



Peace building and conflict transformation

A workshop with Paula Green and Olivia Stokes Dreier of the Karuna Center

Friday, 29 July 2005

Our second meeting in the series "Peace begins here" and our last of our events for the current scholastic year, was an excellent one-and-a-half day workshop on "Peace Building and Conflict Transformation".

The workshop was organized jointly by Doumia - Sakinah and [Akoda Peacebuilding Learning Community](#). It was led by Paula Green, Ed.D., Founder and Director of the [Karuna Center for Peacebuilding](#) and Olivia Stokes Dreier, M.P.A., M.S.W., Associate Director of the Center, which is located near Boston, Massachusetts.

Dr Paula Green, has extensive international experience in peace-building and conflict transformation, as an international consultant, facilitator and lecturer. She worked with many groups of Israelis and Palestinians from 1995-2000 in dialogue and training, both mono- and bi-communal. As a psychologist, educator and consultant, Dr. Green brings to her work a synthesis of personal change, social responsibility and spiritual awareness. Dr. Green is also professor of Conflict Transformation at the [School for International Training \(SIT\)](#) in Brattleboro, Vermont, where she co-directs the Conflict Transformation Across Cultures - CONTACT program, a summer institute and graduate certificate program designed to strengthen and support the community-building, coexistence and conflict intervention efforts of peacebuilders from the United States and around the world. In addition to authoring numerous articles published internationally, Dr. Green co-edited the textbook, [Psychology and Social Responsibility: Facing Global Challenges](#). She has been an active board member of several international peace organizations, including the [International Fellowship of Reconciliation](#).

Olivia Stokes Dreier, has facilitated intercommunal dialogues and peace-building seminars in Bosnia, Macedonia, the Republic of Georgia, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka. She is the Director of the [Graduate Certificate Program in Conflict Transformation](#) at the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont. A clinical social worker with many years of experience in community mental health, Ms. Dreier also worked for two years with the Gandhian movement in rural India.

About 25 participants were present at the workshop, all peace activists who wish to improve their skills in peace building and to recharge their energy by learning the tools for conflict transformation. Most of the participants were Jewish Israelis, with some foreigners who work in Israel or Palestine. About half of the participants were psychotherapists, some of whom are members of [Machsom Watch](#) (Women's human rights movement serving as observers in several checkpoints in the west bank.) Three young volunteers from NSWAS participated in the workshop since all three of them are students interested in the topics of the workshop and, for once, they had the opportunity to hear a workshop that was facilitated and managed in English.

The workshop focused on the interrelationship between inner and outer conflict transformation. We explored the deep motivations of the participants for continuing to act for peace and social change despite seemingly intractable obstacles. In addition, we learned ways of managing the difficult feelings that arise.

The Workshop Activities

On Friday afternoon after a circle of introduction, each participant was invited to share a recent event where they felt pain, grief or despair because of something that happened around them in the country or in the world.

This activity brought us closer to the issues that we wanted to discuss. Many of participants shared their pain and anger regarding atrocities they have witnessed in the framework of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

Later in the afternoon, we viewed a short documentary about the work of the Karuna Center and of Dr. Paula Green in Bosnia. The film related related events during the war between Moslems and Serbs, and showed how, after much inner work, the victims and perpetrators were able to start a healing process.

On Saturday we spent the morning learning about "breaking the cycle of violence and revenge". We looked at the process that starts from an act of aggression and how it can lead the victim eventually to perform "justified" acts of aggression in the name of self defense, and then the cycle starts again. In this model there is also a turning point where it is possible to break out of the circle to create a spiraling movement. If mourning and expression of grief takes place on the side of the victim, and acknowledgment of wrongdoing is made on the side of the perpetrator, then there is a chance of breaking this cycle of violence and revenge and establishing justice and reconciliation.

The theoretical model thus described was drawn on the floor of the hall, and we were asked to choose the stage of the conflict in which we see ourselves, by standing in the area of the drawing that corresponded to this stage. We were then asked to explain why we had chosen the place where we stood.

The facilitators explained how this model was used in various parts of the world where there are bloody conflicts and it always proved to be appropriate, though the nature of the conflicts are different. We found this model very useful for our own situation and each of us were able to identify themselves in one or more of the stages.

The second part of the day was dedicated to the issue of identity and the impact of violence on it. We were invited to reflect on various aspects of our identity and to try and express what happened to a certain aspect of our identity that was wounded. We learned that the wounded part takes more space, like a swollen wound. Being aware of this, we can learn to take care of this aspect of our personal or collective identity and, perhaps, help it to return to its proper size.

At the end of the day we reflected on our visions for the future, the challenges that could stop us, and the ways to overcome these.

As we left the workshop to return to our various projects, we felt that we had acquired new insights into ways to empower ourselves in the struggle for peace. We took with us a clear vision of the possibility to break out of the cycle of violence and revenge, and steer a new course towards justice and reconciliation.
