



# Reconciled

*IFOR's Newsletter*

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October 2019

Dear friends,

We trust this finds you well. We are writing to you as individual members of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). In recent times, you may not have heard from us much. Over the last months, although our branches, groups and affiliates (BGAs) have continued their work in their respective lands and the Secretariat has continued to function, capacities have been challenged. Our most recent International Coordinator, Lucas Johnson from the USA, stepped down from his role prior to our last international Council that took place in Sicily last November. We, the International Committee (ICOM; the 'board' of IFOR), now seek to re-engage with you.

In Sicily, the current ICOM was elected. Our President is Lotta Sjöström Becker, also General Secretary of SweFOR (IFOR's Swedish branch). The other ICOM members come from Colombia, France, India, South Sudan, the UK and Zambia. IFOR is operating without an International Coordinator at present, however as a movement we maintain a part-time staffing structure at our HQ in Utrecht and carry on work at four UN HQ's.

We wish to share with you some updates that our BGAs have sent into us over recent months and that we have put together in the format of a bulletin. In this edition you will principally find news from our European-based branches, as well as from our affiliate in Pakistan, STAR. We intend to continue to put together these newsletters, as a means of informing you of activities going on around our Fellowship.

It is worth reminding ourselves that IFOR itself is 100 years old this year, the first meeting of national branches having taken place at Bildhoven in the Netherlands in 1919. Likewise, SweFOR is celebrating its own centenary throughout this year, their principal celebration coming up this month. ICOM has also sought to reach out beyond our immediate circles, issuing and sharing statements this year upon learning of the mosque attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, and against churches and hotels on Easter Day in Sri Lanka. On a happier note, we have reached out with a message of welcome to the new Co-Presidents of Pax Christi International, Sr. Teresia Wamuyu Wachira and Bishop Marc Stenger. IFOR members were also present at the War Resisters' International conference in Bogotá, Colombia, in July.

We ask for your comprehension as we ourselves learn about and re-engage with all the different aspects of IFOR life, including yourselves. If you have any news or points of view that you would like to share with us, we would be delighted to hear from you, and publish it if appropriate. Please also feel free to simply introduce yourselves to us, and let us know how we might be of service to you.

As the world takes some concerning turns (the climate crisis, disillusionment with politics leading to fresh expressions of populism, new fronts for militarism, etc.), we are convinced that the patient, day-to-day work of IFOR, its BGAs and its members, as well as its spiritual insights, are of continued, vital importance. We thank you for your moral and material support, and we look forward to building on the last 100 years of work together!

Peace and all good,

Blas García Noriega (blas.garcia@ifor.org) and  
Peter Cousins (peter.cousins@ifor.org).  
Co-Vice Presidents,

*On behalf of ICOM and the Secretariat.*



*Dr. K.P. Pothen*

*President of FOR India*

Whose funeral took place in July at Indore, Madhu's Pranesh, India. We send condolences to all his family and friends.

RIP.

## Updates from BGA's

### **MIR ITALY**

#### **#DoNotKill 5th don't kill, 7th don't steal**

*June 12th 2019*

Ion Stavila, a young man of 24 years old, was killed in Pavone Canavese, near Ivrea, while stealing at night from a cigarette machine outside the tobacconist's shop. The tobacconist fired at the three who were carrying out the robbery, hitting one of them fatally with a gun. The fact pains everyone and makes us think. One human person has lost his life, another torments himself thinking

Therefore, we deplore the logic, supported and spread by certain political parties and certain media, of an always legitimate defense, by any means. This logic leads to a diminution of the sense of compassion, empathy and humanity. In order to prevent other similar tragedies, it is necessary to reaffirm, above and beyond any instrumental propaganda, that life is an inestimable and unavailable good, that it is worth more than any material good. It is necessary to carry out a work of education on human rights, legality and nonviolence, which is the

about what he has done. We are close in pain to the families of both.

When a tragedy happens it is said: "that at least it serves as a lesson so that it doesn't happen again!" What can we do to ensure that no one is killed anymore? What to do so that no one is robbed anymore? The law of God and the law of men condemn murder and theft. These are clear moral points. Just as it is clear that human life is worth more than material goods. Therefore the fifth commandment comes before the seventh. It is legitimate to defend one's own goods, but not at the cost of suppressing a human life, not even that of those who steal.

method for achieving a less violent, less frightening, more just and more peaceful society.

