



Peace through Youth (or Skills Solve More than Soap)

By Phoebe Milliken, Plowshares' Program Manager

In Kampala, Uganda every bridge, overpass, lamppost, and fence was papered with hundreds of bright campaign posters. It was January 2011, a month ahead of elections for positions in all levels of government. Crawling through Kampala traffic, Bob, Alice and I had plenty of time to study the posters which gave the impression of vibrant democracy. However the young people with whom we were working, the news, and even the posters themselves told a different story. "In my rural area," said one workshop participant, "the prices for sugar, soap, and other staples rose dramatically a month or so ago for no apparent reason. Now, in the weeks before the election, the ruling party comes to visit the villages to tell the people to vote for their candidates and to hand out what? Sugar and soap." In the news we heard that the main opposition candidate for president had been released from jail again. While it was good that he had been released before the election, it was common knowledge that should he appear to be doing too well he would be locked up once more. At the airport – official government property - the only posters were for the re-election of Yoweri Museveni, the ruling president. His posters promised voters continued stability if they returned him to office. Given Uganda's turbulent history, "stability" seems like a strong incentive. But what is that slogan really saying to Ugandans? Perhaps that without this president's iron rule they cannot be trusted to take care of themselves? That they should be afraid of each other without their omnipotent protector? That with more freedom they would descend into chaos bred by religious and ethnic differences?

Plowshares was in Uganda to work with a group of young leaders from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and the Congo who challenge that paternalistic prescription. They sought conflict transformation skills to better use the energy of conflicts to promote justice. Not afraid of their ethnic differences, they joined together in prayers led by Christians and Muslims alike. They did not flinch from discussing the serious issues facing their communities or their nations. They are committed to leaving behind the violence and repression of the past to forge a bright future for their region; and no one mentioned a revolution.

Right now you can open any news magazine and see headlines of young people taking to the street or the square to bring down a repressive regime. Many of these regimes ought to go; the people of these countries deserve better – better in the form of responsive governance devoted to greater equity, greater justice, greater transparency and less poverty. However, these revolutions that have so captured the public's attention are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Youth leaders around the world, such as the ones we worked with in Uganda, are seeking the same ends through reform rather



Campaign posters on a Kampala overpass, January 2011

than revolution. Reform may have less cache as a headline, but can, slowly and peacefully, bring about real change.

Plowshares is currently working with several such reform-minded youth movements. (We define youth in the same way as the South African government, meaning people aged 14-35.) In Northeast India, young participants in a Plowshares workshop have formed the Peace Coalition of Northeast India which is dedicated to charting a way out of a generation of war between multiple insurgent groups and "mainland" Indian government. In South Africa we are equipping young leaders from the Zimbabwean refugee community with skills to cope with their tenuous situation in a hostile South Africa and the conflicts implicit in their potential return to Zimbabwe. Participants at the Uganda workshop from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi are organizing a Franco-phone workshop in the eastern DRC to help residents cope with the daily conflicts that result from decades of warfare and underdevelopment.

Revolutionaries may be in the spotlight now, but Plowshares is proud to work with so many young leaders committed to working quietly to reduce the violence and repression born of inequality, prejudice, corruption and poverty. When we say we are promoting "peace through youth" this is what we mean.

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China: Bob and Alice Evans, Plowshares Directors, and YanYan Yip of Civic Exchange (our Hong Kong-based partner organization) have made multiple trips to mainland China in recent months to nurture participants in the Risk Management for a Harmonious Society project. Chinese participants trained in the early rounds of the project have led many workshops for their own constituencies and have gained additional practice by acting as co-trainers. Recent workshop hosts include Yanjing Theological Seminary, the Pudong Social Workers Association, and HuiZeRen (a disaster relief organization akin to the Red Cross). In March Alice, Bob and Yanyan led a case writing workshop for Chinese participants in order to enhance their skills in writing and teaching cases as well as expand the number and variety of Chinese cases available.



Participants in the case writing workshop enact a role play from one of their own cases.

Northeast India: Plowshares' new "Peace through Youth" project moved into high gear with a conflict transformation and peace building workshop in Northeast India in December, 2010. Bob, Alice, and YanYan Yip conducted a week-long intensive training course on conflict transformation and peace building. The 35 young people in the workshop represented universities, seminaries (Protestant and Roman Catholic in this predominantly Christian region of India), non-profit agencies, the Gandhian Peace Institute and religious leaders. The workshop culminated with the official formation of the Peace Coalition of Northeast India (PCNI) with the intent of finding a new way out of the decades-old civil war in their region.



Participants in the Uganda workshop celebrate the end of their week together with poses from a learning exercise.

Uganda: The Evans and Phoebe Milliken led a week-long intensive training workshop in Kampala, Uganda with representatives from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), organized by Youth Employment and Sustainability (YES)-Uganda. The workshop included representatives of YES from all participating countries as well as leaders of youth-focused NGOs and university student organizations. Many of the NGO representatives came from northern Uganda which is still recovering from more than 15 years of terror inflicted by the Lord's Resistance Army. At the

conclusion of the training the participants formally established the Great Lakes Youth Peace Network (GYPN). Participants from the DRC and Burundi will offer a workshop in French and KiSwahili to be held in eastern DRC in April. Plowshares is co-sponsoring the workshop which will be led by Congolese, Ugandan and Kenyan participants from the Kampala workshop.

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New Hartford Seminary course taught by the Evans

Bob and Alice will teach the following course at Hartford Seminary next January. Registration for the course is not yet open, but please mark it on your calendar if you are interested.

Theology, Ethics and Practice of Conflict Transformation and Peace Building

In light of youth-led revolutions in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, what are the skills needed for conflict transformation and peace building? Using a case method approach, this course will teach seminary students and religious and community leaders the theory and practice of proactive conflict intervention. These skills are especially appropriate for congregations, community organizations and local communities. The course will also explore important world events from the perspective of theology, ethics, dialogue and peace-building.

January 9 to 13, 2012, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, plus an evening session to be arranged.

The Evans to speak at the IRAS Conference in June



The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science Presents
Doing Good, Doing Bad, Doing Nothing
Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Human Behavior
June 18 - 25, 2011 ☆ Athenaeum Hotel ☆ Chautauqua, New York
Co-Chairs: Karl Peters and Barbara Whittaker Johns

This years conference will address: "What causes people to behave in ways that harm others? Benefit others? Why do some stand by and watch while others are hurt? And why do some step in to help, even at risk to themselves? In response to these questions, the conference will seek to integrate recent understandings of behavior from the evolutionary, genetic, developmental, neural, and psychological sciences with teachings of the world's philosophies and religions, in order to better understand how we can become more "humane" humans."

Bob and Alice will speak on conflict transformation and will lead participants through case study approach to analyzing conflict. For registration information go to www.iras.org.

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South Africa: In January Bob and Alice Evans, and Phoebe Milliken conducted a day-long workshop in Soweto on conflict transformation for the leaders of the migrant Zimbabwean community and their advocates. Violence against Zimbabweans is increasing, both within Zimbabwe as a new election draws nearer and in South Africa where xenophobic feelings are again on the rise. Bishop Paul Verryn of Central Methodist Mission concluded the workshop by drawing participants into a conflict analysis of the situations in Zimbabwe and for Zimbabweans in South Africa.



First Grade pupils at the Albert Street School for refugee and homeless children set up by the Central Methodist Mission. Phoebe's daughter's kindergarten class sent them letters and artwork.

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