

Peace By Peace

Issue 5
Spring 2009

Also inside:

FoR youth delegation to Israel & Palestine; new resources; corporate mercenaries, International Peacemakers Fund report and much more.



**UN year of
reconciliation**



What is FoR?

The Fellowship of Reconciliation began as a response to the challenge of the First World War. While opposing war and militarism it strives to promote those things which make for peace and justice, to build – in the words of our founders – ‘a world order based on love’.

Today FoR:

- Undertakes education work within the Christian and wider community on peace, war and nonviolence;
- Seeks to identify the causes of violent conflict and raises public awareness of them, encouraging supporters and the public to challenge the structures, policies and attitudes that lead to violent conflict
- Supports and affirms all those with a commitment to peace and nonviolence;
- Is committed to developing a spirituality of peace, justice and nonviolence in witness to Christian faith and gospel values.

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Front cover: Reconciliation sculpture by Josefina de Vasconcellos at Coventry Cathedral. Versions of this statue can also be found in the Peace Memorial Garden in Hiroshima, at the site of the Berlin Wall, and in the grounds of Stormont Castle, Belfast. Photo: C. Garrett

Photo credits: p2 Aldas Kirvaitis; p5 Martha Beale; p6 SPADO; p7 Jon Dorsett; p9 James Emery; p10 Blackwater; p11 Cymdeithas y Cymod; p14. Back cover photo by Zoriah (<http://www.zoriah.com>). *Copyright Fellowship of Reconciliation except where stated. Please feel free to reproduce with acknowledgment*

Welcome

2009, despite being designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Reconciliation, opened with the awful conflict in Gaza. Once again civilians and children were the primary victims of war and armed aggression. Each day for weeks our TV screens showed graphic images of the mounting casualties and the literal destruction of Gaza. According to BBC figures, more than 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed – over 400 of these victims were children.

It is very hard for us to see such death and destruction and it sometimes seems easiest just not to watch – to harden our hearts a little perhaps. But we cannot do that – we must not do that. As a Fellowship of peacemakers its important that we are open to hear the cry of victims of war and violence from around the world. This cry should spur us on in our peacemaking task and ensure that we don't fall silent, don't become complicit. However it is not easier. That is why its important to be part of a community, a fellowship.

2009 also happens to be the ninety-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. For the past ninety-five years, members and supporters of FoR have kept faithful to the belief that violence can neither save nor redeem us – only love can do that. Through two World Wars and countless other armed conflicts members of FoR have resisted violence and war and continued to speak out for peace and nonviolence wherever possible. Today the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFoR) has branches, groups and affiliates in more than seventy countries around the world. Here in the UK, the focus of our work remains on educating young people, being a public voice for peace and helping grassroots peacemakers in areas of conflict overseas.

In this issue

In this issue of Peace by Peace we have a report from a small delegation of FoR young people who undertook a visit to peacemakers in Israel and Palestine, as well as a article about our most recent youth conference. There is also news on the projects that we are supporting through the International Peacemakers Fund which supported peacemakers in ten different countries last year, including Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Chechnya and Palestine. We also have an interview with Arfon Rhys, Secretary of Cymdeithas y



Graffiti seen in Beirut

Cymod (FoR Wales), a short report on the growth of corporate mercenaries and a review of some new resources. In this issue we are also beginning a series of articles reflecting on the political and social aspects of reconciliation.

As always, if you would like additional copies of Peace by peace magazine for your church or to pass on to others, please do let us know.

Chris Cole, FoR Director
chris@for.org.uk

Elnora Ferguson

We are sad to report the recent news of the death of Elnora Ferguson. Elnora, and her husband John, were key members – and often committee members - of the Fellowship of Reconciliation for many, many years. John was the author of a number of books for the Fellowship and, remarkably for over twenty years, between 1967 and 1989, Elnora and John edited FoR's key publication, Reconciliation Quarterly (RQ). More recently, Elnora gave core behind the scenes support to the Peace by Peace programme and the International Peacemakers Fund. We give thanks to God for her life and her commitment to peacemaking.

