Message from International CoP President, Daphrose Ntarataze

As follows is my President’s Report to the 9th AGM General Assembly held at the Initiatives of Change (IofC) Caux-Palace Conference Centre in Caux Geneva on 26 July 2015.

It was heartwarming that so many CoP delegates from around the world were able to attend the AGM, even though there were critical events occurring in their different countries worldwide.

We were grateful that the President of IofC International, Dr Omnia Marzouk, took time out from the IofC General Assembly to attend. She congratulated CoP for the extraordinary work done so far, and was happy to share that she had participated in her first CoP Circle in January 2015 in Oxford. She looks forward to celebrating with us at the 25th Anniversary of CoP in 2016.

Omnia pointed to an attractive paper art piece at the front of the room, explaining that this was created by the delegates at the General Assembly of the International Association. It depicts the important role that CoP plays in the IofC story. The tree represented the international work of IofC; the birds represented the delegates who come from around the world to the IofC Annual Conferences; the branches were the different continents; the symbols the different programs, and the 41 flowers represented the countries that CoP Circles are run.

In my report to the AGM, I explained that this year CoP has tried to initiate an evaluation of our work; however, there are two factors that have prevented us from providing a true evaluation. The first is that some CoP Circles essentially happen in remote and sensitive conflict affected areas. The second reason is that in a CoP Circle a safe sacred space is always developed, where trust between the participants is built and the privacy of the circumstances of the individuals or groups are held in strictest confidence. Therefore, to collect a report at the source of some CoP Circles is not always possible.

As well, because of the modest means of some CoP women, in some places internet is not even easily accessible, and the general lack of finances of the CoP Association (being that we are all volunteers), does not allow us an opportunity to assess the level of transformation of the entire global network.

Moreover, our field of work is essentially with ‘the human being’ in its multidimensionality. It is therefore difficult to quantify. The measurement of the impact of our activities are very often too sensitive and traumatic to share outside the Circle. However, a majority of our activities and successes are nevertheless obvious and shared in the reports that can be seen on our website www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace. These stories are inspiring, and representative of what happens in CoP Circles around the world.

I pay tribute to the dedication and selflessness of my fellow CoP International Coordinators: Kate Monkhouse (UK), Iman Al Ghafari (Damascus, Syria), Portia Mosia (Johannesburg SA), Shoshana Faire & Tanya Fox (Sydney, Australia), and Jean Brown (Adelaide, Australia). Reliably each month they connect in a generous devoted spirit by Skype with me in Burundi (or Switzerland).

My loving thoughts and feelings go to Trish McDonald-Harrison (Sydney, Australia) who held the People Care Portfolio—she has had to step down due to health issues, and also to Pari Sanyú (Melbourne, Australia) who was the Secretary elect—has also stepped down due to heavy work commitments.

Our leadership team always aims to achieve the highest values for CoP. These values are conveyed in our fruitful decisions and actions. Our monthly Skype meetings are conducted with supportive team cohesion, in productive and creative consultation on forward planning, reflecting on global activities, and generally monitoring the smooth running of the association. We decide collectively who will do what, taking into account particular contexts in which our members live.

We are ever grateful for the support received through the link with our international parent bodies of IofC through the secretariat and contacts with the responsible international Geneva office.

Creators of Peace (CoP) is a global network of women who have experienced a CoP Circle.

CoP Circles are creating cultures of peace around the world in solidarity with women of all faiths cultures and backgrounds.

During a CoP Circle, women share, listen, and learn from each other’s stories; reflect on and analyze the causes and solutions for conflict; look with-in and with-out for the ethical prerequisites for effective peaceful solutions, and identify their own innate ability to engender peace in all areas of conflict.

Based on the principle that ‘peace begins with me’, CoP women are empowered to initiate peace in their own lives, and to seriously consider opportunities to engender peace, and actively engage in community peace building initiatives.

Explore more about our Circles of Peace in the film "Celebrating 10 Years of Creators of Peace" on YouTube

Click here to join us on the Creators of Peace Facebook page

Check out our website www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace
Continued from Page 1

CoP ACTIVITIES: Your International Coordinator Committee have represented CoP at plenary panel discussions, lectures, workshops and public Forums. We have actively participated in this year’s Annual IofC Caux Conferences with representation at the ‘Just Governance’ and ‘Land and Security’ conferences, and participated in the International Peacebuilders’ Forum (IPF) and held an exhibition stand to explain our work to the public.

As we have seen from our participation at the IPF, CoP is a program which interests many people. Thanks to our wonderful volunteer Facilitators and our global network generally, who promote it in every way they can, we are now in 43 countries. Previously reserved for women only, more and more men are also becoming interested now.

The success of CoP Circles is such that requests have now come from Senegalese prisons. To our knowledge, as well as Mali where many Circles have launched off since June 2015, the countries which are asking for them straight away are: Armenia, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, France, Lebanon, India, South Sudan, Chad, Niger, Tunisia, Zimbabwe.

