

# IFOR INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION



## Reconciled *IFOR Newsletter*

December 2020

Dear IFOR community,

We are coming to the end of a year like no other, and above all we hope this finds you well and healthy. When the last edition of Reconciled was published, the covid-19 pandemic was really beginning to bite, but even then perhaps we had not yet realised the degree to which we were in it for the long haul. Since then, the world – and IFOR with it – has had to adjust to these new realities.

As we report in this edition, a number of branches have responded to the changed circumstances by meeting regularly in an informal fashion on Zoom. Apart from the company and fellowship that this has provided, it triggered a Global Day of Action that itself grew into the ‘Make Peace the New Normal’ campaign, which has been promoted on IFOR’s social network pages and those of the branches. Susan Smith of FOR USA summarises the development of this group’s activities, which are open to all branches (participation is encouraged!), for this edition.

## IFOR DAY OF ACTION MAY 27TH

Pandemics know no borders! War and violence anywhere threaten health and peace for everyone everywhere.

MAKE PEACE  
THE NEW NORMAL



Perhaps equally strange is that the pandemic comes in what may already have been considered a frenzied year. While the inequalities faced by the black community of the USA were thrown into relief by the virus, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in that country and elsewhere is a case in point. We re-publish our statement issued at the time and addressed in solidarity to FOR USA. And of course, Uncle Sam's presidential elections are of enormous consequence beyond that country's borders. At the time of writing, President Trump has not conceded, but the election of the Biden-Harris ticket offers a breath of fresh air. In more recent weeks, cities in France and Austria have fallen victim to targeted attacks, including one in a house of worship. We mourn the loss of life in those attacks and reject the violence perpetrated in Nice, Avignon, Lyon and Vienna.

But 2020 has not been without positive news. The world's opprobrium towards nuclear weapons was formalised on 24th October, the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, when Honduras became the 50th country to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, facilitating its entry into force as international law next January. IFOR, through its membership of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning ICAN, the work of its UN representatives, and the consistent anti-nuclear witness of its branches over the years, has played a part in bringing this about. We now call on all States parties that have yet to ratify the Treaty, to do so, and on those (nuclear) States that have so far declined to sign, to reconsider. For now, we bring back our occasional 'Militarism Watch' column to celebrate this achievement. And as a spiritually oriented community, we can celebrate the publication of Pope Francis's third encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, a reflection on the things that make for human coexistence. His words on the just war in chapter seven bring the Roman Catholic Church as close as it has been in recent centuries to a rejection of the Just War theory and more fully into nonviolence.

Elsewhere in this edition, Zaira Zafarana reports on the work undertaken by our UN representatives and Michel Monod offers a reflection on his time as a UN rep. at Geneva. Thank you, Michel, for your dedication and commitment! We are pleased to share news from the Austrian, Italian, Swiss and Ugandan branches, and SERPAJ Colombia – and would be delighted to receive more news from BGAs, the beating heart of the IFOR network, in future editions. We also commemorate the life of the late Mark Johnson, former Executive Director of FOR USA, who died in October.

From ICOM, we would like to share with you the good news that IFOR is finishing the year in a healthier place financially. The confirmation we were awaiting at the time of the last edition from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust regarding our UN work was received, and we are delighted that it extends our work on conscientious objection at Geneva for the period 2020-2022. Unfortunately, we twice had to postpone our 'Introduction to the UN' week due to the pandemic, but watch this space for an opportunity next year.

Additionally, IFOR is the beneficiary of another legacy this year, from the late Peter D. Glusker, M.D., Ph.D., a distinguished medic from the US. We are deeply grateful to him, as well as to Mara Thomas, the successor trustee of his estate, who is graciously overseeing the legal process, and to Susan Smith, who is helping to facilitate the arrival of the legacy. The money will help cover running costs, and there are other claims on it and ideas as to what to do with it. We will look at these questions in ICOM and report on the year's financial result early in 2021. We thank all BGAs for your contributions throughout 2020, which have helped to achieve this result. We also thank Iskra and Roel for their ongoing work throughout the year.

Finally, we would like to advise that the final quarter of 2022 has been earmarked for the next IFOR Council, slated to take place in South Sudan. This completes the four-year cycle from Sicily in November 2018, and maximises the time available for looking at fundraising possibilities once the emergency grants that have characterised the covid period give way to more conventional cycles.

May we wish everyone a peaceful forthcoming festive season and the very best for 2021. Hopefully the world will learn some lessons from 2020 and we will see the back of the virus over the coming months! As always, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Peace and all good,

Blas García Noriega and Peter Cousins,

Co-Vice Presidents, on behalf of ICOM.

*Happy Holidays*

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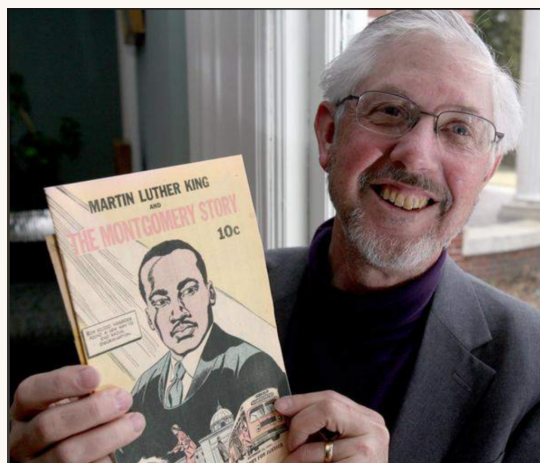
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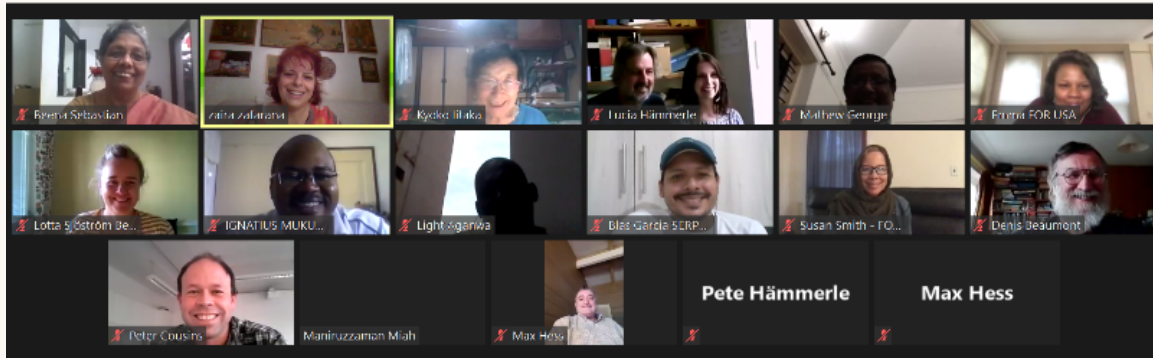
Mark C. Johnson. Photo credit to Ethan Vesely-Flad.

*Mark C. Johnson,  
Executive Director,  
FOR-USA, 2007-2013.*

Full obituary in this issue



# Branches Galvanize



Screenshot of BGA Zoom meeting by Zaira Zafarana.