Pushing at the wall

Palestinian delegation report for *Peace by Peace* magazine

At the end of 2008, four members of Fellowship of Reconciliation, England travelled to Israel and Palestine as part of a joint delegation with Interfaith Peace Builders and American Friends Service Committee. With 20+ other British and American delegates, they visited Palestinian and Israeli grassroots peacemakers, and experienced and engaged in nonviolent peacemaking in a region where violence has prevailed as the solution to conflict. The hope was to be empowered as peacemakers, to gain a first hand understanding of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, to learn new peacemaking skills, and to make lifelong friends.

Before, during and after the delegation they wrote about some of their experiences on the 'Stories of Peace' blog, which can be found at www.storiesofpeace.blogspot.com. Here are edited extracts from the blog:

Preparation and Training, 04/11/2008, England, Martha Beale

The training weekend [was] a wonderful experience and [I] was very glad to bring the team together to focus on what we are doing and why. Sam [Perlo-Freeman]'s knowledge of the area and history of the region were really helpful in getting us focused on what we wanted to achieve. And the weekend felt hugely affirming as the group came together as a team. I appreciated the opportunity to get to know everyone better, think about how we can support one another before, during and after the delegation, and how to deal with some of the challenges we may face – from keeping ourselves healthy during the delegation to going through check points.

Reading through the notes from the weekend, my excitement about going grows and how much I'm looking forward to being part of the team.

In just a few hours... 09/11/2008, England, Rachel Smith

... I will be flying to Tel Aviv with a bundle of emotions, hopes, expectations and fears.

My hope is that I will find hope, my fear is that I will find hopelessness. I expect to find both.

I have two inspirations/motivations (at least!) for this trip. One is the motto of a co-operative of Palestinian olive farmers who print on their bottles of olive oil 'resisting the occupation by insisting on life'. The second is Jesus, who insisted on life – who insisted on life so strongly that he overcame death.

I'm really hoping to have an inspiring and fun time, as well as testing my own strength. I hope to come back with some songs, and I hope to encounter joy, in even the most difficult situations.

The People Who Speak in Poetry, 12/11/2008, Jerusalem, David Masters

Today we visited a Palestinian place of study, Birzeit University, in the West Bank. I felt at home in the university. The inside of the buildings felt similar to British Universities – long corridors kept cool by their marble floors, administration offices bustling with secretaries making phone calls, classrooms with the last lesson's diagram still on the blackboard.



Students here are committed. Many of the students live in Bethlehem – a 30 minute drive away. Yet the separation wall between the West Bank and Israel means students have to go the long way round, a journey that takes at least an hour. If students are stopped at one of the 93 checkpoints in the West Bank at the whim of a moody Israeli soldier, the journey can take 3-4 hours.

Given the harassment and violation of dignity that Palestinians are subject to on a daily basis, it is an amazement that they are able to stand at all. Yet not only do they stand, but they stand tall, they stand on the soldiers of giants. According to UN statistics, Palestinians are the most educated people in the world.

Still, it is not easy for them to sustain this upright pose. Asked what hope she has for the future, the female student replied: “What future?”

“I can’t feel anything here. I can’t give anything. I can’t give feelings. We are dying everyday. We are dead. That’s it.”

“It’s like we are pushing a wall,” she says. “Everyone is depressed. Everyone is down. How can we give?”

The administrator, though, speaks up to disagree. He has hope. It took him 11 years to complete his studies for an MA in sociology because of the difficulty of getting to university. Somehow, he still manages to believe that a better future is possible.

Martha, David, Joff and Rachel with Zoughbi Zoughbi from Wi’am, the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center

Palestinians are dying inside with the pain of oppression, yet their hands are open for peace. What can I do to fill these open hands with the peace they so deserve?

New Profile, 17/11/2008, Tel Aviv, Joff Williams

Yesterday we visited a Jewish Kibbutz. A focused community who live and work together. They are a small and focused group working on demilitarizing Israel.

Consigning to the Israeli army is part of the education system. From the age of 12, children are encouraged to begin to think about their involvement in the army and what part they might play. Every young person is issued with a military number. The military provide no information for young adults who do not wish to sign up and make the process of refusing conscription very difficult.

‘New Profile’ work to provide information and support for young people and parents about their rights to refusal. This includes legal aid teams that work with young people to give them legal advice and representation, a parents support group and a youth group and summer camp to give space for young people to ask important questions about.

