



# **Small Actions - Big Movements: The continuum of non-violence**



**War Resisters' International  
Conference  
4 - 8 July 2014, Cape Town, City Hall**

**Plenary session discussions**

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## Introduction – Goedgedacht Forum

The Goedgedacht Forum was founded at the end of the apartheid era to promote reconciliation and to help develop a humane, peaceful and democratic society in South Africa. As time has passed and our democracy is evolving, the focus of our events has shifted to promoting active citizenship and accountable government through dialogue. We believe that this is an important and vital part of creating a vibrant and healthy democracy.

## Introduction to the conference

This international conference is organised by War Resisters' International (WRI) and is the first major WRI conference to be held on the African Continent. The WRI has been involved in many aspects of the continent's anti-colonial and anti-war movements during its 93-year existence. WRI sees all forms of violence as interconnected – from domestic and street violence through to multi-national military interventions. WRI believes that countering violence requires full understanding of the continuum and necessitates social solidarity and sharing of non-violent strategies and tactics across the globe.

Partners in organising this conference include: the Ceasefire Campaign, Embrace Dignity, Action Support Network, Economists Allied for Arms Reduction, the Goedgedacht Forum and WRI's Africa Support Network

## Overall themes emerging from the plenary sessions

### DAY ONE – 5 JULY 2014

#### The continuum of violence

#### Opening statements

#### **Bernedette Muthien (South Africa)**

This is one of few spaces that honours the local/indigenous people who were originally here – the Khoi and San. One in every five people [across the world] is from these matrilineal societies. How we view things and think, our very being, impacts on our actions and what we want to achieve. We are not one-dimensional static lines. Nothing is as simple as that. Matrilineal societies have developed complex organisational structures over many generations. Where we hierarchize one over another the separation becomes violent in itself. Within each of us is everything, including violence. We need to embrace everything within

ourselves. We make assumptions which we project on to people and this becomes a form of violence.

In Namibia, the Germans were so organised as to require a permit to hunt animals as well as humans. Colonialists chopped off heads and breasts and used [the breasts] as tobacco pouches. When we talk of the horrors of apartheid and slavery we all have so much stuff to deal with in regard to the degradations suffered by people. The evil perpetuated was extraordinary. But how does one heal with communities if we haven't done enough work in ourselves? The critical issues are mind-set and consciousness. [Steve] Biko said the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind. The way in which we look at things impacts on how we do the work we do. Everything is in us including extraordinary violence.

## **Zenzile Khoisan (South Africa)**

I feel I'm much younger than I was many years ago! I investigated cases for the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] - trying to find an outcome to translate into society. I was one of those people dodging bullets outside this building as a 13-year-old in 1976. I [have now] returned to the garden of my idealism - the safest space I can be as a human being. Go and find your essence. My essence is located in my indigeneity, but to locate that I have to deal with contesting narratives. We live in the most violent society. It has lost the plot because it has forgotten that in order to deal with the problem of transition you won't reach the core until you deal with the translational problem. There was near evisceration of its indigenous people. Cape Town became the city it is today by force - people had to die. Even our motto is wrong. 'Unity in our confusion' is the real meaning of our motto. That's why our soccer team can't get it right; [they have] too many languages. We can't win; we have lost the plot. We must return to the gardener to deal with our woundedness. People have not come to terms with the issue of woundedness. Martin Luther King said: "I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality." We have to address foundational violence which is found all over. In Brazil, for example, there is intense violence against the indigenous peoples and we are destroying the Amazon. Now, though, a soccer ball is more important than dealing with original violence. It's the same in many other countries - the US, Canada, Australia and Asia.

## Questions and discussion

### ***How does violence impact on current conflicts?***

**Response (ZK):** The story of how we got to where we are is a dangerous and precarious narrative. People in the peace movement refuse to drill down because the narrative is too close to home. What part of the

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narrative do I take? People want to stand apart and locate their struggle in one area. When it reaches our own story we begin to put up a screen. We come to the table with different suitcases and when we open them, there's a lot on the floor. The notion that we have distance from each other in an international movement is wrong. We must collectively own the narrative but in a way that is honest. For example, if I am a South African I must bring my indigenous narrative to the table at an international level.

