



Friends Peace Teams Peace Ways

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By David Zarembka

The Referendum on the Kenyan Constitution

In the African Great Lakes Region elections are frequently violent and can include bribing, intimidation, human rights violations, and the potential for civil war. In 2002, Quaker and Mennonite organizations formed the Quaker Peace Network-Africa. QPN has observed elections in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Kenya.

AGLI volunteer Andrew Peterson observed five elections in Burundi this summer. Andrew also came to Kenya as a QPN observer during the August 4 referendum on the adoption of a new constitution. He led the training of the 50 election observers in western Kenya, saying: "Suppose nothing happens at your polling station except the orderly voting and counting according to procedures. Will you have wasted your time? No, because your presence was perhaps the reason that nothing unlawful happened. The concept of election observing is that people will be careful if someone is watching them."

In contrast to the death of six people in Nairobi and some hate speech and leaflets before the 2007 Kenyan election, the 2010 referendum went surprisingly well. Unlike in 2007, the government responded quickly to hate messages, posted extra security forces in the hot spots, and announced those actions publicly.

The new constitution was accepted by 69 percent of the voters. About 63 percent of adults registered to vote and about 72 percent of registered voters cast ballots—a good turnout for Kenya.

AGLI and Friends Church Peace Teams placed eight observers in Uasin Gishu in the Rift Valley, an area hard hit by 2007 post-election violence. The observers reported that the new Interim Independent Electoral Commission did an excellent job of conducting the election, although some room for improvement was noted.



A woman casts her ballot in a Burundian election.

My polling station was one of the 18 (of 210) that had electronic voter registration. Voters put their left thumb on a device that brought up their picture, registration card, etc. About five people had problems and were sent to the Presiding Officer for validation. After the voting, the Presiding Officer used a cell phone to text results to headquarters. Results were announced two hours after poll closing, with no time for rigging returns as in 2007.

As Andrew commented, while not much happened at polling stations, our presence was valuable. Most polling stations had no neutral election observers and in one constituency, the QPN observer was the only independent observer.

Acceptance of a new constitution is only the first step in reorganizing the government. It will not be easy. We hope that the orderliness and acceptance of the referendum results will not lull Kenyans into a false complacency. I am sure that will not happen with AGLI and the QPN.

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By M. Dahlan
(translated by Nadine Hoover)

A Reflection from Nurussalam, East Aceh

After decades of armed conflict, it's important to rebuild trust as well as livelihoods. I look for opportunities to help people get legal claims to the land they are on, get the resources they need to plant and harvest, and get food and shelter if that is needed. I am grateful that people can trust me to see that resources get to the people. I am building a small space for AVP workshops by my fish farm so that people have a safe, calm place to practice. My strength is when I can have more friends from around the world who have insights beyond mine and have a conscience within and beyond themselves.



M. Dahlan (center) leads an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshop with M'dain (left) and Kamilia (right) in M'dain's home.

By Nadine Hoover

"Real Work"

The Acehnese talk about the day-to-day work we do together as "entry points" or reasons we get together. They consider "real work" to be our mutual struggle to live full, conscientious, peaceful lives on this planet. The Indonesia Initiative has a number

of "entry points"—workshops in nonviolence, trauma healing and developmental play, collaborative development of water filters, shipping wheelchairs and so forth. But we measure success by how deeply we touch and transform our own lives and the lives of those we spend time with, and then trust that the work of our lives will transform and serve others.

We need to be familiar with "real work" in our own lives in order to be able to recognize it in others. We must be changed ourselves before we can change others.

After the tsunami and the subsequent Aceh peace accord signed in 2005, the Acehnese were taken with our statement that Friends travel to share our experience in a "Living Spirit that gives life, joy, peace and prosperity through love, integrity and compassionate justice among people who live in simplicity, equality, liberty and nonviolence." They asked, "This! How do you do this?"

It's a challenging question. How do we spend our time, develop and share our talents, tend to our health, finances and relationships? Does our daily reality match our image of our best

self? How do we balance caring for those who have been beaten down and exploited with caring for ourselves? More and more, we are asking these questions along with the Indonesians.