Continued on page 14

International Peacemakers fund



Nonviolence Training program in North West Frontier province, Pakistan

2008 was a successful year for FoR's International Peacemakers Fund. Thanks to donations from our individual members and grants from 8 UK trusts, we have been able to support 14 peace-building projects in Pakistan, Kenya, Sudan, Russia/Chechnya, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Uganda, Zambia, Rwanda, and DR Congo. Since 2006, over 1,600 people have participated in a variety of IPF community peace-building programmes.

Here are just three high-lights of our overseas work in 2008. In Zambia, FOR Zambia's Ignatius Kabale and David Chisanga have created a nonviolence training curriculum that has been piloted in three training programmes for students and teachers in Kitwe. In 2009, it will be delivered across at least 10 schools in the Northern Copperbelt Province, culminating in a Schools Peace Festival to be held in Kitwe in September.

In Pakistan, IPF partner SPADO (Sustainable Peace and Development Organization) have created the Islamic Nonviolence Training Program in the troubled North West Frontier Province that borders Afghanistan. Project Manager Raza Shah Khan is working in partnership with both Islamic and tribal leaders to develop a nonviolence curriculum, and launched the programme with an initial training weekend for 118 young people drawn from tribal communities across the entire region.

In Rwanda, and in partnership with FOR (MIR) France and Charles Serushyana from "Association Famille De Paix" (Umuryango W'Amahoro), IPF funded a regional

Great Lakes Peace-Building Conference, that brought together 20 NGOs working on peace-building and conflict resolution in DR Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Burundi – to share their experiences of peace-building work, and develop a unified regional framework and strategy.

What continues to amaze us are the huge number of individuals and organisations globally that are striving for nonviolent social transformation, in some of the most divided and horrifyingly violent societies, and often in the midst of war and conflict. So far this year, we have received over 50 applications for funding, and the depth and range of peace-building projects is both staggering and life-affirming. Wherever there is war, violence, and conflict there are brave peacemakers striving to build reconciliation and peace in their communities. All our peacemakers overseas are united by a deep spiritual commitment to peace and nonviolence that transcends religious and political sectarianism. Whether Muslim, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Jain, or Hindu, they are all able to draw spiritual inspiration for their peace-building work from their respective faith traditions.

‘Wherever there is war, violence, and conflict there are brave peacemakers striving to build reconciliation and peace in their communities.’

In 2009, we are looking to both develop our current overseas projects, and support new international partners for peace-building.

Could your Church or Meeting be a Partner for Peace?

FoR is looking for a small numbers of Churches or Quaker Meetings to pilot a new programme to support grassroots peacemakers in areas of conflict overseas through our International Peacemakers Fund.

If you think your Church or Meeting might be interested in being a Partner for Peace, please contact Nick Chavasse at the FoR office (nick@for.org.uk).

Peace begins with me and you

John Nicholls, a first-timer at FoR's youth conference describes his experience

My first 'Called to be Peacemakers' conference was an inspiring and deeply rewarding weekend. It sparked new questions in my thinking on peace and conflict issues, which I hope to take forward in my university studies and future work. The combination of interactive sessions, speakers and discussion worked well, and the programme was greatly complemented for me by informal conversations with other participants who are working in peace-building and conflict resolution. I hope to keep in touch with many of these people in the future.

For me one of the highlights of the weekend was hearing Benny Wenda, the leader of the Free West Papua campaign in the UK, speak about his struggle for peace and justice in a largely unknown part of the world. Hearing of the efforts and sacrifices he and his movement have made in the face of violence and oppressions by the occupying Indonesian army was moving. It struck me deeply that I had never before heard of this issue being reported in the media, and that the major world powers seem to keep silent on the issue and tacitly support the status quo. What engaged me most was the reference by Benny and Suriel Mofu (another representative from the campaign) to the potential power citizens of powerful nations like the UK have in influencing political decisions and outcome in countries across the world such as theirs. This privilege seems to be largely taken for granted in our society, and their comments made me determined to act upon this position and support the campaign.