We say we are going to divert from militarisation to assist people but R30million is devoted to militarisation in South Africa even though we have no enemies at the door. What is the cultural make-up of the decision maker? They loot the treasury and rob the poor – that is violence against the poor. We must detect, unpack and expose potentially dangerous mercenary ideologies that will distract us from the pathway of finding our true humanity.

We have been working with young men and women at risk and taken them through a process where they remove the gold they wear [which symbolises present-day cultural influences] and take on their indigenous beads. I was beaten into the anti-apartheid struggle by seeing my parents being shot at. Gentleness is not contrived – it needs to be more accepting and less judgemental.

**Response (BM):** The most important thing is not to chop things off into small bits like mincemeat. When we separate, we chop our heads and hearts from our genitals. It's butchery. Part of the healing that I have had to do has been around uniting the forced cleavages. We had to find a way of healing and transitioning, marrying cleaved off bits and pieces. We are a three-dimensional spiral – with no beginning and end. There are actions I have to practice every day to remind myself and find compassion for the perpetrators in everyone, including myself.

**Response (ZK):** When I was processing for the TRC I had all these cases. I was going to mortuaries continually. This line from the Pablo Neruda poem kept me alive. "There is no clear light, no clear shadow, in remembering".

**Participant:** This was very moving. People find that they really struggle as immigrants in the US. There are times it feels like the land is toxic – literally in some places. The basis of what one sees there is criminal. Money is based on slavery. People travel and see symbols. [It is] slowly creeping through the country killing people. There is toxicity in being an immigrant in a place where there were millions of indigenous people and now there is no trace. People don't know how to deal with the guilt of being an outsider – do they blame themselves?

**Participant:** Some participants come from southern Africa and these issues are not just for South Africa. In Angola in the 60s and 80s the San were used as human shields. No one will talk about it. International organisations should extend a hand to Namibia and Angola. We attend international indigenous peoples meetings.

**Participant:** Thank you for raising the issue of how our past controls our minds. The doctor injected me with drugs to steal my babies. It is so horrific. Women are at their most vulnerable in the labour room and they inflict that kind of violence in the labour room.

**Response (ZK):** Toni Morrison captures this eloquently in *Beloved*. We must be aware of ancestral memory – be conscious that where we walk there is a story we haven't heard. Unearth the hidden narrative and celebrate and return the story in a dignified way. Societies refuse to deal with the need to drill down to the deeper narrative.

The indigenous movement in the SADC must be a broad front, not located in one country.

**Response (BM):** At an International meeting last week I saw San people from Zimbabwe who we thought had been eradicated – it was an exciting discovery. We return to the womb and take back our knowledge and practices, ways of being and thinking. In South Africa we have a huge proliferation of all sorts of cancers. People are dying like flies – it's the emotional violence because the society doesn't change from the decolonisation violence. We need to change to more gentle ways of being.

## DAY 2 – 6 JULY 2014

### Reflections

#### **Sophie Schellens (The Netherlands)**

Through what we did yesterday, I would like to borrow a word from Bernedette – “consciousness”. I want to reflect on my consciousness of the day. Bernedette talked about peace and that we have to be conscious that peace is a process that we should not take for granted. Zenzile talked about idealism and foundational violence, and addressing the woundedness of such violence.

There was very big consciousness in the women’s meeting held over lunch. We were conscious of the gender dynamics in the room. We need broader inclusion and exclusion. [We need to understand] who is talking and who is being silent and ask the silent to talk – it is a safe space. [If we look at] developing sustainable goals at the UN level; it’s very difficult to be conscious at the UN. Countries should be conscious of their power in these negotiations and civil society voices must be heard there. I got conscious about my lack of knowledge about non-violent action. We need to be conscious of the great opportunity to meet and connect here.