As non-violent persons and organisations, we do not in any way approve of the death penalty; we also consider immoral, and a source of other tragedies, the justification for the use of weapons and their spread among the civilian population. The security of citizens is the task of democratic institutions and cannot be left to private initiative.

MIR Ivrea local group and Ivrea Gandhi Center

## #Nonviolence on Air



The vice-president of MIR Italy and the IFOR Main Representative at the United Nations in Geneva participated in early April in a radio interview about IFOR and MIR Italy and its main area of work, included conscientious objection. Read more at <http://www.ifor.org/news/2019/6/4/the-vice-president-of-mir-italy-and-the-ifor-main-representative-at-the-united-nations-in-geneva-participated-in-an-italian-interview>.

[representative-at-the-united-nations-in-geneva-participated-in-an-italian-interview](http://www.ifor.org/news/2019/6/4/the-vice-president-of-mir-italy-and-the-ifor-main-representative-at-the-united-nations-in-geneva-participated-in-an-italian-interview).

## #Nuclear Ban



MIR Italy is part of the national campaign to support the UN Treaty to ban nuclear weapons and in particular to ask Italy to sign it. The campaign #ItaliaRipensaci (Italy, reconsider it) is led by [Rete Disarmo](#), an Italian network which gathers organizations working for disarmament, such as MIR Italy.

As part of the several initiatives and local networks engaged in this campaign, on May 18th a Circle of

Silence has been organized in downtown Torino and a public appeal has been published to ask to the candidates to the European Parliament to support the nuclear ban and make Europe with no nukes and eventually the world with no nukes.



## #Culture of Peace

With the favourable vote of 36 deputies out of 36 voters, on June 12th, the Sicilian Regional Assembly approved the law for the "Culture of Peace in Sicily", following the example of the other Italian regions. The law deals with the promotion of human rights, the culture of peace and cooperation, the commitment against racism and all forms of discrimination, and it established

October 2nd as the Peace and Nonviolence day in Sicily. The bill of law has been supported by MIR Italy, through its local group, together with other 40 organizations.



## #Standing with Refugees

MIR Italy adhered on June 19th to the [Appeal "Registration of asylum seekers"](#), promoted by the Association of Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI), ActionAid Italy and the Mayors of the City of Crema, the City of Syracuse and the City of Palermo.

The Appeal is addressed to all the Mayors of Italy to sign a commitment to register asylum seekers in the civil registers, even after the entry into force of the so-called security and immigration decree (Law 132/18). The objective is to promote access to essential rights such as the right to education, health, social benefits, for asylum seekers in Italian cities.

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## FOR Austria – Activities since Council (some highlights)

### Successful BGA Cooperation

In April 2019, FOR Austria issued its latest edition of its magazine, Spinnrad ("Spinning Wheel"), on the topic of Reconciliation. You can find contributions from various IFOR members in it, including PDF Africa (Uganda), FOR Zimbabwe, Michel Monod from IFOR-MIR Switzerland, FOR Zambia, Organization for Nonviolence and Development (SONAD South Sudan) and FOR India. Unfortunately, the magazine is in German language, but we are thinking of making the articles available in their original versions (English or French) in an electronic version, too. This was a good example of cooperation among IFOR members in our view, without a lot of extra effort, and we want to thank all those who participated with their contributions.

### Celebrating Active Nonviolence

A special occasion coming up will be an international symposium "Active Nonviolence" from September 27-29, 2019, organized by the Peace City of Linz in cooperation with IFOR Austria and about 20 other peace and nonviolence organizations from Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The symposium will remember the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi (October 2 – also the International UN Day of Nonviolence), and – as many IFOR members are among the speakers – also the 100th anniversary of the official founding of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation at a conference in Bilthoven (Netherlands) in October 1919. The topics of the conference will include a (video) presentation by Cristina Zerr and Pete Hämmerle on the work of Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, talks about Gandhi,

## Peace Efforts in the Middle East

One of FOR Austria's international fields of work (besides Colombia, Western Balkans and Turkey) is the Middle East, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We are part of the National Coordination in Austria for the WCC-EAPPI program, the World Council of Churches' initiative "Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel" (<https://eappi.org/en>). Under this program a continuous presence of 25-30 Ecumenical Accompaniers (EA's) on the ground is provided, serving for three months in accompanying and offering protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitoring and reporting human rights abuses and joining Palestinians and Israelis who work in nonviolent ways for peace.