A person exercising conscience doesn't need war and violence to infuse life with a sense of adventure, glory and honor. Living with integrity of conscience demands strength, courage and boldness that saves us from the boredom of a mundane life and offers a tremendous sense of power, liberty and vibrancy.

After the peace accord, travel restrictions continued in Aceh through 2009, and harassment and extortion persisted from wartime behavior, particularly in former independence strongholds. In 2010, for the first time in decades, foreigners were allowed to travel freely in Aceh. Their presence alone calls people to a higher standard of public interaction. We are glad to bring foreigners to Aceh at this critical time in history and be witnesses to the possibility and promise of peace.

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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 Val Liveoak

Sowing Miracles

It would take more effort than I am able to mobilize at this moment to count the number of Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops I have facilitated over the last 12 months; it is at least 20. In addition, my work with Peacebuilding en las Américas involves mentoring new facilitators and helping groups in the countries where we work—Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua—form self-sustaining organizations to continue the work independently of international presence, and in the long run, to develop local resources—human and financial—to support the work.

Paradoxically, the workshops become repetitive as one facilitates more and more, while at the same time, each workshop is unique. During the workshops, each participant and facilitator experiences similar events, exercises and activities, and through the course of the workshop has “aha” moments, small miracles of insight. Some of these are so illuminating that they change people’s lives. Other insights lead to a slower transformation; however, when people continue to participate in AVP, transformation can be cumulative. A facilitator cannot always know who is transforming herself or who is going to make a permanent change in his life. Always, however, participants experience some laughter—even moments of joy—and thoughtful reflection.

Evaluations at the end of workshops are markedly similar in the many different environments in which I have worked—jails, churches, schools, community groups—and after being translated from the many different languages of the countries where we work. The most common response is, “Thank you.”

In my experience, if given the opportunity to do so, over 80 percent of participants in a Basic workshop want to continue on to the 2nd Level (Advanced) workshop, and most of those who do want to become facilitators. Appreciation for the program seems to be greatest in groups of people who have had fewer opportunities and little encouragement to reflect on their own experience and to be treated as equals by others. Thus prisoners, victims and perpetrators of violence, poorly educated and oppressed people are, if only momentarily during the workshop, transformed, and see a vision of a different life. My experience



Blindfolded participants (including Val Liveoak in rear) in a community-based trauma-healing workshop in Colombia cross an obstacle course, guided by their partners’ voices—with all the partners calling out at once. “This teaches us that we have to learn to listen to the voice that is right for us as we try to heal ourselves,” commented one participant.

is that we see ourselves as more whole during an AVP workshop.

In this way, it seems easier to work with people who know they have suffered, who have been the victims and the perpetrators of violence. They are the “fertile ground” in which AVP is sowed. But those who are relatively rich and privileged can also benefit greatly, *if* they open themselves, “plow up the fallow ground” as early Friends expressed.

The love and care I have received from participants and other facilitators have been transformative. On the other hand, when I work with people who are in denial about the violence in their lives, protected by their status, wealth or privilege, and those whose desires to help others cover up their need to work on their own suffering or violence, it’s hard to plant deeply. When I share those feelings, I also fail to bring forth the profound changes needed in my life.

It is a great privilege to keep sowing, to experience wholeness in workshops and to share the possibility of transformation that AVP offers. The good effects often are apparent, and many times I feel them in myself. But even when the good effects are not readily apparent, one never knows when or where a seed might sprout.

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Developmental play is one of the strongest medicines for raising up children and women, teachers and parents after war. At Tunas Baru Preschool in the former refugee camp of Barak Induk, North Sumatra, Indonesia, Dita, who is newly married, learns to be a teacher. The children are thrilled with the developmentally appropriate materials and activities. Friends Peace Teams' Indonesia Initiative is excited to be part of a global peace movement helping children, parents and families learn to practice nonviolence and peace every day.

Please contribute to the Friends Peace Teams initiatives and to the general fund. Undesignated donations to FPT go to the general fund to provide shared administrative support, publish PeaceWays and maintain the website. Checks should be made out to "Friends Peace Teams" and mailed to the address at right. Donations can also be made on line at www.friendspeaceteams.org.

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