#### **Miles Tanhira (Zimbabwe)**

We are at different levels of consciousness in our deliberations. We need to be respectful of others and mindful of the language we use – explain technical language and ensure everyone is at the same level. There are excellent discussions around how war affects disenfranchised groups – e.g. capitalism affecting women. Language usage is very important; using words like “sex work” versus “prostitution” make a difference. Whatever we call it is has an impact on the lives of women. Are we not being violent and confrontational in our language? We must be mindful of the people in the group. We must organise nonviolently. We should continue questioning things.

### The continuum of nonviolence – beyond regime change Opening statements

#### **Janet Cherry (South Africa)**

*[Ms Cherry started her presentation by asking if anyone in the audience knew the image on her T shirt. One participant did.]*

It’s a T-shirt from Yugoslavia from Tito’s partisans. It shows a partisan who was hanged; it’s a photo of his execution. For me it’s an image of

defiance. He has no weapons. It's something I found while working in Serbia which raised questions for me of warfare and violence, and the efficiency of nonviolence in bringing about change. My family are from Scotland and Ireland, and I have worked with people in many struggles who are interlinked with our colonial struggles. Both my grandfathers fought and survived the First World War. The struggle for the liberation of Palestine has become part of my life, partly due to my grandfather's [involvement] in Palestine after the war. I grew up with a father teaching me an abhorrence of war and seeing the First World War as a terrible tragedy.

Regarding going beyond nonviolence to regime change: I have been involved in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Guinea, Egypt. The lesson has been that the power lies with ordinary people and civil society is essential for a just and equitable outcome. We have been struggling for years in these countries. Authoritarian African leaders leave power usually through the following: death, military coup or succumbing to nonviolent action (e.g. election). In [some countries] like Guinea, the leader does die and there is a coup with great violence and it takes more years before a top-down political solution is imposed. Despite all our frustrations there has often not been a decisive democratic moment. Regime change is often just the beginning of the struggle and the beginning of the empowerment of civil society to bring about the change that is needed.

My recent focus is climate change which should be the trigger for global nonviolent action.

### **Yash Tandon (Uganda)**

All liberation is self-liberation. All development is self-development. All development is resistance. All aid is corruption. No one from the outside can bring liberation. They can support but the agenda must be yours. It's a difficult, complex process. It's so easy to think you can bring change through violence. It's an illusion. Guerrilla fighters think they brought liberation but the real fight was by the people here - the youngsters who defied the bullets. Britain and America think they will bring change - these are illusions. War manifests itself in many different forms. I recently travelled in six African countries to persuade governments not to sign economic partnership agreements with Europe. The EU [European Union] is forcing this on Africa and, if you sign, it's an act of war. Many people don't know about it - especially Europeans. They know about Ukraine but not Africa. The first regime change in Uganda was at independence. I was involved in the struggle. It took a long time to get regime change but the British only left physically - their structures stayed.

I've been coming to South Africa for 30 years. Nothing structurally has changed. Buildings are still owned by Old Mutual and others. You can have regime change at the top but no real change at the bottom. In Uganda there were five regime changes. We dissolved the guerrilla army to raise the consciousness of people to liberate themselves. Africa is becoming the

proxy ground for other people's wars. Uganda is now fighting a war on behalf of the US. They had no business sending troops to Somalia. The war on terror is not our war.

## Questions and discussion

### ***What are some of the factors that can enhance the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of civil society?***

**Response (JC):** Change brought about through nonviolence and civil society is more likely to be enduring.

Don't undervalue basic human rights and democracy – they are the basis from which civil society can strengthen. In South Sudan the military is still effectively in power, so it could easily revert to violence due to the weakness of civil society.

Civil society is people organising themselves. The reclaiming of space allows civil society to grow.

