



Friends Peace Teams PeaceWays

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Volume 3 Issue 2

Living through Trauma; Working Towards Joy



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Friends Peace Teams

Friends Peace Teams (FPT) is a Spirit-led organization working around the world to develop long-term relationships with communities in conflict to create programs for peacebuilding, healing and reconciliation. FPT's programs build on extensive Quaker experience combining practical and spiritual aspects of conflict resolution.

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By Sharon Hoover

From the Editor

The essays in this PeaceWays are like peace work itself: multifaceted and challenging in each particular time and location and with each of the individuals involved.

Although volunteers often want to jump right into programs to help the traumatized people they meet, they find that they must take the time and commitment to learn something of the facts that situate international war and poverty. War and poverty involve national and international policies, including those of the United States. In addition, it is necessary to understand that war and poverty benefit particular segments of a population, both national and international, while they dehumanize others. Two of the articles in this PeaceWays particularly address such facts, which may help us better to understand peace work. You will also want to be alert for similar issues woven throughout all the articles.

We must also realize that the greatest outcome of war and poverty is the destruction of human relationships and its related trauma. The articles throughout the issue present these ruptures in multiple ways: death, terror, anger, displacement . . . affecting all aspects of the daily lives of those who are traumatized and those who perpetrate terror.

What is the nature of this trauma? How does it show itself? How do we relate to it? What tools do we have or need to develop to help people work their way through trauma so that they may live in greater contentment? Two articles particularly speak to those questions, which volunteers find especially perplexing as they seek to answer them.

Friends Peace Teams work not only to seek to understand the issues of war and peace and the pain people suffer and how to bring them to joy, but also to make certain that leadership is developed in all the areas where they work. There are stories in this issue written about or by people who have suffered trauma and who are now becoming leaders and trainers in their communities.

Finally, in this issue, we see one of the greatest rewards of working with Alternatives to Violence Project and those for Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities – the joy that people find as they renew their lives. It is amazing to experience the transformation in people as the work shifts back and forth between deep, empathetic listening and relieving humor. Laughter itself is one of the victims of prison, torture, and war. To see it again in the faces of former enemies who are now becoming friends is truly to experience joy.

May you feel the joy in your soul, too. ■

Cover Picture

Alternatives to Violence Project workshop exercise, Mrs. Mumbly. See story, page 12.

What Is Trauma?

“Trauma” is one of those words we bandy about without thinking too much about what it means or how it affects people. In particular, I mean traumatic stress, a set of physiological, mental, and emotional responses to a horrible event or a series of them. I don’t know much about trauma, but trauma healing is a big part of the work that Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) does, so I am trying to learn the basics. My sense is that we should all be a little more aware of trauma, whether our concern is with returning Iraq War vets, domestic violence, the aftermath of earthquakes and tsunamis, or countries emerging from conflict, like Burundi.

What people in the United States now classify as “Post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) is a concept that has evolved over time from the notion of “hysteria” in the late 19th century that focused on women, to “shell-shock” during WWI, then reaching its present form following the Vietnam War. PTSD can happen to both victims and perpetrators of violence.

According to Judith Herman, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School and author of *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, there are three main symptoms of PTSD.

- The first is being in a constant state of hyperarousal, a nonstop fight-or-flight response that continues long after the threat is gone.
- The second is recurring intrusive thoughts and dreams that are so intense the person feels as though they are actually re-living the event.
- The third symptom is “constriction,” a sort of paralysis of the mind in which the individual avoids thoughts, experiences, and situations that could evoke the intrusive memory. Constriction can lead people to become numb to all emotions and experiences. Self-medication with alcohol and other drugs by people affected by PTSD may be an attempt to benumb their way out of their feelings of helplessness and terror.

Interestingly, these symptoms can lead people either to avoid situations similar to their traumatic experience or to seek them out.

Finally, PTSD dramatically affects people’s ability to function within the family and society since it inhibits their ability to make plans for the future and violates their basic sense of self-worth. Victims often blame themselves and feel guilty. Traumatic experiences can throw into doubt our notion of basic trust and belief in the nature of the community and world as fundamentally safe and positive.

The good news is that recovery from trauma is possible. Our three-day HROC trainings help people to understand traumatic stress and to deal with it. Following Herman, the trainings move through a three-stage process that includes re-establishing a basic sense of trust, giving space for remembrance and mourning, and reconnecting the traumatized with his or her self and with others in the community.

For example, my coworker Adrien returned from a HROC workshop last week in Rurengera in which a number of people had very moving experiences. One commented (in Kirundi):

These teachings have helped me so much because all that I had lost had made me unable to care about the world. I could not undertake any activity that would require effort from me for I felt that all was futile. Since the war took away my dear loved ones, I decided to get drunk every single day. It is painful, I tell you! It is after participating in this workshop that I have stopped this bad behavior because I understand what was wrong with me. I promise you that I am going back to work instead. ■

Andrew Peterson, a graduate of Haverford College, and most recently the Grants Manager for Friends Committee on National Legislation, is in Burundi with AGLI for one or more years to work with those in the HROC program and the Friends Women’s Association on how to write, secure, and implement grants.



Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities in Rurengera

A Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshop took place in May in Rurengera. Located in central Burundi, Rurengera is in Mutaho commune. The particularity of the workshop was that participants were next-door neighbors from one community mixed with IDP (internally displaced people) camp residents who normally come from that same community but are now staying in Mutaho IDP camp. Twenty-one participants attended, although only 20 were invited. They were 10 men and 11 women. Five facilitators (Joseph, Sebastien, Dorcas, Pascasie, and Eraste) conducted the workshop.

On day one, it was obvious that participants did not want to express themselves much, and some could not even smile or laugh. As the workshop went on, they started to fear each other less and their faces were brighter.

When we entered into the “Loss, Grief, and Mourning” session, tough matters came to the surface. We need to remember that all the participants knew each other because they belong to the same community, even though some are now staying in the IDP camp. In fact, whatever was done or happened to one of them was known by almost everybody. That is why the sharing became so fluid and deep. They mentioned relatives who got killed and belongings which got stolen or destroyed in 1993. It was expected that the workshop would be emotional, as folks were gathered close to where the horrible events took place. Consequently, the facilitators provided needed services for those who struggled with their emotions.

Two participants (a Tutsi from the IDP and a Hutu from the village) conjointly asked for more time to work on the issue that had been between them since the 1993 war. Here is what happened. When the war started, the Hutu man came to the Tutsi family. He had been sent by a group of other Hutu who were hunting Tutsi to check if there were still Tutsi males

hiding in the house, especially the brother-in-law of the Tutsi woman. If the Hutu found any male, he had to catch him and take him to the group. Only the woman and her kids were there. So, when the Hutu man arrived in front of the house, he pushed roughly on the door, his eyes open like a monster. The woman and kids got terribly frightened. Shocked by the act and trying to protect the kids, the woman took her hoe as a weapon and went to fight against the man. As he was strong, he took away the hoe and started beating her. Leaving her rolling on the ground, he checked in the rooms and found no one else. He went back to the other Hutu furious! The two folks asked for a special time; they were taken to another location for more privacy and one of the facilitators led the dialogue. They finally succeeded in reaching a common agreement. It was with big smiles that they came back to join the group, sharing that they are healed from carrying such a big burden for years.

Shivering occurred in the room when it was revealed that it was Pastor Sebastien (a Tutsi and HROC facilitator) who had been wanted at that time and he was among the facilitators of the workshop!!

On the last day, participants were more open, joyful, and interactive. They even expressed that they would feel happy to stay for one more day. Below are some of the many quotes from participants.

- *Alcohol had become my refuge. Every single night I came home, my wife and kids had to hide themselves. Breaking the pot on the fire (before the food would be ready) had become my easy thing to do. You know, I deprived my family of several meals. I am ashamed! It is time for me to change and I am going to do it. I want to be a tree of trust for my family. More, I will tell those with whom I shared beer to stop and plant the tree of trust.*
- *I enjoyed the games. I am not shy any more!*

By Deborah Dakin

What Is a Border?