Effective Communication

I also thoroughly enjoyed the interactive conflict scenario facilitated by Laura Gilchrist, a director of the social enterprise 'Resolutions First', providing training and consultancy in conflict resolution in Manchester. The session involved teams of five working out a problem regarding nuclear weapons on one of five neighbouring islands. The difficulty of the task was that each individual was given information on different aspects of the situation, which had to be pieced together in order to work out the solution. I felt it was a very useful exercise in highlighting the necessity of effective communication in conflict



Three ball concentration

resolution. The location of the conference added to the experience, and being in the Peak District gave me a chance to do a bit of walking in the countryside. This was a welcome break from the hectic non-stop culture of my current university life.

I have to admit I was slightly apprehensive of the religious element of the weekend. Defining myself currently as a non-Christian Quaker, I was worried that a Christian focus might put me off. However I was refreshed by several conversations with other participants about the importance of Christianity in their own lives and in providing direction in their work for peace. This affirmed to me the importance of toleration and respect for all views, 'religious' and 'non-religious', and the necessity of cooperation between different denominations, faiths and other organisations. What has always attracted me to Quakerism is the emphasis on putting faith into practice, an idea that I believe goes beyond theological divisions, and is essential in helping to bring about peace.

The one overarching principle that I took away from the weekend was the idea that peace begins within individuals; within you and me. The concept of a 'web of peace' spreading out into our close relationships and then into local, national and international spheres is, I believe, a very powerful one. I hope to take some of this energy and creative ideas when contemplating how I can be involved in making peace, both now and in the future.

Reconciliation reflections

2009 has been designated as the United Nations International Year of Reconciliation. In this first of a series of articles exploring the concept of reconciliation, FoR Director Chris Cole introduces the issues and looks at some major questions.

In our increasingly secular world, the concept of 'reconciliation' is seen as a difficult one. For many in the professional peace building world, for example, its connection with the Christian faith makes it awkward. Far better, it seems to use more neutral phrases like 'peace building', 'conflict resolution' or even 'national unity process.' For those in the churches too, the term 'reconciliation' can be problematic with many arguing that reconciliation can only really refer to personal relationships or even simply to the spiritual realm. Any notion that reconciliation can enter the 'real world' of the political and economic sphere is dismissed with an injunction to leave reconciliation in God's hands alone and to the fullness of God's own good time.

Reconciliation in the Bible

By contrast, FoR believes that reconciliation is not something that people of faith can simply ignore, or just set aside till a later date after more pressing issues are settled. While the term 'reconciliation' is not used at all in the Hebrew Scriptures, the overcoming of hatred and enmity, division and alienation and the achievement of peace and love between God and human beings, between peoples and between people and creation, is fundamental to the biblical story.¹

Again and again, whilst railing against injustice and oppression, the prophets are consumed with a vision of the reconciled world:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The infant will play over the den of the adder; the baby will put his hand into the viper's lair. No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will

be full of knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

This vision and hope for the reconciled world are not mere dreams, meant to comfort or distract, but are intimately connected with an urgent and vital call for justice and repentance. Indeed the Hebrew scriptures seems to make it clear that reconciliation cannot be achieved without it.

Through the New Testament, we come face to face with the fullness of God's revelation to humanity: the person and the life of Jesus. From the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) to the story of Zaccheus (Luke 19) and the forgiveness parables (Matthew 18 and Luke 7) we can see that reconciliation is central to Jesus' mission. Again and again Jesus focuses on reconciling conflicts; the healthy against the sick, the rich against the poor, men against women, Pharisees against tax collectors, the good against the wicked, the perpetrators against the victims.²

Paul's writings too are an important source for reconciliation in the Bible. Paul's theology of reconciliation can be discerned in three ways; "a Christological level, in which Christ is the mediator through whom God reconciles the world to God's self; an ecclesiological level, in which Christ reconciles Jew and Gentile, and a cosmic level in which Christ reconciles all the powers in heaven and on earth."³ Overall it is perhaps suffice to say that the central message of the New Testament is of the reconciliation of humanity with God and with itself.

However it is not just scripture that calls us towards the work of reconciliation. Karl Barth's famous injunction to tackle the world with "a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other" demands that we open our eyes and look at what is actually going on around us. Space here forbids any detailed survey of the conflict, suffering and injustice that



characterises our world today – that is available in abundance elsewhere. Suffice to say that the brokenness, alienation and anguish in our world cries out for, well, reconciliation.