PROMOTION: We’ve promoted CoP through diverse forms of media, speeches; participated in public events, including 5th Forum for Youth in East Africa. We have also established new programs and partnerships with IHEID/Geneva University, GIPRI, and reinforced our collaboration with Republic of Geneva, Geneva Town & Meyrin Town. We pay tribute to private donations received to help fund specific actions such as the one to Burundi from friends and acquaintances in Switzerland, as well as from CoP’s at The Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies at Sydney University notably initiated by Shoshana Faire; and, those to Baringo County in Kenya and in Zimbabwe.

DEVELOPING OUR RESOURCES: A new CoP promotional film was launched to support a Fundraising Appeal entitled ‘Give Tens’ to pay tribute to the past 10 years of the Creators of Peace Circle program, and raise funds for the core resources required to sustain the growth of our work into the future—to acknowledge the value of our wonderful volunteer Facilitators and CoP women in the global network as they continue to put peace into practice by running CoP Circles, participating in local community support groups, conferences, workshops and other peacebuilding initiatives.

CAPACITY BUILDING: The International Coordinator Committee have identified that we need to put in place a administrative structure worthy of a global network such as ours, and service its growing number of responsibilities, and for this we will need funding. Since May 2015 a young university intern, Laura Chello, has been voluntarily helping us prepare for a major event to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Creators of Peace planned for 4-10 August 2016

GOALS FOR 2015-6
* modernise and stabilise the governance of Creators of Peace
* prepare the next strategic plan for 2016-2020
* prepare the election process for the 2016 AGM General Assembly
* stage a major event to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of CoP
* develop partnerships
* initiate research projects
* embark on a global fundraising initiative to mobilise the human and material resources to stage the 25th Anniversary Celebration event, and secure the necessary ongoing financial resources required to take CoP into the future.

FINAL WORD: It was very pleasing to hear the national reports from the delegates present at the AGM, as well as those transmitted in writing.

With all my heart, I send gratitude to our entire global network as you continue to travel on your journey as creators of peace.

Creating next steps...
...Growing our capacity

By Kate Monkhouse, UK

Two key words within Initiatives of Change are “next steps”. For two days in Caux this summer, 5 of the International Co-ordinators of CoP International took time out to discern some “next steps” for CoP.

We had just sat with colleagues at our Annual General Meeting to share reports on what CoP women around the world have been doing, updates on our finances, and how we are managing our programmes, communications and fundraising. As well as, it was a wonderful time to celebrate Creators of Peace Circles in different countries.

After that, we took time aside from the busy conference season to sit quietly, reflect together and discuss difficult challenges.

CoP is led and held by volunteers, both locally in most countries and internationally. Together we carry a lot of responsibility for training and accompanying women in their peace work, as well as for stewarding resources and finances. We also bring our community and professional experience to bear on the development of our training materials and effective communications with a network of over 40 national coordinators.

Items for our consideration included preparations for the 25th Anniversary Conference in 2016, and how to secure grants to support our network and assess the risks for women doing peace work in conflict areas.

Some of the challenges we would like to share with our network, and glean your wisdom on over the next year, include:

- Succession planning for our international committee: who might take on responsibility for our finances as Treasurer and who would be interested to develop our training programmes?
- How to develop our team of trainers who can respond to our growing list of requests for facilitation trainings – in French, in Spanish, in Arabic…
- Can we build up a “Response Fund” following on from the Give Tens appeal to ensure we have the money we need to visit and support Creators of Peace women in dangerous situations?
- Should we start charging for facilitation training to encourage participants to help cover our training costs?
- Making the most of online opportunities, social media and blogging to help sustain the friendship between women in different countries.

We recognised that we need to work towards putting in place a team of core people who will carry the work through to our 25th Anniversary Conference and beyond.

We look forward to journeying with you...
REPORTS OF CREATORS OF PEACE CIRCLES AROUND THE GLOBE

Creators of Peace at the International Peace-Builders’ Forum

By Tanya Fox, Australia

CoP were invited for a second year to participate at the International Peace-Builders’ Forum (IPF) on ‘Non-violent Conflict Transformation: Dignity, Inclusion and Participation’ held in July 2015 at the IofC Conference Centre in Caux, Geneva.

CoP President Daphrose Ntarataze, was a panelist on the Forum; Jean Brown and Shoshana Faire (Australia) co-facilitated a Workshop on ‘The experience of CoP Circles as an approach to peace creation’, and I steered a CoP exhibition stand with support from Christiane Garin Al-Azhari (Switzerland) and Lauro Chello (Roma). This all generated a high level of interest from exhibitors, IofC General Assembly delegates, and visitors to the IPF Forum.

It was a unique opportunity to be in the company of practitioners, NGO’s and students of peacebuilding efforts from all corners of the globe who came together specifically to showcase and share their theories, modalities, educational programmes, methods and ideas on how to create peace.

The workshops, panel discussions, group discussions and one to one connections were all focused on the topic of peace which created a palpable sense of a common vision and positive energy.

In the true spirit of the principles of IofC, the Quiet Time sessions reinforced the message within everyone present, that ‘Peace begins with me’.