- *The time I spent in this workshop will remain unforgettable for me. Those I used to fear and get afraid of have been the ones I talked to, shared food with and at the end we were good friends. It is possible to rebuild again our neighborhood as people who remained in the village and those who are in the IDP camp.*

- *I gained very consistent skills to help myself and especially my children.*

- (From a Hutu woman married to a Tutsi): *The example from our two friends touched my soul so deeply that I feel I want to pull out my own stuff too. When the war was hot and we were fleeing in the bushes, a Hutu woman told me: 'Why are you still tying that evil child on your back [meaning that the child whose father is a Tutsi is evil]? Take him down and throw him away!' Did she forget that he was my child? Did she mean that my loving husband was evil? Since that time, I decided not to be with that woman and had been holding such hate and anger against her. But this workshop taught me how to let it go. I want to meet with the woman and tell her how what she said wounded me but that I have been able to forgive.*

We closed the workshop with a fervid request from participants to be invited again. It was also asked that many more workshops be conducted for more folks in Rurengera. ■



Adrien Niyongabo is the coordinator of HROC (Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities) in Burundi.

Each time I read about Friends Peace Teams in Africa, Indonesia, Central and South America, I am in awe of the capacity of the human spirit to love and rebuild after unimaginable sufferings. I also find it easy for me to think of those stories as disconnected from my personal experience. I don't live in a war zone. I have never been to any of the countries where we work. I am a member of the Peacemaking en las Américas Working Group but do not speak Spanish. I do not have any AVP training. I am deeply moved by stories of people using love in response to large-scale violence perpetuated on whole communities, and the power of those same communities to heal and rebuild. But frequently the extremity and sheer magnitude of the violence makes it seem as if I am working to help people victimized by wars and corrupt governments so very far away from my comfortable life in Iowa.

I do my best to spread the news about FPT whenever I get a chance. When I told my friend Ann about FPT's work in Guatemala, she told me about translating the life story of a young Guatemalan man she met in Cedar Rapids. I was moved by Rene's story, and would like to share some excerpts from it below:

This is the story of my life. It is a story that is both true and sad. I was born in 1982 in the mountains of the Chucumatanes in the country of Guatemala. Instead of happiness there was fear and anguish during those times; all around us there was the sound of bombs and gunfire as a consequence of the civil war that lasted there for more than a decade. The little house of my dear parents was burned and the livestock had all scattered and were gone. We all lived in fear and that fear was the darkness caused by the war between the guerrillas and the army of the government of Guatemala. The families in the countryside and villages all fled to the mountains to try to save themselves. There was nothing to eat except plants without salt and without sugar. We did not have medicine or clothing or any help of any kind. All we had was grief, sorrow, and tears. It was a time of

great confusion: the army of the government was killing people and the guerrillas were killing people, too. We could not trust anyone. Each family had to fend for itself, fleeing to the mountains where there was total silence. Even the dogs had been killed. The mothers covered the mouths of the babies and children when they woke up crying so they could not be heard and be found. It was a complete disaster.

The guerrillas attacked the small business owners and farmers. My grandfather was one of the most sought after because he had, by hard work and effort, put together a small grain and livestock business. One morning at five a.m., the guerrillas came to his door and told him to hand over all the money he had. He did so and asked them to leave him and his family in peace. They took the money and shot him in the doorway of his own home. After that the family suffered greatly because they lost the one who had strived so hard to support his family and provide their daily bread. He was the leader of the family, beloved and respected, and the family suffered knowing how he had been killed although innocent of anything.

The truth is that I know little of life – all I have known seems to have been suffering. Now, I will continue with the story of my father who for 35 of his 50 years has suffered from an illness that has not been successfully treated. The family has not been able to pay for the treatments he needs or even to find an answer to questions about his health. Ever since I was a child I have tried to help my family. I had to go to school without shoes and with torn clothing. I wasn't embarrassed about going to school that way because I knew that I needed to survive and help my family. When I was a teenager, I worked in the fields. Sometimes I had food and sometimes I didn't have anything to eat at all. I saved the money I earned to go to school and finally I was able to graduate with the certification of a primary school teacher.

I taught for two years in the primary school. What I earned was not enough to pay for the

medicine and medical care that my father needs.

How familiar Rene's story is to readers of PeaceWays! I decided to learn more of the war Rene talks about. One major source was the report by the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) which carefully documents the more than 34 years of civil war in Guatemala from 1962 to 1996. I discovered how the relationship between our two countries entails much more than the United States simply being the destination of people looking for work. Here are some of the things I learned:

Many historical and social factors led to Guatemala's civil war, and they tell a story common to many countries all over the world since time began. From the initial declaration of independence in 1821, an elite ruling class established an authoritarian government in order to maintain control of the country's resources, wealth, and power. Over time, the growing disparity between the very wealthy and the very poor (and a disappearing middle class) led those in power to use increasingly repressive measures to ensure their wealth and safety from an increasingly dissatisfied poor majority. The land reforms of the government of Col. Jacobo Arbenz led to his overthrow in 1954 (aided by the CIA at the behest of the United Fruit Company). Another result was an ever increasing military repression of the general population, fueled by the fierce anti-communist fervor of the day. That same anti-communist ideology was my own (U.S.) government's justification for supporting the Guatemalan military's violence against its own people. It was part of our cold war anti-Soviet strategy as outlined in our National Security Doctrine.

The Guatemalan government used the military to systematically remove the poor from their land. From 1978 to 1983, more than 200,000 people "disappeared" or were killed. Eighty-three percent of the victims of that violence were Mayan Indians. The government declared Mayan tribes the "collective enemy of

I taught for two years in the primary school. What I earned was not enough to pay for the medicine and medical care that my father needs.

the state” and they became victims of deliberate ethnic cleansing.

Rene is a member of the Ixil tribe, and was born at the height of the most violent time in the most violent region. The CEH report carefully details how the orchestrated removal and killing of his people qualified as genocide, as defined by the U.N. The report also corroborates Rene’s telling of terrorism by the state, and of the guerrilla counterinsurgency that killed his grandfather. Like others that we read about in the pages of PeaceWays in all the countries where FPT works, the victims of violence care little about the politics that uproot their lives and leave them mere pawns in others’ power schemes.

Let’s return to Rene’s story:

Gradually the idea came to me and grew that I would emigrate to the United States and look for work there. I hoped that I would then be able to pay for the medical help my father needed.

The trip to the United States cost a lot of money. I had to borrow the money at 10 percent interest. The trip to the U.S. border was very difficult – I went through many difficult moments – times of hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue, and fear. I was afraid that the authorities would find us. I spent nights and days in the desert. I decided to offer up to God all of this for those others who in one way or another just like me wanted to come to this land to earn their daily bread and due to hunger and thirst remain sleeping forever in the desert.

I arrived in the United States in December of 2004. In May of 2007, I was arrested for working illegally. Now I am in jail facing a sentence of maybe two or three years and when that is over I will be deported.

Rene came to live and work in Cedar Rapids for a couple of years, not far from my home. After his arrest, he was moved around the state and the country until finally landing in the Ohio jail cell where he sits today. It was one year before he was brought before a judge. He has been able to call his family only

once since his arrest. As a teacher, he hopes to help other prisoners prepare for GEDs, but so far has not been allowed to do so. He is cut off from those who know and care for him. All that for someone we will deport as soon as he is released. Our current immigration policies demand punishment of him and his family. What are the costs to all of us of these retributive policies?

It is ironic that other than needing a Social Security number in order to be employed, Rene had no personal gain from his crime of “identity theft” for which he now sits in jail. It is an open secret that employers hire workers with false Social Security numbers, and in many cases, even help obtain them. The result is that those workers consistently pay into Social Security and Medicare for the rest of us, even though they will never be able to use those same numbers to draw benefits.