More than Conflict Resolution

Over the past few decades there has seemingly been something of an explosion of peace processes, truth and reconciliation commissions and organisations promoting and dealing in conflict resolution. But great care needs to be taken here on very two, very important levels.

Firstly, ‘reconciliation’ as a word and as a concept can be taken and used in many different ways. We need to be aware that ‘reconciliation’ can be used in the political arena in a very minimalist way. Just as a truce is not peace, reconciliation is not conflict resolution.⁴ Theologian and sociologist Gregory Baum says “the ethic involved in conflict resolution remains utilitarian. Contesting parties learn to recognise the justified interests of their opponents and through carefully managed negotiations reach a compromise that allows each party to protect the essential elements of its own interest. Conflict resolution does not involve conversion or forgiveness. Conflict resolution may in many instances make an important contribution to reconciliation but is not identical with it.”⁵

In other words, we need to recognise that reconciliation is not just a cessation of violence, a negotiated settlement or an ‘accommodation with the enemy’ but involves much more – nothing less than a fundamental repair to human lives.⁶ The process of reconciliation demands metanoia – a conversion, a change of mind and a change of heart.⁷ The work of reconciliation is about overturning the order of domination and injustice and working for an order based

Reconciliation mural in the Church of the Sermon on the Mount, Galilee, featuring Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Rachel Corrie and many others.

on love, on right relationships between all people and creation and God. As Dr David Porter of Northern Ireland has put it: “Reconciliation is a process, an ongoing transformation at the heart of our being and our communities that results in God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.”⁸

No Reconciliation without Justice?

Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, great care is needed when talking of reconciliation as it is “a potentially scandalous move to call for people to reconcile with their enemies... for it threatens to re-victimise the victim and exonerate the evildoer.”⁹ Far too often the call for reconciliation is made to ‘paper over the cracks’ of the injustice that has or is taking place. As writer and academic Mary Grey states, from a feminist perspective calling for reconciliation can mean “sweeping huge areas of injustice under the carpet.”¹⁰ Many argue that there can be no reconciliation without justice and liberation for the victim first:

“By calling on those who have suffered to forget and to overlook their suffering, the would-be reconcilers are in fact continuing the oppressive situation by saying, in effect, that the experience of those who suffered are not important – and therefore they themselves are unimportant to the process... Reconciliation as a hasty peace is actually the opposite of reconciliation.”¹¹

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Curbing the corporate mercenaries

Whilst the problem of individual mercenaries goes back almost to the beginning of recorded history, the end of the Cold War and, more recently, the war in Iraq, has brought a new twist to the problem – the growth of the corporate mercenary. The number of private military and security companies (PMSC) has mushroomed in the past decade with 100's of companies operating in more than 50 countries. The war in Iraq has given an enormous boost to the industry with over 60 companies employing more than 20,000 private personnel providing military and security services. Aegis Defence Services (UK), run by Lt Col Tim Spicer (former owner of Sandline involved in the 'Arms to Africa' scandal) has seen its turnover rise from £500,000 in 2003 to £62m in 2005, mostly due to work in Iraq. Private Military and Security companies are effectively the second largest contingent in Iraq after the US.

Numerous reports of human rights abuses follow in the wake of the deployment of these companies and there is little, if no accountability. Several PMSC personnel involved in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, for example, were not prosecuted.

Perhaps even more serious is that the very existence of these companies with the tacit approval of national



Blackwater recruits

governments such as the UK, together with their own often exaggerated claims of what can be achieved, means that they are often prioritised as a means of solving a conflict situation rather than more peaceful and sustainable options.

In 2002, following the 'Arms to Africa' scandal involving one of the better known private military companies, Sandline, the government published a Green Paper on the various options for regulating private military companies from an outright ban to a licensing system to self-regulation. However, following a public consultation and a report by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 2002 and then an apparent review of the situation by Jack Straw in 2005, the issue has slipped off the agenda. In response to a recent parliamentary question in 2008, the Foreign Office Minister, Meg Munn, told MPs that there were "difficulties" with each of the options and that the extra-territorial issues were "complex". Whilst there are problems with definitions involved in this issue it really should not be beyond the abilities of government lawyers to draft appropriate legislation.