At the moment there are three EA's from Austria on the ground, which is the highest number from Austria we ever had, one of them a young member of FOR Austria. After their return we will organise a speaking tour for them to reach out to the public with their witness of what they experienced during their stay in the 'Holy Land'.

nonviolence and resistance, civilian peacekeeping and civil disobedience, as well as a training on nonviolent action (by friends of Kurve Wustrow/Germany) and an exhibition on M.Gandhi of the Anti-War Museum Berlin. (German speaking) guests from all over the world are welcome; you can find more information on the symposium website: <http://www.gandhi-symposium.info/>

## Peace Policies in Europe

For the EU elections at end of May, FOR Austria (along with more than 100 organisations, among them several other European IFOR branches) joined the campaign "Save the European peace project!"

(<https://www.forumzfd.de/en/savethepeaceprojecteu>) and sent letters with eight questions on peace issues to the Austrian candidates for the European Parliament. We received answers from six political parties (all except "Freedom Party", who were busy with some other problems you might have heard about in recent weeks), which can be read on our website as well. We want to follow up with those candidates who have been elected to the EP, as well as start a similar campaign for Civil Peace Services in Austria for the upcoming national elections in September (sooner than expected).

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## FOR England and Scotland

*(taken from 'Peacelinks', Summer 2019)*

### Pathways to Peace

Members of FoR, Anglican Peace Fellowship, Baptist Peace Fellowship, Methodist Peace Fellowship and United Reformed Church Peace Fellowship came together for our annual conference at Hinsley Hall, Leeds from 8-10 March. The diverse programme had something for everyone. Hope in Troubled Times was a seminar featuring Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University and Janet Fenton, a Quaker feminist

internationalist who participated in the negotiations at the UN for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Paul identified three drivers for conflict:

- Security: rectifying problems by handing them to the military, to put the lid on (lidism).
- Climate Change
- Global Economy.

To turn round our situation, changes could mean more control of financial systems and taxes, and a move to a mixed economy. We need more political will to use better technologies to stave off the threat of worse climate events. And we should rethink security: it does not simply mean defence. See [www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk](http://www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk).

Janet Fenton talked about the UN Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (also known as the ban treaty). It had been signed despite the efforts of the Nuclear Weapons States. The treaty addresses the shortcomings of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Some non-nuclear states who signed the treaty have already ratified it and more are committed to doing so. So the treaty could enter into force by the NPT Review conference in 2020.

Both Paul and Jane gave examples of how quickly positive change had previously come about, such as the 1952 Great Smog of London that led to clean air acts, and the 1915 founding of WILPF in response to the First World War. Methodist Rev. Dan Woodhouse described how he and Sam Walton had been acquitted of causing criminal damage at an aircraft factory. The magistrate could see that they were convinced that they felt they had no choice but to take action but ruled this did not make a legal precedent.

Peace is a Global Public Good was the title of a talk by Fabian Hamilton MP, shadow minister for peace and disarmament, his role since October 2016. He had been the only UK establishment person to attend the first conference in New York on the prohibition of nuclear weapons treaty, which he hopes his party would sign if they get into government.

Labour propose a Peace Doctrine that brings together some of the resources of externally facing government departments - the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department for International Development, the Department for [International] Trade, and the British Council - that will overhaul how the UK responds to conflict, and work with institutions in civil society. It would be an open consultative doctrine, not owned by the Labour party.

Other workshops at the event included 'Civil Courage' led by Oliver Robertson and 'Engaging with the Media' by Philip Austin.

## **Witness at Westminster Abbey**

On Friday 3 May more than 150 Christians from across the country came together for a witness for peace outside Westminster Abbey. Inside, Prince William was among those attending a National Service of Thanksgiving for 50 years of British nuclear weapons being at sea, described by the Royal Navy as a 'celebration'. FoR was one of the groups supporting the event, organised by Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).