An added bonus was the backdrop of the breathtaking views from the Caux-Palace of the French and Swiss Alps that tower either side of Lake Geneva, helping us to reflect on our vision for world peace.

Another bonus was that fourteen women and one man stayed on after the IPF to participate in a 3-Day CoP Circle, and then the Facilitator Training that immediately followed.

We welcome our new Facilitators who came from Australia, Armenia, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Tanzania, Burundi and Italy, to the CoP global network, and in particular, Jean Maurice Muret, the first male CoP Facilitator outside of Burundi!

Below is a report from one of the graduates:

A gift without price

by Marie Émilie Lacroix-Messinak, Quebec province

Kuí! (An Innu greeting),
First of all, I want to thank everyone I met at Caux Conference Centre during my first (and not my last) stay. I was there for the International Peace-Builders’ Forum.

It was a very great and determinative experience for me.

I shared good and precious moments with many wonderful people in a unique scenery, a kind of anticipation of paradise, the promised land!

I could meditate as I needed to, shared my thoughts, and I received a lot of very essential nourishment - food, spiritual, mental and physical.

When you come back from a place like this, you are different - if not, it was a lost of time.

I personally grew, I worked on my suffering past - now I am free from certain suffering and important scars. I have a new, strong peace in myself. When I left Caux, I had some plans concerning my attitudes, my engagement as a spouse, mother, grandmother and as a teacher. I’ll apply what I learnt and share what I lived, and put a first seed in the heart of my students.

Of course, I’ll work with the group of Initiatives of Change in Quebec city, specially with my people, the Natives.

I was in Caux specifically for the IPF forum, but I was invited to stay and participate in a Creators of Peace Circle which I accepted, at first out of curiosity, because as a native I know about Circles, in which I believe so much. Secondly, because the women who invited me were so careful with me, I was in a kind of mother’s womb (I’d never known that before), I wanted to stay in this dream.

After the CoP Circle, I stayed on to do the wonderful instructive Facilitator training. This was like a circle as I knew it, but the big difference was the participants. It was with women from different cultures, but the process was different. There is a goal, that we don't have in ours, but the result is the same, a step on the healing path ...our Red way. The CoP Circle is a very productive way to create strong links and to give precious and unique tools to help others, to help ourselves and to guide our environment, softly, gently to a great change. As a result, I strongly believe that I am different—more enriched, more balanced.

I am grateful to have experienced the Spirit of Caux, it was a mystery that I couldn't understand at first, but now I feel part of it having lived the mystery. I want to thank every person that I met, the men and women who shared with me the precious gift of sharing more and more. A special thankfulness to Tanya, to my dear Daphrose, Shoshana, Laura, Yannick, Jean Maurice, Laurent from Montreal, Elvani and all the others I met.

I hope to be with you all for the CoP 25th Anniversary to help celebrate this particular way to create a profound and stable peace.

FOOTNOTE: Thank You from Tanya Fox. I’d like to acknowledge the wonderful support that the Creators of Peace team received from the Caux Conference convenors, organisers and administrators, as well as the housekeeping volunteers.

Caux is where the world meets ..it’s an opportunity to connect with people from all around the globe. The spirit of the house is ever warm and welcoming. People genuinely listen and are interested in each other. The policy that everyone does service in the kitchen or dining room is a humbling experience where people of all faiths, backgrounds and levels of society, work together as one—one human family.

I’m ever grateful for the opportunity to participate at IofC conferences, and to make a contribution to build bridges across the worlds divides.
Forgiveness decontaminates the environment by Vera and Maria Cristina

BRAZIL ‘Peace is the spiritual state into which we enter when we accept our own story, let go of our pride and of our desire for revenge and walk towards forgiveness to heal wounds’ - this is the definition of peace made by the participants of the last CoP Circle held in Brazil during the first weekend of May 2015; a group of young women who, despite their age have already suffered so much and carry the consequences of their wrong decisions.

For most of them it was an amazing experience as they found new things inside themselves, which they had never been aware of. They were very brave in facing the pain and anger while sharing their stories as part of the healing process, something that some of them never thought could happen when they first arrived, but they soon became so natural and even necessary in the midst of the trust and confidence that was built during our time together. There was also a strong call to forgiveness, both for those who believed they had forgiven, as well as for those who thought they would never do so; as the turning point ended with the presentation of the film ‘Beyond Forgiveness’. The experience encouraged the participants to make a list of the people they needed to forgive and/or that of those to whom they should apologize, knowing that ‘Resentment is a poison that I take, while hoping the other one will die.’ (an indigenous motto on which we had a reflection).

They concluded to continue working on their own change without waiting for the other to change first, without blaming anyone, using the tools they received, and take Quiet Time seriously in search for the peace and happiness they deserve.

We welcome these women to the CoP global network.

Free flights for peace!
By Jean Brown

INDIA
Two Indian airline companies, Spice Jet and Jet Star, flew five Kashmiri women free of charge to and from the capital Delhi for them to take part in a CoP Circle and facilitators’ training in August 2015—say this was their contribution to ‘women’s empowerment’.

