the director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and after 9/11, as a coordinator of chaplains for the Red Cross at the New York Family Assistance Center. For information about his books, articles and speaking schedule, see: [www.fatherjohndear.org](http://www.fatherjohndear.org). ■*

EVENTS



**May 24 2009: International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament**

e-newsletter

**“Voices of peace from the Balkans and Caucasus”**

In honor of May 24, the International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, IFOR's Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) and Musicians without Borders will organize the seminar “Voices of peace from the Balkans and Caucasus” on May 24, 2009, in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Pioneering women peace activists and female musicians from the Balkans and Caucasus will come together to share their experiences with peacebuilding, reconciliation and healing. In an exciting seminar they will explore similarities and differences between the regions, as well as opportunities for cooperation and strengthening of each other's voices. The women will interact with the audience in lively debates and workshops, focusing on women's contributions to peacebuilding and the role arts and music can play in bringing divided people together.

The seminar aims to offer a space for women peacemakers, musicians, civil society actors and interested others to explore how peace and security can be enhanced in the regions, and what both regions can learn from each other.

Prior to the public event in Utrecht, WPP will produce the May 24 Pack, which contains articles on the topic, lists of resources, suggestions for actions, and a list of women's organizations working for peace. IFOR co-produces this pack with the International Peace Bureau (IPB) in Geneva. For previous editions of the May 24 package, please visit our website: [http://ifor.org/WPP/wppmaterials\\_newsletters\\_archive.html](http://ifor.org/WPP/wppmaterials_newsletters_archive.html)

For more information, please contact WPP Information Officer José de Vries ([j.devries@ifor.org](mailto:j.devries@ifor.org)). ■

**Workshop March 8, 2009  
Launch of the We-Can Campaign**

On March 8, Movisie will launch the ‘We Can-campgain’ in the Netherlands. WPP will participate in this event, by organizing a workshop on gender and violence. The campaign is part of an international one focusing on ending violence against women. The core of the campaign are changemakers and coalition partners; individuals and organisations that take action to stop violence against women.

Workshop WPP:

Tough Guys: are you concerned?  
Using the documentary ‘Tough Guise’ we will explore the link between violence in the society and at home and how this links to the education of young boys and girls.

Language: English

In the workshop ‘Tough Guys: are you concerned?’ we will explore the link between violence in the society and at home and how this links to the education of young boys and girls. The documentary ‘Tough Guise’ (from Jackson Katz) is the first educational video geared toward college and high school students to systematically examine the relationship between pop-cultural imagery and the social construction of masculine identities in the U.S. at the dawn of the 21st century. Within her work, WPP focuses on the topic of masculinities and how this is addressed in the peacemovement.

To learn more about the WE CAN Nederland program (Dutch), please see: <http://www.movisie.nl/eCache/DEF/1/22/935.html>

WPP Contact person:  
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**MOVISIE International**

MOVISIE is the Netherlands centre for social development. Our mission is to promote the participation and independence of citizens. We do this by supporting and advising professional organizations, volunteer organizations and government institutions.

Website: <http://www.movisie.nl/> ■

NEWS

**To Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr:  
My Profuse Thanks!**

by Raul Socrates 'Soc' Banzuela

June 1984. Philippines. An exploding, social volcano. Eight months earlier, Ninoy Aquino, the most popular opposition leader had, been assassinated. The whole nation suddenly woke up in anger and defiance against the twelve year-old Marcos military dictatorship. Mass rallies and demonstrations were almost a daily occurrence. The economy was tumbling down. Calls for armed revolution were in the air. The Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army and their front organizations were leading the rapidly growing national mass opposition movement.

It was in this context when three five-day workshops on active nonviolence (ANV) were conducted by a French-Austrian couple from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). The participants were Catholic Bishops, NGO workers, and social movement leaders. I attended one of the three workshops, as an NGO worker in June 1984.

