Transforming, empowering and engaging women in peace creation

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Dear Friends,

In March every year, we celebrate International Women’s Day. As Creators of Peace (CoP), we have much to celebrate. CoP Brazil have completed their tenth Creators of Peace Circle and are now planning for their first facilitators’ training later this year. CoP Kenya have just celebrated ten years of working together to bring transformation to their communities through peace circles in 17 counties across the country and they don’t plan to stop there...

...At our latest count, we can show that in the last 15+ years, Creators of Peace Circles have now taken place in more than 50 countries worldwide. We are each part of this rich pattern of creating peace. As a network, we want to be able to tell the fuller story of the impact Creators of Peace has – in different countries and contexts, as well as a whole. I look forward to more opportunities to visit and to speak with everyone to continue to learn and support one another.

Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye,
President, Creators of Peace International
A new look newsletter
One hundred years ago in 1918 in the UK, women secured the vote for the first time after a long struggle. Women continue to work for transformation, for their own empowerment and for social change. Creators of Peace is now looking to our next chapter. What could we accomplish if we put the learning from our Creators of Peace Circle experiences into practice? What might it mean for us to all take up a challenge to become “Advocates for a New Story” or to give leadership for peace wherever we are?

In this our new newsletter, Rose provides inspiration from her own journey as a peace creator and Jean offers some thoughts for our own reflection. Meena shares about supporting women leaders in Nepal through peace circles. There is an update about our new Strategic Plan for 2018-2020 and information about our ongoing project to share the impact of our Creators of Peace Circles. Please let us know what stories you would like to see featured in the next edition.

Kate Monkhouse, Executive Officer
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Join our new ‘Giving Circle’
www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-donate
Rose Njeri Kamau was born in a village near Kiambu, Kenya’s Central province. Her mother had been raped and, at age 17, forced to marry her rapist. When Rose’s father left them, her mother abandoned her as well. Rose grew up among her grandparents, extended family and the people in her village. She was cared for by a lady who suffered from a mental disability. When Rose was six years old she should have started school, but the lady did not have money to pay for her schooling so she visited the village chief and begged him to help Rose.

Rose’s grandmother then passed away, and she grew up in great poverty, having to cook, clean, and take care of her stepfather’s children in order to attend school. She went to school without books or lunch, and her stepfather often beat her. After primary school she had to work as a housemaid in different houses for years, sustaining horrible exploitation and abuse, and through it all she was never paid; her mother collected her earnings.

“I owned two items of clothing, had no underwear, no possessions, nothing”. One day, when Rose was 17, she was married off to a neighbour. He was a good man, he bought her clothes and for the first time, Rose received care, comfort and safety. It was the first time Rose slept on an actual bed and ate meat. She was used to sleeping on a mat

We are full of hope
a story towards healing and peace

Rose Njeri Kamau is part of the Creators of Peace team of women who are courageously working for peace in Kenya. Rose offered her personal journey to be shared so that others can learn from it and be healed.
and eating leftover rice and vegetables. The meaningful part of getting married was that Rose received a surname, something she had not had ‘the right to’ before. Rose had an identity.

Rose had her first daughter when she was 18, and her son when she was 21. But when their son was two months old, Rose’s husband passed away from throat cancer and the problems returned. Rose was sent away from the village of her in-laws. She left with slippers and her two small children, told to never return again. She had not a coin in her pocket or any documents. Rose had no choice but to return to her mother’s village.

Her mother and stepfather were unwelcoming and hostile, but the lady who had cared for her during her childhood pleaded on her behalf again to the village chief, who provided her and her children with a small house and food.

Rose got very sick, but in the midst of all this suffering, she witnessed great kindness. Members of her late husband’s church arrived with food and clothes, and they took care of her hospital bill. When she recovered she lived at the church and received care and counselling. She struggled to find work and to keep hope; several jobs were in abusive conditions, and she was fired more than once for not being educated enough.

“I felt like I wanted to die again.”

Then, in 2011, she met a lady from Initiatives of Change called Ann Gitu Njeri. Ann asked her why she was crying and Rose shared her story with her.

“I don’t know who I am, where I come from, I don’t know why God makes me suffer so much.”