FoR believes there should be a complete ban on all mercenary activity. However as a first step we would like to see legislation brought forward to curb the activities of Private Military Security companies including a ban on all combat activities by PMSC including combat support all other PMSC services must be made subject to individual licensing requirements and open to prior parliamentary and public scrutiny all dealings between government departments and agencies and the military companies, other than operational details, to be in the public domain; companies to be made responsible under UK law for any breaches of human rights or the laws of war that may be committed by their employees.

Nonviolence
A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR CHANGE
3-5 July 2009

Nonviolence is a concept which is often talked about when working for peace, but what does nonviolence mean in practical terms and how can it be applied to our campaigning and our lives?

This weekend is a chance for 18 to 30 year olds who are interested, active and/or engaged in peace and conflict issues and who want to acquire new ideas and skills. It offers the opportunity to have non-violence as the subject of on-line discussions to learn new skills, practice applying them, and discuss nonviolence as a tool for social change. With expert speakers and skills training, the event provides an opportunity to join a community of like-minded individuals for a weekend.

For more details and up to date information on speakers, please contact Martha Beale: ✉ mbeale@fo.org.uk ☎ 01865 250761 🌐 www.fo.org.uk/tw2009

Resources



Great Peacemakers: True Stories From Around the World by Ken Beller and Heather Chase, £11.95

These outstanding life stories instill in the reader a sense of hope for the prospect of a peaceful, nonviolent and green planet. Each profile chronicles the obstacles overcome in the fulfilling process of working toward peace and justice, taking from a wide variety of fields such as literature, architecture, botany, environmentalism, and music. Accessibly written, Great Peacemakers is a resource for young students as well as adults in search of inspiration.

Threatened with Resurrection: The Difficult Peace of Christ by Simon Barrow, £12.95 (available March 2009)

Threatened with Resurrection examines the traditional stand-off between 'just-war' theory and pacifism, and offers a radical

alternative rooted in the Gospel. Simon Barrow explains why saying no to 'war in God's name' is a serious threat to those (both religious and non-religious) who persist in justifying the use of political violence. He presents a serious and vividly illustrated case for a major shift in mainstream Christian understanding — one which signals fresh hope for all those who have come to see in religion the problem not the solution.

Towards an Ecumenical Statement on Just Peace, WCC Decade to Overcome Violence

To mark the conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), the World Council of Churches (WCC) is planning to hold an ecumenical peace convention in Jamaica in May 2011. In addition there is to be a process of wide consultation to be developed an ecumenical declaration on "just peace". As part of this, an initial statement 'Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace' has recently been published by the WCC and is available on their website or via www.tinyurl.com/b66wr6.

Did you know that a Government department currently employs around 200 civil servants to promote arms exports?

UK Trade & Investment helps promote UK businesses abroad. Yet despite arms sales making up just 1.5% of all exports, UKTI employs as many staff to promote those sales as it does for **all other industries combined!**

UKTI's work supports exports to countries involved in conflict and human rights abuses. It gives credence to an industry known for its corruption, which pursues profits regardless of the human cost involved.

Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) is calling for an end to the uncivil service. Please help us by getting involved.

Complete the form opposite and send to CAAT, Freepost, LON 6486, London N4 3BR.

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- Send me more information, including a FREE copy of CAATnews.
- I'd like more information about CAAT's Christian Network.
- Send me a UKTI campaign pack.
- Add me to your monthly email bulletin.
- Tick here if you would rather not receive occasional mailings from CAAT.

Thank you for your support



Talking Peaces

Long time member and peace activist Arfon Rhys is secretary of Cymdeithas y Cymod (FoR Wales). Martha Beale interviewed him for *Peace by Peace* magazine.

Martha Beale Thank you for coming to talk to us Arfon, it's great to meet you. Please can we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself?