Over 200 Anglican clergy had signed Christian CND's statement and more than 1000 people signed a petition to the Dean of Westminster, calling for the service to be cancelled. Although the service went ahead, the mainstream Christian view was expressed outside, nuclear weapons are nothing to be thankful for. There

were Bible readings, prayers and contributions from a range of denominations.

Nearby, CND held a die-in. Around 500 people were there. The act of witness was covered by television news, newspapers and radio, and several clergy gave interviews.

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## Annual German National Assembly

150 years of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

(31 May – 02 June 2019)

*By Anneke Lübbling & Samya Korff*

150 years of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. 150 years of a person whose philosophy of nonviolence has shaped an entire subcontinent, even the entire world, and still does so today. Or not? Is Gandhi still relevant today? What can we take away from his message? How does he influence humanity today, in a world differing so much from the one 150 years ago? With these questions in mind, the annual conference of the German FOR 2019 started. Taking place in Duderstadt, a small town in Lower Saxony, the conference hosted 230 participants coming from all parts of the country as well as guests from Switzerland and all the way from India, the country at the center of this year's main topic.

The first day started with a dive into the content, when Swati Desai, an environmental activist in Gujarat, India, gave a talk about whether Gandhi should be seen only as a historical relic or as a motivator for a sustainable future. Prof. Dr. Gregor Lang-Wojtasik, who is deeply connected to India, added the critical question whether the underlying reason for Gandhi's recognition worldwide is based on an idealistic idea more than just the quest for change. He also shared the importance of seeing Gandhi not as a perfect being, a god or guru, but as a human being with edges and flaws. Someone who failed again and again, but who continued his battles, internally and externally.

The conference went on with quite some inspirational input, providing food for thought for everyone. Thirteen workgroups addressed different aspects of Gandhi's philosophy and life, including Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a close friend of Gandhi who is also called 'the Muslim Gandhi', Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, Gandhi's intercultural roots and the meaning of his nonviolent activism for today's world.





A variety of discussion fora also took place. Traditionally these discussion fora also give room for the general working groups of the FOR Germany, to meet and work together. This year with Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence in mind, the participants were able to get insights into the theology of peace, the Indian subcontinent, conflicts in the Near and Middle East, nonviolent communication,

sustainability, gender equality and many more. Apart from the content-related offers, there was also a lot of space to connect to and motivate each other, discuss and learn from one another. Children could take part in playing activities, every morning could be started with spiritual devotion and one evening was prepared to be an Indian celebration. One outstanding highlight of the conference was the concert of the Maharaj Trio, accompanied by a special guest. The Maharaj Trio has played for millions of people at the biggest celebration of Hinduism in India. Listening to them playing just for the participants of the conference in Duderstadt was an extraordinary experience.

After four fulfilling and inspiring days the participants made their way back home, taking with them new friendships, ideas and especially new hope for a better, less violent world.

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## STAR Annual Report 2018

### Education Support 2018

Last year in 2018 we have provided education support to 80 children throughout whole year - March 2018 till Feb. 2019. We provided books, copies, uniform, school fees and other charges like paper fund etc. We got good results this year - all children who are getting education support have passed their final annual exams and were promoted into next classes.



STAR arranges free education summer camp for the children who cannot afford tuition, provides them stationery for their summer vacation work, and two hours daily June-Aug every year. Last year STAR arranged two summer camps in different areas, Ibn-e-Mariam Colony and Barkatpura. 118 children were in Ibn-e-Mariam colony and 86 Children in Barkatpura who got the education support in STAR

Free Education Summer Camp 2018. Very thankful to our friends who supported STAR to organize.

*STAR wants equality for all without any kind of discrimination on color, cast, sex and religion.*

We have organized workshops, seminars with youth; school teachers on the topic promote gender equality for development and peace because peace is not possible without gender equality. STAR wants everyone to have equal rights to life and enjoyment on earth.

STAR arranged teacher training, workshops, and different kind of competitions - art, singing, poster making and speeches to promote inter-faith and peace culture in society for unity, better development and human respect. STAR has good and strong networking with different NGOs, schools and groups, to build good relations and promote unity and organized joint activities like an awareness program in the community.

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## **IFOR UN WORK**

As discussed at IFOR Council and communicated by ICOM in the March 2019 letter, efforts have been put in place to structure the coordination of IFOR UN work and we are working on this assignment.