I was a young community organizer then, two years fresh from student activism in a Jesuit University. With grand idealism and vision for an alternative democratic society, I was first assigned by my NGO in a remote town to do organizing work among coconut tenant-families using participatory action research methodology. I was deeply moved and angered by the misery of the coconut tenants caused by social injustice.

All forms of organizing work were suspect. Six months into my work one of the farmer leaders we helped form was abducted and summarily executed by para-military forces... Find the remainder of this article at: [http://ifor.org/articles/Reports/ad%20news\\_mar08.pdf](http://ifor.org/articles/Reports/ad%20news_mar08.pdf)

This report provided by Bobet Corral:  
ALAY-DANGAL NEWSLETTER  
March 2008 Issue, Manila, Philippines  
AKKAPKA Foundation Inc., International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) ■



**10 January 2009: New WPP intern working at the International Secretariat**

WPP is very happy to announce that for the coming six months a new intern - Merle Gosewinkel - is strengthening our team at the International Secretariat.

"My name is Merle Gosewinkel, and since January 2009 I am working as the new intern at the WPP. I grew up in Hamburg, Germany, and started my studies in 2004 at the Humboldt Universität Berlin, where I did my Bachelor in Gender Studies and European Anthropology. In 2006 I came to the Netherlands to follow a Master Program at the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UVA). In

September 2008, I graduated with an MA in Sociology, with an emphasis on Gender, Sexuality, and Society.

"During my studies I worked as an intern at the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV) in Amsterdam on the project of the European Feminist Forum (EFF) from July 2007 until May 2008. It was during my time there, that I came across the work of the WPP.

"After finishing my studies, I applied for an internship at the WPP, since I found the issue of gender in peace

building a very important and necessary subject to work on. Due to my background in Gender Studies, I am familiar with many aspects of women's lives, including in conflict areas. I hope to gain a deeper knowledge on the relationship between gender and peacekeeping during my time at the WPP. Women are one of the groups which suffer the most in an armed conflict, which is also related to their gender.

"I am very happy to have the opportunity to work at the Women Peacemakers Program. Since my future plans are to work, if possible, in an NGO on the issue of gender, development and/or peace, I also hope that my internship will bring me one step further to put my plan into action, and to equip me with the skills necessary."

To contact Merle Gosewinkel, please see the WPP website at: <http://ifor.org/WPP/contact.htm> ■

e-newsletter

OPPORTUNITIES

**IFOR's Women Peacemakers Program Interns**

WPP is always looking for interns who can work with the program for a minimum period of 6 months and are eligible to live and work in the Netherlands.

IFOR's Women Peacemakers Program looks for volunteers to assist us with:

1) Administrative tasks  
(e.g. correspondence, updating database, impact measurements etc)

2) Publications  
(e.g. contribute with articles, essays, illustrations, etc)

3) Computer and IT skills

4) Social and cultural assistance  
(e.g. offer hospitality to visitors from other countries, pick up visitors from Schiphol airport, assist organizing public events etc)

As a volunteer, you will receive:

An orientation to our organization and our work with women peacemakers around the world

A multicultural environment, with colleagues from different continents

Access to publications and material about issues related to peace, conflict, gender, nonviolence

Travel reimbursement (or a volunteer allowance with a maximum of 150 Euro per month)

If you are interested in volunteering in any or all of these working areas, please contact us! For more information, please contact the WPP Information Officer:

José de Vries  
IFOR's WPP Information Officer  
072-5123014  
j.devries@ifor.org

WPP's website: <http://ifor.org/WPP/index.html> ■

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**The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)** was founded in 1919 and now has member organizations in over 48 countries around the world. IFOR supports the activities of these member organizations through worldwide programs, active nonviolence training, supporting and linking women peacemakers who live in conflict situations, empowering young people in making a contribution to non-violence, and campaigning for disarmament.

IFOR members are committed to active nonviolence and come from every major religious tradition. IFOR has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO.

For more information about IFOR, visit our website at [www.ifor.org](http://www.ifor.org).

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**Please note: IFOR reserves the right to edit all contributions for clarity and content.**

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