



TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR YOUTH LEADERS



on

NONVIOLENT TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT

**FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE
MANO RIVER UNION**

5–9 FEBRUARY 2007

COLLECTIVE NONVIOLENT ACTION IS A REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE to violent struggle and armed conflict. Its proper use can lead to stable, long-term results that benefit all parties to a conflict—without bloodshed or physical and economic destruction. Scholars believe that the technique can gradually replace some deadly conflicts, if organised around specific needs and targeted purposes. Thus it is important for the representatives of civil societies, governments, international organizations, news media, and universities to recognise and understand how it works. With continuing study and deepened knowledge, the technique of nonviolent struggle can become even more effective in facing current and future conflicts where deep-seated and serious issues are at stake.

Nonviolent movements—employing methods such as boycotts, demonstrations, vigils, and strikes against authoritarian bureaucracies and despotic regimes—have occurred in history as an alternative to violence and passivity. The young, who are particularly susceptible to arguments that ‘what is taken by violence must be retrieved by violence,’ can be helped to reject violence as problem solving—but only if they know that a realistic alternative to armed struggle is available that can be successful. Its success, however, depends upon study and preparation, and thus young leaders need to be offered knowledge of the theories and methods entailed.

In order to prepare younger generations to be able to stand up to organized mass violence, fight for their rights, and pursue justice with methods that do not injure life or limb nor rely on violence of any kind—which is counterproductive and prolongs disputes—the technique of nonviolent transformation of conflict must be coherently presented in structured training programmes or rigorous academic study. While conflict resolution techniques are crucially important, the still-older field of nonviolent resistance may be the only way of reaching the stage when negotiations or conciliation methods can work. Hence the nonviolent transformation of conflict is a critical and indeed central part of peace and conflict studies.



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Executive Summary

Following upon the success of a workshop on nonviolent transformation of conflict, held for youth organizations in Port Harcourt, Niger Delta of Nigeria in November 2005, the University for Peace (UPEACE), in partnership with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, organised a second training session on the topic for youth leaders of civil society organizations in the Mano River Union and Ivory Coast, 5th – 9th February 2007, at the Hotel Bintumani, Aberdeen, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The workshop brought together thirty-seven young leaders, who represented their youth organizations in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Also participating were the Director of the UPEACE Africa Programme and staff, faculty and evaluators from UPEACE, and two professional trainers from the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) in Belgrade, plus the local coordinating team from Fourah Bay College’s Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies, led by the University Coordinator.

The Mano River Basin, in particular the West African sub-region, has recently been disrupted by a series of conflicts. At the time of writing, Guinea is in the grip of a nationwide general strike, led by trade unions, for which the demands have shifted from the amelioration of economic hardships to the resignation of the aged and ailing President Lansana Conté.

Sierra Leone’s civil war was officially declared to have ended in January 2002. Even as the peace in the country is solidifying, the pending elections of July 2007 pose a threat to the stability that has been experienced in the past five years.

In Liberia, after a fourteen-year civil war, the country is gradually gaining stability under the leadership of Africa’s first-ever woman president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a respected economist. Despite this development, the security situation is still fragile and uncertain, especially as a number of supporters of the former leader, Charles Taylor, are playing significant roles in the new administration.

The Ivory Coast, once regarded as a ‘zone of peace’ in the turbulent West African landscape, has similarly degenerated into chaos and bloodshed, with the country divided into a rebel-controlled north, and government-controlled south.

In the four countries' scenarios highlighted above, the role of youths as both perpetrators and victims of discord and violence is indisputably documented.

The need for exposing youths to other methods of resolving conflicts, mainly nonviolent strategies, can therefore not be overstated.

Awareness is growing that violence only succeeds in creating more violence. Much as is the case with youths in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the young people in the MRU basin also long for the opportunity to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills in the area of nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

The training began in earnest on Monday, 5 February 2007, with an official opening ceremony presided over by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, University of Sierra Leone. The Minister of Youth and Sports, Dr Denis Bright, offered a keynote address and presided over the official opening ceremony. The programme culminated on Friday, 9 February, with a closing ceremony chaired by the Director of the Africa Programme of UPEACE, Dr Jean-Bosco Butera, at which certificates were presented to participants. By the end of the weeklong training the knowledge base of the participants had dramatically increased, judging from their final presentations. They were visibly eager to continue to learn more on nonviolent transformation of conflict, and they vowed amongst themselves to develop a network among the workshop participants.