**Response (YT):** Civil society is not homogenous. There are antagonistic contradictions between people on the ground. Civil society from the outside has no business. Human rights are a contested terrain. There is a responsibility to protect. Outsiders have taken the responsibility to protect us in Africa – they don't have that right. We will re-join the ICC [International Criminal Court] after the US Congress ratify it and they evict [Tony] Blair.

### ***What is liberation and what does it mean to be a liberated individual/community? What can we do to empower the youth to engineer their own liberation?***

**Response (YT):** There are three kinds of young people: 10% are collaborators who participate in the violence because they want jobs; 80% are simply surviving – they are adaptors, and there is no time to reflect, that's a luxury; and 10% are resisters – they resist the system. In South Africa there are people challenging the system. Now they must mobilise the other 90%.

**Response (JC):** The youth need to build an alternative society - something positive. For example, I believe that Israeli youth will make the difference. They have a different vision and that's the key to that context.

**Participant:** Regarding the creation of the ICC: even Tutu is supportive of this. How can the world deal with criminals in these countries without it? Leaders are being arrested in Sudan by the ICC. The UN [United Nations] is not doing anything for Sudan and the people don't have anything.

**Participant:** Africa being used as a proxy of other people's wars speaks volumes. People are seeing the detrimental effects on the lives of gay and lesbians in Uganda. What is civil society doing about that? Civil society is often polarised around issues; for example, in Zimbabwe. Organisations need common goals.

**Participant:** International friends must research before offering solidarity. The struggles are different [by region]. International groups need to know if the organisations they support are people driven, because at grassroots you have to hear what the people are saying. People are pushing the agendas of the organisation leaders - not necessarily the agendas of the people.

People who are in the surviving group also need self-determination and self-liberation. How do people take the antagonistic parts and tie them together? Self-deliberation has to be centred.

**Response (YT):** The ICC issue is complicated. All knowledge is experiential. I will not challenge peoples' experiences. In Uganda, the regime uses the ICC to detrimental effect. Politicians use [the] ICC for their own reasons. I am in favour of creating our own structures. If you go with the ICC it is sometimes an admission of your own failures at home e.g. the lack of your judicial system. The ICC is not a long-term solution. Rwanda created its own court, handling it internally. This is an amazing feat. You can't bring justice through criminalisation. You need self-reliant structures. Do not surrender your rights.

**Response (JC):** International solidarity movements have to understand what is going on, on the ground. People do look for organisations that claim to represent the people but what if they aren't [representing them]? Who do you choose to work with? It requires sensitive judgement. Change will come from below but it is difficult if civil society is deeply polarised.

**Participant:** One participant said he cringes when he hears the words "civil society" as it weakens us. It is important to name who we are talking about and who the agents are.

**Participant:** Violence does sometimes bring change – for example, in Cuba – but mostly it doesn't.

External violence brings change (in Arab countries, for example), but not good change.

**Participant:** What does this meeting mean by “civil society”? Often it is people who want access to power; when they get it nothing changes. Poverty is the real issue. Referring to Yash's three categories of young people: collaborators don't want to suffer and have no need to resist, resisters want access, adapters do it out of fear.

Why is the WRI not more visible in other African countries?

**Response (JC):** Civil society is a space within which people do things collectively. It's not trying to get state power. It is frustrating in South Africa – there is very little using space to build alternatives. In most cases violence leads to the destruction of civil society and the maintenance of a militarised society.

**Response (YT):** Batista's Cuba was violent. When Castro came on the scene the country was breaking from within. Revolution dislodged the system. [It was a] rotten, collapsing society. His own people betrayed him. There are limits to nonviolence. In Zimbabwe the most marginalised were women – who walked miles for water and maize grinding. Young women took on the challenge of a male-dominated society. All experience is existential.

There is the Pan African Network for Non Violence – created by the WRI in 2012 – to expand the work of the WRI.