27th October, 2020

*By Susan H Smith, FOR-USA (with input from Max Hess and Zaira Zafarana)*

## IFOR Branches Galvanize Virtually for Global Impact

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has relegated much of the world to virtual meetings replacing in-person gatherings, a group of IFOR branches began weekly Zoom check-ins earlier this year to find ways to support each other and respond to mounting global crises. This concerted effort prompted an open letter to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres affirming his March 23rd appeal for a global ceasefire, in which he urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons to confront the pandemic, humanity's common enemy. IFOR's letter of 19th May, which was copied to the UN General Assembly, underscored the Secretary-General's statement by declaring universal health and peace as a means and end to sustainable human security. Moreover, it put forth a three-pronged platform pushing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals further by: 1)

We are aware that this event has triggered protests in countries other than the USA, emphasizing the global dimension of present demands for change” (see later in this bulletin). The message of solidarity highlighted FOR USA's statement, which recognized that demonstrations are “rooted in a deep desire for justice and respect for the inherent human dignity of all persons.” In another statement before the HRC, informed by the input of the Branches meeting weekly, IFOR drew a link between the murder of Black people in the USA and the senseless callous deaths of tens of thousands of primarily Black Africans in the Mediterranean Sea. Many of those who perished drowned as a result of the European Union's racist and xenophobic policies, practices, and alliances in violation of International Human Rights and Law of the Sea Conventions, which mandate immediate rescue and the provision of safe harbor. The group of IFOR Branches has continued to meet regularly to examine current and developing situations globally, and strategize on the actions of IFOR. This has provided participating BGAs with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of local situations, while exploring ways to act as a fellowship with global reach --

Prioritizing the protection of poor and marginalized people; 2) Protecting civil liberties and human rights; and 3) Using the momentum of this global crisis to shift resources to create lasting peace.

Later that month, on May 27th, the group of IFOR branches launched a Global Day of Action and campaign to “Make Peace the New Normal” with emphasis on the need for “compassion, accountability, and change.” Several branches took part in the initiative by holding parallel events raising awareness about the necessity of prioritizing peace now and in the future. These events were shared on social media, and IFOR president Lotta Sjöström Becker provided a “Pause for Reflection” broadcast live on IFOR’s Facebook page. It became clear to the group of IFOR branches meeting weekly by Zoom, that inherent in the crisis of the pandemic was the opportunity to use technology to connect in new and bold ways.

As a follow-up to Global Day of Action campaign to “Make [a Just] Peace the New Normal,” reports were submitted to Zaira Zafarana, IFOR’s UN Geneva Main Representative, concerning the murder of Ahmaud Arbery (see photo of mural in Georgia, USA), as well as Georgia State Representative Carl Gilliard’s efforts to abolish citizen’s arrest and a proposal to Equal Justice Initiative to hold a community remembrance project. These reports were in anticipation of upcoming dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, scheduled for the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and with (i) the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and (ii) the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of non-Recurrence, scheduled for the 45th session of the UN HRC.

particularly in the midst of the worsening COVID-19 pandemic, the death toll of which has surpassed 1.13 million with more than 41 million cases globally. BGAs are encouraged to join the ongoing conversations on how to strengthen IFOR’s responsiveness and impact, while adapting to and taking advantage of the opportunities the millennial age provides. At the same time, the online group is committed to supporting local organizations, amplifying their voices, and leveraging IFOR’s global fellowship in pursuit of universal human rights, nonviolence, justice, reconciliation, and peace.

In addition to responding to the global pandemics of COVID-19 and anti-Black racism, the group is focusing on initiatives to increase the engagement of youth in IFOR’s work. Currently, under the leadership of the Japan Branch and Kyoko Itaka of the Representative Consultative Committee, they will begin soliciting articles and drawings from young people to enrich and strengthen IFOR’s stakeholder base, reach and relevance. Initially, these submissions will examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives, as well as that so many children go hungry and in situations of violence and forced displacement, while the military industrial complex and war economies thrive. It is hoped that publication of children’s work will provide them with opportunities to express their fears and anxieties, as well as the aspiration that -- one day -- all children’s basic needs will be met, such as safety, shelter, food, clean water, the opportunity to go to school, and climate cooling and sustainability. Also, under discussion is the publication of an IFOR newsletter by and for youth.

At the October 1st gathering, Lucia Haemmerle of the Austria Branch underscored the “need for IFOR to live what we preach and live our stated

In June, the group continued their efforts by bringing the matters of anti-Blackness in the United States and Europe to the attention of the international community. With input from FOR-USA, FOR-Japan, FOR-India, FOR-Austria, FOR England and Scotland, ONAD (South Sudan), and MIR Italy, Zaira Zafarana delivered a statement on July 15th before the Human Rights Council. In it, IFOR condemned the murders of African-Americans George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others by police. Sending a message of solidarity to their families, IFOR stated, “We were appalled, and our hearts were broken, at yet another needless act of police violence against an unarmed, African-American citizen.

identity through increased awareness of existing power structures that exclude younger, diverse grassroots voices.” Mathew George of the India Branch added: “The group of Branches meeting Mondays via Zoom is a work in progress. We are shaping ourselves to address the challenges of today and wish to have the participation of as many BGAs as possible.” The growing group of Branches meeting by Zoom is also gearing up for IFOR’s Quadrennial Conference slated to be held in South Sudan towards the end of 2021. Said the Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson, Executive Director of FOR-USA, “I hope that, when we go back to meeting in person, there will always be a vibrant tele-platform participation option. More people should have access to these deliberations and our mission: Subvert the world order!”



End Citizens Arrest - Mural by Roderrick Davis.

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**Call to the Global South!!**





Dear friends,

The German branch of IFOR is looking for some people from the Global South for a short input on climate justice.

We will hold a conference on this topic from 13 - 15.05.2021 and would like to either show a pre-recorded video message from you or connect you live via video call and ask you a few questions. You can speak in English, French or Spanish. We will do the translation.

So if you come from the Global South and are an activist for climate justice or if you know someone who fits this description, please contact me.

Best regards,  
Mirjam

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**PDF Uganda**

**Updates from Peace & Development Foundation - Africa,  
IFOR's Ugandan affiliate**

CLIMATE JUSTICE

PDF-Africa is one of the organizations in a campaign for nature conservation (Climate justice) in Uganda. We have an ongoing advocacy campaign to save Murchison Falls in Murchison National Park, Budongo forest, Jocka forest reserve, among others. The government wants to give away Murchison Falls for power dam construction. At this link you find the leaflet with logos of collaborating institutions:



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Following the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the countrywide lockdown in Uganda early this year, there was an alarming increase in domestic violence and GBV in Uganda. In response to this, we therefore formed a collaboration that would bring on the power of Data Science to come out with an innovation that can be used by GBV activists.

We are a collaboration of three organizations; Patira Data Science (An ICT company based in Ohio USA), PDF-Africa, and HANDLE-Uganda.

We already have a GBV App which you download from Google play store.

We are implementing the project entitled “Digitizing GBV cases in Nwoya district”, a district in northern Uganda. We started by scanning GBV cases recorded in books, digitized them, created a district GBV dashboard, developed a GBV App, and now we are training the GBV focal persons on how to capture GBV data using the App. This data is then used to update the dashboard on a regular basis, analytics will be done to inform interventions.

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## Dialogues For Peace

SERPAJ-AL, CINEP, JUSTAPAZ, Somos Defensores, CAPS



## Words and wisdom for building peace from the regions

Four years after the signing of the peace agreements between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), now defunct and converted into a political party, the Common Revolutionary Alternative Force, grey clouds are gathering, seeking to darken the panorama of the implementation of these agreements although, at the same time, hopes are being rekindled that this long-awaited peace will come through a national effort.

In this sense, with the aim of positioning itself in the media agenda and in social and cultural debates in general, in addition to the eminently academic and political debates, a group of organisations – the Service for Peace and Justice in Latin America, SERPAJ-AL; the Research Centre for Popular Education-CINEP; the 'Somos Defensores' (We are Defenders) Programme; the Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta, JUSTAPAZ; the Atlántico University; and the Centro de Atención Psicosocial-CAPS – have carried out Dialogues for Peace, Words and Wisdom for Building Peace from the Regions, bringing together various national, regional and local actors, broadcast by the television channel CTV Barranquilla, also on its website : <http://ctvbarranquilla.com>; by the newspaper La Libertad – its website: <https://diariolalibertad.com/sitio/> – as well as the radio stations of Cadena Radial La Libertad; and also on the country's community television channels and community stations and social networks: Facebook live, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter.