On May 12, 2008, the largest single-site immigration raid in U.S. history took place at a kosher meatpacking plant in nearby Postville, Iowa. Most of the 398 workers arrested come from Guatemala, offspring of the very same violence that led Rene to Iowa. This generation of Guatemalans saw their parents killed, their villages destroyed, their culture erased. Many have no way to support their families at home. They do not want to leave their homes, but both war and the poverty exacerbated by U.S. trade policies leave them no other options. The wounds from the violence that lead them to Iowa are the very same wounds our FPT Guatemalan peace teams are working to heal in their home countries.

Since beginning work on this story and just one month after the raid in Postville, my beloved Cedar Rapids experienced horrendous damage from historic flooding. The recovery will take years and cost billions of dollars. There are serious public health hazards resulting from sewage backup and flooding. Day after day, we hear news of the rebuilding that lies before us. Not as well reported are the stories of “imported workers” who have been brought

In May of 2007 I was arrested for working illegally. Now I am in jail facing a sentence of maybe two or three years and when that is over I will be deported.

in by companies hired to supply labor. Those rarely reported stories tell of people being hired under false pretenses, cheated out of their promised pay, charged unfairly for food and travel, working in unsafe conditions without respirators and proper protections, and sleeping under buses. Like Rene, and like the Postville meatpackers, these people are hired behind the scenes by contractors who promise to supply cheap labor. They remain invisible to the folks who benefit from their work. Such is the story of low-bid contract labor in America today. It touches every aspect of our lives.

What is the moral cost for me to maintain my good life? What is the moral cost of living as though counting immediate financial cost is the only price to be weighed?

It is a mistake for me to think that it is only donations of time and money that connect me to the people who live in the countries where FPT works. It is a mistake to believe that violence perpetrated abroad has no direct affect on my sheltered life in the United States. When I support Friends Peace Teams, I am not only helping “unfortunate people in distant lands,” but I am working to redress the fruits of

violence that reach all the way to my hometown. Whether I am aware of it or not, my life is intertwined with those I will never meet, on both sides of the U.S. border. Our lives are braided together so tightly they can’t be unwound. Is it possible for us to find ways to live that don’t exploit or harm, but enlarge and enrich each other? That’s a tough question. Perhaps this same question is also God’s gift to us.

I am humbled by how much people who endure great hardship teach me about grace. In this spirit, I offer a prayer written by Rene “to the Creator by Whom all is made”:

Lord, I commend to You all my acts and all the steps that I will take in my life. Put Your gaze and Your helping hand over all those grieving families that feel hopeless and without protection, over those who are looking for health. Protect the old, the orphans, and the widows. Light the way for those who are trying to help us. For those who harm us, help them come to You so they learn to act humanely and with justice.

Thank You, God, for life, for the rain and the sun and the bread we have each day, for the fresh air and friendship and for Your love. ■



Deborah Dakin is a member of Whittier Monthly Meeting of Iowa Yearly Meeting, (Conservative). She and her husband, Bob Yeats, have four kids and are, as of July 3, 2008, new grandparents of twins, Francesco and Alexandra. Deborah is a teacher and professional musician. She is principal violist of the Quad City Symphony, faculty at

Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, and member of the Ohmes String Quartet. Deb and Bob are founding members of the Iowa Chamber Players, a group that performs benefit concerts for peace and justice causes. Bob and Deb are looking forward to returning to Brazil to teach and perform at the end of August 2008.

Deborah is a representative to Friends Peace Teams from her yearly meeting, a member of the Friends Peace Teams Council, a member of Peacebuilding en Las Américas working group and Council Liaison with our Administrative Assistant.

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- Make friends around the world
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- Invite us to speak at your meeting or church
- Represent your yearly meeting on the Friends Peace Teams Council
- Donate to Friends Peace Teams

Contact Kathy at fpt@quaker.org or call 314-621-7262

Crossing Borders

Florence Ntakarutimana, Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) Program Manager of Training, experienced her first journey out of Africa when she traveled thousands of miles from Burundi to New Mexico in order to participate in the Friends' Intermountain Yearly Meeting (IMYM) before going on to other U.S. gatherings. The desert was dry and the weather hot and windy, but not too hot and definitely not humid – conditions Florence said she found pleasing,

Despite arriving at IMYM less than 24 hours after landing from Burundi, Florence joined many activities with tireless enthusiasm. She passed her visit with Western Friends by attending worship and business meetings and assisting with children's activities, while delighting us all in beautiful African dress and joyfully providing African songs. Most important, she held two discussion groups on different days, sharing details of her peace building with about 30 attendees at each 90-minute presentation.

Everyone felt Spirit powerfully present with the timing of Florence's visit. Our plenary speaker at IMYM this June was Leah Greene and the theme was "Compassionate Listening." I introduced Florence at her talks with the words: "The work of Florence Ntakarutimana, through Friends Peace Teams' African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) and its witness for peace through HROC, is the embodiment of compassionate listening and her work manifests its power to heal." Florence's gentle voice began with compelling stories of her experiences with the work of HROC in Congo and Burundi. The recounting deepened further when she shared her personal family trauma and the life journey that brought her to work with AGLI.

At each presentation, Florence began with general information about Burundi. It is a small (10,745 square miles), landlocked country in Central-East Africa, almost the size of Maryland, bordered on the east by Tanzania, on the west by Congo, and on the north by Rwanda. Burundi's capital city is Bujumbura, located on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. There is a population of approximately eight million (expected to be more than ten million by 2015), mostly Christians (Roman Catholics), but with 23 percent holding indigenous beliefs, and 10 percent Muslim beliefs. Ethnic groups include Hutu (85%), Tutsi (14%) and Twa (1%). Florence's work and that of AGLI is mostly outside the city in the bush with rural Hutu and Tutsi communities.

In response to questions, Florence gave a short history lesson about her country and the three ethnic groups, the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa. Researching further, I've learned that the original colonizers were Germans who received the colony

during the 1886 division of Africa. In a 1923 war settlement, a League of Nations mandate, Belgium won a part of German East Africa that became the territory of Burundi.

When Burundi became an independent nation in 1962, the land-owning, more educated Tutsi sought to dominate with a Tutsi ruler, and a Hutu rebellion followed in 1965. Subsequent conflict and coups in 1966 and 1976, civil war in 1970-1971, and in 1993 (when the first Hutu elected president was assassinated three months after his election) have led over the years to the brutal slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Hutu and Tutsi and deep internal wounds and continued strife. The country has experienced mass, disruptive emigration to neighboring countries by people



Florence Ntakarutimana showing drawings made by workshop participants in Burundi to Friends at Intermountain Yearly Meeting

fleeing violence. Such is the background to the challenges of the current work of AGLI, Florence, and others trained in Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and HROC.

Elise Boulding's vision, when Friends Peace Teams was founded, was to facilitate peaceful communication between struggling populations and then to train some participants to train others. After a brave initial group stepped forward and found *their* path to peace, in order to further peace, they reached out to still more people. I asked Florence for details about her work, and was deeply moved by her commitment and energy since she began to heal from her personal trauma. Since May of 2006, she has seen the completion of 30 basic HROC workshops in Burundi, five in Kenya, and three training-of-facilitators in Rwanda. As a result of the training-of-facilitators workshops, 72 skilled individuals have become Healing Companions and facilitators to assist in follow-up, continued support, and to conduct more basic workshops. The task is huge and the work is ongoing. It spreads, workshop by workshop, to save and change the lives of hundreds of Hutu and Tutsi.

During Florence's presentations we saw drawings from workshop participants and read aloud several quotes from them:

- *I am glad to know that trauma can be healed. As evidence, I feel OK after these three days. Listening to a person is taking care of that person.*
- *Bad dreams were haunting me very badly. I am very happy that I have learnt how to put away the bad dreams and keep the good memories, especially in the night.*

Drawing was part of the healing process in the workshops and the copies of those drawings we saw graphically showed the terror and struggle to survive of courageous workshop attendees.

