Gathering Point

News from Creators of Peace

September 2018

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Transforming, empowering and engaging women in peace creation
It was a pleasure to visit the founder and initiator of Creators of Peace Mama Anna Abdallah-Msekwa in Tanzania on 8th March 2018, together with Mediatrix Masava from Kenya. Though retired from active politics, she is still engaged in public life supporting various initiatives for the development of the social and economic life of Tanzania. She was very happy to get news of the spread of Creators of Peace in 50 countries and how women have been impacted by the challenge she herself set out for us in 1991, inviting women to recognise and enhance their role as Creators of Peace in both private and public life. Since my visit, CoP Tanzania hosted its first Peace Circle from 30th October to 2nd September 2018. Twenty two women participated with Anna herself opening the session with great delight and hope that this will empower more women in her country. She expressed gratitude to Mediatrix Masava and Judi Mumbi, from Kenya, who facilitated the session. We look forward to hearing more from them and from you too. Do enjoy reading this latest edition of ‘Gathering Point’. Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye, President, Creators of Peace International
Our first ever ‘Gathering Point’ was produced to mark 8th March, International Women’s Day. This second newsletter is timed for the International Day of Peace, which takes place each year on 21st September. These two dates provide two moments each year for us as women to re-dedicate ourselves to working for peace.

The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by a unanimous United Nations resolution, Peace Day provides a global date for all humanity to commit to peace and to contribute to building a Culture of Peace across our differences. In 2018, #peaceday celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Peace One Day is a campaign to make 21st September a day of peace by challenging people to stop violence. Projects have led to a ceasefire allowing vaccinations in local communities and reductions of bullying in schools. An overall goal is to reach as many people around the world to focus their efforts and attention towards peace.

Creators of Peace is joining with Peace One Day as part of a coalition to promote a message of peace. Our contribution will be inspirations from friends from across the CoP network about what it means for them to be a creator of peace and an advocate for a new story. Please pass these on via social media to CoP participants and wider.

Kate Monkhouse, Executive Officer

www.internationaldayofpeace.org
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As if it were in a movie, it all started with a kidnapping. More than scared, I felt the certainty of the nearness of death, but when the head of the gang saw me, he said, “I never hurt a handicapped person” (I was born without a hand) and he set me free... but in that time – early in the century – I was not really free; since I was a child I had lived through aggressions, grudges, frustrations, attachments, bitterness... and I did not know how to get out of it all. In this darkness, God intervened and gave me a second chance and I got to know Initiatives of Change!

The experiences of Frank Buchman and his team broadened my horizons and gave me hope; the first experiences in Colombia with IofC helped me to make radical changes and to deepen my spiritual life through the quiet time and the principles. These principles helped me sharpen awareness and make practical changes; for example, with Absolute Honesty, I realized that not always the classes that I used to teach lasted the right time; with Absolute Purity I recognized that I sometimes used to say things with a second intention; Absolute Love invited me to realize how much I judged people (in the quiet time I was inspired by a solution: to seek a quality in those that I judged, and soon I freed myself from this bad habit), and...
in relation to Absolute Unselfishness, how to forget it when I succeeded to free myself from the addiction to television by which I avoided pain, or from a toxic relationship in which I persisted for fear of loneliness?

I have been able to take great strides in this process of change, detachment and forgiveness, after finding the true roots of my problems and working on them: low self-esteem, rejection, guilt, fear, rancor... if we do not rip out the root, we can only prune the problems! It has been a strong, yet beautiful, process in which I have been working within myself, I am getting the peace I needed and the joy I wanted and sharing them in my surroundings.

These “tools for change” continued to accompany me when I began working with Creators of Peace as a facilitator. In them, I discovered that if I overcame pride and shared my problems, failures, and struggles, I could help many women by building bridges of empathy and providing hope for their own change.

And in this new approach to life, I continued to receive unexpected blessings: the IofC Brazil team invited me to work with them full time, collaborating in their different meetings and initiating Creators of Peace Circles there. In fact, God has a good sense of humor, because He took me to a happy and relaxed country, so that after three years living in Brazil I, who was so serious, rigid and structured, became a little more flexible and relaxed!