Ann invited Rose to a Creators of Peace Circle.

“People were talking about things I have never in my life heard before, like inner peace and forgiveness.”

The second day of the Peace Circle, Rose slept peacefully for the first time in many years.

At that Peace Circle, Rose shared her story for the first time and cried for three hours.

“It was like something shifted deep in my heart. Others in the group also cried and I felt like they were sharing my pain. I felt a belonging, warmth; I felt like I was becoming a different person right there. It was magical.”

Rose received training and became a facilitator for Creators of Peace. Now she shares her story so that others can learn from it and find their own peace.

After she became a facilitator, she met her biological father for the first time. She also went to her mother. She chose to forgive them both and left them, finally at peace. Rose’s stepfather phoned her himself and asked for forgiveness then from her. Rose told him: “You are my only family; I will support and love you.” He blessed her and welcomed her back into
the family; their relationship to date is strong.

“My life changed when I met Initiatives of Change. For 34 years I lived crying, full of hatred, revenge and pain. It has helped me see a way. […] I used to tell my children I wished I was dead and that their father survived. But IofC changed me. Now I tell them that God has a plan for us, and no matter our struggles, we are lucky to be alive”.

“Life is challenging but we manage. We are full of hope and love.”

Rose sells second-hand clothes when she is not with Creators of Peace and takes care of her stepfather and mother who are sick. They have changed too; her experience has made ripples of love and forgiveness.

Rose lives a legacy with her story; it is her journey of sharing hope with other women.

“It doesn’t matter if the tree has been cut in your life, a new branch will grow. I encourage people to look forward - tomorrow is another day.”

‘Life is a challenge but we are full of hope’

Now, Rose lives with her two children and grandchild in a single room.

Rose told her story to Talia Smith in advance of Creators of Peace Kenya’s 10th year anniversary. To read about their gathering near Nairobi, please visit: iofc.org/creators-of-peace-news
Our role description has four dimensions.

1. Living the peace we want to see in the world. Peace starts with me, and the change that needs to happen for me to be effective, has to start with me too. And not only start. This inner transformation is an always and forever journey of self-discovery. Or Self discovery with a capital ‘S’, as we discover the true Self we are called to become. So, this requires a steady self-care, restoring our inner peace, resolving our personal conflicts, challenging our own hypocrisies, a continuous practice of compassion for the world around us – all to be free to be and to give the best we can. And living reflectively is a key ingredient. Taking regular time for the inner listening that reveals truth and direction to our hearts. We long for a world of moral and spiritual integrity through which the needs of humanity can be met. It starts with me. Every day!

2. Sharing the peace we want to see in the world. All our encounters; at bus stops, in the office, around the meal table and in Creators of Peace Circles, are opportunities to share the peace we are committed to. We might do this through our deep listening to another person, our sharing of a new story – of hope and transformation, through revealing a personal insight, through an invitation to an event or meal. Every encounter can convey our love and respect for others, undermining prejudice and fear. Every encounter can contain an invitation to join the global movement for peace which starts with each of us. This outreach to others can be both spontaneous and planned. Our daily reflection might remind us of a person...
Why not take some time in quiet to ponder which dimension is speaking most strongly to you today? Are there any people or situations where you might be able to share something with a friend or offer to accompany a colleague, neighbour or community leader? What issues are you committing to act on?

3. Accompanying those already working for the peace we want to see in the world. There are amazing people deeply engaged in peace work, in tackling issues that disturb our communal stability, in addressing issues of poverty, displacement, abuse and so on. They are highly skilled and dedicated. How do we care for them, offer them the friendship and care that can help sustain their work? I know of many examples of this accompaniment. One union leader had a particularly tough job. He wanted his role to bring peace and constructive relationships into the workplace. A friend who had got to know him offered to meet him for breakfast once a week. During this meal they talked through the various issues and then had a time of silence together to see if the Inner Voice had any fresh insights. The union leader had to confront his own wrongdoing and put things right. This gave him a moral authority that helped in negotiations. My friend’s accompanying provided a safe place for sharing and encouragement. This is a strategic role. To identify and befriend those already doing the work and to be alongside them in a way that helps them to be and do their best, to listen deeply and to really care. We long to see those in leadership transformed, empowered and supported. It starts with me.