The 18 women who attended the Circle were invited and hosted by Youdon Aukatsang, Member of the Tibetan Parliament in exile, currently serving her second term as an elected member of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, is also the Executive Director for Empowering the Vision Project [ENVISION], an NGO based in New Delhi, dedicated to youth empowerment with the focus on Tibetan youth since 2008.

Youdon commented, ‘I first came across the CoP Circle group while attending an International Dialogue on Just Governance at Initiatives of Change, Asia Plateau, at Panchgani, in February. I was so inspired by the stories shared by the women peace practitioners, that I was determined to be a part of a CoP Circle.’

Among the participants at the two day Circle were social activists, environmentalists, community workers, teachers and students. We were a group of Afghans, Tibetans and Indians from Kashmir, Sikkim, Pune and Delhi.

It was a great opportunity to explore personal challenges of creating peace and understand peace as a process and not an arrival.

In journeying through the ten gathering points which included an understanding of what builds and destroys peace, inner peace, inner listening, the power of forgiveness and peace in practice, the women shared their life stories in a trusting and non-judging atmosphere. Learning to listen with empathy, they gained insights from each other’s experiences.

The beauty of the CoP Circle was that the women not only connected with each other but took deep interest in the process.

Almost all women committed themselves to further widen CoP Circles in India, and went on to join the Facilitators’ Training which immediately followed.

By the end they were making plans for CoP Circles for isolated women and widows in Kabul and for villagers in rural India.

AN UPDATE: The first CoP Circles in Indian rural villages are now being trialled in the State of Maharashtra. Spear headed by the young woman, Archana Rao, who did the August Peace Circle they will take CoP Circles to 5 villages.

‘You can tell people of the need to struggle, but when the powerless start to see that they really can make a difference, nothing can quench the fire.’

By Leymah Gbowee
REPORTS OF CREATORS OF PEACE CIRCLES AROUND THE GLOBE

CoPeace Circles: Nurturing from success to significance

By Mumbi Judy and Njeri Kimanthi
Photos by Sam Mwaura Kamau

KENYA

CoP was introduced to Kenya in 2007 by Jean Brown (Australia), Tehmina Siganporia (India) and Ann Njeri Ndiangu-Kimanthi (Kenya). Ever since, the programme has successfully reached out to over one thousand women from all over Kenya. Now, eight years later, the CoP team in Kenya have made the decision to go back and find out what the impact in the lives of the participants has been.

At one of the many meetings planned for this year to measure the impact of the CoP programme in Kenya, most of the participants voluntarily shared how it has changed their lives positively and influenced others around them. ‘CoPC training healed me from the disease of tribalism that I had suffered from for quite some time after the post-election violence of 2007 in Kenya,’ shared Elizabeth. ‘Together with other women that took part in the training, we were able to forgive and reach out to people from the ethnic group that had attacked us,’ she said.

Did the participants remember the different sessions they had been taken through during the training? Yes. For most of them it was still very fresh in their mind. This was a very good indication that the learnings from the programme were very helpful in their lives.

The most mentioned turning point for them had been the meeting on the ‘Power of Forgiveness’. Margaret, a beneficiary of Peace Circles, shared how she had lived a life of bitterness and anger towards her closest relatives for a period of 9 years. She used to occasionally carry a knife ready to seek revenge on her co-wife as a result of her broken marriage. The story sharing sessions made her gain new strength and hope for her situation and she made a decision to put the knife down and forgive. Her relatives could not believe it and were challenged by her decision. From a family that could not see eye to eye, this decision changed her family.

‘I used to think I was the only one who was always right and the one who could talk and make the right decisions. The CoP Circle training changed me. I learnt to listen to others and respect their opinions without discrimination. Now I give everyone a chance to talk and we make decisions together.’

As a symbol of peace and a way of the women re-committing themselves to be peace creators, candle lighting was done. And since a candle looses nothing by lighting another, they committed themselves to keep the fire of peace alive and pass it on to others. The candle lighting was done as women went round the room singing and dancing to the song ‘Peace begins with me, peace begins with you, peace of the world begins with us.’

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Njeri Kimanthi inspires 1000’s of women in Kenya

Thanks to Njeri Kimanthi’s leadership, passion and vision to bring peace to her beloved Kenya, 1,000’s of women are being inspired to create peace….one CoP Circle at a time.

Below is brief reporting on recent events that have led to a historical reconciliation in Baringo County—thanks to Njeri’s dedicated CoP Kenyan team. To read further on these and other reports go to: https://www.iofcafrica.org/en/news

A CoP Consultative Meeting was held with Baringo County Leader

The Governor of Baringo county, Kenya, supported the CoP Circles program ever since he was told of its effectiveness.

Therefore during the first week of February 2015, two CoP Circles took place in two villages in Pokot East-Baringo County; Njinyang and Tangulbei.

Thirty-four leaders from Baringo county honoured the invitation to take part in a consultative meeting organized by the CoP team in Kenya on 22 June. ‘This was the most successful meeting with leaders that I have ever been part of’, said Njeri. We had politicians in the house….but there was no politics…it was all in the spirit of searching for peace in Baringo County.

