



Campaign against election violence in Sierra Leone

According to the Chairman of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Sierra Leone's recent elections were a 'turning point' in this country that is still recovering from a ten year civil war. It was no easy ride. The first round of Presidential elections was inconclusive with no candidate securing enough votes to win, forcing a run-off. In this period of uncertainty a series of violent clashes took place – most attributed to party militants hoping to influence the results.

In the months leading up to the first poll on 11 August, Hope-Sierra Leone (H-SL), the Initiatives of Change NGO based in Freetown, mounted a Clean Elections Campaign (CEC). As reports of the violence came in, H-SL, having forged strong partnerships with the main political parties, consulted with them and developed a project, 'Save Mama Salone', to defuse the situation.

The party leaders, concerned about the escalating situation, had planned a major peace rally in Freetown, but then cancelled it fearing violence. One of Save Mama Salone's first acts was to attempt an alternative symbolic bringing together of the two main political parties – the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the opposition All People's Congress (APC). Both parties assigned two people to work with the project and agreed that a cavalcade, comprising of people from H-SL, the two parties, journalists and police would visit each of the party headquarters in turn.

First stop was the SLPP HQ where over 500 party supporters were gathered. Brima Koroma, administrative secretary of the SLPP, welcomed them saying, 'This event should be recorded and passed on to our children. The reconciliation you witness here today means that the APC and SLPP are one people.' But as the cavalcade approached



APC members welcomed at the SLPP headquarters

the APC office the APC representative leading the group in was dragged from the vehicle where he was sitting and beaten. Communication about the visit had not filtered down to some of the militant APC youth supporters who prevented the group from entering for 40 minutes. The APC leadership apologized and condemned the act, but by then the propaganda machines of both parties had gone into overdrive. On this occasion and many others the H-SL team found itself having to quash the false rumours and facilitate conversations between the parties. Night after night the H-SL team took part in talk-back radio programmes spreading their message of peaceful change and engaging in dialogue.

On polling day the team patrolled some of the toughest parts of Freetown well into the night, reporting any signs of trouble to the police. Whenever the H-SL van encountered a mob they would slowly approach while playing the CEC 'peace education' jingle, then politely engage them in conversation. On several occasions they were able to be a neutral intermediary, initiating dialogue between leaders of the mob and the police.

Various gangs of disaffected youth were a volatile element in the violence, and the H-SL team started to engage with several of these gangs around the country – many of whom were homeless and had little to eat. A feeding programme was started and channels opened for dialogue with government to find ways to address their problems.

Further violence broke out after the election results were announced. Despite warnings that it was too dangerous, the team decided to target two hotspots – Mile 91 and Magburaka. Thanks to the moral authority H-SL had gained throughout the campaign, they were able to bring together several hundred party activists, gang leaders and other stakeholders in reconciliation. In Magburaka a town meeting reached agreement to bury hate and prejudice (after which they walked out in procession and carried out a symbolic burial) deciding to celebrate 28 September each year as a 'Day of Peace and Reconciliation'. The following day the CEC team worked with thousands in a clean up of the garbage around the town.

For details see www.hopesierraleone.org



Feeding members of street gangs – a volatile element in the violence

News in Brief

Peace Circles in Africa

Ann Njeri



Peace circles participants in South Africa

In Juba, the Vice-President of the South Sudan Regional Assembly, Dr Riek Machar, opened a five-day workshop led by a team from IofC's *Creators of Peace* programme, for members of the Regional Assembly and National Assembly, Khartoum, and for peace and social activists. Angelina Teny, Minister of State for Petroleum and Energy, hosted the team from eight countries, who were in Africa during October to conduct a series of women's 'Creators of Peace Circles'. A second workshop followed in Khartoum.

In South Africa four workshops brought together 60 women, including some from Zimbabwe; and in Kenya 25 came from around the country and Uganda.

The 'Peace Circle' process includes participants sharing their stories, accepting their contribution in the perpetration of conflict and embracing their peace-making potential. Together they examine the character of peace and the character of the peace creator.

One participant said, 'We became one family as we wept with those sharing their stories. As we saw our personal faults portrayed, hilarious laughter sometimes lifted the tension and led to reconciliations with great rejoicing.'

The workshops focussed on enabling the participants to run *Creators of Peace Circles* in their respective villages and regions.