4. Engaging directly in the issues that block the peace we want to see in the world. We may be the ones called to take leadership in a particular issue and we may be the ones who need accompanying. That awareness of our own need helps to undermine any powerplay our ego likes to indulge in! Whether in leadership or not, some of us feel called to be engaged in a very specific issue ourselves. As a Creators of Peace team we may feel led to be involved in a specific area of social need. This would bring the Creators of Peace ethic to the heart of an action in partnership with other organisations. This will require a different level of commitment and teamwork for the Creators of Peace. We long to bring the message of ‘change starts with me’ or ‘peace starts with me’, to the heart of the policies and practices of organisations, government departments, NGOs and CBOs. It starts with us.

in need or a family or community issue requiring our attention. A phone call or visit to make. An action to take. We long to build trust across the world’s divides. It starts with me.
Dreams for Nepal

Meena Sharma, National Co-ordinator for Creators of Peace Nepal, introduces us to the impact Creators of Peace Circles have having in Kathmandu and different regions following the earthquake.

Where is the need for peacebuilding in Nepal?
During the armed conflict in Nepal (1992-2006), we lost more than 19,000 lives, and still the families are waiting for their members who had disappeared to come back home. The government had various benefit/compensation packages for the victims’ families, however these are not enough to heal the inner wounds of the mothers, wives and sisters of the deceased families. Most of these women are not educated so that they can go and advocate for themselves for better laws and policies.

Though the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been established for a justice mechanism, no real progress is yet seen or felt by the victim or family. The major task of the TRC to the present time is documenting the cases of Sexual and Gender based violence, disappeared people’s details and so on. Hence as women working for social change, we need to identify ways to deal with this situation and we found Creators of Peace’s approach is helping us to take incremental steps in the society. We are not giving any monetary benefits to these groups, but we are using the Creators of Peace Circle as a platform to engage with people from different dividing lines (caste, ethnicity, gender, race, communities, political ideologies and different geography). We want to work with these marginalized groups of women to transform the way they look at themselves - from a victim into a contributor to society, empowering each one by letting them share their untold stories and feel light.

What is it about the CoP approach that is particularly effective?
We create an environment where everyone can feel safe and comfortable as sharing a personal story is not so common in our culture. In the Peace Circles we don’t talk so much about the definitions, concepts and any other “brainy stuff”, rather we work together so that everyone feels a real heart to heart connection. We provide this opportunity to everyone, without discrimination based on their educational or family background. So, participants feel this tool is developed for the people of Nepal.
What have you accomplished so far?
Working with the different groups of women and adolescents, I realized that story sharing is a powerful tool for each one of us to understand people more deeply, it broadens our horizon to see things from different perspectives. We find bonding between participants is very strong leading to ongoing connections and support in the groups. A woman whose only motive was to commit suicide because of her difficult circumstances decided after being a part of Peace Circle that she will not kill herself at any cost.

For another woman who was running for political office, she chose to run her campaign differently. During the Peace Circle she realised how judgemental she had become and now realised that listening to others was very important. During the elections then, rather than criticising others, she focused on what positive changes she was going to bring to the community. She has now been elected as deputy mayor to her municipality.

We cannot predict these magical moments, but we are creating this in our Peace Circles.

What brings you (as Meena) most joy in your role and work with CoP?
When I see how my small piece of work in this corner of world is helping to complete the bigger puzzle of creating peace and harmony in the world. I feel proud of my contribution to the wider, global mission of the CoP.

It is like I am not working even for a single day, more that I am fulfilling my dream for a better Nepal.

As a Nepali, I have, like many of us, a lot of frustrations with things that are not going well, like the reconstruction work after the massive earthquake, dealing with the issues of local political parties and providing support to the people of remote areas. I think with my work with CoP, I am directly working to dream with them and their families, creating hope, building partnership with the people who are seen as others to them.

What are your future plans?
During our recent teambuilding days, we worked with the core group of Creators of Peace Nepal and also with neighbours from the regional team. We did a visioning exercise and a SWOT analysis, discussed on our short term and
long-term priorities and generated ideas to foster the Peace Circles alumni.