The work is unquestionably important, and it was an honor to have Florence at IMYM. In addition to informing Friends in the United States about the activities of AGLI, Florence confidently and gently sought financial support

for Friends Peace Teams (FPT). She also invited individuals so called to consider joining a workcamp in Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, or Rwanda. Information in detail is available at friendspeacetams.org. ■

Florence Ntakarutimana is 32 years old and married to Dominic Niyonkuru. They have three children. All are members of the Religious Society of Friends. Florence received her degree of Arts in Christian Leadership in 2005. Since 2006, she has worked in Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) as a Program Manager. She has conducted many trauma healing workshops in local communities in Burundi, Rwanda, and Kenya. Her work includes assistance with the HIV/AIDS struggle, mediation, and peaceful conflict resolution. She likes her work very much because it allows her to understand and address her own inner wounds and trauma: her mother was poisoned by her sister in 1996 and her father was killed by rebels one year later in 1997. Through her work, she has experienced that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible, even though they can take time and much strength. She uses her experience to help others and will continue to do the work of healing and rebuilding.

Florence is the coauthor of "Now I Am Human: Testimonies from the Healing Companions Program in Rwanda and Burundi." This can be found on the AGLI website, www.aglionline.org.



Florence and Joanne

Joanne Cowan, born in San Francisco, is a long time resident of Boulder, Colorado, and a member of the Boulder Friends Meeting. She has served on the Friends Peace Team council since 2007 as a representative from Intermountain Yearly Meeting. Both locally and nationally, she is an active resister for peace.

A Young Friend Growing Peace

In Rwanda, Sarah Mandolang and the Friendly Folk Dancers offered a dancing ministry toward creating a world community and interconnecting the world's peoples through international folk dancing. Their performances include suites or sets of dances from cultures or nations that have been or are at war with one another. The suites are followed by participatory folk dancing. Each dance is performed as an act of peace.

The Rwandans appreciated foreigners coming to their country and sharing something of the world with them, which is highly uncommon. People in Rwanda were eager to stand up and participate. Nearly all Rwandan churches have dance in their worship services, so the idea of dancing for peace was understood and well received.

Sarah then traveled to Northern Uganda and met Abitimo Odongkara, who established the Upper Nile Institute for Appropriate Technology (UNIFAT) in 1986. The school supports AIDS and war orphans and now accepts child soldiers returning from the bush.

For more than two decades in Northern Uganda, children abducted into the Lord's Resistance Army have fought Sudanese rebels and the Ugandan government. The high level of general plundering and abduction has driven civilians into townships together, creating makeshift urban areas and camps for internally displaced people.

The Ugandan government's curriculum for primary education does not include art. Sarah brought art supplies from Alfred, New York, and ran an after-school art program. Each afternoon she went to a different classroom of 90 to 105 students each. Children from the older grades wanted to know what good coloring would do for them, so she taught them about the development of cognitive skills and representational thought through drawing.

Instructing them to use only crayons rather than pens and pencils increased the creativity in their work.

She was able to do counseling and to organize games and art projects with small groups of children, to teach conversational English, meet people, build relationships, learn to speak some Acholi, and spend time writing about her experience.



Ojok Ojara Phillip and Sarah Mandolang

Back in the U.S., Sarah attended a month-long Training for Change to help groups more effectively stand up for justice, peace, and the environment through strategic nonviolence. Through her travels, she has become increasingly aware that nonviolent action is a powerful force that brings love and truth back into human relationships. People who have lived with war often recognize the power of nonviolent actions to build

community both in their area and in the world, actions that may seem quite ordinary to those who have never lived in war.

This summer, Sarah participated in developing a community-based group trauma healing retreat for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as anyone else who has suffered wounds in life. She has returned to Northern Uganda to bring what she has learned from her experiences with Training for Change and trauma healing.

She will leave Uganda to attend the International Alternatives to Violence Project Conference in Kenya before she goes on to Indonesia to work with the Acehese doing basic Alternatives to Violence Project workshops. The Indonesians are excited to learn about the trauma work she is doing in the United States and in Africa and to try some of the same activities.

Sarah has been asked to speak at a Friends World Committee for Consultation gathering in

See Young Friend, page 18

Our Great Task: Communication and Bonds of Friendship After War

Ed. Note: This article includes more detail about a workshop than we normally present. However, we found it an excellent introduction to an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshop for those who have never experienced one and a view of the different kinds of responses and thinking that come from participants.

Readers should know that Indonesian is no one's ethnic language. It is a made language used throughout the Indonesian islands. At home, most people speak their native language, thus the emphasis in the workshop on not conversing in languages other than Indonesian. In the Indonesian language, pronouns have no gender; the translation uses he or she when necessary.

In AVP workshops, we learn from experience rather than from lectures. On February 22-25, 2008, the Forum for Attention to the Poorest of the Poor (Forum Peduli Rakyat Miskin, FPRM) cooperated with Friends Peace Teams' Indonesia Initiative to hold an AVP workshop in the City of Langsa, Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalm, (NAD), Indonesia.

AVP facilitators and participants are regarded as equals and all are volunteers. They come to workshops out of their inner urge to create a life of peace without violence. They believe that everyone has worth.

Of our twenty participants, several were ethnic Javanese whose ancestors were brought to Aceh generations ago by the Dutch to run plantations and who are now displaced by the war into the Sei Lengan area of Langkat, North Sumatra, on Leuser Mountain. They are

currently unrecognized by any government. They are traumatized and don't dare return to the homes taken from them in East Aceh (where the workshop was held). Several participants were ethnic Acehnese, some of whom were victims and some perpetrators of the armed conflict.

Trauma is still raging for most of us after the brutal armed conflict caused by provocation from the conflicting sides: the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The character of an AVP workshop



Ferrizal, Indonesian Coordinator of the Indonesia Initiative and AVP facilitator

uses an approach to group dynamics that raises up care for each person, a sense of family and community, and prioritizes honesty, openness, and togetherness. Therefore, although the facilitation team was anxious about the differences, each member was also optimistic, thereby instilling anticipation in the participants. As the Indonesian Coordinator of Friends Peace Teams' Indonesia Initiative, I explained that the purpose of this training was to remember the threads of friendship between our two communities that had become casualties of the war. Another purpose was to eliminate suspicion among us and to rebuild trust between our two ethnic groups. [The participants were mostly young people who have grown up in a war zone in

which gathering with unrelated people has been illegal for most of their lives.]

Initially, the facilitating team greeted everyone and explained the beginning and history of *Hidup Tanpa Kekerasan* (HTK) in Indonesia, known as Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in English.

Participants and facilitators made several agreements we called the Cooperative Agreement and Contract, which included rules of interaction to be maintained by all of us. Gaining participants' agreement, we were able to develop a bonded culture. The role of facilitators is not to be teachers who bring answers but to be present as we practice and train ourselves.

The facilitating team read some basic rules, such as to respect oneself and others, to listen deeply, and not to interrupt. Participants added rules like no smoking in the room, speaking in Indonesian, not having side discussions during large group discussions, putting cell phones on silent (allowing receiving calls for two minutes outside the room), being on time to sessions, and using the AVP hand signals.

The facilitators then previewed the training agenda, introduced team members, and had everyone introduce themselves by name and tell something they hoped for from this training. The atmosphere was very tense. Participants were clustered in ethnic groups. To shift the atmosphere, the facilitators called for a Light and Lively called Big Wind, that causes everyone to change seats. Jufri, one of the facilitators, gave directions: "The big wind blows for everyone who..." and added something true about himself. Everyone for whom that was true was asked to change seats. This continued until we were moved around so that each participant sat with people he or she did not know.

Afterwards, a facilitator asked each participant to state his or her name and an adjective that was positive that started with the same sound as the first name. In this training we

always begin with the positive, affirming oneself and others. For example, Superman's adjective was *Sabar* (Patient), because he wanted to become a patient person. For the rest of the workshop, we said our positive adjectives and names before we spoke.