CoP was so much commended for the work they have been doing there. Well done CoP team Kenya!!!

CoP was given the blessing to engage communities in a bid to search for peace in Baringo.

‘Wow! Not many organizations come back to see how we are faring after they train us.’ These were the words of Assistant Chief of Gichaka location in Nyandarua county who took part in a CoP follow-up meeting that brought together 13 participants on 8 July, 2015.

‘Here in Maasai land we only forgive twice and the third time we react. But Thank God now, because what CoP taught us, has changed this negative ideology.’ This was a comment by one of the 14 women who participated in the CoP follow up meeting that took place on 11 July, 2015 at Ololulunga center, Narok County.

An emotional apology from Pokot women was a historical moment!

As a result of CoP Circles, an apology has taken place by the Pokot women to the Illchamus and Tugen communities on behalf of their community for atrocities caused.


Watch a further inspirational film to see Njeri encouraging women to be powerful agents of transformation: ‘The Role of Women as Agents of Peace’

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A Way To Look At It:

**Editorial piece** by Edward Peters - a member of the International Council of Initiatives of Change International. He lives in Sweden

**Refugees ...a gift not a threat**

‘Attitude is everything’ is a well-known maxim. Our chances of overcoming a problem, according to this philosophy, depends largely on our attitude to it.

With refugees pouring into Europe by the tens of thousands, our attitude to this ‘crisis’ may not be everything. But if we don’t un-muddle the thinking in our heads, the consequences could be catastrophic – for them and for us.

So much of the current debate is centred on our ourselves – whether we can cope, how we will be affected. Of course these issues are important, but there is more at stake here.

As Europeans (and fellow human beings), we need to reboot our brains, shedding the notion that these people are a threat, and come to see them as a gift instead.

A gift? How can that be when many European countries are already struggling with economic inequalities, unemployment, ethnic tension? We may find that these fleeing people, poor in possessions, but rich in experience and values, may help us in ways we have not imagined. Their humanity could rekindle our humanity.

As we become more aware of the smallness of our often-self-preoccupied lives, we might begin to find a new and deeper motivation. Already we see the crisis bringing out the best in people, as the latent generosity in so many Europeans is unleashed.

It could lead to a renewed sense of purpose – amid the drifiting aimlessness gripping our continent – to help shape societies which provide justice for all.

Another gift could be an opportunity to atone for the woes of the past. As everyone knows, whether we admit it or not, Europe bears a heavy responsibility for the breakdown of nations and communities in many of the countries from which the refugees are fleeing. For centuries we have acted largely out of self-interest without thought of the consequences. Here is a chance to help redress the balance.

A new humility and integrity in the West might give us more credibility, too, in the world.

Yes, seeing these people as a gift to us, instead of as a threat to our comfortable isolation, could be the change of mindset which would release new ideas and fresh teamwork across the continent. What this might mean in terms of hard government policies is another matter. But attitude, if not everything, is fundamental to find a way forward.

**The CoP Circle heals the past**

by Valerie Tikkanen

**SWEDEN**

Anna Molgaard had invited six friends to take part in a CoP Circle. As most of the group already knew each other, there quickly developed a deep sense of trust, respect and warmth which enabled everyone to be really honest about the hurts and burdens they are carrying.

One woman said ‘I don’t believe that I said all that, I haven’t told anyone else’ Another from Ethiopia said ‘I thought that all Swedes had a good life and that only we immigrants had problems, now I understand that I also have preconceived ideas’.

During the weekend we realized that each person had grown and developed by going through difficulties, so problems can turn into XXXX. Everyone went away with the desire to listen more to themselves and to others.

The group plans to meet again to continue the conversation and we promised to support each other as the CoP Circle needs to happen inside us to heal the past first and then we can create peace outside of ourselves.

On reflection from a CoP Facilitator

I am reflecting on how elated I was to be part of the first AGM to be held in South Africa and to attend the CoP Facilitator’s Refresher Course that followed.

At Or. Tambo airport we were warmly welcomed by Jackie Euvrard, one of the gathering organizers. We were taken to the Lumbo Institute where the gathering was being held. It was 6.30am and participants were just getting ready for Quiet Time. We joined them at breakfast and received some welcome embraces. Then the intensive program began.

Women shared how they organize CoP Circles in their various countries. Facilitators from Burundi, South Sudan, Kenya and Ivory Coast demonstrated the need of CoP Circles in their various communities. They shared their experiences of putting Peace into Practice.

The Facilitators formed one big circle and went through all the gathering points, sharing experiences of new methods of facilitating.

I revived my skills of Listening and of Inner Peace. I learned the need to involve other stake holders in the process of putting peace into practice. I also learned that the CoP program is to liberate women’s hearts and minds. That forgiveness is the key to freedom; that ‘She who walks with peace walks with God.’ I also learned to manage CoP finances according to the values of the four standards of IofC.

As a facilitator, I learned to accept criticisms from members in my circle as a way to shape my character.

I have learned to live with the opposing and sometimes violent situations that I have to face from time to time.

