Gathering Point

MARCH 2019

NEWS FROM CREATORS OF PEACE

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Transforming, empowering and engaging women in peace creation
We began this year contributing to two events in India: a “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges” trustbuilding conference and the global consultation with new Initiatives of Change Council Members. During our visit to Grampari village project, we saw how important it is to have all voices around the table as we plan for change. I was glad to have time face-to-face with friends from across Asia and Africa. As Meena Sharma from Nepal said: “Meeting peace builders from different parts of the world gives me an understanding of my role in the bigger picture and where am I contributing.”

It is important that as Creators of Peace we connect across our regions and co-operate with our neighbours. I felt inspired hearing stories from each one’s lives. Technology help us a lot within our network across 50 countries, but it is wonderful to get to know people personally. Each one can play a role and so despite distances, we can include one another. Is there someone you could be in touch with to encourage them in their peace creation?

Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye, President, Creators of Peace International
As Initiatives of Change focuses on “trustbuilding across the world’s divides”, Creators of Peace has been thinking about how we can contribute to this wider mission. As we witness different crises of trust in our societies, are we as peace creators able to show that we are trustworthy people? As various divides continue to polarise or mobilize fear, are we as peace creators willing to reach out to offer hospitality? As we and others work hard to promote dialogue in difficult circumstances, are we as peace creators ready to accompany and walk alongside them? These are some of the themes we explore in this edition of ‘Gathering Point’ on the occasion of International Women’s Day 8th March 2019.

As Meena, who was with Amina in India, continues: “Where people from different struggles came together, we made some wonderful connections, collaborations and confrontations. We shared the work of Creators of Peace from the different parts of the world and how we are changing the lives and relationships of women from different divides. We shared how women from marginalized communities are co-operating together for peace in their communities. And how we are investing our time and resources to make the collaborative actions sustainable. This is our way of working and advocating for new stories to be told.”

Kate Monkhouse, Executive Officer
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Preparing for Peace

When Iman Al Ghafari returned to Syria after some years in Canada, she began to run Creators of Peace Circles for women in Damascus. She talks about what it has meant for her to ‘live peace’ through conflict.

Living peace in Canada is so different to living peace in Syria. I learnt about peace in a place where I could apply whatever ideas I wanted, where dreams can be achieved because there are no hindrances apart from oneself. I went to Canada to learn about education, but I learned about peacebuilding and integration, through experiencing life as an immigrant.

When I went back to Syria, I thought, how can I apply peace? Thank God, we don’t have war! A few months later the war broke out and I found myself in a chaotic situation.

When bloodshed is everywhere and pain is spreading around, you need something to lean on. Peacebuilding is a medicine that brings faith and hope.

It is not easy to tell a person who has lost their loved ones or their fortune to think about peace. Actually, it is provocative! It is like a denial of their suffering. But you have two options, either to continue with the pain or to try to swim towards a safe beach. We need to be careful about who is ready for peacebuilding in their lives and who is not. If you raise the issue in the wrong way, it won’t create peace but resistance.

In IofC’s Creators of Peace programme, we identify the problems, and then as a group we discuss what we
can do. We encourage people to dump out all their worries, to sort them out, look at where they don’t have any control and where they can do something.

‘When you are in conflict, all you can do is build peace.’

So, we ran some programmes in the shelters for families who had been evacuated and we also joined other charities to work with orphans. We also get war widows involved in Creators of Peace programmes to give them a chance to contribute.

Each woman has strengths and skills, but as we don’t talk about them, we tend to ignore the parts of ourselves that can create change. By sitting together and talking about what we can do, we strengthen ourselves and one another. Then we can build our countries. We can start small, in our neighbourhood, a centre near to us.

When we sit together, we put our political attitudes and certainties aside. We meet as human beings and learners, as people who want to make a difference in their lives. Having this intention makes a big difference. Of course, we also try to have some fun! At the end of each programme, we have a potluck dinner and play music. Other times, we go to the park, walk together and do some yoga or meditation. Spending time together in quiet reflection is essential. We go deep into ourselves and pour out our emotions, freely and honestly. That really makes a big difference.