Supporters of this appeal: the Federation of Community Media of Colombia, FEDEMEDIOS; the National College of Journalists-CNP; the churches Celebra and Ana Bautista-La Unción; the Red Vida Federation; the TEKNOS Foundation, SolutionsTeach, among other organisations.

The theme of each session was determined according to the circumstances, so our Peace Dialogues have addressed, among others, the following topics: Communication for Peace and Social Development; Family Resilience and Harmony, Preconditions for Social Peace; Planning for Peace; International Cooperation in the Pandemic, Entrepreneurship and Peace.

We highlight the participation of delegates from various social sectors, peasants, women, youth, trade unions, academics, politicians, commercial and community media, and international aid workers: from the Montes de María, two internationally recognised alternative communication collectives and peasant organisations; women, leaders of the Mothers of Soacha Movement, groups of young people who are victims of 'false positives' (murders by the Colombian army); the National Trade Union School; academics, researchers and teachers from the following universities: the Atlántico, the

Autonomous Region of the Caribbean, the American Corporation, the Simón Bolívar of Barranquilla, etc.; and representatives of the National Trade Union School.

During the sixth peace dialogue, emphasis was placed on the need to plan for peace. Speakers included the former presidential candidate, Cecilia López Montaña, who was also the former Director of the National Planning Department; the former Minister of Mines and Energy; Amylkar Acosta; and the former Secretary of Planning for the Atlántico region of Colombia, Lourdes González; all of whom agreed on the need for peace planning to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements, especially the 'PDET', or Territorial Development Plans.

By: Fabio Monroy Martínez.

General Coordinator of the Dialogues for Peace.

Coordinator in Colombia of the Service for Peace and Justice in Latin America, SERPAJ-AL.

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## MIR Italia

On October 2nd 2020, in occasion of the International Nonviolence Day, the Italian branch of IFOR has launched a national campaign to demilitarize schools.

The “Scuole smilitarizzate” campaign has been designed by MIR Italy, together with Pax Christi Italy and SOS Diritti.

A more just and supportive society necessarily passes through a school capable of educating the new generations to ideals, values and models of behaviour inspired by peace, rights, dialogue and the rejection of all forms of violence and therefore war (as also enshrined in Art. 11 of the Italian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).



A press released has been sent out and published by media and a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/scuole.smilitarizzate>) has been inaugurated with the premiere of a professional video presentation of the Campaign.

MIR Italia and Pax Christi, promoters of the campaign, are movements born after the world wars to practice reconciliation, practice nonviolence and create a Culture of Peace. As part of this campaign, they make their expertise available, together with other members, to support its aims.

In order to transform the current culture permeated by violence, discrimination and social injustice, it is necessary that all actors in society work together, starting with the School which is the heart of the community, where sociality is experienced,

knowledge is learnt and many skills are developed which then enable individuals to evaluate, choose and act.

Many non-violent alternatives are at the moment not very widespread and practiced and the predominant narrative continues to refer to defence and armed security. It is essential to achieve a demilitarized society, starting from school.

This national campaign is addressed to Teachers' Colleges and Institute Councils as well as to every teacher, by virtue of their indispensable educational role, and calls for action so that schools are actually places of Peace, committing themselves to enhance and promote Peace and Nonviolence education within their educational-didactic programming and to exclude from the educational offer any project, initiative and material aimed at spreading, promoting militarism and related activities, such as the arms industry.

Italy and all over the world need a school that prepares for Peace and that promotes ideas and projects that implement it.

All schools are invited to sign a Manifesto and commit to peace, in particular:

1. Value Peace and Nonviolence among the educational aims of its PTOF, proposing educational initiatives and interventions addressed to teachers and students, aimed at highlighting the importance of Peace Education and the commitment in the practice and research of reconciliation and conflict transformation with nonviolent methods, as also indicated in the Guidelines for Peace Education and Local Citizenship.

2. Carry out and disseminate initiatives aimed at experimenting and implementing a Culture of Peace and non-violent civil defence and solidarity practices, as indispensable tools to guarantee the dignity and rights of citizens without any kind of discrimination and to face the serious emergencies that are present today in the world scenario, linked to the protection of health, human life, environment and territory.

3. Exclude from the educational offer of schools, meetings and projects aimed at promoting and celebrating, directly or indirectly, military activities, the logic of war and the Armed Forces;



4. Not exhibiting and disseminating promotional material in the school aimed at propagating activities of a military nature, enlistment, the Armed Forces and other training activities indirectly related to the military world;

5. Do not organise visits involving the access of students to barracks, firing ranges, military ships and other structures related to military activities; do not participate in partnership projects with military structures or companies involved in the production of war materials.

6. Enrich the school library with publications on peace education, nonviolent conflict transformation, nonviolent civil defence, territorial protection, human security and

other related issues.

7. Promote projects of collaboration or partnership with third sector realities committed by statute and competent in training activities concerning the promotion of the Culture of Peace, Human Rights, Nonviolence, Solidarity and Dialogue.

8. Celebrate - in the manner that each school will deem most appropriate - the birth of Mahatma Gandhi on 2 October, International Day of Nonviolence (proclaimed by the UN on 15/6/2007) as a time to reflect on the value of nonviolence, as a model to be practiced in personal, social and political relations involving, where possible, associations engaged in the promotion of a Culture of Peace.

9. Display at the entrance of the School Institute the logo of the Campaign "Demilitarized Schools", in order to show the choice of a school that will teach Peace and Nonviolence and research alternatives for the transformation of conflicts at various levels, repudiating war as enshrined in the Constitution.

More info and materials are available at <https://www.miritalia.org/2020/10/02/lancio-campagna-scuole-smilitarizzate/>

To contact MIR Italy: [segreteria@miritalia.org](mailto:segreteria@miritalia.org)

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## Peace Education

From Nonviolenz-MIRoir, No. 32, 2/2020', pp.7-9

*"You are unique and precious! We have an exciting task for each and every one of you. You're learning to be convincing, to manage conflicts and to improvise successfully."*

At the beginning of the year, IFOR-MIR Switzerland launched a call for proposals for peace educators. However, the introduction mentioned above is not taken from our announcement, but can be found in the new DDPS [Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports] brochure "Your chance - our army!. With the motto: Fight, protect, help. Under the motto "Changing the world without violence", we invited interested trainers to an information day in Basel on 18 July 2020.

Before Ueli Wildberger and I presented IFOR-MIR to the future course leaders, we wanted to find out what peace means to them and how they implement it in their daily lives. We are happy to share with you excerpts from their personal visions of peace:

"Peace permeates all areas of life. It doesn't work if only a small group of people pursue a policy of peace," said Lea Suter.

"People, animals, plants, nature and also the relationships between all beings" are part of the peace concept for Flavia Klausberger and V erane Loriot.

"Equal opportunities in society, regardless of a person's religion or origin" is part of peace for V erane.

For Oliver Langenbach and Hansueli Homberger, freedom plays an important role in their personal definition of peace. Hansueli: "Freedom belongs to everyone, like the air".

Most also mentioned inner peace. For example, Matthias Fenner, who said: "Let's leave aside the political dimension and start with ourselves".

"Part of peace is also to leave oneself alone, to let others be who they are" (Flavia) and "not just to come from outside and want to change". (Hansueli).

"Tolerance and acceptance are the lasting foundations for peace". (Flavia)

"Peace is not made around a table, geopolitically, militarily, but in the street," says Oliver. The One Planet bicycle tour through the Töss valley shows what this can mean in practice.

For Ueli, "reconciliation is the crown of peace". He uses the term active nonviolence instead of peace.

For me, peace consists of many small and large contributions from different people. Only together do they lead to peaceful coexistence.