We completed a context analysis and identified that our niche in Nepal should be the Terai region for some time to come. As a team we explored a few models of fundraising, considering which models and donors we will work with. The next Peace Circle will take place in the far western region of Nepal (Dhangadi), an area we have not visited to date.

We also have presented our plans to national level activists like Sharmila Karki to create opportunities to work with newly elected women politicians in the parliament. Finally, we are building links with development partners so we can reinforce our work with community women on a broader scale.

As a regional hub, we will collaborate with our Creators of Peace neighbours in India and Pakistan to support the establishment of new programmes and facilitator trainings.

‘As women working for social change, we have found CoP’s approach is helping us’
Since last December, we have been asking all CoP National Coordinators to participate in a survey in order to gather what’s been happening in each country. Our deepest thanks to all who have participated so far: your feedback is very valuable.

Creators of Peace is growing! We now have had 475 Peace Circles in 51 countries around the world. We are thrilled that more and more women are getting involved and we would love to strengthen our global connections!

We want to celebrate what has been made possible through Peace Circles, share this learning with each other within our Creators of Peace and the wider Initiatives of Change network. Donors are also telling us that they want to see more evidence of the impact of Peace Circles.

Each and every one of us has a piece of the puzzle: together, our activities in different countries build the picture of the how Creators of Peace makes a difference. All together, this will help us produce a new Case for Support document that will also be available for your own local fundraising.

To all who have not received the survey, or who have not responded yet, please do respond as you are able. We still have a few gaps so if you didn’t receive the survey, or if you didn’t have time to reply please contact us. We would love to hear your stories, celebrate and support you, and learn from any suggestions you may have.

Manu Granados ran a workshop last summer on evaluating the impact of our Creators of Peace Circles. She shares some of the progress we have made and requests more participation in this important aspect of our work.

ACTION STATIONS ➔

If you have any feedback on how to evaluate your CoP activities, email: manu.granados@iofc.org
NEWS >

New CoP Strategic Plan

The new Creators of Peace Strategic Plan is ready. This was developed with the initial input of participants from “Peace in Practice” at Caux in August 2017 and refined by the International Co-ordinators, in consultation with our Elders. The plan describes the “Creators of Peace Circle” as a foundation to prepare women for engaging in peace creation. It provides two new programme themes, “Advocates for a New Story” and “Giving Leadership for Peace” which we hope will become topics for future events at Asia Plateau and Caux. The plan highlights growing areas for our work together, including regional gatherings and teambuilding, developing more trainers and a new online training resource platform, providing materials for “Peace Focus Gatherings” to help grow local CoP networks and support fundraising.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES >

Caux 2018

CoP Training Track 23 - 27 July
CoP Strategy Day on 28 July

This year, we will focus our attention at Caux on “Addressing Europe’s Unfinished Business”, a forum designed to explore the roots of increasing polarization and the future of social cohesion across the continent. There will be two Creators of Peace training tracks: one “Telling a New Story” exploring personal narratives and a second developing a CoP regional plan for European countries.

Our Annual General Meeting will take place on Friday 27th July (to be confirmed) and Creators of Peace National Co-ordinators will be encouraged to take part via Zoom.

GET STARTED >

Keen to grow Creators of Peace Circles in your country, discuss training or programme development options?
Contact: creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

VOLUNTEER YOUR SKILLS >

Support Creators of Peace by contributing your translation skills for some written materials: French, Spanish, Portuguese.
Apply: creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

Photos: IofC Switzerland
Support Pakistan training

We are raising $2,500 to cover the travel costs of two trainers, training materials and venue hire. Working in partnership with Khwendo Kor women and girls NGO, the first Creators of Peace Circle will take place in the Peshwar region to provide local women a space to explore their own potential as peace creators and to find fresh approaches to overcoming challenges such as domestic abuse, poverty and inter-tribal conflicts. Go to www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-donate

READ THEIR STORIES >
A resource full of stories of courage and commitment to inspire and motivate you, your friends or your local community.
Buy online: shop.iofc.org

TAKE PART >
A retreat weekend for women from NGOs, UN agencies or community networks involved in peacebuilding.
Register: creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

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).