The Blanket Game helped participants remember everyone's name by racing to say the names of other participants. The atmosphere

became more fluid. Participants who at first were very nervous began to laugh spontaneously during the game. We ended with an evaluation and the closing Rainstorm, a series of hand movements in the group that made the sound of light rain getting louder and louder then getting lighter again.

For the introduction of the second session we went around the circle to say our

adjective names and "A time I felt happy was..." Examples of responses were: "I was happy when rain arrived." "I was happy when I could sleep soundly, until satisfied." "I was happy when I could gather like this because then I could speak with friends." "I was happy when I could exchange thoughts like this."

The next activity was Affirmation in Pairs. Participants paired off and faced each other and each person was given three minutes to answer the question "What do I like about myself?" The listener was asked not to make any comments, only to listen. Then the speaker and listener switched roles for three minutes. A facilitator led a reflection by asking how they felt when they were talking or when they were listening without responding. One participant said he was very annoyed when he was a listener because he could only listen without giving his friend words to help him speak.



After this activity, we did another Light and Lively, Zip, Zap, Boing, so participants could regain a positive outlook. We then brainstormed What Is Violence and What Is Nonviolence? Participants brainstormed all types of violence while facilitators wrote on newsprint as fast as they could. Then facilitators asked the participants to come up and circle the types of violence that they had experienced. They circled words like: forcible eviction, murder, beating, robbery, insult, betrayal, deception, provocation, fighting, discrimination, and many others. Then they brainstormed words associated with nonviolence: writing, smiles, affection, love, honesty, humaneness, justice, peace, working together, gatherings, honor, harmony, friendship, and many others. After the reflection, we did another Light and Lively to relieve the tension. We closed with an evaluation and Group Affirmations.

After this tiring day, we ended at 10:30 p.m. All day, facilitators had worked hard to see that participants sometimes sat with people of another ethnicity. Participants often were nervous in that situation.

For the second day, we gathered promptly at 9 a.m. After the agenda preview, we began by stating our adjective names and three words about how we felt. Some felt their hearts were still having difficulty, some felt quite anxious, but most felt happy.

Next, we brainstormed Good and Poor Listening. Then we did Concentric Circles, in which the facilitator instructed participants to form two circles facing each other (the inside facing out and the outside facing in). The facilitator asked each person in the inside circle to talk for three minutes to the partner opposite while the partner listened quietly. Then the speaker and listener switched roles for three

minutes. Six topics were used and the circles were rotated between topics. One topic was, "A person I admired in my life and why." The activity told a lot about one's experience, goals or plans. The atmosphere was stiff and the participants appeared nervous about speaking to random people in front of them.

A facilitator led the reflection by asking, "What it is like to do this activity, when the friend listened and did not speak?" There were those who said, "I felt very uneasy because I did not yet know what the listener was thinking." "I felt nervous and frightened because the listener was quiet without giving any response." Another person said, "I felt happy because I was not cut off." "I partly felt understood by my partner, which was input and learning for me in judging another person."

To refresh our memories of each other's names we played Pattern Balls. We laughed happily while playing.

Afterwards, in the activity A Problem I Solved Nonviolently, participants divided into five small groups. Each participant was asked to share a personal experience of solving a problem nonviolently. Each group selected one story to share with the whole group. One-

by-one, each group told about their living experience in solving a problem without violence. One of the speakers almost could not tell his story. The facilitators gave him a lot of time without forcing him to speak, and finally he could tell it. The room felt very quiet. The participants listened seriously to those stories. The facilitators had reminded them not to comment, judge, or advise. The listening was respectful and deep.

The facilitators talked about the concept of Transforming Power – the strength to change. Pieces of the mandala were placed on the



*Alternatives to Violence Mandala. Translation:
Transforming Power, Respect for Self, Caring for Others,
Expect the Best, Ask for a Nonviolent Path,
Think Before Reacting*

floor: respect for self, caring for others, ask for a nonviolent path, think before reacting, and expect the best. To elicit more details, the facilitator distributed cards with several points, and each participant was asked to stand on a part of the mandala that spoke to her or him and explain why she or he chose that part. Participants shared their opinions easily. Then the facilitators pushed the parts together around a circle labelled "Transforming Power" and said that all the parts that were chosen by participants, if united, became the strength of change and our strength together. We closed this session by doing the "Hand Push." We talked about the principle of life that must be owned by all of us to live without violence. We had to be clear that how we respond to our "opponent" is within our own control, even when we feel pushed. Everyone has power; we have to carry and use our power.

The participants gave a very positive evaluation of the session. They spoke up about what they liked and didn't like and even made suggestions. We closed with Waking Up in the Jungle. Everyone was asked to make the sound of a jungle animal. We started low on bent knee making our sound softly and increased the sound as we stood up. Everyone relaxed. Many participants could not keep from laughing when they heard others make such funny voices. This activity reminded us to love our fellow living creatures and the environment as well as each other and established much closeness among us.

In the second day participants no longer gathered with their own ethnic group. One of the most encouraging events was the wonderful relationship that developed between one of the participants and me. The participant had tried to kill me with a knife in 2005. Surviving

this moment had become one of my stories of transforming power told in AVP workshops. Initially this participant was very nervous and embarrassed in front of me. But I, as well as the other facilitators, succeeded in eliminating his nervousness with our attitude of friendship and affirming attention toward him and the other participants. That greatly surprised him and made him realize that his first impression of us was a mistake.

The change in attitude was not only in that participant. Facilitators' patient and continuous efforts to engage in constructive communication as well as to establish friendship with and among participants produced results. On the second day, a change was apparent. Participants were communicating with one another. As participants became tired, facilitators would call for a Light and Lively and the atmosphere would revive. The agendas of AVP workshops deliberately include many games and sharing of experiences through which participants can learn and experience Transforming Power.

We began the next session with our adjective names and "One thing that I have gotten from the workshop so far is..." Many of us said that we had gotten friends and a new family in this workshop. Next we moved on to "Broken Squares," an activity that practices working together to solve a problem as a group. Each member had to form a square in front of him or her. Pieces of the squares were mixed up and each group member got a few. They had to cooperate to complete their squares, but they were forbidden to communicate except by giving pieces to each other. The task was complete when all members of the group had squares of equal sizes.



Broken Squares Game: Cooperative activities and games help develop skills and reflect on the roles we take on in groups.

That experience helped participants increase their awareness of the surrounding environment and realize the actions that they could take to help the group or conversely to see when they were becoming the obstacle to the group's achieving its aim. In the reflection, one participant said that he finally realized how important communication is in cooperating with other people. Another participant said he realized that we must have an awareness of what is around us and care about the needs of others, even occasionally make a sacrifice to help the other person who was stricken by a difficulty.

We followed this discussion with a Light and Lively called Mrs. Mumbly. Laughter threw people to the ground and relaxation became clear all over their faces.

In the next session each of us completed the sentence, "One place I felt safe as a child was..." Then we did an activity called Nonviolence Barometer. We explored our understanding of what was nonviolent and what was not and our differences of perception. A facilitator read a scenario and asked everyone to consider his or her opinion of whether it was violent or nonviolent and to what degree. The subsequent dialogue inspired many people to change their positions. This indicated that we could change the train of our thought if we shared and accepted others' reasoning. We also realized that the perception of violence and the degree of violence was very different among us depending on our feelings, experiences, and ways of thinking. Because of that, we could see that thinking before reacting and communicating to other people is very important so as not to perpetuate the hurt that we are so accustomed to in our everyday lives. We moved from this reflection to a Light

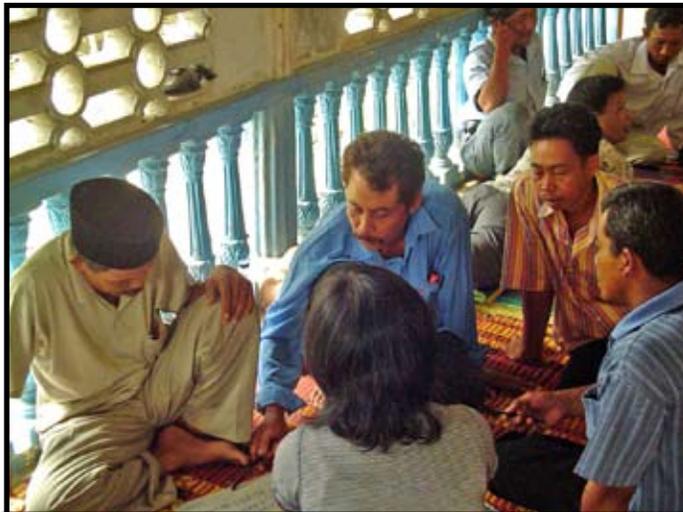
and Lively called Sending the Pulse. (Pulse in Indonesian is the word used for pre-paid minutes on your cell phone.)