The main purpose is to coordinate the different efforts IFOR carries on at UN and harmonize the work among all the different sites.

The first step pursued has been to get a clear understanding of the UN work status quo and then to strengthen the team work of UN reps.

On March 21st 2019 the first meeting of all UN reps took place by zoom; all reps were present except those working at UNESCO who couldn't join.

The main purpose for the first direct exchange has been the introduction of all reps and welcoming the two new ones, Sherly and Chrissy (USA). Each rep had the opportunity to briefly introduce the current work at each UN site. It was

IFOR UN reps act on behalf of the fellowship and therefore are to follow up on those issues of IFOR most interest. An example is the increase of initiatives on migration which took place in Geneva since the topic has been raised in the 2018 EuFOR meeting and since the planning of the IFOR International Conference on migration "On the move".

IFOR UN reps collaborate in the creation and strengthening of relations with other actors of the civil society. The facilitation of mutual collaboration between UN reps and BGAs stands at the core of the work of coordination.

The "Introduction to UN" program in Geneva had the aim to provide IFOR members with the opportunity to come and experience, then to go back and share, thus enhancing a two-way collaboration.

An up to date communication which can provide BGAs with the possibility to actually engage at UN has been set as a priority.

Often IFOR UN reps receive communications and invites from NGOs

highlighted that IFOR brings a particular point of view (also at the UN) fostering nonviolence.

Following this first collective zoom meeting, individual calls with reps started to occur in order to detail on-going work, personal availability, and interest and suggestions for work development - one of these is about the proposal for simultaneous initiatives on the Right to Peace to be held in Geneva and New York this upcoming autumn.

interested to partner with IFOR. These contacts are always reported to IFOR leadership, and whenever appropriate info is shared among BGAs. This has been the case for Freedom United which is campaigning against human trafficking and therefore collaborations on the ground are suitable and can be of interest for IFOR BGAs. <https://www.freedomunited.org/advocate/>

The current coordination work is focused on strengthening internal communication, drafting UN guidelines and implementing a reporting procedure.

*Zaira Zafarana*  
*IFOR UN Coordinator*  
*zaira.zafarana@ifor.org*

*Editors' note: The following is a taste of the work undertaken across the UN HQs. For reasons of space, it has not been possible to include everything here.*

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## **News from Geneva**

Human Rights Council ([HRC](#))

IFOR participates in the regular meeting of the NGOs committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief; IFOR is part of a Geneva NGOs supporting group on Western Sahara.

40th Regular Session 25 February 2019 to 22 March 2019

IFOR delivered several oral statements such as on children in armed conflict, Eritrea, Western Sahara.

IFOR organized also the side event "Child Soldiers, 17 years after Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict-OPAC" [see picture attached] with as speakers: Mr. Daniel Mekonnen -Director of the Eritrean Law Society (ELS) & Visiting Fellow at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights- on the case of Eritrea, Mr. Ezequiel Heffes -Legal adviser at Geneva Call- on non-state actors and child protection, Ms. Charlotte Cooper - UK Research and Campaign Officer at Child Soldiers International- on juvenile recruitment in the UK.

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## **Human Rights Committee - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([CCPR](#))**

- 125th Session 04 Mar 2019 - 29 Mar 2019

Consideration of Angola situation and its State Reports; IFOR has made a written submission on the local current situation with particular focus on conscientious objection (c.o.) aspects.

Consideration of Eritrea situation in the absence of a State report; IFOR follows up on this country where there is also a compulsory lifelong military service.

- 126th Session 01-26 July 2019

Consideration of Tajikistan situation and its State Reports; IFOR assisted local activists in briefing the Committee on the current situation with particular focus on c.o. aspects.

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## News from New York

In early May, the UN HQ hosted the third session of the Preparatory Committee meeting for the 2020 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. John Kim, the IFOR Main representative in NY, worked with Ms. Whang of PSPD, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, a large NGO from South Korea, on a joint statement on Korea. The title of the statement was "End the Korean War and Move towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free NE Asia." It was delivered to the participants of the meeting by Ms. Whang on May 1, as part of the NGO statements to the conference. Our [statement](#) was endorsed by 40 civil society groups from around the world.