It is essential to have hope that tomorrow is a better day. We need to encourage one another. And to learn to be vulnerable. This is a problem in our culture, you have to be strong. Yet it is OK to be weak, because weakness can help us understand the situation around us, and we can change it into an opportunity.

I am an optimistic person. It you look back at history, you will see that after war peace comes. But you have to be ready when peace comes to be a builder. It is important to learn from war. We need to address problems before they become conflicts, before they lead us to more wars. Violence cannot make peace, violence always makes violence. We need to find win-win solutions so everyone can participate in our country and everyone is concerned about each person. I believe it is going to happen and I hope it happens soon.

It is so hard to see your country suffering. When I talk about it, I burst into tears: it breaks my heart. But it is a blessing and honour that God has given me this chance of building peace. We have two choices. Either we raise hatred and anger and excite people to go to war, or we build peace. I thank God everyday that I am used to heal people, to help people to find a safe zone where they can love each other and rebuild their lives. If we start from the person and help them build themselves, we will build Syria. That is my hope.
This article first appeared in Initiatives of Change UK’s magazine Changemakers winter 2018. For more stories of change visit: changemakersmagazine.org
What does it mean to accompany someone? In music, the accompaniment sustains, amplifies and enhances the melody. It also means choosing to walk alongside someone with the same steps and pace. It is not you who chooses the way, the direction or the goal. If you can put yourself in your friend’s shoes to feel what she feels, then judgement changes and you can appreciate the motives, hurts and feelings that drive her actions. And you can help by sharing the vision that sees higher and further than the next step or by warning of the obstacles on the way.

It has been my privilege to accompany the Creators of Peace women’s initiative since its beginning with the preparation for the first big gathering in Caux. That’s when I met the pioneers of this idea originating in Africa. Our first conference in 1991 demonstrated its timeliness and universal appeal, so I started to take responsibility for the preparation of our second large conference in 1994. The main impetus was given by our African friends and I wanted to become a bridge builder. This led to lasting friendships and further commitment. Little by little, as a medical doctor, I became convinced of the need for healing the apartheid type of relationships between us Europeans and our deeply hurt African sisters. Meeting together in Tanzania, Uganda, and later in Rwanda or Kenya on equal terms, accepting their hospitality, listening to their hopes, sharing in their needs and pain.

A hint of inspiration led me to invite a Burundian acquaintance of the Geneva refugee diaspora to attend our Kampala
CoP Conference in 2005. She had to overcome her fears to return to the Africa she had had to flee years before to save her own life, but this was the start of a deep reconciliation process. Subsequently in Caux where several workshops were held in the fold of IoF for the warring Burundian parties, she had the possibility to meet face to face the former leader who had threatened her.

The first Creators of Peace Circle held in a Kenyan village convinced me of their effective healing power. Then I undertook to translate the new manual into French and to get training as a facilitator. We started then to explore the Peace Circle together with my Burundian friend. With some other African Great Lakes friends, we attended the next CoP conference held in Sydney in Australia in 2009. The women’s range of experiences, the quality of the exchanges, the depth of sharing was a big challenge and a model of inspiration for how we could find and generate peace in all kind of situations from the personal to community and leaders.

Back at home, we led some circles together in Caux and in Geneva, where she had gathered some of her colleagues and friends. When she felt that this peace building tool was needed in her country of origin, I went with her to evaluate if and how it was possible to bring it there. Talking on a hill with very poor villagers we could feel the deep hunger for this new hope...

This common road opened my heart and brought a new depth of understanding. I have learnt not to judge others by my own standards, to share what I have and to just simply accept what my friends offer me. When we share the same vision, the same goal, there is no more need to try and control, freedom to create a different story can be born.

What does ‘accompaniment’ mean to you?

One of the most valuable aspects of our work as Creators of Peace is this commitment to walk alongside one another in friendship. This can take many forms: practical help with initiatives, listening during difficult moments, sharing friendship through social media...