Award for peace in Côte d'Ivoire

On 10 October, Initiatives of Change (IofC), Côte d'Ivoire, received the 'Prix du Merite' for its work towards national reconciliation and peace at a gala event

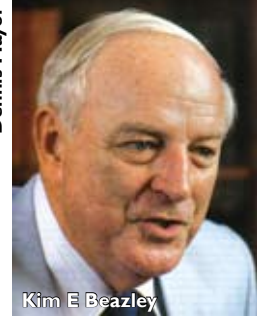
Caux – Visions for Peace

A 16 page colour report of the Caux 2007 conferences has just been printed and is available from national IofC centres or through globalupdate@iofc.org. Also available is a short DVD *Visions for Peace* made during the Caux conferences. The film features an interview with Mohamed Sahnoun, President of IofC International,

arranged by the Ministry for National Reconciliation and Relations with the Republic's Institutions. The Ministry wished to express gratitude to the various public figures and informal groups who have been involved in the current peace process. The prize was presented to the Côte d'Ivoire IofC President, Mme Assana Sangare, in the presence of guest of honour, Gerard Patrick Lekota, South African Minister of Defence.

A different politician

Three former Prime Ministers of Australia were among the 300 who attended the State Funeral of Kim Edward Beazley on 20 October. Obituaries in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Britain's *The Independent* and *The Guardian* made



Dennis Mayor

reference to his long connection with Moral Re-Armament (as IofC was previously known) going back to 1953 when he spent seven weeks at the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Caux, Switzerland. A committed Christian, it was in Caux that he commenced what became a life-long habit of spending time in silence each morning to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit – an experience which profoundly affected his life and political career. It shaped his conviction to work for 'the rehabilitation of the Australian Aboriginal race'.

Healing family violence in Colombia

In Colombia, where more people die from domestic violence than from conflict with guerrilla forces, IofC launched the Spanish edition of the book *Listen to the Children - Stories of Change in Family Life* on 28 September. After a short extract from the book had been read out, the 180 present joined in silent reflection. First to speak afterwards was a seasoned journalist who said he was usually a cold observer, but the event had moved him exceptionally. He has since mentioned the book in his weekly column.

about his vision for the role Caux is meant to take in helping peacemakers address the deep causes of human insecurity. There is also footage of Kofi Annan speaking in Caux.



CALENDAR

LONDON, UK

20 November

Greencoat Forum: South Africa's 'Miracle Train'
www.uk.iofc.org/events/306.html

PANCHGANI, INDIA

23-27 November

Caux Initiatives for Business conference
www.cauxbusiness.org

FRANCE

23-30 November

International Farmers' Dialogue
www.farmersdialogue.org

PANCHGANI, INDIA

15- 21 January 2008

40th Anniversary conference at Asia Plateau
www.in.iofc.org

CAUX, SWITZERLAND

International conferences

3 – 9 July

Global servant-leadership

11 – 16 July

Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy

18 – 23 July

Addressing the root causes of human insecurity

25 July – 1 August

Tools for Change

3 – 10 August

Renewal Arts: Can artists mend a broken world?

12 – 17 August

Developing Cultural Dialogue

www.caux.ch/2008

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Initiatives of Change

Building trust across the world's divides

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Sushobha Barve; against Dal Lake, Srinagar, Kashmir

PEOPLE BUILDING TRUST

Healing a bitter legacy of 60 years

A people's 'peace constituency' has grown in India, Pakistan and Kashmir, nudging governments to move.
Mike Brown meets Sushobha Barve who is part of it.

Despite three wars fought since their bloody partition, despite nuclear armaments, terrorism and over half a million troops on both sides in Kashmir, peace is coming between India and Pakistan, argues Sushobha Barve.

'We can look forward to ending the bitter legacy of the last 60 years and begin a new chapter in our bilateral relations,' she told a conference in Caux, Switzerland, last August. The most visible sign of a change is the peace dialogue between governments which 'has been sustained over four years, despite serious provocations'.

'We can look forward to ending the bitter legacy of the last 60 years and begin a new chapter'

At breakthrough talks in 2003, both sides modified their long-held positions on Kashmir, and launched a 'composite dialogue' which has made progress on multiple issues, including border security, combating terrorism and economic cooperation. Several rounds of talks have been held on the Kashmir dispute, on such issues as cross-border trade and travel, troop reductions, re-uniting families and humanitarian relief.

In Kashmir last July, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the moment had come when 'people are energized' to make a genuine effort 'to build peace and create the conditions for an historic reconciliation of hearts and minds'.

Sushobha Barve agrees. This 'emerging story full of hope' is based on her 20 years' involvement in the growing 'peace constituency' in India and Pakistan. Progress made by governments has been largely 'people-driven'. This movement has begun to reverse the 'trust deficit' accumulated over six decades of 'deep-seated distrust and hatred between us'.

The first significant civil society initiatives began in 1995. In Delhi, 200 Indians and Pakistanis met for the 'Pakistan-India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy'. The following year, the meeting was repeated in Lahore, and then annually. At the height of the Kargil war in 1999, a women's group travelled to Pakistan from India, affirming their commitment to peace. The return journey to India brought a senior lawyer, Asma Jehangir, who apologized for Pakistani aggression in that war.

Sushobha first visited Pakistan in 1986, meeting women activists. Initially, she felt some lingering suspicion towards Pakistan. But through many visits, staying in homes, her mistrust melted. Today, the team from the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation which she directs, is in touch with 'all the key relevant persons in the two governments, as well as dissident Kashmiri leaders'.