In an empathy activity, we made small groups and each of us wrote a problem we were struggling with right now. We exchanged our papers randomly. When everyone had someone else's problem, we read the problem we had as if it were our own, then passed it on to the next person to read and respond to as their own, and so forth around the circle. We could see our problem personally through each other's eyes and we shared approaches in a personal, supportive manner.

The atmosphere was very respectful. In the reflection after the activity, one participant commented that when he first came to the workshop he felt he was the "outsider" (ethnically) and that he could feel the work changing his heart from a heart that was mean to a heart that was trusting. He realized that actually everyone had some goodness. He added that at first it was hard

for him to speak, but now it was easy to talk and tell his story and share his thoughts.

In the next session we did role playing. A group of four to six people enacted a violent moment that had been experienced by one of the participants. We asked everyone to imagine and study the point of power as well as the weakness at the moments of conflict that occur in our daily life. We asked them to identify the feeling of each role played at the moment of conflict but to let the role play unfold based on their own sense of being in their roles. Members of the other groups became the audience and later gave their perspectives of what they had seen, without judging or attacking the players. After seeing the role play and the interview with the audience, we realized that if we believed in



Role Play preparation: small group and one-on-one communication are key to seeking a nonviolent path.

the power of the change, it could emerge from anyone and from any condition if we wanted it. One moment of comic relief occurred when one member of a group doing a role play titled Hit and Run made everyone laugh by the actions of his body. We talked about how humor can be used to redirect conflict, but it was very sensitive.

We then did Peace Ball with a ball of plastic string that we threw from one person to the next across a circle while calling out elements needed for peace. Thus we wove a web among us, sensing how it takes everyone to build a peaceful community.

In an evaluation in which we reviewed all the activities of the workshop from the first session to the last, the participants took small stones and set them on the activities they liked the best. We closed this session with "I am one person working, breathing and living for peace."

The final session opened with our adjective names and "Most useful to me after having participated in this workshop is..." We did a meditation. We were asked to visualize ourselves now and how we were going to practice nonviolence in our daily lives and how we were going to give ourselves permission to feel capable of changing ourselves and our situations. We don't have to accept passively whatever happens to us and feel powerless to change. In fact, we have a big role in directing our own lives. We also acknowledged that we don't have to and can't do it alone, but that we need others. We gave ourselves permission to ask for help from others as appropriate. There was tension in this session, possibly because we were feeling our own experiences too fully. Several participants cried and a couple passed out from realizing the magnitude of the violence they had participated in before. Facilitators had anticipated this situation and we immediately and calmly carried some to another room to rest, and we gave them medicine, if necessary. Not long afterwards they were healthy again.

At the end of the final session, we made Affirmation Posters for each other, on which we put our positive adjective names at the top of a

large sheet and then each of us added to the others' posters, writing positive comments and signing our names. After that the closing was Circle Greeting. We then sang *Sya'ir*, a song written by Ms. Sukiyah, one of the participants from East Aceh.

In the workshop, participants felt the tight schedule was initially heavy for them, but they slowly began to enjoy it. What was most important was the feeling of friendship that emerged among us. Participants who at first were reluctant to communicate in the end cried while embracing and didn't want to leave. We could see people who suffered from war casualties little by little overcome their feelings of trauma. People who had sworn that there were no good people in Aceh and that they would never set foot in Aceh again, even though they owned land here, slowly began to soften and to realize that not everyone in Aceh was bad. The Acehnese and Javanese were both casualties.

When the workshop was over, Tengku Nasruddin, Director of FPRM, asked participants from Sei Lengan to go around the City of Langsa, East Aceh with him. Many of them felt sad because this was the first time they had stepped onto Acehnese earth since the war. For the length of the trip, many participants had mixed feelings. There was fear and confusion and they were startled by the change that had happened since they had been there. Someday, they may try to return to the houses they still own in Aceh. One of the big tasks for the AVP team is to be able to continue to struggle to give workshops and to open the hearts and minds of the survivors of the conflict in order to reestablish communication and bonds of friendship among us. ■

Ferrizal is the Indonesian Coordinator of Friends Peace Teams' Indonesia Initiative. He has lived almost his entire life in war. He is Acehnese from East Aceh where the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian Government fought from 1976 to 2004. The war followed the United States' backed coup d'état in 1965, when the Indonesian military turned on Communists, Islamic leaders and anyone else that might challenge its power.

LAC Becomes PLA and Develops New Work

A few months ago, the Latin America-Caribbean program (LAC) of Friends Peace Teams chose a new name, Peacebuilding *en las Américas*. The new name returns to the term we had used for our work in Colombia (Peacebuilding in Colombia) and reflects the bilingual nature of our work as well. Finding an acronym, an apparent necessity in our work, was more difficult than finding a new name. While “PELA” might seem an obvious choice, *pelea* in Spanish means “a fight” and thus seemed inappropriate. Hence PLA. We consider the Caribbean part of *las Américas*, so we have not forgotten that region in the name change.

For the last three months, I have been traveling and working in Central America and Colombia. I have done ten Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops and, with Cecilia Yocum and Alba Arrieta, two demonstration/experimental workshops on community-based trauma healing, following the model of the Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshops used in Africa. Additionally, PLA helped sponsor AVP workshops with youth in Guatemala in June. During my travels, I formed closer bonds with our partner groups in Guatemala, and with AVP groups in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua; I co-facilitated an AVP Basic workshop in Managua. As a result of the outreach I did in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, I expect PLA to consider future programs in those countries. PLA, with a generous grant from Cambridge Monthly Meeting, is planning to send a Guatemalan AVP facilitator to the AVP International Gathering in Kenya in September.

In Colombia, seven AVP workshops I have done with PAV-Colombia (“PAV” is AVP in Spanish) have resulted in 21 new apprentice facilitators in Sincelejo and Barranquilla, and energized AVP groups there and in Montería on the Northern Coast of Colombia. Each group has plans for getting grants to hold more workshops, especially with displaced people and youth.

Each also plans regular workshops financed with local funds and using an *olla comunitaria* (community potluck) to provide meals for workshop participants. In Montería, which didn’t have a Training for Facilitators workshop, one is planned for August or September. I think AVP is now ready to take off in Northern Colombia, one of the most conflictive regions of the country – where guerrilla, paramilitary and Army units are still fighting – and one with more than a million displaced people. Additionally, the coordinating team of PAV-Colombia is developing organizational and administrative skills, and has finally received its legal status as a nonprofit organization.

Owing to the pressure of deadlines, there will not be a full report on the experimental trauma healing workshops in this issue of PeaceWays. Participants were very encouraging about the value and effectiveness of the workshops and are eager to see them be developed in their communities. For a full report, please go to the PLA website, under “Initiatives” at friendspeacetteams.org. ■

Young Friend, from page 11

Bhopal, India, in November 2008. It is amazing to see how much difference a young Friend can make in the world.

