

AFRICAN NONVIOLENT EXPERIENCES

SOUTH AFRICA

The brutal policies of South Africa government convinced many the apartheid would only end in a violent showdown and to that end the African National Congress had an active military wing. Nonetheless, the heart of the resistance movement was classic nonviolent resistance: education, vigils, rallies, marches, petitions, boycotts, prayers, fasts and civil disobedience.

Governmental attempts to stop this resistance with massive detentions, bannings of organizations and individuals, intimidation and murder, as well as emergency rule could not, in the end, stop the movement.

In 1989, the churches responded to the draconian measures of emergency rule with a nationwide effort called "effective nonviolent action" that trained citizens for grassroots campaigns to break racial barriers in housing and transportation, defend conscientious objectors, visit prisoners across racial lines, etc.

After the elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, though incomplete and not totally effective, allowed the country to leave apartheid behind without revenges and bloodshed. The Commission was chaired by the Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, who received Nobel Prize in 1984.

MOZAMBICO

During the 80s, Mozambico experienced a conflict that went on for more than 10 years creating an enormous number of victims and displaced people. The conflict, between the government, Frente de Liberaçao de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and the guerrilla, Resistencia Nacional de Moçambique (RENAMO) seemed endless. Many western chanceries at the time thought that the Mozambican conflict

could not be dealt with until after the resolution of apartheid in South Africa. The result was a paralysis. The Community of Sant'Egidio, who was already present there with some humanitarian work, perceived the situation differently: despite the historical references to the general picture of Southern Africa, one sees in both rival groups a progressive exhaustion in the faith of military solutions while, at the same time, Sant'Egidio identified the endogenous reasons of the conflict which cause its unending continuation.

After various attempts to search for institutional support, the Community of Sant'Egidio offered itself as "mediator". They established certain contacts with the RENAMO guerrillas. The negotiations took their start amidst great difficulties. The negotiation table opened in July 1990 in Rome, together with Bishop Jaime Gonçalves and the representative of the Italian government.

The process was possible when both parties recognized each other "compatriots and members of the same great Mozambican family". The Mozambican negotiations lasted 27 months, with 11 sessions of work. The general peace accord was signed on October 4, 1992.

The peace in Mozambique has become an example of how a non-institutional reality, the Community of Sant'Egidio, can successfully bring a mediation process to an end with a mixture and a synergy of responsibilities between governmental entities and non-governmental organizations.

SIERRA LEONE

In the ten-year civil war in Sierra Leone, it was the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), composed of Christian and Muslims, that took the initiative to contact the warring factions in order to convince them of the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and for reconciliation as a guarantee for lasting peace and stability. The catholic representative was Makeni bishop rev. Biguzzi. Especially after 1997 Council action was central in the peace process. The catholic representative was Makeni bishop rev. Biguzzi. Especially after 1997 Council action was central in the peace process. It organized many meeting between different social groups, with soldiers and rebels which the aim to build some trust. They asked the president to freed the rebel leader and have him speak on the radio so that he could lead his fighters to talks. The IRCSL persuaded the leaders for see reason and talk peace. When eventually the warring factions opted for dialogue and a negotiated

settlement, the IRC SL accompanied the peace talks, first in Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast, and later in Lomé, Togo, and has been very instrumental in the monitoring of the implementation of the accord signed in Togo in 1999. Its action has been going on even after to help the reconciliation process, decrease tension and support locally social peace.

MADAGASCAR

After its independence from France in 1958, Madagascar was ruled by a military dictatorship, especially after 1975 by president Ratsiraka.

Starting from 1991 the Christian Council and Forces Vives (a group of opponents to the dictatorship) committed in a active nonviolent effort to change things. They organized a month of mobilisation, demonstration, mass strikes of public institutions (post, railways, school) paralysing the state. The dictatorship reacted violently, firing on people gathered to demonstrate. Bishop Victor Razafimahatratra asked to continue the nonviolent struggle, organizing mass prayers. The government started to give in. Negotiations opened leading to a transition government.

Contribution of Catholic Church was fundamental within the process, as it was in the Philippines were the nonviolent “People Power” movement would have likely failed if not supported by the church.

NORTH UGANDA

Uganda has experienced numerous conflicts since negotiating its independence from the British in 1962. During the early years of the war in Acholiland, religious leaders in the region focused primarily on providing moral and practical support to their parishioners and Church institutions became centres of support for thousands seeking shelter from the violence. Over time a greater consensus emerged amongst church leaders in the North on the need to be proactive in ‘bearing witness’ about the conflict and to engage directly in peacebuilding. This transformation has resulted in a number of initiatives that have placed religious leaders at the heart of efforts to support a political resolution of the conflict and to address the consequences of the war. The most prominent bodies conducting these initiatives have been the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission

(JPC).