For Sushobha, that process started with a Muslim classmate in college in Mumbai. As a Maharashtrian Brahmin, Sushobha began to face her prejudice against this fellow student and apologized for it. 'This encounter opened the windows of my heart' to the Muslims in India. It also opened Sushobha's volunteer work with IofC (then Moral Re-Armament) in India for some 30 years.

A critical turning point came in 1984 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh



bodyguards. Sushobha was travelling on a train, stopped by angry mobs. She tried to protect two Sikh businessmen in her compartment, but was grabbed by the neck and pushed aside. The Sikhs were brutally beaten, dragged from the train, stoned and set on fire.

Traumatized, Sushobha was 'tortured at night by not being able to save the lives of the two innocent men'. It shattered her image of India. Feeling national repentance was needed, she wrote letters of apology to prominent Sikhs. She learned that the Sikh businessmen had somehow survived their massive injuries, and found her way to their homes. 'I cannot express the joy I felt when I saw Bhupendra Singh lying on his bed. I was greeted not with hostility but as an old friend of the family.'

Sushobha's work took on a new urgency. In 1992, the destruction of a mosque by right-wing Hindus set off waves of rioting and serial bomb blasts in Mumbai. Thousands died. For three months, Sushobha moved through communities where minority Muslims were under threat, opening communications with the police, confronting hostility at the street level. With Mumbai's former police chief, she spent years setting up citizen-police 'mohalla' committees in 24 areas, rebuilding trust between divided communities through dialogue and practical projects, such as sports facilities.

In 2000, she launched the 'Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation' (CDR) in Delhi. In numerous conflict situations, such as the 2002 Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat, she has been actively involved in mediation efforts and research studies.

'This work forces me constantly to face others' pain and suffering, prompting me to look into my own heart'

But Kashmir has been her toughest challenge. 'Going there over the last ten years has made me realize another side of the story. Kashmir is not a Hindu-Muslim question but a political issue which has never been settled. Even now, many Kashmiris say they don't know where they really belong.'

The CDR began a series of dialogues, starting in homes, mainly with women. 'Our ground rule was not to talk about politics but how the conflict had affected us. Each one's experience, bottled up, was heard.' The women began to think how they could help others. Someone spoke of a village where there were only widows – they helped them get the compensation that was due. Others set up a project to train destitutes in weaving Pashmina wool.

Eight of these dialogues were held in Srinagar, Jammu, more in Delhi-Gurgaon. They brought in Kashmiri Pandits, the minority Hindus, thousands of whom had fled in the 1990s. 'We found that both communities had developed their own narratives of the past, completely opposite. But both were based on real experience.'

Many women feared for their sons. A professor expressed how warped life had become for children: 'Young people are trained to use guns, but there are no courses in how to resolve conflicts.' So began CDR's programme of 'Educators for Peace' which, since 2003, has trained some 150 teachers to take a peace curriculum into government schools.

In 2004, CDR held the first of seven 'Intra-Kashmir Dialogues' for representatives from 'both Kashmiris'. These have continued in Islamabad, and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Former foreign secretaries of both countries have participated, sending proposals back to policy makers.

The dialogues aim to include the most diverse points of view in order for reconciliation to have a chance. They have engaged significant 'dissident' leaders such as Yasin Malik, pioneer of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front who, following his release from prison, renounced violence and is leading a non-political Safar-e-Azadi (Journey of Freedom), going village by village in trucks. His message, says Sushobha, is that Kashmiris should not suspect the intentions of the peace process but, at the same time, insist on their right to be included in deciding any agreement.

Sushobha supports this principle. She quotes one woman: 'Why are Kashmiris always expected to accommodate Indian and Pakistani interests and suppress our own aspirations? Why don't you take us into your confidence? Trust us that we will consider your difficulties while responding to your national interests.'

Establishing this trust, Sushobha insists, is the key. 'I've always known you cannot hold people by force. If they don't feel part of our country, that's something for us Indians to think about. You can't appease them by giving money.'

The peace process has to be taken to the masses by Kashmiris themselves. 'The dialogue participants must be responsible for keeping the lines of communication open so that opportunities for peace are not missed.'

Most difficult for her to 'keep on learning', she admits, 'is to find my own sense of neutrality. So often without realizing it, one suggests something to one side or the other, and then your objectivity gets diminished. This work forces me constantly to face others' pain and suffering, prompting me to look into my own heart to overcome my pride and blind spots about my country.'

What stops her getting cynical? 'In the last seven to eight years I have seen what was unbelievable actually becoming a reality. The fact that the peace process is moving forward, and that so many are taking overall responsibility, that's what gives me hope... Of course there are times when I feel discouraged. But those moments last less and less.'

For more detail, see www.himmat.net/cdr.htm