There in Brazil I met another facilitator, Vera, now a true friend-sister, and together we have worked with Creators of Peace, adding the foundations that IofC has given us and that has helped us a lot in our own lives: we motivate the participants to, with Absolute Honesty, recognize, accept and, if they wish, share their life stories; we help them to look boldly for the roots that hinder real change, and we invite them to find the answer on how to achieve it in the Times of Silence. Through our own experiences, we motivate them to practice Absolute Purity, recognizing their share of guilt in the difficulties they face, and in the Absolute Disengagement in deciding to let go of everything that does them harm or of what they have lost the control (social medias, food, alcohol, abusive relationships, grudges, etc...). Finally, we invite them to practice Absolute Love, first with themselves, since most Brazilian women are linked to a social work or are heads of families, not having time for themselves; and, as a culmination, we invite them to give themselves the gift of forgiveness for themselves and for others.
As I write these lines, I look back and do not recognize myself in this bitter, spiteful and unhappy woman who was kidnapped.... Now, I am much more honest with myself and transparent in my attitudes, I have given up everything that does not do me good, I value myself more, and I have forgiven my past. Yes, I feel more free and I am happy; I am at peace in the midst of new processes of change and forgiveness. I much identify myself with the phrase of the journalist and writer Caio Fernando Abreu: “We have to see all the scars as something beautiful... Because a scar does not form in the dead, it means: I survived!!!”

‘I am at peace in the midst of new processes of change and forgiveness...’
Peace is a much sought after idea. For Peace to work effectively, each one involved in creating or building peace has to be at peace within.

In today’s fast-paced life, where we hardly notice things, where our minds are running faster, we need to set aside time to be quiet and listen to our inner voice to reflect taking stock of where our lives are heading. We all desire to be meaningful, purpose-filled human beings. A time of quiet I believe is an antidote to a fast-paced life where digital distractions continually crowd our mind-space.

I started out on this journey of having a regular quiet time over fifty years ago as a college student. To begin with, I was somewhat idealistic at the same time stubborn. Whenever we as students met to plan for our city, we were seeking direction for our action. We would be silent for a few minutes to gather our thoughts. While most of them shared their ideas, I usually did not have anything to share. I would just directly write “No thoughts.” I realized it was because I was afraid to face the truth about myself. I hated being wrong. Self-righteousness was a demon I had to confront time and again.

I have had many slips and stumbles along this long journey only to discover that they are the best teachers. I am aware I have miles of learning before my final rest.

Zen masters say: “when the pupil is ready the teacher appears”. I began to open up and was ready to accept challenges and not run away from them. Nature is a gentle inspiration in my experience. I found the truth about

Vijayalakshmi Subrahmanyan, from India and one of Creators of Peace Elders, reflects on how she has developed her inner reflection and how it has served her as a teacher and in peace creation.
forgiving and forgiveness through observing nature. It is easier to ask forgiveness than to forgive.

“We all desire to be meaningful, purpose-filled human beings.”

Along with a time of quiet, it is important to meditate too. Both work together and compliment each other. Listening to the inner voice helps you to bridge the gap between the head and the heart. And meditation gives you the compassion and understanding and builds patience. All of these qualities enhance a peace maker.

I have a pet Dalmatian. She is 15 years old. Both her hearing and vision are impaired, but her sense of smell is intact. She is not aware of her disabilities. She keeps banging her nose and head. She can smell me and make her way to me. Every day there is something I can learn from her. She is not self-piteous. That is her biggest strength. Self-pity is one of the greatest enemies, and she has taught me to give my best at all times whether at home or the school with 40 plus children.

What does ‘quiet time’ mean to you?

As people committed to working for peace, a time of quiet can be helpful for all of us: to refresh or renew our thinking, to seek wisdom for a challenging relationship or to clarify a way forward on a difficult issue. Each of us can draw on our own spiritual tradition or follow the Initiatives of Change practice of ‘inner listening’. Some questions to ponder on...

- what does ‘quiet time’/‘inner listening’ mean to you?
- how would you describe this to someone else in your mother tongue?
- how do you yourself use such a period of such reflection or prayer?
- why does it make a difference in your commitment to be a peace creator or trust-builder?
- could you give an example of a change that you have decided on or a discernment you took?
- What tips would you give to someone who has never done this or who would be encouraged again?