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative was formally inaugurated in February 1998 with the Anglican Bishop of northern Uganda Nelson Onono-Onweng as its founding Chair.

ARLPI developed its activities in a number of directions: continuation of efforts to build a public consensus for peace through sensitization, training and dialogue; advocacy for specific policies, especially the amnesty law; and mediating or supporting negotiations.

Most ordinary people in Acholiland, without regard to their membership of a religious community, have trust in the motivations of the religious leaders to play a meaningful role in the search for peace. Thus far the religious leaders have resisted the temptation to present themselves as the ones who can deliver peace. After fifteen years of brutality, the community has become weak and divided, and to address this challenge, the religious leaders are promoting a philosophy that sees the creation of peace as a long-term, group effort.

NAMIBIA

African history is rich in nonviolent struggles. In the case of the 1971–1972 labourers' strike in Namibia, solidarity and unity in nonviolent resistance successfully led to consideration of the demands of exploited workers. The Ovambos, the largest ethnic group in Namibia, at the time governed by South Africa and called South West Africa, had been working under harsh conditions.

A massive strike went out on 10 December 1971. Through letters to other parts of the country, the action spread throughout the territory encouraging the involvement of trash collectors, porters, and hotel and airport workers. Food boycotts constituted part of the strike action, with strikers refusing to consume the food produced for them, opting instead to buy their food elsewhere.

Despite international support for the workers—as demonstrated by the visit of UN secretary-general Kurt Waldheim in March 1972 and the endorsement of their cause by the United Nations Council for Namibia—they did not succeed in having all their demands met. They had, however, amply demonstrated that united, nonviolent action could force government authorities to the negotiating table.

R. D. CONGO

On August 1998 East regions of Congo were invaded by Tutsu soldiers from Rwanda. Congo population was dismayed, but soon after they organized to resist. Some chose a violent way and organized an army. But luckily most of the people decide to react nonviolently.

It was the “Civil Society”. It was all over the area, but mainly in the city of Bukavu from where other cities took strength. Churches, universities, trade unions, traditional networks, radios, NGOs worked



together to keep alive the conscience and dignity of a People and find a way out, freedom.

There were many killings, two bishops as well, rev. Munzehirwa and Kataliko.

BURUNDI

Working for Reconciliation in Burundi:

CENTRE UBUNTU INITIATIVE (Bujumbura - Burundi)

From our field activities, we came to realize how people show signs or experience somatic signs of trauma in a wide spread way. One can feel despair, anguish and loneliness in all corners of the country. The increase of poverty is not helping either. There is a widely spread veil of trauma on the society, and this may start from the Head of State because he is a human being as well. Religion has become a refuge for wounded people with fragile psychologies. Churches are full and new religious movements are springing out like mushrooms. It has been necessary for us to get involved in psychosocial programs helping regain and develop the resilience capacity for individuals and communities, all this being rooted in the rediscovery of the Ubuntu value. The community facilitation revealed to be an efficient tool for local communities on the hill sides all over

the country where people could reflect on problematic behaviour undermining the Ubuntu value in their region including the ethnic suspicion and hatred, map the main problem they wish to see changed, analyze the root causes and the effects, externalize it through plays. After deconstructing the problem story as a community, people could shape together the desired story, discuss what may be the required components using the local energies and resources and play the desired story allowing the process to see how realistic it is.

We were amazed to see how this methodology can be fruitful when in Buhoro area – Gitega Province – for example - Tutsis from internally displaced camp, Hutu returnees from refugee camps in Tanzania, demobilized soldiers, former “political prisoners” and local community people on the hillside decided to set up a common local organization after a few sessions of our community mobilization. They are not yet discussing politics. They are not yet sharing on past events. It is still too early for that. But they are jointly involved in activities generating income and find this to be a “win win” process.

People know CENTRE UBUNTU belongs to the Catholic Church even if we work with communities in their respective diversities. Reconciliation has to be for the communities, not for Christians alone. This brought us to develop techniques dealing with individual and communities so that individuals and communities regain their capacity of resilience beyond gender, ethnic, religious and other considerations related to those kinds of identities.

In our Christian understanding we are convinced that God is the author of our healing and reconciliation. This is the core motivation of our action. But we still believe in our cooperation with God to help reconciliation happen. The special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa promoted the category of the Church being a family of God. This has to come true somehow.

By Fr. NTAKARUTIMANA Emmanuel, O.P.
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RUWANDA

In 1995 was born the first Amahoro project (Amahoro means Peace)

in Munyaga, Diocese of Kibungo. At the very beginning it was a family-house to welcome genocide orphans. The guests and the parish volunteers came from both hutu and from tutzi ethnic group . Therefore since the beginning it was an example of Christian fraternity despite the ethnic hatred.