John also participated as a panelist in the NGO workshop on the topic of "Peace and Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula," which was organized by PSPD on May 6. About 30 people attended the workshop.

*John Kim*

*Main Rep in New York*

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## News from Vienna

In March IFOR attended to the meeting of the NGO Committee on Peace. Mr. Valère Mantels, Head of the Vienna Office of UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, gave a presentation on "Disarmament - state of affairs and the future of disarmament education", which was followed by a discussion. Four members of FOR Austria attended the meeting because in the business meeting, after the presentation, Margot Hruby, our colleague, presented some short videos of her project "Art goes for Peace" (they are in German, and can be watched on FOR Austria website: <http://www.versoehnungsbund.at/art-goes-for-peace/>).

*Pete Hämmerle*

*Main rep in Vienna*

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**Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze  
Remembered**

*By Volker Grotefeld*





The year 2019 sees quite a number of IFOR anniversaries, like the official founding of IFOR and a number of its branches in October 1919. But there is another anniversary: one of the men whose handshake on 4th August, 1914, in Cologne, started IFOR, died 50 years ago. Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze was born 14th June, 1885 and died

on 11th July, 1969 in the city of Soest.

The German FOR remembered this pioneer of peace-, social- and ecumenical work with a conference in Soest. Participants at the conference included some people who had met Siegmund-Schultze. One was a deaconess who was a close friend of one of his daughters and could give some information on his private life while other lectures reported about his work. In addition, a German-language exhibition was on display showing photos and many important documents.

Besides getting to know Siegmund-Schultze better, the participants deeply discussed the question of what actions Siegmund-Schultze would have taken today, where he would have spent his tremendous energy. They came to the conclusion while the ecumenical work is quite established (with all its problems), the question of war/peace (e.g. working against the militarisation of European community) and social justice, as well as the integration/acceptance of refugees in our society, would see him active.

The conference closed with a visit to his graveside and to the church in which the funeral service for Prof. Siegmund-Schultze was held 50 years ago.

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## Conferences and meetings

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### **Nonviolence Conference in Bogotá**

Based on a text by Matt Meyer (FOR-USA).

Prior to the War Resisters' International Conference, a weekend seminar took place, organised by two continental peace and nonviolence networks: Servicio Paz y Justicia America Latina (SERPAJ) and the Pan African Nonviolence and Peace-building Network (PANPEN). Both groups wanted to share best practices of unarmed civil resistance, safety

planning in the context of repression and state violence, and capacity-building. With logistical and moral support from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and financial support from SweFOR, and assistance from War Resisters' International and the International Peace Research Association, panels were held on: the history of nonviolence in both regions; Decolonization, Revolution and Nonviolence; Solidarity Strategies for the 21st Century, and case study contexts from Western Sahara, West Papua, Ambazonia, Chile, Central America, Haiti, Chile, Puerto Rico, Colombia including the Afro-Colombian city of Buenaventura, and South Sudan. Participants also attended from Argentina, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK and the USA.

More on this, hopefully, in the next issue!

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## Looking back at the CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION: #OnTheMove

«A new conversation about migrants, led by migrants themselves»



In November 2018 the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), together with its Italian branch (MIR Italia), invited members, activists and interested fellow humans from over 40 different countries to join a «New Conversation about Migration» in Catania, Sicily. The conference, held on the weekend before the international Council of IFOR, had the primary objective of creating an open

platform to talk with migrants, rather than simply talk about migration itself.

Therefore, the panels organized were focused primarily on the issues concerning migration causes, the individual experience of the journey and strategies of hospitality and interaction. Zaira Zafarana, IFOR UN Representative and member of MIR Italia, energetically coordinated and moderated the conference. The Conference conversations and contributions were simultaneously interpreted into English, Italian, French or Spanish to include as many participants as possible. By establishing a new way to converse and think about migration, the participants of the conference sought to develop a broader and more diverse perspective on the topic; to overcome the Eurocentric perspective often dominating the discourse on migration and integration politics in Europe.

Since the starting of the conference “migration” has been identified as a wider subject including different elements to be addressed. Many participants were puzzled yet intrigued by the diversity of migration patterns. For instance, most migrants worldwide are involved in internal migration within their region, moving to other cities or to

neighboring countries. An idea that differs from the everyday understanding of South-North-immigration enforced by media. Throughout the conference 14 representatives openly shared their very personal and emotional experiences regarding their endeavors, as well as the life they left behind in their home country, often describing hopeless and painful pictures of degrading living-conditions.