After the presentation and exercises, the afternoon was devoted to the objectives and content of peace education. The following elements are important for our peace education programme:

Making peace concrete and tangible

Building bridges between the daily life of the students and the theme of peace

Everyone can contribute to peace

Conflict resolution skills can be acquired

Student participation

Peace is a process and still relevant, we must continue and stick to it

Important terms are: active nonviolence and civil courage

Workshops for secondary schools last one lesson and are intended to provide food for thought. For example, as a complement to history lessons. A contribution to peace when the Second World War is dealt with.

Neither in the DDPS brochure mentioned at the beginning nor in the current MILAK (Military Academy of ETH Zurich) brochure does the word "peace" appear – not once! How can we make "a contribution to the security and freedom of Switzerland" (to keep the official language of the department) without having an understanding of what peace means? You certainly know that "peace is more than the absence of war", but what should young people learn about peace?

We offer two different workshops: peace in general and peace on a personal level.

With the workshop What is peace? - What is war? we ask ourselves the following questions: what happens in the "gaps" between wars? How does a new war start and

why is it so difficult to make peace? Pupils learn that peace does not automatically come about when war ends. In an exercise, they can recognise for themselves the traces that war leaves behind. As peace seekers, we look for things that promote peace and things that produce the opposite.

The Creative Conflict Solutions workshop focuses on personal conflict resolution skills. We ask ourselves the following questions: "What is a conflict and why are there always new conflicts?". Students learn to distinguish between a person's actions and intentions and thus defuse conflicts. Together we develop creative conflict solutions that go beyond victory and defeat.

In addition, there are individualised offers available. We can draw on the experience of past IFOR-MIR offers, for example on the themes of reconciliation, prejudice and civic courage.

At the end of the information day we had a discussion on cooperation, the content of the workshops and questions such as: "Is the term peace no longer relevant, too uncool, too left-wing or too imprecise? "Are there alternative terms?"

## How did this happen and how will it continue?

I met Carmen Gadiant, another interested course leader, for a half-day briefing. We approached 50 secondary schools (in the cantons of Basel, Basel-Landschaft, Bern and Zurich, the cantons where the trainers live) to propose our peacebuilding offer.

At the end of August, I had a meeting with "education21 ESD" (Education for Sustainable Development). This entity will include our workshop "Creative Conflict Solutions" on its platform.

In November, we will have another training day for course leaders.

Because of Corona, it is difficult to start with new offers in schools. The rules concerning external providers are not the same in all schools (currently there are schools that do not allow external offers). We are not discouraged by this. On the day of the training we will also discuss how to deal with the Corona situation.

By *Charlotte Bhattarai*

Charlotte Bhattarai has been responsible for peace education at IFOR-MIR Switzerland since April 2019. She holds the CAS certificate in Peace and Conflict Transformation and has worked for various organisations in the field of peace.





Whereas amidst the pandemic various “live events” could and can not happen in the way planned, FOR Austria tried to keep up ongoing activities and adapt them to the situation. We are very grateful for the initiatives developed by IFOR members in these recent months und took part in the regular online meetings as well as in the Global Ceasefire campaign for a “new normal” after COVID 19. One fruit of improved communication with other BGAs is that in our latest edition of our magazine Spinnrad on Black Lives Matter we have contributions from FOR USA, FOR Germany and Peace & Development Foundation Uganda. We also started a media campaign in Austria on “Global Ceasefire” (<http://www.versoehnungsbund.at/aufruf-waffenstillstand/>), including an international webinar “What is needed for Peace?” with IFOR partners from South Sudan, Colombia and Afghanistan.

One of the imminent threats discussed in IFOR’s letter to UN SG Antonio Guterres is the use of nuclear weapons. We participated in a media action in Vienna when Russian and US diplomats met for negotiations on the prolongation of the New START-Treaty in Vienna in June, and we especially welcome and celebrate the 50th ratification of the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons and its Entry into Force in January 2021. We think that cooperation between civil society organisations like ICAN Austria, IPPNW and IFOR with the Austrian government in this issue could serve as a model for more countries in order to increase the Treaty membership significantly in the future, although it will still be a long way to go till we get rid of all nuclear weapons.

We also made some steps forward with the introduction of a Civil Peace Service (CPS) in Austria (<http://www.versoehnungsbund.at/zfd/>) which has been included in the program of the new government in January this year. There are now eight Austrian organisations that form the Coordinating Committee for CPS, and we hope that it will be realized in the course of next year. In the meantime FOR Austria is about to start a CPS pilot project in Colombia where one FOR member will work as a “peace expert”, with the task of politically accompanying rural and indigenous communities in the Northwest of Colombia in their nonviolent struggles for human and land rights and the preservation of the environment.

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## **IFOR at the UN**

Covid-19 has unveiled a lot of inequalities, discriminations, dramatic unpreparedness and increase of militarization.

On May 19th IFOR issued an Open letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres which has been also sent in copy to H. E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, president of the U.N. General Assembly at that time and to the rotating presidency of the U.N. Security Council. IFOR expressed support for the UNSG's call for a ceasefire and invited all UN member States to commit themselves to the protection of human rights and the pursuit of peace, with particular attention to the vulnerabilities further highlighted in the pandemic particular period. The letter also included a specific reminder of the need to invest more in human security and thus also in health, shifting funds from the military to the civilian sector.

This letter has been also shared among international NGOs partner -who expressed appreciation for the initiative- and permanent missions in Geneva and New York and at the United Nations Office in Vienna.

Since the pandemic started, the UN regular activities have been modified to adjust to prevention measures and local governmental instructions. In person meetings have been either suspended or limited in the attendance or conducted online.

Civil society has been very attentive concerning the limitations due to the prevention of the Covid-19 spreading and their possible effect on the work on human rights and the regular ongoing of vital UN working sessions.

The 10th Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), scheduled to start on April 27th in New York, has been postponed to the spring of 2021. IFOR, together with about 80 NGOs, has issued a Statement to the NPT States Parties on May 11th to urge the government members of the NPT-especially the nuclear-armed states and their allies- to take serious steps to fulfil their obligations to nuclear disarmament under article VI of the NPT and join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

In Geneva, the sessions of the Human Rights Council resumed regularly in June, after the suspension in March during the last week of the 43rd session.

During the 44th session of the Human Rights Council, IFOR continued to stand up for the right of the “people on the move” and intervened publicly during the interactive dialogue with the Special rapporteur on the human right of migrants to express concerns for the misuse of laws to punish migration related humanitarian acts and the criminalization and restriction on civil society that assist migrants. In particular it has been referred the case of threats towards the Italian journalist Nello Scavo who has been living under protection since October 2019 when he investigated on human trafficking in the Mediterranean area. IFOR also highlighted the case of young people fleeing Eritrea because of the indefinite national service and because there is not recognition of the right to conscientious objection. IFOR reminded member States that conscientious objectors are eligible for refugee status if they are put at risk of persecutions in their own country.

IFOR addressed the situation in Eritrea also in a dedicated oral statement and spoke up on systemic racism referring to the IFOR public release on the issue and to the situation in the USA and in other areas of the world.

During the following 45th session of the Human Rights Council, which took place in September, IFOR followed up on system racism and delivered an oral statement during the interactive dialogue with the Working Group on People of African Descent.

The same topic has been addressed also during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; IFOR mentioned the serious deficiency in the process of memorialization which limits

guarantee of non-recurrence and then presented the “Citizens Arrest Repeal Bill” cosponsored by Georgia State Representatives. IFOR expressed also support for the recommendations to bring about a Culture of Peace.



IFOR took the opportunity to speak in the plenary keep on the agenda migration issues and in particular the criminalization of solidarity, denouncing that the German rescuing ship SEA-Watch 4 was just impounded in a Sicilian port; a special call was made again for nuclear disarmament and against juvenile recruitment and police brutality.

IFOR was able to participate in a general debate with the High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet and present the above issues adding a deep concern for the in the number of human rights defenders who are victims of violence, referring the latest Colombian murder cases of Mario Paciolla and Yamile Guerra.