## DAY 3 – 7 JULY 2014

### Reflections

#### **George Alain Ah-Vee (Mauritius)**

I have been an activist for 30 years. We are trying to keep Creole alive in my country. It is banned everywhere but 90% of the population speaks Creole. I am also an internationalist – I was in Palestine. The plenary was rich, animated and passionate. With a large number of activists, it is natural that it is passionate. There were many descriptions on liberation, the power of ordinary people, the limits of civil society and confusion around terminology. There were also discussions on youth – [asking the question] should there be special groups? I am impressed by the WRI – they are experienced but young people. The notion of youth is also not clear cut. When you put a date on your age, people speaking to you decide how to deal with you.

The debate in the plenary sharpened our ideas on common ideals and how we get there. We are developing a common understanding – without it it's difficult to move forward. The WRI has existed for 93 years – this is rare for an activist organisation. What are the factors that make it live so long? We should applaud the organisers and the nurturing structure of the organisation.

There was passionate debate on the notion of economic alternatives in the workshops. We thought about land control, reform, food security, women's rights. We attacked the arms industry. If you are building tanks you are not going to make peace – it's to make war – so we have to attack the arms industry.

We also talked about consciousness and I believe it lies in memory – the collective memory of a better world. Language tells the story. Marikana, for example, is a starting point for stories from below.

Small actions are a good way to start but we need to be more conscious and more precise in analysing the situation to have a strategy to come out of the situation.

#### **Jungmin Choi (South Korea)**

There was a workshop [yesterday] on women in global movements. We came together to discuss obstacles. I was pleased about the consensus in concerns and problems. I see similarities and [these] empower. We drew pictures of our childhoods to see gender imbalances. Inequality and violence is closely linked to our daily lives and patriarchy. It's important to capture these issues. Militarism is also about the system and patriarchy. We need to analyse to create a better world. We need to recognise the

power and privilege in the world, recognise over-aggressive behaviours, and create safe spaces.

## Non-violence defence of livelihood and corporate militarism

### Opening statements

#### **Lexys Rendon (Venezuela)**

Latin America currently has governments covering the whole ideological spectrum; all the models, however, include intense militarisation. I would like to clarify 'extractivism'. This is about organising the economy of a country around the extraction of natural resources; single-crop farming and high extraction of value commodities that are destined to be exported. The current expansion of extractivism happened regardless of government ideology. It strengthened the role of the state. National states and companies are important stakeholders in extractivism in the region. Seven of 10 of the largest companies carry out these activities and five are state owned. They represent the major exports of the largest companies in the region.

Militarism was inherited from the Cold War and the role of the US in the region. Increasing militarism is related to maintenance of the flow of capital. Militarisation is part of the model – there is no large-scale mining without it. Extractivism requires the militarisation of resource-rich territories. A physical military presence is needed to safeguard business and claim it is in the national interest. In every country human rights are violated especially the rights of indigenous communities who have no say in the exploitation of their lands. Big budgets are allocated to defending the country. In Venezuela the military received the fourth highest percentage of the budget - seven times the budget of the Department of Environment and 106 times the indigenous people's budget. This model is same in all Latin American countries. We need to understand that militarisation is not a military base somewhere but a military vision – it makes an enemy of anyone not in agreement with the government. This has led to the criminalisation of protest. Many social movements have campaigned against this. The governments then criminalise these campaigns to silence resistant voices against extractivism. These policies have led to the implementation of anti-terrorist clauses in many countries – if you oppose you are tried as a terrorist. In Bolivia in 2011, four people died in protest against a road project crossing indigenous territory. In Venezuela there is ongoing struggle against expansion into indigenous territories.

## **Anand Mazgaonkar (India)**

Thank you for helping us to forge this Venezuela - India alliance. The most striking thing is that the story of Venezuela is the story of India and of many other places. It's a conflict between cultures – a violent assault of one culture on another, the assault of the oil economy on [the] soil economy, of Western lifestyles versus the Third World. Many of our natural resources are [in areas] inhabited by indigenous people and indigenous lifestyles. Traditional communities used to surviving on resources by sharing are now forced to pay for them. This pay-and-use culture is alien to traditional culture. There is changing language but an unchanging reality just a change in nomenclature – we see it in every World Bank document – but reality is unchanging. It's a cover up and repackaging. It is the universalization of middle-class norms and lifestyles, hopes and aspirations – killing the diversity that exists and pitting people against each other. The Third World is oriented to serve the First World. The role of government is changing.