We are planning to put together some new resources to help with reflection for peace creators. Please let Kate know what you would like to see included creatorsofpeace@iofc.org
Journey to healing

Cleo Mohlaodi, National Coordinator, Initiatives of Change South Africa, reports on a Creators of Peace collaboration with the City of Johannesburg that has given hope to hundreds

Creators of Peace South Africa focuses on building our nation by creating a foundation for growth through healing hurts and growing trust as an outcome of our story sharing. The aim is to help individuals see their part in rebuilding the broken structures of our country, starting with change in ourselves, our communities and then our country. Between April and June 2018, Creators of Peace Circles were run each week and the team were able to reach 133 ladies and 18 men in the most disadvantaged communities in five regions across Johannesburg. Cleo Mohlaodi, Lucel Snyers and Portia Mosia facilitated the 12 Peace Circles.

This exciting journey of collaboration with the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) started in 2014, when we piloted Peace Circles with the Woman and Elderly Social Development Unit, as they were searching for an NGO to assist in their “Work Readiness Programme” to capacitate inner healing. Thereafter, we spent a year applying to be on the CoJ’s database and two years applying to be funded by the CoJ, to be able to sustain the programme. Finally, we got the grant approval in March 2018.

The collaboration has been an experience of challenges and confirmation of the importance of, and need for, Creators of Peace work in South Africa.

Opening the graduation and certificate presentation held on 6 July at the Jo’burg Theatre, Programme Director Carina van Zyl spoke of the aims of the programme as being to “raise consciousness of your own identity, empowering women to stand up for themselves and find inner healing, respect and pride.” She pointed out that 33% of participants had found direction and a way forward since the programme started, including some finding employment or starting their own NGOs. This is an incredible turn around.

Two motivational speakers were Nthabiseng Montsho from Soul Inspiration and Cleo Mohlaodi from Initiatives of Change.

Nthabiseng shared her own experience of abuse within a marriage relationship and how eventually she had the courage to speak out. This led her to begin Soul Inspiration, from a deep motivation to work with and help young
women in similar situations. Nthabiseng passionately expressed: “You are not defined by your troubles. Say with me, ‘I forgive the person who has abused me. Today I let go. I choose to forgive. There is power in forgiveness. Today I take my power back. I was born to make a difference.’”

‘As from today we are no longer perpetrators of conflict but peace builders,’ Cleo told the graduation. ‘The “I can do it” attitude was awesome to see in the Peace Circles. We gained the emotional strength to become the best we can be. Together we shared tears, humour, and a great platform of a safe space to exchange these personal stories.’

‘To the 133 women and 18 men who were brave enough to take part in the circles, please continue the healing journey. To the City of Johannesburg, we have only scratched the surface. How can we do more?’

Guest speaker Dr Mpho Phalatse stated her commitment to engage with the CoJ Economics Department to support graduates of the programme.

‘You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated,’ she quoted from Maya Angelou.

We are intending, out of the 151 people who have been through the programme, to train facilitators who will continue with us as we reach the communities. We will continue working with City of Johannesburg. This raises a need for funding to be able to give stipends to facilitators, fund further training and development, support programme participants in the change they are embracing, and extend our work to other parts of the CoJ - to all races, classes and genders.

Some comments from Peace Circles participants:

‘I learned a lot about introspection.’

‘It is the first time I am in a space that I can show how I feel, as hard as it is. It is also fulfilling.’

‘Many thanks to Creators of Peace for the opportunity to help us deal with our deepest emotions.’

‘This is a lifestyle we didn’t know possible.’
Advocates for a new story

Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye outlines how Creators of Peace teams can get involved with a new conversation about our contribution to the global narrative for peace.

At the Caux Forum this Summer, Jean Brown and Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye led a training track called “Telling a New Story”. It took place during “Addressing Europe’s Unfinished Business” and aimed to explore issues of personal identity and global change. The training invited participants to consider how the histories of their communities and countries shaped their own personal histories. Each person had time to explore some of the turning points along their own life journey and discuss which stories in their own cultural contexts might be challenged or transformed.