I happily jumped at the opportunity to lead the ecumenical service we organized at the gathering. It was such a joy to be part of this Facilitators Refresher Course co-facilitated by the facilitation team Jean Brown (Australia), Kate Monkhouse (UK), Shoshana Faire (Australia), Portia Mosia (Johannesburg) and Ann Njeri (Kenya)

From this gathering, I hope to live in peace, to move from talk to action and thus put peace into practice.

_Humbly submitted by, Lydia Ebah, Cameroon_

‘As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world ...as in being able to remake ourselves’

Mahatma Gandhi
Building peace & understanding in Syria

By Iman Al Ghafari

Thanks to Mr. Ramez Salamah who facilitated our entry to Lebanon in May 2015, I was able to accept an invitation from Mr. Ramez and Marie Chaftarie to bring 6 CoP women from Damascus to meet the IofC Lebanon team. Two of them, Rahaf and Suhair, had been before, the other four got to meet the team for the first time.

Marie and I enjoyed organizing the day which included an ice breaker, welcoming, sharing their stories, and what impact has the CoP Circle had on us. We then watched the film *For The Love of Tomorrow*. After lunch and walking around the lake we shared our visions for a better Syria, a really important session.

Being associated with MRA/IofC and CoP, and then watching the film *For The Love of Tomorrow*, has shown me what qualities I need to be able to build peace and that I need to be: The Explorer: exploring possibilities of reconciliation, finding the passionate side in myself, and then others. Exploring the creative side in us for reaching out, learning from others experiences and finding out the good side of each one. The Challenger: we need to move from our comfort zone, from our daily life and feelings. To challenge our true side that has been controlling us and sometimes slaving us and turning us into tools of perception and pre-judgment. I need a Companion: we need a person, a group or a team to accompany us through our journey, someone who can push us forward. Someone who can mentor us, guide us and advise us. We need to find God’s presence in our lives who never leaves us even when we go astray. We should not give up on one another. To be a compassionate and understanding person: One who understands the pain, anger, frustration and other’s needs. Someone who’s realistic and wise. Acknowledgment is a key to reconciliation even with the self.

Here are reports from the 6 Syrian CoP women:

**Rahaf. N.**
The navigating question was why IofC/ MRA doesn’t start with programs and tasks to do when someone wants to join. I asked the international and Lebanese team ‘what do you suggest we should do, what task would you give us?’ Their answer was working on the self first ...but I wanted to do something more. Then later I received a message from my mentor in Syria who said, ‘Give and forgive’. In a quiet time I realized that God had chosen us to learn about peace in order to purify our hearts to reconcile with our own selves, and then others. In my third visit to Lebanon and meeting with the team there, I have noticed how much MRA team have such great morals and behaviors. They caught our hearts with their kindness, hospitality and love.

**Fatima A.K.**
We want to work, we want to do something. I have thought CoP should be about achieving what we want. But we still have problems within ourselves. If we start purifying our intentions God will help us and forgive us. We need to start purifying even the smallest issues that are stuck inside us.

**Rula. T.**
I was surprised the way we were received by the Lebanese team and international. I was in awe of the way they showed love and compassion. The media and a few experiences during the war got us to think that Lebanese didn’t like Syrians. In fact it was amazing to see the good way we were treated by our neighbors. This event and gathering was the best place for connecting with the inner peace inside. Dr. Omnia and the team didn’t give us work or tasks to do, but they showed love and shared their wonderful experiences, and showed the importance of self change we should apply. That this is the start of the work. The film *For The Love of Tomorrow* was amazing. It showed the similarity during wars everywhere. Is it possible that we hold hands and build our country like in the film?

**Thanaa A.**
Meeting such great people helped me recall the time I attended the CoP Circle a year and half ago in Damascus. It helped me empty all the negativity held daily from what we have been experiencing. It is really not about who is right, but what is right. CoP left a great impact on me and made me aware of my behaviors and decisions. Through this program I realized how important it was to live the core of our faith and how to reach people from different backgrounds. Everyone has a touch of cruelty and passion but we need to be inspired. We need inspiration that frees us from hatred, stereotypes and anger. As Dr. Omnia said, ‘Everyone is unique’. This can really only be achieved by listening to our inner voice. I am going to commit to CoP meetings and be one of the facilitators in the future. ‘The verse in the Holy Quran says: ‘Oh who believe enter into peace completely’.

**Summaya M.**
I was cautious at the beginning about the background of the movement and association. However, when I met the team there I didn’t feel I was a stranger. The Prophet’s saying is: ‘Souls are like people they can connect or disconnect’. We connected fast with our Lebanon friends and the international team. I didn’t feel the differences which broke the barriers I had felt in me. The day after when I came back home, I got a phone call from a Christian colleague telling me about the loss of her close relative and I felt that I could support her and be there for her. It was amazing that God Almighty used me first to support my Christian colleague right after the meeting in Lebanon. I believe our task is to bridge more and build more good relationships with others in my country.