Sarah is able to do this work through the generous support of people in the community and beyond, including the folks at Friends Peace Teams and the Elise Boulding Fund. Most of her funds have come from individual Friends. Sarah is still accepting donations to Friends Peace Teams, 1001 Park Ave., St. Louis, MO 63104. Please write on the memo line: Sarah Mandolang – II. For more information, see these websites:

Upper Nile Institute for Appropriate
Technology: www.friendsofunifat.org

Friends Peace Teams:
friendspeacetteams.org

Training for Change: trainingforchange.org ■

War and Poverty in Today's Colombia

Ed. Note: The following analysis was presented by a Colombian conscientious objector, and edited and translated by Val Liveoak. The presenter's name is withheld for safety reasons. This perspective from a Colombian's point of view presents the context in which Friends Peace Teams works with partners in Colombia to teach nonviolence and promote trauma recovery.

Colombia is a rich country, with abundant natural resources. It occupies a strategic geopolitical position on the South American continent. Its biodiversity is remarkable: 10 percent of all the earth's flora and fauna are found in Colombia, and 22.4 percent of the planet's fresh water. The abundance of water makes the country attractive to transnational and national businesses that need water to produce their products. Colombia has a very youthful population – of the total 43 million inhabitants, 46.5 percent are younger than 19 years old.

Additionally Colombia has great mineral wealth. Its largest product is coal – 1,183 metric tons have been mined, about one-sixth of the known reserves. Gold is also a major product. The companies that exploit those resources, along with petroleum, nickel, uranium, magnesium, zinc, copper, and many others, are mainly U.S. or Canadian owned.

In gold production, for example, Gulf Crown, a Canadian company, takes around 80 percent of the income generated by its mines. Workers, using 18th century technology and little safety equipment, enter dangerous mineshafts, dig with pickaxes, and then carry out ore that they treat with an acid despite having no protective equipment. They then transport it by muleback to the mine's office and are paid less than two cents per gram for partially refined gold. Gold sells on the world market for up to \$2.50/gram.

Despite Colombia's natural wealth of mineral and biological resources and our geopolitical importance, or to be exact, because

of them, it is ironic that Colombia is also a place with great poverty and human suffering.

For more than 50 years, Colombia has suffered one of the most prolonged and bloody civil wars of the century. The past four administrations in Colombia have tried to diminish the war or even deny that it is happening, but there have been more than 2,500 military actions annually and more than 3,000 combatants have died, so it is undeniable that there is a real war in process. (International standards consider an annual total of 1,000 casualties as defining a war.) The national newspaper *El Tiempo* published a survey on June 6, 2008 showing that around 20 percent of Colombians did not believe there was a war going on, whereas the other 80 percent believed there was.

The human consequences of this ongoing war are innumerable. It would not be feasible to try to document in this article all the effects on Colombians during nearly four generations of war, but we will outline a few.

The most noteworthy effect of the war is that nearly 10 percent of the Colombian population suffers from internal, forced displacement. Colombia has the second-largest population of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world, more than 3,500,000, according to the U.N. High Commission on Refugees. Even this figure is considered low, owing to IDPs' fear that reporting their displacement might put them or their families at further risk of violence. Both paramilitary and guerrilla groups cause displacement, although paramilitaries are responsible for the majority of them.

In addition to the people who have suffered displacement, thousands have been assassinated, kidnapped, or disappeared. From 1993 to the first quarter of 2006, the Self Defense forces of Colombia (known in Spanish as the AUC), only one of a number of paramilitary groups, have carried out 1,517 massacres, with a total of 8,386 victims. According to the Association of Families of the

Disappeared, more than 7,000 people have disappeared since 1977, and we know that the actual total might be much higher. Not all disappearances are reported because of the fear of further violence. During the process of demobilization begun in January 2007, former paramilitary members' confessions have led to the discovery of about 800 common graves, each containing from 2 to 18 cadavers.

In Colombia, according to the Fiscal General (a Cabinet position similar to U.S. Attorney General), there were "...more victims of paramilitaries than there were in Chile during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and in Argentina under Rafael Videla together." Paramilitary groups are blamed for the majority of disappearances. (Note: Paramilitary groups began appearing in Colombia around the mid-1970s, when Colombian officers began receiving counterinsurgency training at the U.S. School of the Americas – now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security and Cooperation. They were taught to form groups that could do things the Army was forbidden to do by law. Additionally, large landowners and other business owners began around that time to hire armed groups to "protect their interests," which included displacing small farmers from desirable land and suppressing unions, journalists, and judges.)

Kidnapping is common in Colombia, with more than 21,000 known victims in the past 12 years, 3,167 of whom remain in captivity. Massive protests against kidnapping and public demand for the liberation of the victims have received worldwide publicity. During this month, there have been very few days when the media did not mention a victim of kidnapping, or his/her release. The guerrilla groups, the FARC and the ELN, use the ransom money to help finance their programs. (Those groups also blockade and rob travelers on highways – a tactic known as "miraculous fishing" – and are involved in the drug trade.) Other groups also kidnap people for ransom, but kidnapping by guerrilla groups is most loudly denounced.

The psychosocial impact of constant and innumerable deaths, disappearances, tortures,

kidnappings, threats of violence, displacements, and aggressions against the civilian population throughout the length and breadth of the country, in addition to the grave implications of entire generations marked by violence, are compounded by the economic effects of the war economy: terrible impoverishment throughout the Colombian population.

Currently, according to CEPALC (The People's Communication Center of Latin America), 63 percent of Colombians live in poverty on less than \$2 a day. Of that group, 32 percent live in absolute poverty on less than \$1 daily. At the same time, 1.8 percent of the richest Colombians control approximately 68 percent of the wealth and capital of the country. (In the U.S., the richest one percent controls about 55 percent of the national wealth.) Six thousand of the largest landowners control 50 million hectares of land while three million small farmers (*campesinos*, literally, "country people") share around seven million hectares, an area which is constantly being reduced by the difficulties of agricultural production, violence, and the threats of armed groups.

The current administration is spending record-breaking amounts on the war, deepening the critical problems of the country and creating a dangerous economic dynamic around "national security," which is not only onerous but is also ineffective at fulfilling the government's goals.

Increases in military spending directly correspond to increases in the rates of poverty among the population. A recent year's defense budget of more than \$9.7 billion makes Colombia the country with the third-highest military budget (by percentage of GNP) in the world, at 6.3 percent. (The United States, even with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, spends around 4.04 percent of GNP.)

Military spending results in less money for health, education, housing, pensions, public services, infrastructure, sports, and other vital elements for development. As a comparison, consider that there are five Colombian soldiers for every 1,000 civilians but only one doctor for every 3,800 persons. (And that doctor is

limited to serving only paying patients, so most of us use herbal medicines and other home remedies to keep well. This may be like the U.S. medical system.) Members of the armed forces are not the only ones involved in efforts to ensure “national security.” Of 556,000 public employees, 460,000 are working in the area of defense, security, or as police. By the account of the Colombian Defense Department, each soldier costs \$7,900 annually (up from \$3,500 in 1999) while the Ministry of Education budget allocates a little less than \$900/year per student for funding of public schools.

The U.S. government is supporting this onerous war machine, too, with \$320 million for Plan Patriot (in addition to Plan Colombia that gave the Colombian government \$580 million over the past ten years of both Democratic

and Republican administrations). The United States has also provided more than \$150 million in technological and logistical assistance and in military equipment (mostly obsolete). Large amounts of military supplies are being stored in depots, far more than the Army can currently use.

Why then, cannot the 415,000 members of the Colombian Armed Forces (aided by an estimated 21,000-30,000 paramilitary members) defeat the guerrilla groups FARC (15,000 members) and the ELN (7,500 members)? Paraphrasing Noam Chomsky, “Winning a war is not good business.”

Recent events also seem to indicate that the United States is nudging the Uribe government into a proxy war with Venezuela (see article below). ■

What Are (Some) Colombians Afraid of?