Celia Demoor, from France, who took part said: “In order to be an ‘advocate for a new story’, words are not enough. You can’t convince your sisters and brothers by theory. People change or decide to change when they are affected, when they have been able to identify with a story that has inspired them that echoes in their own lives. We can convince people by inviting them to experience, in fact, the practice of a new story, and by examples of changed lives.”

To continue this conversation, Creators of Peace has produced two new videos to start exploring these ideas. These, together with in the context of our own commitment to share our stories as women in the service of change.

See www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-advocates and join the conversation
DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES >
It’s all happening this November!

International Day of Peace

Creators of Peace is partnering with Peace One Day as part of a social media coalition of NGOs to share as widely the promotion of a day without violence in the world. Please share via your Facebook our messages of inspiration in support of partnership for peace and the Sustainable Development Goals: #peace day #goal 17

Geneva Peace Week

Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye, President of Creators of Peace, will be speaking at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) Library as part of an event organised by Initiatives of Change in November 2018. For more information about Geneva Peace Week and how to attend: www.genevapeaceweek.ch

Community Albums

Creators of Peace is taking part in an exhibition in London to invite people to commit to being peacebuilders for the future following on from the close of the commemorations of the centenary of World War I. Along with other NGOs working in reconciliation, education and development for peace, CoP will be encouraging all to #choospease www.communityalbums.com
ANNUAL REPORT >

Our 2017 Annual Report was launched at our General Assembly in Caux in July 2018. You can now download and print to share with others.

PARTNERSHIP BUILDING >

More CoP teams are starting to work with local community partners to maximise the effectiveness of their outreach and follow-up. Do explore with us ideas or get examples.

COP IN EUROPE >

In Caux, CoP women held a meeting to explore priorities for Creators of Peace to respond to growing divisions and political challenges across Europe.

NEXT NEWSLETTER >

The deadline for the next CoP newsletter will be 30th January 2019. Please send ideas for articles or any news updates that you would like to see included.

CALLING ALL COP NATIONAL CO-ORDINATORS…

Anne-Claire Frank-Seisay organises a skype call 3 times a year for all National Co-ordinators to have the chance to talk together about topics that are of interest to us all. Those who have taken part have enjoyed sharing some of the highlights of their Peace Circles and ongoing activities with women in their areas. The calls also give us a chance to share or consult on issues such as training facilitators, intercultural understanding or fundraising. Each time the calls take place over a couple of days at different times to allow multiple time-zones to take part more easily. The next round of calls will take place on 20th and 21st November, so please keep space in your diary to make the most of the opportunity to take part.
We are planning for our first Facilitators’ Training in Brazil. Brazil has held 10 Creators of Peace Circles and is now ready to train a new group of facilitators. A team of volunteers are translating the Creators of Peace training materials. Would you help make this long-awaited training possible by helping to fund costs of travel and new resources?

www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-donate

IMPORTANTLY
We have completed our first data collection exercise. Following our workshop in Caux as part of “Peace in Practice”, 25 Creators of Peace National Co-ordinators shared what they have done in their countries to date. We discovered that since 2004 up to the end of 2017, Creators of Peace around the world has reached: 50 countries, 420 (+174 estimated) = 594 Creators of Peace Circles, 3052 (+3992, of which Kenya, c.3,000) = 7,044 women reached through Peace Circles (this is based on a modest average of participants to a CoPC 7 to 8 women), 403 women have taken part in a facilitator training, 115 women have been active as facilitators, 20 are confirmed as trainers (experienced facilitators able to pass or run facilitator trainings). And Creators of Peace have also been at the origin of 6 International Conferences reaching at least 1,880 people, at between 80-600 participants in each one.

This is a wonderful picture of many lives and communities transformed. We plan to keep encouraging one another to improve the way we celebrate and evaluate the impact of the Creators of Peace Circles we do. This will enable us to deepen the quality of facilitator training and secure the funding we need to meet and learn together. Please do look out for opportunities early in 2019 to contribute further reports so we can continue to share the positive news of what we can do together as a whole network.
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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