Listening to these painful testimonies, hearing about the injustice and the inhumanity described, participants showed empathy, felt the disappointment about conditions lived and many were supremely moved. Nevertheless, the united efforts and strong will of people from all over the world, ambitiously advocating for peace, non-violence and solidarity, created a hopeful, energetic and confident atmosphere.

One noteworthy issue, among the already many compelling stories, was the alerting gap between the theoretical idea of human rights and their practical implementation. The experiences shared by the participating refugees and migrants demonstrated circumstances where their rights are not substantially protected and respected; instead the trend moves towards criminalizing migrants while people and organizations remain helping them.

Father Zerai, from the Habeshia Agency declared once again that: "The rights of the weak are not weak rights. The rights of the poor should not be poor rights." Abdelfetah Mohammed an intercultural mediator migrated from Eritrea to Sicily gave a brief insight into his own story:

*"I was moving from place to place for 11 years, which was not planned at all. I did not come straight to Italy. I moved when the violence became too dangerous ... war is always waged against the people, therefore, living in conflict areas becomes unbearable. Most of the people flee within the region, since they hope to go back home as soon as the violence is over. No one wants to be a refugee."*

Another speaker was Junior Nzita Nsuami. He is a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of Congo, founder of the organization "Paix pour les Enfants", and a goodwill ambassador for the UN campaign #enfantpassoldat. He has published an autobiography about his childhood experiences and because of death threats in DRC, Junior got asylum in Canada. Junior stated that children pay with their lives and lose their childhood while the European and US-American arms industry is profiting from wars fought in Africa and from child soldiers' practice. He insisted that there is no positive war and that the only way to fight is in a non-violent and peaceful manner. Then, he concluded his speech with a forceful and urgent appeal towards the audience:

*"The children pay the price of the weapons that Europe produces. I am African, but I would like to speak as a citizen of the world today. [...] I urge you in Europe and in the USA: Stop with the gun production! You should know that in Africa we don't have factories to produce weapons, they are all in Europe and the United States. Your factories will enrich themselves and your gross domestic product will rise. There are more than 300.000 child soldiers in the world - It's enough! Nonviolence and education are the only ways for our world."*

During the Conference it became clear that the central problems connected to migration are war, global injustice and human rights violations, all brightly debated by the audience throughout the conference. The current situation in Europe was often criticized and the European Union's credibility called into question, one crucial example



being that although the EU declares respect for Human Rights and their promulgation as one of its core values, the political practice often is in contrast. The island of Sicily, where the conference took place, is a vivid example of these practices: FRONTEX, the agency for the "protection" of the European external borders, is based in Sicily. The restrictive European policy endangers migrants, asylum-seekers

and refugees who are thus risking their lives in reaching out for help. It's time to begin rethinking the entire concept of borders and belongingness in the Mediterranean; a more distinctive vision was proposed by Runbir Serkepiani from the "Christian Peacemaker Teams" in Greece:

*"[The Mediterranean Sea] is militarized. We need to remember that the Mediterranean is a sea that is connecting hundreds of cultures, and languages, and people, all having a connected history. What's happening is injustice and what's happening needs to change. Mediterranean is not "Mare Nostrum" it's "Mare Liberum" - it's the "Sea of Liberty" and we need to remember that."*

One of the biggest lessons drawn from the Conference on Migration was to dissolve the Eurocentric perspective on migration, as well as the racist and post-colonial structures influencing the modes the issue has been discussed. Therefore, we should be listening to refugees and come together and talk with migrants as with people within sources like #OnTheMove in order to find appropriate and adequate solutions.

A thriving example of solidarity and integration was presented by Roberta Ferruti from ReCoSol - Rete dei Comuni Solidali (Network of Solidary Communities). She spoke about Riace where the Italian community took in and integrated refugees that stranded at their shore in 2003. Today the model is replicated in over 40 Italian communities and inspired projects in seven other European countries. Although Riace lost financial assistance by the government and faces financial and political difficulties the community fights for the project's persistence. In this light, Ferruti insists that solidarity can never be a crime and advocates for civil resistance and if necessary civil disobedience to preserve human rights and human dignity.