We are now establishing learning communities – which are engaged in struggles of survival -equipping and training and trying to empower them. In India we tried to build alliances between farm workers, fisher people and indigenous people - those who work with their hands, with sweat and blood. We have tried to form alliances through the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements. It has had limited efficacy but we are using the law to get to the negotiating table, engaging with decision makers. Sometimes [you] have to make compromises but its part of the change process. In India there is now [a] law that guarantees minimum employment and right to information. There are still many obstacles but this is a big gain. There are also land rights for indigenous people – the Forest Rights Act. The Colonial Land Act - a 120-year old law - has now been amended to ask for people's consent to give away lands: 70 to 80% must agree. But we are always up against the *status quo*. It is claimed that movements that oppose damage the GDP. The charge is they are anti-national.

### Questions and discussion

**Participant:** The world needs a new development model not based on extraction of natural resources and killing mother earth. The world cannot advocate for freedom and justice for the people while we are killing their mother.

How do we define extractivism? There is no difference between it and the origins of colonialism in Latin America and any history of capitalist development in the world. It is a concern that a non-ideological frame of analysis puts different things in the same category across the world. Non-ideological non-historical analysis may miss the path forward.

**Participant:** Extractivism is based on obtaining development and explains how cities go from very poor to having infrastructure. It means taking everything based on farms and fields, and emptying indigenous areas. Making cities look modern.

We live in a patriarchal, hierarchical society which is highly dependent on oil extraction. What strategies have you found to be successful to help women engage in claiming their rights? How do you support women to stand up for land rights?

**Response (AM):** Development means displacement, dispossession, dehumanisation and death. More and more violence is used in the name of development. It is seen as a holy cow - a new religion. Every 'ism' seems to limit you to something. Left and right-wing governments are doing the same things.

Yes, we live in a society where women don't even see their own land. We have brought them back to their own land. These are symbolic programmes - they accept the land as their mother. We also take women to mixed-gender programmes. It is not just a fight against profit but a process of political and social change. Men won't give up their power easily.

**Response (LR):** This is not the place to speak about whether revolution has brought good to Venezuela. I advocate for a change in the model. Extractivism has a lot to do with colonialism. But I want to emphasise how the government is protecting this industry. They are bringing people out of villages to live in a different way somewhere else.

We are trying to go with women who have asked for support. In the last 14 years many things have changed. They want to come out and show what is happening. You need allies to say that's enough, that's it. Some have e-mail and internet. Silence is on the side of the powerful. We need networks. It is slow. We need time.

## DAY 4 – 8 JULY 2014

### Reflections

#### **Kanya D’Almedia (Sri Lanka)**

*Presented as the lyrics to a song*

We need to build a society based on eco feminism, control the arms controllers and stand against capitalism.

No one should be imprisoned for fighting a good fight.

We must end the war on drugs and start rehabilitation.

We must end police brutality.

We must trap criminal leaders in the ICC including Bush and Blair.

We need to stop talking about Arab extremism and talk about US expansionism.

We need to channel the masses, teach children real history, return all the stolen land and ease one another’s pain.

We must stop selling guns and stop putting bandages on wounds that are still bleeding.

Maybe then we will have freedom.

#### **Andrew Dey (UK)**

It’s a challenge to reflect on four days. I will therefore focus on one thing that really made an impression on me. I heard a story of local resistance to a US Naval base in South Korea. The villagers blockade the gates 10 times a day to stop the concrete going in. It’s a commitment. In the UK, where I am from, it’s a challenge to make actions happen – activism is seen as a choice, a hobby, that you choose instead of another hobby. Activism could be seen for some as a privilege, . We don’t see the damage. We don’t see things as a war zone – until we see this, activism will be a choice. Seeing the violence that your state is causing and the violence done in your name compels you to act. Otherwise there is [a] disconnect. This is what I’ll take from this conference.