• what does ‘accompaniment’ mean to you?
• who has walked alongside you in your journey as a peace creator? can you send them a message of acknowledgement or appreciation?
• are there women whom you have chosen to accompany in your own or other countries? is there anyone you could reach out to today?

We will be doing a workshop on accompaniment during our time together in Caux in July 2019. Contact creatorsofpeace@iofc.org with any ideas of what you would appreciate to discuss.
Valiant Women

Daphrose Ntarataze Barampama and Désiré Tuyishemeze recognise the accomplishments of rural women in Burundi who have shown leadership.

We want to share some of the experiences of rural women, now peace creators and community leaders who have taken part in the ‘Muntunuwundi’ Circles of Peace and Development programme in Burundi. Their extraordinary stories, courage and resilience prompt our admiration. Almost all of them cannot read or write, but since they participated in CoP, they are carrying a light that sparks hopes in an environment of great precariousness. They come from a commune in Kayanza province, one of the most populous provinces of Burundi and very marked by the different conflicts that have caused inter-community cracks.

The negative consequences of overpopulation are many and the wounds of the past are not yet healed in the hearts and memories of the inhabitants of this part of the country.

Amahoriwacu (Peace at Home) and GAP Abarimyi b’Amahoro (Peace Growers) are the names of two of our Positive Action Groups (GAP). Each brings together ten to twelve women representative of the ethnic, associative and socio-political diversities of the Butaganzwa Commune. The majority of Amahoriwacu GAP members are Batwa women - the underreported ethnic minority of the country.

During the 6-day Peace Circle in a safe and reassuring space – so different from their daily environment marked by concerns, traumas and anxieties - these women had the opportunity to rebuild themselves, and then rebuild their communities. To heal history, we helped them face their anxieties and to pin down their fears in order to find new perspectives.

These valiant women did not fail to take advantage of the what they experienced and our innovative training in development for the benefit of themselves and their entire communities. Their testimonies were worth ingots of gold for their achievements as creators of peace - a peace which is rooted in each person and then grows around them.

The impact of the Creators of Peace Circle on these women and their communities exceeds all expectations. The control of anger, forgiveness, the healing of the wounds of the past, initiatives defeating the complexities imposed by habits and customs are all testimonies of transformation carried out
by these women. This transformation is also evident as solidarity, mutual aid and a culture of trust builds among them. They have started a goat-breeding initiative to lead together. This approach provides a restoration of the positive actions and values that once were the pride of our ancestors and of our society, but now are shrinking because of the rifts between Burundians and growing poverty.

Other activities such as pottery, basketry, cassava cultivation using the “Tumbukiza” method and vegetable farming are practiced by these women with the aim of increasing production to meet their family needs. These activities also allow them to remain united in order to find answers to community challenges. They meet monthly, or more often to deal with emergencies, and talk about the health of their action group, their family and their community in general.

Despite their difficult economic situation, they did not hesitate to collect money to return a child back to school who had been expelled for not being able to pay school fees and to pay a mutual health card for a needy person of their village who needed to be treated.

These women have taken many other initiatives to reduce injustices and strengthen social cohesion. This is the case with this woman who had extraordinary courage in saving the life of an infant that a mother had abandoned. This brave woman was able to listen to the cries of this life in distress, overcome fear to find it in the dark and call the police who found the baby’s mother.

In their communities, these women are inspiring and people come to confide in them. Three other groups were born under the initiative of these two action groups in order to do like them in the search for solutions to their own challenges. One is composed of young students, the second of local women, and the third by women and men of the Twa ethnic group.

These women shine through civic and practical leadership. Together, they are shaping a new community story, going beyond taboos and social clichés. Their ethnic, social and political differences, which some might consider an obstacle, have been transformed into an asset that serves as a model of friendship and social cohesion.

Photos: Artisans de Paix Burundi
Giving Circles... growing our culture of generosity

Valerie Tikkanen, from Sweden, invites us to think about how we can all contribute to fundraising for the work we do as a network across 50 countries.