In Vienna, in the past months, the UN Office in Vienna has been closed for public attendance and IFOR participated in a couple of online meetings of the Committee on Peace.

The main recent event, within the UN system, which needs a particular mention is the achievement, on October 24th, UN Day, of 50 ratifications to the UN Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons which will therefore enter into force on January 22nd 2021 and it will be an additional international law instrument that IFOR will use to continue to advocate for nuclear disarmament at the UN and elsewhere.

IFOR has continued to partner with NGOs at the UN and as a side result there have been several opportunities in the past months to join international public statement on particular issues related to Colombia, Western Sahara, the Korean peninsula and European Union, for instance. And IFOR participated in international initiatives as well such as:

On October 14th, the 4th anniversary of CENPAZ (National Peace Indigenous Coordination) organized by a network of Colombian NGOs very active in the peace process; IFOR was able to present its engagement for peace and reconciliation at the UN and the ongoing collaboration with local human rights defenders in different countries of the globe.

On November the 11th, the online ICAN meeting where the director Beatrice Fihn exchanged with partners and campaigners about the enter in to force of the UN nuclear ban.

Due to Covid-19 the second edition of the IFOR “UN introduction” program has been postponed to next summer, possibly.

All the mentioned statements and documentation are available on IFOR website.



By Zaira Zafarana -UN Work Coordinator and Principal Representative at UN Geneva-, with the contribution of John Kim-Principal Representative at UN NYC- and Pete Haemmerle-Principal Representative at UN Vienna

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## **IFOR project on conscientious objection to military service**

The core of the project is the country-based monitoring of the implementation of the right of conscientious objection to military service and the contribution to the reporting process with the UN system, with particular attention to the Universal Periodic Review and the Human Rights Committee.

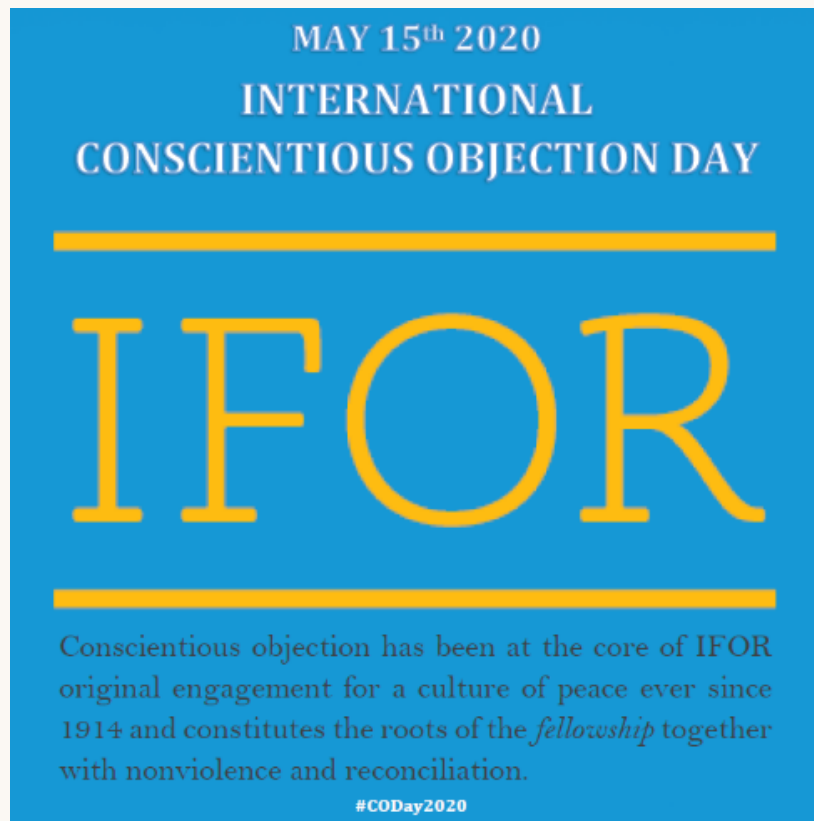
Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the States reviews at the Human Rights Committee have been postponed to next year.

In the past months IFOR has submitted reports concerning Austria, Georgia and recently about Singapore and Ukraine. Other countries, such as Finland, Israel and Germany are the object of current ongoing research.

As part of the project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, IFOR pursues opportunity at the Human Rights Council to address the right to conscientious objection and the status quo regarding its implementation worldwide.

At the last session, for instance, IFOR referred to the issue of CO several times as usual and additionally delivered a statement on the current situation of this right in Ukraine mentioning a few details and highlighted that “Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a non-derogable right and it continues to apply regardless of a situation of armed conflict.”

A specific statement on CO in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan was also delivered during the adoption of the UPR outcome.



The project is aimed also to raise awareness and strengthen international solidarity. IFOR has promoted May 15th, the International Conscientious Objection Day, with special online publications and supported War Resisters International (WRI) initiative. On June 17th IFOR participated in an online workshop organized by Service Civil International (SCI), to present to young participant form different countries, the work of IFOR on conscientious objection and its engagement at the UN. On November 21st IFOR cosponsored a webinar on CO in Turkey, organized with WRI and Connection eV.



IFOR is currently planning for next year a series of CO webinars together with WRI and QUONO.

IFOR collaborates also with the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO); on October 15th they ran together a hybrid seminar titled “Conscientious objection today, worldwide” and on November 14th IFOR participated in EBCO online General Assembly with representatives of organizations based in several countries such as Finland, Belgium, Germany, Cyprus, Turkey, Italy, France, Ukraine, Spain and Greece.

All the statements mentioned and documentation are available on IFOR website.

*By Zaira Zafarana -CO Project Manager and Principal Representative at UN Geneva.*

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## **SHORT OVERVIEW OF 30 YEARS AS REPRESENTATIVE OF IFOR TO THE UN IN GENEVA *by Michel Monod***

**April 2020**

**At the time when I leave my official function of Representative of IFOR to the UN in Geneva I like to present a short overview of my activities during those 30 years of voluntary work.**

**First I dedicated myself to the defense of conscientious objectors to military service during the sessions of the Council of Human Rights on the basis of an existing resolution. It has been adapted and improved by Rachel Brett every four years in order to keep it under the attention of governments and obtain their consensus. Now Zaira Zafarana is taking over this work. I Took part to the working group on a declaration to the Right to Peace which has been issued on 19.12.16.**

**Simultaneously I attended the sessions of the Conference of Disarmament. Since 2015 I took part to the open ended workshop to bring forward a world without nuclear weapons. The results of those debates have been transmitted to the General Assembly which decided to convene a Conference on this issue. In 2017 the Conference adopted a treaty for the abolition of nuclear weapons. I also followed the meetings organised by the institutes of strategic studies at the Maison de la Paix and mentioned the alternatives nonviolent solution to the military ones.**

**Beside this official function as Representative of IFOR I travelled to Africa and taught non-violent communication in many French speaking countries. Now I facilitate workshops on restorative circles for conflict resolution in several city quarters in Geneva. This basic work seems to me very useful to promote good living together in quarters, institutions and enterprises. I recommend this**

teaching to branches and affiliates of IFOR as a tool of reconciliation and I could send a copy of the workshop by email, to if you write to me at [mmonod@genevalink.ch](mailto:mmonod@genevalink.ch).

## Mark C. Johnson, 1947-2020

Dr. Mark Charles Johnson, 73, died of cancer on October 12, 2020, surrounded by his family at their mountain cottage in New York State. His life-long fascination with ideas, history, language, and people created diverse networks that motivated and sustained him. Mark read voraciously and wrote poetry throughout his life, was active in countless movements for peace, justice, and environmental sustainability, and loved cooking, gardening, hiking, and kayaking.