The project is not limited to supply means and consumables supplies, but allows local and Italian

volunteers to live together, sharing daily life and decisions.

Bishop Frédéric Rubwejanga wanted and backed this experience. Nowadays there are 3 Amahoro projects in Kibungo Diocese, and they welcome a wider range of people: orphan or sick children, elders, physical and mental handicapped. These houses are run mainly by local volunteers. At the moment there are 2 Italian volunteers charged by Reggio Emilia Diocese.



SOUTH AFRICA

The Denis Hurley Peace Institute named after South African Catholic Archbishop Denis Eugene Hurley, a critical voice of the church during Apartheid, would like to be associated with his stance that the church (its people and organizations) must become a community serving humanity. The Institute hopes to do this by serving people in conflict situations ensuring that building peace addresses the root causes of conflict and the processes by which the peace is achieved, respects the human rights of people. The vision is that the Denis Hurley Peace Institute will be a credible and respected peace-builder in Africa and internationally, actively upholding the social teaching that peace is much more than the absence of war. Its mission is to build and co-labour for peace in Africa and internationally through solidarity with and service to humanity in conflict through the promotion of dialogue, justice and reconciliation.

The goal of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute (hereafter Hurley

Institute) is the enhanced capacity for an informed and appropriate response to conflict by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) in particular and faith-based leadership in general, acting in solidarity with other civil society partners for the benefit of humanity.

As an ally in the advocacy for peace and justice, the Institute is established as a professional and independent organization with the following three strategic objectives:

- Enhanced capacity of Catholic and faith-based leadership in their peacemaking in Africa
- Increased successful advocacy for an end to violent conflict
- Established, effective organizational and administrative support structure in the form of a peace institute .

The Institute will be both responsive i.e. acting on requests and invitations from partners as well as proactive in its approach to peacemaking, peace-building and collegial encounter informed by its research and monitoring of conflict situations and innovative experiments in mediation and reconciliation.

BURKINA FASO

DUDAL JAM

From 1969 until 1973 the country was hit by a long drought. In 1969 Dori Emir and the Great Imam asked for help to the catholic mission to face hunger and drought.

In order to avoid the risk of setting a charitable kind of system, which father Bidaud had always fought, he made a proposal to his interlocutors: to establish an Association where Christians and Muslims were equally cooperating, opened to all faiths: l' Union Fraternelle des Croyants (UFC).

UFC is based on reciprocal religious toleration, cooperation and shared willingness for a socio-economic and cultural development of the community.

Dudal Jam centre was borne to carry on the experience of UFC, to make it more tangible and usable by means of activity such as:

- information (press releases, reportages, articles)
- education (seminars about intercultural and interreligious dialogue, workshops for educators both in Italy and Burkina Faso)
- experiences exchanges with similar realities (Névé Shalom in Israel,

Angers Centre in France, Bradford in England)
visit journey in the Shael region for Italian Youth
women alphabetization and health education
professional education for mechanic fitter and *chaffeurs*.
Moreover it was born because of the understanding that conflict
prevention is not only a matter of prayer, but requires time and
energy invested on education and reciprocal knowing.

TCHAD

RESRAT and RADIO LOTIKO

Sarh Diocese. The country has been undergoing a civil war since 1964: north areas, with a prevailing Arabian culture are poor of natural resources and have always been supported by French colonist; south areas, with a prevailing Negro African culture, have a good percentage of Christians and is rich in natural resources. Crashes have developed a consistent number of internal refugee; politicians want to split the country despite the civil war which would follow. In 1978 a church association was born to facilitate the unity of the country, RESRAT. During the years following the independence, from 1960 to 1979, in spite of the crashes, the country felt as to be one. From 1979 on, divisions came up again because of tribal differences, making the crashes harder since the reasons underlying were older.

Mons Edmond Djtangar is in charge as media referent for the Episcopal conference. People are not alphabetized. In 2003 Mons Djtangar creates LOTIKO RADIO (meaning "stand up, let's work") which is the only radio in the area since the government one does not work. Radio programs are about national unity overcoming religious or tribal separations, they educate about tolerance and the Church Social Doctrine.

The government try to limit the broadcasting range of the radio (height and power of the aerial). The bishop is actually fund raising to have another aerial operating. They are not allowed to speak about national politics, so they speak about local misgovernment (abuses on women, illegal trials, ...) and they take international news form BBC. They broadcast an English course, religious news form Vatican Radio e the rosary from Lourdes daily at 15.30.

It's good that the radio is listened mostly by Muslims.

There was an internet website which collected all local news, it

lasted one year, then it closed because the missionary who run it came back to Europe.