I am particularly grateful to have met Dr. Omnia Mazouk (IofC International President), Dr. Imad Karam (IofC Exec Director), and Mr. Peter Riddle who had come to Lebanon to see what they could do to support Syrians and help us find a way to build peace in Syria. Thank you MRA/IofC Lebanon for inviting us to come from Syria. These meetings have had a very positive influence on us all. Your readiness to help us understand the importance of peace and dialogue has created a new image about countries and neighbors that is so different from politics and their agendas - you are so full of humanity, love, respect and honesty. These meetings will create a new history God willing.

Special thanks to friends in IofC for their ongoing donations to fund our transportation. And to CoP for the tools you’ve taught us and the support, compassionate friendship and guidance that you give us.

**Love sent from Damascus, Syria**

Reported on Facebook by Jean Brown 19.09.15

'I was deeply touched when, after several attempts over several days, I finally got through by phone from my home in South Australia to Damascus to check in with Iman. Iman was in the middle of running a CoP Circle. ‘Oh this is so wonderful’ Iman enthused, ‘please speak to the women’. She put the phone on loudspeaker and I found myself in the middle of an excited babble of voices. I asked questions, Iman translated their responses ‘Yes, we are learning so much’, ‘I am seeing people differently’, ‘I have decided to forgive’, ‘I have changed’, the replies were tumbling out. ‘They are excited,’ said Iman, ‘they have not spoken to anyone outside Syria before’. I thanked them for their courage, and the hope they give for a future Syria. I told them that the world thinks of their country every day and we pray for them. ‘One of them is crying to hear this’ said Iman. In the Circle is a 10 year old girl. ‘She wants to say something to you,’ said Iman. A small voice in hesitant but clearly spoken English came close to the phone and said firmly ‘I love you’.
Fifty-two women in Mali bridging divides

By Daphrose Ntarataze and Marthe Mukerabirori

Invited by 'Women in Law and Development in Africa-Mali' (WILDAF-Mali), CoP President, Daphrose Ntarataze and Burundian colleague Marthe Mukerabirori, made two visits to Mali in recent months to facilitate CoP Circles for 52 women from the north and south of the country. The theme under which the Circles were held was, 'Space for dialogue and inclusive exchanges between women from Mali.'

In recent years the north especially has experienced much violence and massive displacement of peoples. The country is diverse and divided. The CoP Circles, invited in recognition of the influential role of women in bridging those divides, were seen as one step in a longer process of women's engagement.

The programme was supported by the Swiss Department for Foreign Affairs, Oxfam Novib and IMRAP (Malian Institute of Research and Action for Peace).

Key to the success of these Circles was the willingness of the women to listen to each other, to acknowledge the validity of each other's feelings and then the ability to reach out to the other in her pain and together find a way out. As Daphrose commented, 'Before you can ask your partner to change the music, you must first dance with them.'

See more at: www.iofc.org/creators-peace-circles

CoP Circles continue in Gweru, Zimbabwe

By Angie Katito and Adelaide Mhunduru

Since the last two CoP Circles in Mkoba suburbs of Gweru, it was our desire to come back and find out if there had been any ongoing effects. So, on 18 August 2015 we facilitated a follow up with 18 ladies from different walks of life. We began with a song and prayer.

From the group Sarah spoke about her ability to forgive a neighbour whom she had not spoken to for ages. She appreciated the CoP Circle as she now had love for her children. One widow spoke about reuniting with her late husband's relatives after a long time of silence. She is now in contact with them and her children are now able to relate to their family members. Relations with her children has also improved greatly. Mabel spoke of being honest with her husband and family and was now more open in her dealings with other people. One of the ladies, Sitshengisiwe, shared that the CoP Circle helped her to be a counsellor even to people much older than herself, using the IoFC standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love in all her dealings with others.

On 29 August, we had another session in Ascot, another high density suburb of Gweru. In this group we were joined by some of the youth of IoFC, Gweru, who wanted to know how they too could share their experiences. The ladies in the Circle had a complete change witnessed by the neighbours who confirmed that in Rachel's case they were no longer seeing the fighting and arguments that had been part of Rachel's life. The ladies shared how during the Circle they had been touched by the four moral standards and how applying them in their daily lives had brought a change and bound them together.

This group have really applied the standards so much that, at our review, one of their neighbours, who testified to the change in their community, told how they had been so influenced by those who attended the Peace Circle they had decided to join the church.

Our host Ellen shared how the whole community was working together and helping each other so much so that there was now a real bond among the women. They were now sharing their problems with each other and Ellen has expressed a wish to be a facilitator.

Peace Circles in the rural area

There are a number of CoP Circles lined up in the rural areas. We facilitated the first one of these recently over two days in Shurugwi which is about 60 kilometers from Gweru town. In attendance were 20 women from the surrounding area.

The group was very enthusiastic about the Circle and afterwards they were eager to involve others from their community. Three days after the Circle they had already organized another group which we are still to visit. We asked them to reduce the group to a manageable size as they had organized a very large group!

There was a very challenging issue involving a corrupt policeman, but after the Circle two of the participants decided to take it up with the relevant authorities. Another lady promised to go and apologize to her mother-in-law whom she had been very bitter against. The ladies were excited to receive their certificates and promised to display them in their homes as a reminder of what they had learnt.