Background

The Mano River Union, a sub-regional organization formed in 1973, brings together Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. It takes its name from the Mano River, the source of which is in the Guinea highlands, from whence it flows to form a border between Sierra Leone and Liberia. These neighbouring countries on the West Coast of Africa share the same border.

Conflict that began in Liberia in 1989 spilled over into Sierra Leone, as the dissident leader Charles Taylor vowed to ensure that Sierra Leone 'tasted the bitterness of war'. The militarisation of the region began in 1989, as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Taylor challenged and sought to remove then President of Liberia Samuel Doe. Forces from across Liberia, specifically the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, launched an attack from the eastern part of Sierra Leone, from within the town of Bomaru. The conflicts in

both countries created tensions in neighbouring Guinea. Accusations and counter-accusations of Guinean involvement in the Liberian conflict and rumours of imminent attacks on Guinea by members from the RUF further worsened the situation. The failing health of the Guinean President and his reluctance to quit the political stage resulted in recent trade union calls for national strikes, which were brutally repressed by the security forces leading to a number of deaths.

Against this milieu of violence in which youths played a variety of roles, both as initiators and victims of violence, the University for Peace (UPEACE), affiliated with the UN, in partnership with the Centre for Peace and Conflict studies of Fourah Bay college, University of Sierra Leone, determined to take a step. The means of engaging in conflict is a choice. Young people must realise as early as possible that when a genuine and deep-seated grievance has not been solved by institutionalized political action, choosing the nonviolent option has many benefits and advantages. Yet it requires that young people be exposed to the details of nonviolent transformation of conflict and able to learn its theories, properties, methods, and the necessity for preparation and planning. Although vaguely aware of spontaneous nonviolent action, the young need intensive exposure and orientation on the fundamentals of strategic nonviolent action, which is what might enable them to achieve long term, durable, and just results.

In a continent with very little knowledge of how nonviolent collective action had historically yielded positive results, and in a region with a history associated with grim wars and violent upheaval, it is of utmost importance to provide adequate teaching and learning materials. The UPEACE Africa Programme in 2006 produced four publications in its series entitled 'Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict – Africa'. DVDs capturing successful nonviolent action in various parts of the world provided a rich source of film materials used in the training.

Choice of Workshop Venue and Target Groups

Choosing an appropriate venue for the workshop in a war-ravaged region needed the intervention of the Lead Evaluator of the UPEACE Africa programme, Dr Phoebe Nyawalo. Embarking on a fact-finding mission to Liberia and Sierra Leone in 2006, Dr Nyawalo recommended Fourah Bay College as the organizing institution and developed a database of youth organizations, from which the participants would be drawn. The constituency for the workshop was civil society leaders, youth activists, and directors of youth programmes. The presence of the West African Youth

Network (WAYN), with its regional coordinator residing in Freetown, greatly aided the process of determining the potential participants.

Partnership

The decision to host the programme in Freetown, Sierra Leone, resulted in a solid partnership arrangement between the UPEACE Africa Programme and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Mrs Memunatu Pratt, University Coordinator of Peace and Conflict Studies, assumed the role of Lead Local Coordinator, and colleagues from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Fourah Bay College assisted her. The UPEACE team was led by the Director of the Africa Programme, Dr Jean-Bosco Butera, joined by Dr Tony Karbo, Programme Officer for the Africa Programme. Dr Mary E. King, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies with UPEACE, served as the academic adviser for the workshop. Ms Milenia Romera, head of the UPEACE Finance Department, was assisted by Ms Catherine Nicol, Assistant Finance Officer, University of Sierra Leone.

The professional evaluators engaged by UPEACE were Dr Phoebe Nyawalo, of Kenya, and Ms Joan Mbagwu, of Nigeria.