Dr. Mark Charles Johnson, 73, died of cancer on October 12, 2020, surrounded by his family at their mountain cottage in New York State. His life-long fascination with ideas, history, language, and people created diverse networks that motivated and sustained him. Mark read voraciously and wrote poetry throughout his life, was active in countless movements for peace, justice, and environmental sustainability, and loved cooking, gardening, hiking, and kayaking.

Mark Johnson served as executive director of the U.S. Fellowship of Reconciliation from 2007 to 2013, and following his retirement, he continued to stay deeply active in FOR's work nationally and internationally, including as a participant at the 2014 IFOR global council in Konstanz. He formally joined FOR in 1990, though his ties to the Fellowship went back decades earlier to his teenage years in the 1960s. He wrote, "It was Dr. Nels Ferre, a theologian and philosopher at the College of Wooster [Ohio], who first introduced me to FOR in

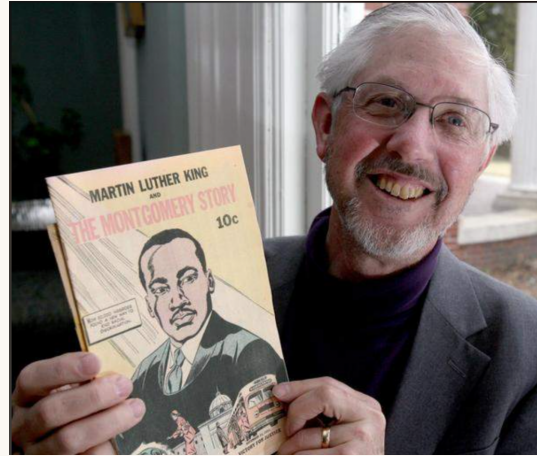


Photo credits to Ethan Vesely-Flad

"While the popular image of the YMCA is as a recreational, community resource (swim and gym), it has a long and important heritage of the work of reconciliation in the world, from the contributions of John R. Mott, Nobel Peace prize award winner, to its role in ensuring the creation of the United Nations and adoption of a universal declaration of human rights. Through the YMCA I have had the privilege of developing leadership and organizational skills as a part of my own professional competence and nurturing them in volunteers and members throughout the country and the world."

He was offered the job in January 2007, and began his tenure shortly thereafter in March, ultimately moving with Mary to Stony Point NY, close to Nyack, where FOR-USA was then headquartered. During the following six years, Mark traveled constantly and worked creatively in the midst of quickly changing times, facilitating FOR's engagement with the Occupy Movement, coordinating a massive multifaith worship service on the

1969 when he, himself a conscientious objector from World War II, counseled and supported me in my successful application as a C.O.”

Mark spent his junior undergraduate year abroad studying at the American University of Beirut. Following his graduation from Wooster - with the U.S. military occupation intensifying in Vietnam, and rooted in his C.O. opposition to the war - Mark returned to Lebanon. As a C.O., he spent the next couple years doing his alternative service as a teacher at Haigazian College.

While in Beirut, Mark met Mary Bell, beginning a half-century romance. They were married in her home town of San Jose, California, and then returned to the Middle East where they worked for the Lebanese YMCA and the University Christian Center. Meanwhile, Mark started graduate studies at the American University of Beirut. The couple moved back to the U.S. in the mid-1970s to New York City, where Mark pursued a Ph.D. in sociology at Columbia University. In the following years they began a family, welcoming three daughters, and commenced decades of service in the YMCA.

Mark and Mary initially both worked at the Silver Bay YMCA conference center on Lake George, in New York's Adirondack Mountains. After four years, they moved to Urbana, Illinois, where Mark was appointed to lead the YMCA at the University of Illinois. Five years later, they returned to Silver Bay, now with Mark serving as its executive director. Following a distinguished 12-year tenure, in 2002 Mark joined the Chicago-based national staff of the YMCA of the USA, with executive responsibilities for youth, family well-being, and many strategic partnerships.

eve of President Barack Obama's inauguration, and co-leading peace & human rights delegations to numerous countries (Iran, Colombia, Iraq, etc.). His breadth of engagement with local, national, and global initiatives and coalitions included the Alliance for Middle East Peace, Christian Peace Witness for Iraq, the Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership, Interfaith Moral Action on Climate, Eyewitness Palestine (Interfaith Peace-Builders), FOR Peace Presence, the Community of Living Traditions, and more.

Upon Mark's 2013 "retirement" from FOR, he served as founding director of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice, and devoted energy to other passions, especially climate justice, Middle East solidarity, and knowledge of the true history of the Indigenous peoples of America (influenced by his recent learning that his own heritage included Akwesasne Mohawk ancestors). Rabbi Arthur Waskow, founder of The Shalom Center and a fellow activist in those social movements, beautifully summarized Mark's life: "... He was a brave, committed, and creative activist in the struggle for justice, peace, and eco-sanity, and in the reawakening of the prophetic Spirit.”

Mark's lifelong commitment to nonviolence involved him with people and causes worldwide. He had a gift for calling others to join him. He constantly expressed hope and optimism, even when faced with cynical, daunting information, that peace, human dignity, and creation-centered wisdom will be our future. He once wrote, "At a moment of great political and societal uncertainty, when financial resources seem especially scarce or problematic, people are coming together to create new communities and forms grounded in the principles and



Throughout that quarter-century of YMCA service, Mark focused on intergenerational training and mentoring, peace-building, and environmental sustainability. He volunteered with diverse community organizations in each place he lived, including active service with Rotary Club chapters and local Chambers of Commerce.

In late 2006, Mark submitted a detailed application in response to FOR-USA's executive director job posting. In his cover letter Mark wrote compellingly,

vision of nonviolence. It seems an unlikely time for such efforts and yet I sense that it is precisely the fragile moment that evokes the greatest proof of resilience of those who believe that it is the power of love and truth that will resolve human conflict and create the beloved community.”

Mark Johnson, ¡Presente!

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## Militarism Watch

### The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: A Victory for Humanity



By *Juan Ignacio Marín*

Last Thursday, October 24th, Honduras ratified the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), with this said treaty has reached the fifty ratifications necessary for its entry into force. 90 days after Honduras ratifies the agreement, on January 22, 2021, the TPNW will enter into force and thus will become binding international law. It is undoubtedly great news that points to all the recognition that the different peace movements involved in this long process deserve.

75 years after the US government dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we can finally have a multilateral and legally binding instrument that

prohibits their use, and above all, that remembers the hundreds of thousands of Japanese who perished and those who to this day continue to suffer its catastrophic consequences.

The TPNW shows that peace activism pays off. 30 years ago it was extremely difficult to think that nuclear weapons would one day be prohibited: "Decades of activism have achieved what many believed impossible: nuclear weapons are prohibited", as mentioned by Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), an organization that received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.

As stated by António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, the launch of the TPNW means "the culmination of a worldwide movement to raise awareness about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons."

Despite the very important step that has been taken with the entry into force of the TPNW, nuclear weapons will continue to exist, and consequently their threat remains in effect. It should be remembered that none of the nuclear states (the US, Russia, China, France, Israel, India, Pakistan, the UK and North Korea) have signed the treaty.

The implementation of the TPNW contributes not only to generating moral pressure on the nuclear states. The companies that produce this type of weapon will be highly pressured to eliminate their production, while the financial entities that invest in companies that produce these weapons will be highly questioned and persecuted not only by the pacifist movements, but also by international pressure from at least fifty countries that have ratified an agreement to outlaw nuclear weapons.

It should be remembered that the TPNW commits the signatory states to never "develop, test, produce, manufacture or acquire, possess, or store nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices."

The entry into force of the TPNW shows us that the path of peace has positive results for all. Unlike an armed conflict, the success of choosing the logic of peace lies in the fact that people will never be divided between "winners and losers": On this path we all win.