### Education/peace building

#### Opening statements

#### **Moses Monday John (South Sudan)**

I am very grateful to be part of this discussion. Peace building is all of our concern. It is not new [to us] as practitioners and researchers but we might have different understanding and interpretations because of our backgrounds and experiences which influence our understanding. Africa

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is rich with various experiences including peace building. What is new is the *imposition of* peace building. This does not take into consideration existing understanding and how it is perceived locally. Peace building must be adapted to local needs – economic and cultural. No one size fits all. We say ‘African solutions to African problems’. But is this slogan practical? Do we own the agenda in Africa? Even in the African Union the peace and security unit is rich but we invest very little in sustaining governance. We need to look into values, cultures, norms and traditions. We have to understand the way we do things and inform the agenda. In Europe there are people who suffer. My picture of Europe changes – it’s all about social justice. I have to understand that community to address their needs. Even in one country in Africa cultures differ. In South Sudan beating a wife may be an expression of love. We need to convince people it is violent and look at other ways to express love.

Peace building is critical and must address structural violence. People keep questioning if peace building is an end or a means to an end. We still see a huge gap between rich and poor – what is peace building doing to change this? Our agenda will not make sense if people don’t see change. Do we reflect on different techniques – for example, dialogue, sport, arts? Do we know what works and why it doesn’t work? We have to be flexible and adaptable. Many researchers have written about it. We need to understand whether our agenda still holds. Different peace actors must reflect so that it is updated from time to time. Civil society organisations have a critical role to play, as do all stakeholders – including regional and international peace networks, and sub-regional bodies. You can’t move without addressing issues of policy and peace, but are efforts co-ordinated or do we end up competing against one another? Whose peace are we trying to build? For peace building to be meaningful, we must understand context. In most cases this is not the case. It is important to understand and research – researchers can help local findings and inform change.

### **Kesia-Onam Akpene Yawo (Ghana)**

There is a story of a woman who had a very hungry child. She went to the market and bought bread and mango seeds. She knew that as the mango grew all the children in the village would benefit. Nurse it and it will grow – and give shade to generations to come. Peace building is creative at every level. It’s a process that you follow. Africa is a continent of paradoxes – rich and poverty, national security and insecurity, development that generates under development, foreign aid that makes the people vulnerable. In 2009 Obama came to Ghana which expected a box of goodies. He said that Africa’s future is up to Africans. This is not new but African solutions to our problems can only be found in African unity – divided we are weak. African can become one of the greatest forces in the world. The trademarks of our continent though are- lack of development; long-term leaders/dynasties; lack of free, fair and credible elections; instability; gender inequality; corruption; disease; poverty; human right violations; and, food insecurity. At [the] end of the Cold War leaders did

triage – they saw Africa as a battlefield and divided it into those likely to live, those likely to die regardless of care, those for whom immediate care might make a positive difference. They classified African like that and gave attention accordingly.

Why can't governments be privatised? Is democracy is a good solution – if so, what type? Peace building must address peace at several levels. In West Africa we question the protocol of governance. We must have people in [the] region in the discussions. How do you monitor and develop data relevant to the region? Why don't we have peace education in school curricula?

## Questions and discussions

**Participant:** One participant pointed out that when he hears 'peace building' he looks around for conflict. Can we find another classification? The connection between peace building and conflict is too close.

**Participant:** The world must address all the problems affecting African societies. Democracy is the tool we need. If I have a choice between different systems, I will choose democracy. It's not a Western tool. African societies had democracy first – it came from Africa. Free speech is not a Western product. People in villages attacked chiefs who were abusing power. The West learned this from Africa.