Creators of Peace has been running now for 27 years amazingly financed by people giving what they have: time, money, making and selling things, hosting peace circles etc. We have managed to get small grants which mainly fund outreach projects. A group of us have been discussing how to raise money for our core needs. As CoP grows, so do the needs for co-ordination, communication and training. We all reap the benefits but are often not aware of where the money comes from.

We need to be financing: a wage for our executive director (and in time a core team); subscription fees to the International Association of Initiatives of Change of which we are part; website and newsletter; and our accounts audit.

As well as the different countries which need help with growing programmes of peace circles, we also want to fund regional gatherings and more facilitator trainings.

My thought is of a lot of people giving a little... can we get a lot of women who have taken part in peace circles to give a little but on a regular basis? It would be part of a commitment to stay active with CoP and would give us a chance to keep in touch with them with news. We would be creating “Giving Circles" that sustain our Peace Circles.

In my own country, I have started asking participants if they would like to give a contribution to CoP. One lady in Sweden decided to give a legacy now instead of a gift in her will. Some people say on Facebook what their favorite charity is when they have birthdays. I decided to give to CoP every month instead of other charities. These are a few things that we could all do.

Can we pool ideas of how to raise money in big or small ways? I am happy to receive any ideas and pass them on. Can we all become money raisers? If there is interest for this we will work out the details for the best way to proceed in each country.

I am grateful to be part of this global peace community and am enriched and encouraged by all the stories of what is happening around the world.
General Assembly

Friday 12th July to Sunday 14th July 2019
We will hold our international gathering for 2 days to look at shared responsibility for our strategic priorities, teambuilding and outreach. Our Annual General Assembly will take place on Saturday 13th July.

To take part, email: creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES >

CoP at the Caux Forum

Sunday 14th to Thursday 18th July 2019.
We will be offering training tracks as part of ‘Towards an Inclusive Peace'

Monday 8th July to Friday 12th July
Tools for Changemakers

For more information, or to register, visit: www.caux.ch

Elections for Committee

In 2019, we are holding elections for our international committee. Our current international co-ordinators were elected in 2016 at our last conference and most of them plan to serve another 3-year term. We are keen to build on the progress we have made under the leadership of President Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye to shape a strong core team. We are looking for skills in communications, fundraising and people care, as well as NGO management and governance. Contact Secretary Anne-Claire Frank-Seisay for more information.
ENCOURAGE ADVOCATES >
At Caux we will be creating messages of encouragement to women who give global leadership for peace. Email your nominations to creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

COMMITTEE GROUPS >
We have started up new whatsapp groups to help us stay in touch across the miles... these are for women active in Creators of Peace to deepen friendship. Want to join? We will connect you in.

TRANSLATORS NEEDED >
We still need skilled translators and interpreters to help us get our training materials to the teams who need them. Please let us know if you can offer your time.

POSTCARDS FOR PEACE >
Look out for our new pack of postcards to prompt discussions with a group.

NEXT NEWSLETTER >
The deadline for the next CoP Newsletter will be 31st August 2019. Please send suggestions for topics or themes so we can consider and work on them with you.

KEEP IN TOUCH >
Wherever you are, whatever you’re doing, don’t forget to send us your web stories
Since 2012, CoP programme in Burundi contribute to the promotion and consolidation of peace and development. It operates in a country where people have been severely divided and traumatized by lingering conflicts since 1960s. Burundi is one of the 5 poorest countries in the world according to UNDP and other specialized bodies.

Up to date, 70 peace Circles have been organized. They generated 70 women’s groups organized into autonomous social and community development entities.

In addition to a common project of peace for a better living together, each group decides a micro-project of income-generating activités (crafts, agriculture, livestock, small business, cultural club, etc).

It is necessary to empower current group and extend our approach to others group.

www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-donate
Initiatives of Change is a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting in their own lives.

In the UK, Initiatives of Change is a registered charity No. 226334 (England and Wales).

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Initiatives of Change

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