Source: *Delfino*, <https://delfino.cr/2020/11/el-tratado-para-la-prohibicion-de-las-armas-nucleares-una-victoria-para-la-humanidad>

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## **Open letter to U.N. Secretary-General H. E. Mr. António Guterres and in copy to the U.N. General Assembly**

His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres  
Secretary-General



19th May 2020

*Dear Mr. Secretary-General,*

We are writing to you as International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a global movement seeking to transform, through nonviolence, the world away from endless cycles of violence towards justice, reconciliation, and lasting peace. As a concerned international NGO, accredited to the UN ECOSOC, we are writing to you to express our appreciation for your efforts dealing with the current health crisis in the world and to share some of our thoughts with you at this difficult time.

We join with you in recognizing "the fury of [COVID-19] illustrates the folly of war," and we thank you for your leadership in calling for a global ceasefire as a first step to "end the sickness of war". We are encouraged that your call has resonated with millions across the world, and gained endorsements from 70 Member States, with expressions of acceptance from parties to conflict, and non-state actors as well.

We call on all UN member States to support Your appeal, to the General Assembly and to the Security Council, and put it into practice.

The pandemic has revealed the single common vulnerability of humankind, which knows no border. We who are but one of the species on the planet earth must shun our urge for identity superiority or risk even more devastating pandemics. With this shattered illusion of separateness, humanity cannot tolerate war and violence anywhere, as it threatens health and peace for everyone everywhere. Countries are grappling internally with political, economic, racial, and social divides that exacerbate efforts to contain the virus, while inequity in the global community reveals the new depths of suffering in countries that already bear the brunt of the pain caused by climate change, hunger, economic sanctions, exploitation, and armed conflicts.

While the impact of COVID-19 on the countries where we have active members has varied, together, we affirm the urgency for a new and creative way forward that builds human security globally through health, economic justice and peace. We therefore appeal:

1. Prioritize the protection of poor and marginalized people. Economic inequality increases the impact of the pandemic and sets the stage for more devastation with the risk of even greater lethality. For instance, underinvestment in healthcare means many countries are unable to meet the simple challenge of providing personal protective equipment to those in need. Concentrated poverty means sheltering in isolation, and for women and children locked down with abusers, it promises new levels of violence, abuse, and death.
2. Protect civil liberties and human rights. Emergency legislation rushed through in many countries may serve as cover for oppressive measures and the violation of human rights. Traditionally marginalized communities are forgotten or ignored, and

vulnerable people are cut off from official support. We urge you, Mr. Secretary-General, to prioritize and support the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Michelle Bachelet to adapt the global index for human rights to ensure that it monitors abuses in a world now reshaped by COVID-19 legislation. We urge you to call on all member States for accountability.

3. Use the momentum of this global crisis to shift resources to meet human needs and create lasting peace. Weapons of war cannot defeat a virus, address climate change, nor solve any other world problem. As States pursue 'business as usual' military strategies to contain the virus and create security, the world wastes opportunities to coalesce around creative responses that match the grave nature of this crisis, like protecting the most vulnerable from harsh economic impacts and working in solidarity to ensure global health emergency preparedness. These are the kinds of creative responses that lead to lasting peace. We call for disarmament and a major reduction in military spending worldwide, starting with the abolition of all nuclear weapons. We call for the conversion of military industry to civilian production and for the end of exports of weapons to states at war or violating human rights. Humanity will thrive with equitable local community investment and the shift from funding warfare to funding healthcare and peace. We urge the United Nations to invest more capacity and financial support in nonviolent conflict transformation, mediation and Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping.

Now is the time to create a "new normal" built on a culture of peace and non-violence. We call for global bridge-building and cooperation, and global leadership encouraging increased global solidarity. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals recognize the interconnected reality of our world. With branches, groups, and affiliates in more than 40 countries, IFOR offers its support to UN agencies in achieving these goals. By highlighting the centrality of peace to a world free from poverty and inequalities, the SDGs challenge the world to put into practice a new way of thinking. Addressing the issues named above ensures that nations can create roadmaps out of COVID-19 that leave no one behind.

We wish you well and further success in your work.

Charlotte Sjöström Becker  
President of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation

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**IFOR sends a message of solidarity to FOR  
USA and to all involved in peaceful and  
creative protests**



Brunswick, Glynn County, Georgia, USA: Mural hecho por Martin Weeks

28 June 2020

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) has been following recent and still-evolving circumstances in the USA that were triggered by the death of George Floyd, and at this time sends a message of solidarity to FOR USA and to all involved in peaceful and creative protest, with our deepest condolences to George Floyd's family, friends and local community.

We were appalled, and our hearts were broken, at yet another needless act of police violence against an unarmed, African-American citizen. We are aware that this event has triggered protests in countries other than the USA, emphasising the global dimension of present demands for change.

We also view the present moment as potentially transformative, and note the proceedings to hold the police officers involved to account, as well as fundamentally alter the nature of future policing in Minneapolis and elsewhere. We highlight the statement by our branch in the USA, recognising that the current protests are "rooted in a deep desire for justice and respect for the inherent human dignity of all persons".

We commend the UN scrutiny triggered by the original action against George Floyd, as well as the killings of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, at the debate held at the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 17th June on Racially Inspired Human Rights Violations. We note the contribution by the UN human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, who remarked that Floyd's death "has become emblematic of the excessive use of disproportionate force by law enforcement – against people of African descent, against people of colour, and against indigenous peoples, and racial and ethnic minorities, in many countries across the globe".

Equally, the increase in violence against journalists in the USA over the last weeks should give us all occasion to reflect on the essential service they render. We call on UNESCO, as an international guarantor of freedom of expression, to make a statement in support of US journalists covering the protests in their country.

These themes find backing in Point 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development”), particularly 16.1, 16.a, and 16.10 respectively.

Despite present calls to de-fund and reconceive policing, IFOR is conscious of the unfolding militarisation of local and regional US police departments, and views with concern the instinct in some quarters to place entire cities under the military establishment. We wholeheartedly endorse the calls for accountability and for urgent structural and attitudinal changes in society, including around militarisation, and remind ourselves and all participants of the immense power of nonviolence in the response. In this respect, a strong legacy dating back through the civil rights movement of Dr M. L. King Jr, Ella Baker, Dorothy Cotton and Vincent Harding, among others, is available to draw on, and has indeed characterised the majority of demonstrations.

Like the rest of the world, the USA will have choices to make as the current coronavirus pandemic gives way to the “new normal”. We urge those in a position to effect change, to recognise the equal dignity and value of each human life, in order to create a nonviolent, demilitarised society based on justice and respect for human rights.

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## **ECtHR judgement on Russian CO case disregards 53 years of international human rights standards**



On the 7th of September 2020 the Grand Chamber panel of the European Court of Human Rights rejected the request to refer the case of Dyagilev v. Russia (no. 49972/16) to the Grand Chamber, thus rendering the judgement of 10 March 2020 final. In this judgement, by majority of four (4) to three (3), the European Court of Human Rights (Third Section), found that there has been no violation of article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights in the case of conscientious objector (CO) Maksim Andreyevich Dyagilev, whose application for CO status and alternative civilian service had been dismissed by a military recruitment commission, and subsequently by courts.

In this judgement, a small majority of judges found that the military recruitment commission “satisfies the prima facie requirement of independence” despite the fact that three out of seven of its members are representatives of the Ministry of Defence.

In this ECtHR judgement a slim majority disregards all other relevant international and regional human rights standards set by numerous UN and European institutions for more than half a century.

First of all, in this case the majority of ECtHR judges appear to ignore that “no court and no committee can examine a person’s conscience”, and that “in order to be recognized as a conscientious objector, a declaration setting out the individual’s motives should suffice in order to obtain the status of conscientious objector”, as European Parliament’s resolutions have repeatedly stated for over 30 years.<sup>i</sup>

Furthermore, the ECtHR disregards the fact that both the UN Human Rights Council,<sup>ii</sup> and its predecessor, the then UN Commission on Human Rights, <sup>iii</sup> have, since 1998, welcomed the fact that some States accept claims of conscientious objection as valid without inquiry. In this case, not only was Dyagilev’s claim not accepted without inquiry, but, as pointed out in the dissenting opinion of 3 judges, the “assessment was based on an overly burdensome standard of proof”.