We thank the Friends of Africa fund for funding these CoP Circles and making it possible for us to do our work.

See more at: http://www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-circles

Creators of Peace ‘Global Connections’ Newsletter - September 2015 edition
Local Council supports Sydney’s Annual Celebration

By Joyce Fraser

Thanks to the generosity of Auburn City Council who gave us the use of the Auburn Centre for Community free of charge for the 11th Annual CoP Sydney Celebration, we were able to attract many women living in the local area, which has one of the biggest populations of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Sydney.

At the beginning, the word ‘togetherness’ rang out in the many different languages of the guests. Leah Briers, the Coordinator of the Auburn Community Centre, along with Bibi Goul a young woman from Afghanistan, were the MC’s for a magnificent program which showcased our local, as well as international achievements over the past year.

One woman shared what she had gained from being involved in CoP. Two others shared how one (a Christian) had invited the other (a Muslim) to answer questions on Islam at her Uniting Church and how this had built a bridge of understanding. Another woman shared what CoP meant to her.

The scene was set for guests to break out into groups of 10 with a CoP Facilitator to reflect on how they find Inner Peace. They were then asked to write onto a sticky post what they had built a bridge of understanding. Another woman shared what CoP meant to her.

Some of the intentions made were: ‘Increase the diversity in my life’; ‘respect differences’; ‘practice more acts of kindness’; ‘listen more’; ‘stop judging’; ‘forgive’; ‘let MP’s know I’m not satisfied with treatment of asylum seekers’; ‘be more accepting’; ‘keep working on inner peace in my family’; ‘be mindful of my actions’; ‘stand up against unfairness’; ‘connect’; ‘hug more’; ‘be myself’; ‘be kind to myself’; ‘be compassionate’; ‘have empathy’.

The circles of intention have been laminated and are now featured on the walls of the Youth Room in the Centre.

The CoP promotional film was an effective tool to show what CoP women around the world are doing to put peace into practice. This was followed by a film of the amazing results of the activities of Ann Njeri Kimanthi who has been working with women of different tribes in the Baringo County, Kenya. Some guests gave generous contributions towards this project.

At the end, the women joined hands with one another singing to the strains of ‘Imagine’ by John Lennon.

Special thanks go to the Coordinating Action Team (CAG) including Shoshana Faire, Trish McDonald-Harrison and Tanya Fox for their planning work on the program, and Wendy de Meyrick for her work on publicity, design and printing.

A comprehensive approach to the work of CoP Circles

Reported on the IofC website

In the framework of the Dialogue on Peace, Land security and Sustainable development at the IofC Conference Centre in July 2015, the CoP President, Daphrose Ntarataze and Angelo Barampama, arranged a workshop exploring the human connections between conflict, poverty and environmental degradation.

Daphrose explained that in fact when we speak about peace building, we can refer to multiple and diverse feelings and actions, including the inner research of fulfilment or the crucial yet difficult step of forgiveness, for instance.

However, when there is nothing or little to eat, the peace may take the shape of an empty dish. When our basic needs have not been met, we cannot establish the basis for a long-term peace. *’The hungry belly has no ears’*, a woman from Rwanda said.

Having this simple but ineluctable principle in mind, the experience of the CoP Circle in Burundi has been developed over time, and now it includes several activities that allow women and men of the community to satisfy their needs and thus create the necessary conditions for sustainable peace.

For instance, in Burundi CoP Circles, participants are also engaged in the cultivation, roasting and culinary preparation of cassava (a key staple food for Burundians). This time taken to process the cassava also becomes the time to tell personal stories, listen to and understand each other, and thus to build a dialogue that is crucial to the peace process.

The close link between poverty, land security and peace is evident. Only persons who can self-determine themselves by satisfying their needs are able to sow the seeds of peace around them. The peace, like the land, requires care and needs to be cultivated.

The tireless effort of CoP is then to start from the needs of women, which, for CoP means specifically from what they feel themselves is their need.

It is the responsibility of the participants in the Circle to find the proper solutions to their own problems. **This is the personal and collective journey of empowerment** that participants experience, thanks to the CoP Circle. Sometimes their needs are similar, some other times they are different. However, what creates a common field of action is the willingness to identify the preoccupations behind the stumbling blocks towards the construction of peace and thus take the relevant actions that make a change in their own life and community.
Calling on Creators of Peace around the globe!

By Kate Monkhouse – CoP International Treasurer

As women who are connected with CoP, and active in our communities, we know the needs around us in our world. We also know the value of the CoP Circle, and of being part of the CoP network.

As recognition of all you have received through your CoP experience, would you donate $10 or more as a gift to enable another woman the joy of taking part in a CoP Circle and help to sustain the network she will be part of?

CoP women are doing amazing work around the world …as you’ve read in this newsletter, and on our website, reports keep coming in of CoP Circles transforming lives, most recently from Mali, Syria, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe.

In order to respond to requests for more facilitation training, and to support women in countries affected by conflict, we need your help to fundraise for travel, pay for manuals, keep up links of friendship, improve our newsletters and on-line presence.