The professional trainers for the workshop included Mr Miodrag (Misko) Mitic, from the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), Belgrade, Serbia, and Dr Janet Cherry, an historian with the University of Port Elisabeth, South Africa, who was for many years an activist with the African National Congress (ANC).

In addition to the UPEACE Africa Programme publications, the trainers utilized a CANVAS training manual. Frequent references were made to the UPEACE publications, complementing the manual and films by Steve York, an independent filmmaker. The trainers maintained that their role was *not* to tell participants what to do, but rather to introduce to them the analytical and strategic tools necessary for them to confront the issues they must face, in line with the insistence of UPEACE that nonviolent action as an alternative that is more effective and intelligent than violence.

Representation

In all, thirty-seven participants were drawn from the four West African countries. Ten came from Guinea and Liberia, eleven from Sierra Leone, and five from the Ivory Coast, plus a guest

participant from Nigeria who had taken part in the Niger Delta workshop, Randolph Okosi. His presence was made possible by the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict. Eleven of the thirty-seven participants were women.

Human and Material Resources

The UPEACE collaboration with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sierra Leone (USL), brought together remarkable and rich human and material resources. The trainers possessed deep experience. Miodrag Mitic had been among the young leaders of Otpor! (resistance), a disciplined nonviolent movement of 70,000 students that in 2000 brought down Slobodan Milosevic, thereby beginning Serbia's transformation from dictatorship to parliamentary democracy. Dr Janet Cherry, historian and activist, was with the ANC for many years, and is deeply knowledgeable about South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. The CANVAS network of professional trainers, from which the workshop trainers were drawn, has carried out similar training programmes in more than 30 countries around the world.

UPEACE supplemented the training with published resources and audio-visual materials. These included:

- 1) Mary E. King and Christopher A. Miller, *Teaching Model: Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict* (Addis Ababa and Geneva: University for Peace, 2006).
- 2) Christopher A. Miller, *Only Young Once: An Introduction to Nonviolent Struggle for Youths*, ed. Mary E. King, *Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict—Africa* (Addis Ababa and Geneva: University for Peace, 2006).
- 3) Desmond George-Williams, *'Bite Not One Another': Selected Accounts of Nonviolent Struggle in Africa*, ed. Mary E. King, *Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict—Africa* (Addis Ababa and Geneva: University for Peace, 2006).
- 4) Christopher A. Miller, *Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: A Training Manual*, in *Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict—Africa*, ed. Mary E. King (Addis Ababa and Geneva: University for Peace, 2006).
- 5) Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004).
- 6) Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, monograph (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Albert Einstein Institute, 1993).
- 7) Christopher A. Miller, *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. Mary E. King, 2d edn, 112 pp. (Geneva: University for Peace, 2005).

8) 'A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict', six 30-minute television films by Steve York, featuring nonviolent struggles in Nashville, Port Elisabeth (anti-apartheid boycott), and the 'No' campaign against General Pinochet in Chile. In addition, 'Bringing Down of a Dictator', a feature-length documentary on the nonviolent struggle that led to the overthrow of President Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia.

Organizing Team Task Force Meetings

Convened by Dr Jean-Bosco Butera, the local organizers, members from the UPEACE team, trainers, and evaluators met regularly to plan ahead and review each day's training. Sunday, 4 February, the day before the start of the workshop, was the first such meeting. Instructors and lecturers from Fourah Bay College were identified and joined the task force meetings, as well as assisting in facilitating the breakout small-group sessions. Adjustments were needed to address the vicissitudes of functioning in a post-war situation and to address minor alterations to the programme. Meeting at the end of each day's sessions, the task force deliberated technical hitches for audiovisual presentations, electric outages, the role of the facilitators, and training methodology. These meetings were vital to the success of the workshop.

Throughout the workshop, it was immensely beneficial that both the two trainers and the academic adviser had been participants in historically successful nonviolent struggles that achieved major social and political change, after long years of institutionalised political action that had not been able to alter conditions of prolonged and severe injustice.

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