In this judgement the ECtHR appears to ignore the international and regional human rights standards concerning any applications for conscientious objector status.

In 1967 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, decided that: “Where the decision regarding the recognition of the right of conscientious objection is taken in the first instance by an administrative authority, the decision-taking body shall be entirely separate from the military authorities and its composition shall guarantee maximum independence and impartiality.”<sup>iv</sup> [emphasis added]

Similarly, the then UN Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance, set the relevant standard as long ago as 1986: “The decision concerning their status should be made, when possible, by an impartial tribunal set up for that purpose or by a regular civilian court, with the application of all the legal safeguards provided for in international human rights instruments. There should always be a right to appeal to an independent, civilian judicial body. The decision-making body should be entirely separate from the military authorities and the conscientious objector should be granted a hearing, and be entitled to legal representation and to call relevant witnesses.”<sup>v</sup>[emphasis added] The same standards continue to be cited today by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief as the role is named now.<sup>vi</sup>

It is obvious that a military recruitment committee with any representatives of the Ministry of Defence, let alone three (3) out of seven (7) members, is not “entirely” separate from the military authorities. Furthermore, insofar it is the military members and not the civilian ones which raise questions of independence and impartiality, as it appears to be accepted by the ECtHR [see *Papavasiliakis v. Greece*, no. 66899/14], a composition which would guarantee “maximum” independence and impartiality should have been one with the minimum [i.e. zero] participation of military members.

Most importantly, in this case the ECtHR does not take into account the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee which, in 2009, urged Russia to “consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status entirely under the control of civilian authorities.”<sup>vii</sup> [emphasis added]

The OHCHR has also adopted a similar standard noting that: “Independent and impartial decision-making bodies should determine whether a conscientious objection to military service is genuinely held in a specific case. Such bodies should be placed under the full control of civilian authorities.”<sup>viii</sup>

It is worth noting that this ECtHR judgement, which appears to accept a minority of military members in the bodies examining applications for CO status, contradicts its own rationale on whether even a single member may affect the independence and impartiality of a body. For example, in the case of *Canevi and Others v. Turkey*, no. 40395/98, which is not related to conscientious objectors, the ECtHR found a violation of Article 6.1 of the European Convention of Human Rights (right to fair trial), because of the participation of a single military member in a tribunal. If even a single (1) military officer affects the impartiality and independence of a tribunal in a case which has nothing to do with the army it is absolutely clear that the same would be true when the issue at stake is directly related to the army as it involves a conscientious objector opposing the army and the military service.

In conclusion, this year’s ECtHR judgement in the *Dyagilev v. Russia* case contradicts longstanding international and regional human rights standards concerning the recognition of COs, as well as its’ own broader rationale on independence and impartiality. In any case, the ECtHR may be responsible for the European Convention for Human Rights, but its judgement does not preclude the possibility for Dyagilev himself, as well as other conscientious objectors in similar position, to seek justice at a different level, such the UN Human Rights Committee, for violation of a different treaty, the International Covenant on Civil and Politic Rights.

This ECtHR ruling, concerning a single case with specific characteristics, adopted by a majority of just one judge, and not examined by the Grand Chamber does not set a general precedent for Russia and cannot annul the growing jurisprudence on the right to conscientious objection to military service.

*Statement published on October 29th 2020 by Connection e.V., EBCO-European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, IFOR-International Fellowship Of Reconciliation, WRI-War Resisters’ International.*

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i European Parliament, Resolution on conscientious objection and alternative service, (A3-15/89), [known as Schmidbauer Resolution], as published in the Official Journal of the European Communities C291, 13 October 1989, para. A (page 123) and para. 4 (page 124). See also: European Parliament, Resolution on conscientious objection, (1-546/82), [known as Macciocchi Resolution], 7 February 1983, as published in the Official Journal of the European Communities C 68, 14 March 1983, para. 3 (page 15).

ii UN Human Rights Council, Resolution 24/17 (A/HRC/RES/24/17), 8 October 2013, para. 7. Available at <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/24/17>.

iii UN Commission on Human Rights, Resolution 1998/77, Conscientious objection to military service, 22 April 1998, (E/CN.4/RES/1998/77), para. 2.

iv Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 337 (1967), Right of conscientious objection, para. b2.



v Report submitted by Mr. Angelo Vidal d Almeida Ribeiro, Special Rapporteur appointed in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1986/20 of 10 March 1986 (E/CN.4/1992/52), 18 December 1991, para. 185. <http://undocs.org/E/CN.4/1992/52>.

vi Rapporteur's Digest on Freedom of Religion or Belief, p. 45.

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf>. vii UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the Russian Federation, (CCPR/C/RUS/CO/6), 24 November 2009, para. 23. Available at <http://undocs.org/CCPR/C/RUS/CO/6>.

viii OHCHR, Approaches and challenges with regard to application procedures for obtaining the status of conscientious objector to military service in accordance with human rights standards, 24 May 2019, para. 60, (g). Available at: <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/23>.

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## Statement on the Current Situation in Western Sahara



Foto: Dominique Faget/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Today, on November 13th 2020, several media outlets have reported that the Moroccan army launched an operation near the border crossing at Guerguerat against a group of Saharawi protesters.<sup>1</sup> The representatives of the Saharawi people had previously stated that any such Moroccan action would be considered an aggression to which they would respond, and that this would mean the end of the ceasefire agreement between the parties.<sup>2</sup> While early reports are still unclear, the developments today represent a clear threat of an outbreak of a new war.

In 1991, the United Nations and the international community made a promise to the Saharawi people that a referendum would be organized, and that they freely and fairly

would get to decide their own fate. 30 years later, that promise remains unfulfilled. Today's events demonstrate that a continued status quo and continued inaction is not sustainable and not acceptable.

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) was founded over 100 years ago in response to the horrors of the First World War. Since then, IFOR has taken a consistent stance against war and its preparation. When people and organizations commit themselves to action, war and conflicts can be prevented and transformed through nonviolent means.

Such action is urgent and well overdue. The UN needs to take concrete steps to deescalate the current situation and demonstrate a serious commitment to renewed negotiations. IFOR welcomes any efforts by the UN to immediately seek an end to the current military escalation. These efforts must be intensified. Further, IFOR calls upon the UN Secretary-General António Guterres to without delay appoint a new UN Personal Envoy for Western Sahara to demonstrate that continued status quo is not acceptable. The position has been vacant for 18 months. With the vacancy, the main avenue for non-violent engagement between the parties is closed and the peace process is at a standstill. The immediate appointment of a new Personal Envoy is the very least that the UN can do to signal to those desiring a non-violent resolution to the conflict that such a path is still possible. The consequence of continued stalling has been made clear today.

IFOR also calls on the governments in the region and around the world to contribute to a peaceful solution of the Western Sahara conflict and the implementation of the fundamental rights of the people living on those territories. The UN Member States must act in accordance with the UN Charter<sup>3</sup> and demonstrate that continued military escalation is unacceptable. The outbreak of a new war in the region would constitute a grave risk for people's lives and livelihoods. The Covid-19 Pandemic has put severe strains on an already difficult situation and would further complicate any humanitarian and other relief efforts that would follow a war. It is imperative that this is avoided and that a credible path to a peaceful resolution is established.

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1 For example, Al-Jazeera. Morocco troops launch operation in Western Sahara border zone. Retrieved November 13, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/13/morocco-launches-operation-in-western-sahara-border-zone>

2 Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic Ministry of Information. Press Release November 9, 2020.

3 In particular, Article 1 of the UN Charter: "The purposes of the UN is to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace".

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