Colombian friends have spoken often of the desire to end the daily “culture of violence.” Although in the capital, Bogotá, life seems pretty normal to most people who do not have contact with the large numbers of displaced people who have fled to the slum neighborhoods around the city, there are many reminders of the ongoing war.

In Colombia, all men between the ages of 18 and 50 are obliged to serve in the military. Most expect to serve around the ages of 18-20, when those who have access to higher education complete their *bachillerato*, a degree similar to an AB from a junior college in the United States. Young men studying for that degree, those who are in seminary, heads of households, the handicapped, and a few others are legally entitled to deferment, if not exemption, from military service. Conscientious objection for religious or moral reasons is not recognized. The Colombian Mennonite Church has led efforts to achieve recognition of Conscientious Objectors (COs) for many years.

One event that affected the group of COs was a massive roundup of young men for

military service in February, 2008. Although some young men volunteer for military service (daily during the evening news there is a Colombian version of the “Be all you can be” advertisement), most are forcibly recruited – swept up by the authorities outside movie theaters or in parks, on their way to work, or even outside schools. On February 12, more than 30,000 young men were taken, in the largest dragnet in the history of the country. Some, like one CO, had received draft notices to report to a center. When he and some 3,000 others arrived they were processed and immediately sent to an Army camp. He had the assistance of the CO group, and was able, after 12 hours of protesting, to be let go with a citation to return in a few months. Others were not so fortunate, and the CO groups are still fighting in the courts for the release of COs and other youths entitled to legal exemptions.

Those are not the only concerns of the COs. They have heard that the new recruits – some of whom should never have been taken – have been sent after brief training to the border areas with Venezuela and Ecuador where

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An Exciting Workshop

In July, Cecilia Yocum, Wilfredo Benitez (a Colombian facilitator) and I co-facilitated an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Basic workshop with staff and youths from a Colombian program that works with minors who have been *desvinculados* (literally “unlinked”) from guerrilla and paramilitary groups and with youth from poor neighborhoods who are at risk for joining armed groups. The program supplements the services offered by government demobilization programs that include foster home placement, support for school fees, and psychological services.

The program uses art to help the young people find ways to express themselves – through drama, music (mostly hip-hop and rap), photography, video, and other art forms, including *capoeira*, a Brazilian martial art combining dance and self defense. The staff seems very upbeat, active, and caring, and their relationships with the young people seem warm and supportive.

We facilitators agreed that the group was, for the most part, an ideal one. More than half the participants were girls or women, and little sexism was displayed – the facilitators were repeatedly reminded to use inclusive language, which is even harder to do in Spanish than in English. There was no problem at all getting

them to share in the processing of even the first exercises. (Managing not to repeatedly go overtime during the processing was a larger challenge.) Unlike some groups, they loved the Adjective (we say, Positive) names. They even liked “I-messages” (which we call Responsible Messages)! The only problems we encountered were with the role plays, which they wanted to turn into dramatic productions rather than practice of conflict resolution techniques. One young man said he would divide up his life as “before PAV (AVP in Spanish) and after PAV.”

In their evaluations of the workshop, there were many comments about how they would use what they learned to help them in living a nonviolent life. Considering that some of them had participated in the violence of warfare, were victims of violence (the parents of at least one had been killed) and forced displacement, and had been abused as children (one said in an exercise, “I cannot remember even one good memory of my childhood”), they seemed like normal, even wholesome youths. While the young people expressed a desire to live more normal lives, they also expressed great hopes for changing their country for the better, and they thought that AVP would help them do that. Many wanted to become facilitators, and I hope they can, because they bring a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to AVP. ■

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many troops are being massed. Although relations with Ecuador have improved after Colombia’s raid on guerrilla camps across the border in March, saber-rattling on both sides of the Colombian-Venezuelan border continue. News stories of Venezuela’s efforts to increase its military might, including its display of newly acquired missiles, are added to the coverage of Venezuelan President Chavez’s defiant statements opposing U.S. military aid to Colombia. “I think there’s a propaganda campaign preparing us to wage a proxy war against Venezuela,” said one CO, “and the troop buildup on the borders seems to point

to a possible war as well, not to mention the stockpiling of military equipment.”

While much of the U.S. peace movement’s attention is (rightly) focused on the Middle East, we should remember that U.S. interests are strong in Latin America and that Colombia is the third-largest recipient of U.S. military aid. On Sunday June 8, President Chavez called for an end of the guerrilla war in Colombia and a unilateral release of all the kidnapped hostages. “You in the FARC should know that the war has become the excuse for the Empire to threaten us all. The day there is peace in Colombia, there will no longer be any excuse for a U.S. Empire.” It seems he is also concerned about a possible proxy war. ■

Alternatives to Violence Project International Gathering in Kenya 2008

The AVP Forest: Seedlings, Saplings, and Maturing Trees

Our Tree of Nonviolence Is Growing into a Forest!

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is active in the world and dynamically bringing peace-building to areas in all phases of dealing with violence – prevention, crisis management, and recovery.

The International AVP Gathering begins with supper on Sunday, September 14, 2008, and ends with breakfast on Saturday, September 20 in Nairobi, Kenya.

We are grateful to be hosted by Kenyans in the wake of the violence there and hopeful that facilitators from around the world can support Kenyans by volunteering on AVP facilitation teams, especially the week before and after the conference.

We invite other countries to consider hosting the next conference, especially one that might benefit from international facilitators coming to support workshops before and after the gathering.

The International AVP Conference is guided by participants' understandings of our most exciting work, how AVP makes an impact in each country, and what will be most helpful to participants' work when they return home. Facilitation is shared among those attending.

At the time of this writing, ideas for topics are: manly awareness, women's issues in AVP, anger materials, workshops for prison officers, increasing facilitator skills, Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshops dealing with trauma, taking AVP into current conflict areas, AVP with ex-combatants, sharing our manuals, an Australian college curriculum, the Demietta Initiative, new communication technologies (Skype and Dim-Dim), and meetings for the AVP International Development and Resource Committee (IDRC), on the topics of communications, education, finance, legal, networking, planning, public relations, and regional support.

Requests have also been made to discuss theory and practice of micro lending (a new concept to those in South Africa who requested more information) and discussions on the scientific and spiritual sides of AVP.

More information about AVP International can be found at avpinternational.org. The epistle of the 2006 AVP International Gathering, held in South Africa, is available at avpinternational.org/2006Epistle.pdf. Keep a look out for the posting of 2008 Epistle. Begin planning now to participate in 2010! ■

Peacebuilding
en las Américas offers opportunities
for Spanish-speaking volunteers to work with our
partners in Central America and Colombia. Prospective
volunteers with skills in the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)
or other areas such as trauma healing, administration, and
peace education should contact Val Liveoak, Coordinator,
Peacebuilding *en las Américas*, by e-mail at
PLA@friendspeaceteams.org.



Acting Out a Happy Memory
Participants in a trauma healing workshop in Colombia dramatize a good memory associated with a lost person or thing. Remembering good things about what they have lost helps them put their sadness into perspective. See LAC Becomes PLA and Develops New Work, page 18.

Friends Peace Team programs include those in the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI), Peacebuilding *en las Américas* (PLA), and the Indonesian Initiative. All three programs have low overhead, minimal administrative structure, maximal program activity, and active participation by local groups of people. With increased donations, all three are positioned to extend Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshops and workcamp possibilities for adults and teens.

This work tills rich soil for ongoing peace work.

Please use the envelope enclosed with this PeaceWays to mail your support. Every contribution is needed and appreciated. None is too small, and all is put to good use by the volunteers who donate large and small amounts of their time to this ministry.

Donations to Friends Peace Teams are tax-exempt. Undesignated donations cover the costs of PeaceWays, financial accounting, and administrative support. Donations may be earmarked in the check memo line to AGLI, PLA or Indonesia, to go 100% for field work in that area of the world, or to the Elise Boulding Fund for scholarships to those called to service.

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