During the two days Conference, there was a dinner shared at Misericordia Mosque, which gave way for encounters and interactions between participants to the conference and the local Muslim community of Catania. The Conference concluded with an inspiring and exciting concert, where participants, together with other locals, enjoyed the rhythmic beats of the migrant's bands Jhonny's Family Project and Ciuda and were dancing until late in the night.

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**Summer party with a glimpse of life as**



# a refugee

Games, music, tarte flambée and reflection: The 2019 summer party of the Swiss Mennonite (Anabaptist) Youth Commission featured special story telling: About 60 French and German speaking youth listened to Abdelfetah Mohamed's story and his perspective on what gives meaning to his life. Abdelfetah lives in Sicily now where he assists with welcoming refugees. He himself has an incredible journey as a refugee: born to Eritrean refugee parents in Sudan, he became a refugee himself as a teenager after he had returned to Eritrea with his parents. He spent years in Libya and elsewhere, hoping to move on to a safe place where he could lead a life as a responsible person.



I had met Abdelfetah at the 2019 IFOR "Introduction to UN" program in Geneva and was immediately struck by his story and his sense of responsibility. Abdelfetah says he realized he needs to take responsibility as a person wherever he is, that life is a gift not to be spoiled. [Abdelfetah has been previously involved, together with its organization Africa Unita, in the organization of IFOR International Conference on migration "On the move" which took place in Catania, Sicily on November 2nd and 3rd 2018.]

The message passed in spite of the language barrier - Abdelfetah

spoke Italian which was translated into French consecutively and into German simultaneously-. These young Swiss people grew up in relative safety and they have many options for schooling, career and leisure. They are aware that their life is entirely different from that of millions of refugees yet they are not far away from the dire situations of thousands of people in need. One participant said: "This was a scope wider than usual". And a young woman found that they do need to hear such stories.

*By Hansuli Gerber,  
FOR Switzerland*

# Communique from the European Region of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation

28 April 2019

At the meeting of the European branches and affiliates of the Fellowship of Reconciliation from April 26th to 28th in Birmingham, delegates from 8 countries identified challenges and opportunities for working together for peace in Europe. The meeting included a speaker from the recent Extinction Rebellion non-violent campaign in London and a vigil for peace beside a 10m 'Knife Angel' outside the internationally famous Coventry Cathedral.

The delegates recognised, in light of upcoming European elections, it is of utmost importance to remember the original purpose of the European Union to bring about peaceful coexistence. The recent disregard for human rights and the unwillingness to react to the current climate emergency endangers these achievements.

The delegates reaffirmed their belief that the climate crisis is urgently threatening world peace. Global warming will destroy the environment and lead to wars over resources. People are losing their livelihoods and becoming climate refugees.

Delegates shared concern about the increasing militarization of the European Union. They condemn the way European countries profit from ongoing wars all over the world by producing and exporting weapons. They believe that the European Union should promote peace in the world by investing in development projects, by intensifying efforts towards diplomacy and by promoting and investing in nonviolent conflict transformation and human rights. As these issues need strong advocates not only within civil society but also on a political level. Individuals and relevant IFOR branches in the European region are urged to question their local candidates for the European parliament on their peace policies and vote accordingly.

Two keynote discussions shaped proceedings. The first was concerning that right to be a conscientious objector. This was given by Derek Brett, IFOR representative to the UN in Geneva. He told the conference, "Since we oppose military intervention as a solution to conflict, we strongly support people's right to refuse military service. Even in European countries there are challenges to conscientious objection that need to be monitored and overcome." The meeting agreed all branches should keep a particular watch on the situation in Greece.

The second keynote talk was given by a guest to the gathering, Father Martin Newell, a Passionist Priest from Birmingham. He talked about his recent experiences as part of the non-violent 'Extinction Rebellion' movement in London. Central to his input were stories highlighting that faith actors were welcomed within the wider environment and non-violent movement.

Delegates travelled to Coventry to hold a special vigil for peace. They stood alongside the iconic Knife Angel, made up of over 100,000 blades, installed outside the Cathedral then had time for conversation and personal prayer and reflection in the ecumenical chapel attached to the Cathedral.



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