**Participant:** There is a tendency in conferences like these to get bogged down by problems. What about a civil movement to unite Africa? It could organise a march throughout Africa discussing and learning from African solutions. Would this resonate with African people? All humans are living in a world where they need protection.

**Response (KY):** Conflict is death. In peace building, activities are carried out that allow you to be proactive. Peace building is dynamic – it's going on – you can't see it. To many people, conflict means violence and death. In their minds it is death. Peace building is a process, an activity that allows you to be proactive. Your response determines whether conflict is negative.

When we are able to unite we see solution to problems. Networking is very important. The powers that be can't do anything when they see you are a strong movement – that you know your agenda and have strategies.

**Participant:** Peace building does not end with a word. No term is an imposition from elsewhere. Humans are responsible to make peace work by any means applicable.

**Participant:** Peace is needed in the Horn of Africa. The world needs to find a common solution for proxy wars – where Africans are used to fight each other for resolution of a wider issue. Organisations need to think about continent-wide professional civil society associations. So that when conflicts break out representatives all talk from a respected professional circle not retreat into nationalities.

**Participant:** Peace building is what we do in communities. We talk to people to solve problems. We are currently training young men to be present in families in South Africa – their absence is having consequences in society. We address this by training. So I am building peace. Peace building is about solving past, present and future problems. We shouldn't only see the monkey who eats the fruit.

**Participant:** I hope the comment about privatising governments was sarcastic! What if Monsanto gets hold of government?

**Participant:** The speakers say problems in Africa are familiar but, if they are, why are there not clear solutions that are equally familiar, why is history going round in circles? If organisations consider themselves peace builders they need to address the models of government before us – they are designed to serve the needs and advantages of those in power who devise the models. We had structures that worked. We have to question whether democracy is valid. Leaders change the electoral system to remain in power – and election results are validated by the international community. Why do activists not struggle against the people who are devising the models? Why do people put up with these puppet governments?

**Participant:** It is important that participants understand what the contribution of civil society can be. Armed conflicts and intervention are not always successful and not always taking into account the needs on the ground. The human rights system isn't working. In Africa Constitutions have been tailor made to serve the leaders not the people. These can be revamped as well as the legal and justice systems.

**Participant:** Africa is confused. Who is confusing Africa?

**Participant:** We are mostly based on looking for raw materials. The plunder of Africa goes on. Organisations have to name and shame the war profiteers. The world needs an institution like the ICC. So they can be brought before the court. Democracy is not an invention of the West. The West did everything to prevent the development of democracy in the DRC.

**Response (MMJ):** In these proxy wars we end up fighting ourselves as Africans. Who is fighting these wars? The youth. They are magnets for civil wars. Mostly politicians develop agendas and make the youth implement them. Youth are, in most cases, vulnerable. Politicians won't send youth to school because they may become critical and say no. It's high time to invest in education. Education can set us free. One of the groups we work the most with is youth. We are bringing the concept of peace to school level. There is often peace at school but tension at home. In one case children told other children about a planned attack on their village. The parents came and talked instead. The youth stopped the violence. They will make a difference if they are prepared. Let us be conscious of ourselves and try to analyse.

**Participant:** There are different models of governance. It's around the concept of rule. People don't want to be ruled; they want to be governed. People have to influence the governance. Poverty is the next war (after education). Humans have to own our positions.

**Response (KY):** If leaders in Africa can reduce their capacity for evil we will have a starting point. We have indigenous mechanisms. Which model of democracy should we have in Africa? You are being used to fight a war that isn't yours. You are either for us or against us. Organisations like ECOWAS [the Economic Community of West African States] and SADC [the Southern African Development Community] must include civil society organisations. ECOWAS has an early warning system: they monitor for months before elections. We know the problems. When our leaders loot our profits where do they send them? Naming and shaming is part of the solution. You can say 'no' to a proposal that is not your agenda. Governance must start from us; we should be democratic and accountable ourselves. Otherwise we become more vulnerable.

**END**