Arfon Rhys Okay, so I'm Arfon Rhys and I am the secretary of FoR Wales and I've been working in this voluntary role now, for about four years. But I'm also on the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFoR) personnel committee and also on the gender working group of IFoR so I'm quite involved today in IFoR's work. You might ask why I came into it at all. The reason is my father was a conscientious objector during the last World War and he used to receive Reconciliation [FoR Britain's magazine at the time]. Of course at that time, Wales was part of FoR Britain and I remember seeing the magazine Reconciliation, and I couldn't read the word it was so big, and in English. And my father had to explain to me what the word meant in Welsh. From a very early age I went to a chapel which also preached pacifism and therefore was brought up from a very early age as a pacifist, a Christian pacifist.

MB So your father was an inspiration for you to get involved in peace work and pacifism?

AR Most certainly. If it wasn't for him I don't think I would be in peace work at all. But of course the other influence was the chapel we used to go to, and the youth club. One year, 1955 in fact, they decided to do an

exchange with Germany. Today I realise how close that was to the war, but at the time of course I had no knowledge of the war, because I was born in the middle of it. I remember people saying to me "beware of the Germans they might poison you" because for them of course the war had been a very recent event and they were still thinking of the Germans as enemies. Whereas for me, as a young boy of 15 at the time, it meant nothing. I made very good German friends and we were visiting each others houses. I think that taught me the futility of the whole thing: how could the generation before myself have killed each other? The whole idea of killing was something which I couldn't understand, really.

My father had a good library of FoR books, which I used to read as a young boy and of course afterwards Gandhi and Martin Luther King had an influence because I was living in that period of civil commotion as you might call it, the 60's, when we believed we could change the world and I was a part of that. Of course in Wales we had the language movement and they were fighting to, in a nonviolent way, to get a language law which would look after our language. We used to take down signs and were arrested and things like that happened. I found myself in court for not paying for a TV license, as we wanted to get a Welsh television channel and all these things. We thought nothing of the idea of protest, nonviolent protest, for the language. One of my heroes was Gwynfor Evans the then President of Plaid Cymru the Welsh nationalist party who was also a very active pacifist and member of FOR Wales, and it was he who ensured the national movement in Wales did not become a violent one as happened in Ireland. The other big influence on me was the late theologian Professor J R Jones of Swansea University who I was lucky enough to have as a Sunday School teacher and he stressed the Christian way of

nonviolence, and introduced us to the works of Simone Weill and Paul Tillich.

Language and pacifism for us are very closely connected because all of them were dealt with in nonviolent methods and we looked to Martin Luther king as an example we were following because the civil rights there we associated with our language rights and of course the movement never became violent, it was always a pacifist movement.

MB One of Cymdeithas y Cymod's current campaigns is to prevent the St Athan Military Academy being established in the Vale of Glamorgan. Can you tell me about that?

AR Well, it's a complicated issue in a way because we as a society – we call ourselves a society not a fellowship – said that we would like to demilitarise Wales and that has been one of our aims. And in one sense St Athan has become an important symbol of that for two reasons. One is the location of St Athan, which is quite near to one of the early centres of Christianity in Europe, and certainly in Wales. Secondly because the word academy and the idea of the connection between a Christian academy that used to send missionaries out to Europe in the 6th and 7th centuries and the idea that today people could be trained there, at St Athan, to go out to kill people anywhere in the world. So in that way we see it as a symbol of our struggle.

MB And how much would you like other IFoR branches, groups and affiliates support you in the campaign?

AR Well there will be military training centres being closed in parts of England and people transferred from there to St Athan's, so it's not just a Welsh thing but it will involve the whole of the UK. But the good news is that it's been postponed for eight years and that has been to us a tremendous victory and a tremendous relief, at this moment. Because it gives eight years for us to work on this and ensure it never happens.



Arfon Rhys (right) with Rev. Guto Prys ap Gwynfor, President of Cymdeithas y Cymod, on the Epynt Mountain Army Range standing next to the name signs put up by the Army at the insistence of Cymdeithas y Cymod as a reminder of the farms which were demolished in 1941 by the Army.

MB Well fantastic. So what else would you like to see IFoR and FoR Wales doing over the next five years or so?

AR Well the next five years are interesting because in 2014 we will be remembering the beginning of the First World War. And this will be an event across the whole of Europe and I think its one we've got to prepare ourselves for now and start thinking of how we can celebrate the peace movement that existed at the beginning of the last century which could have, perhaps, prevented the First World War which then would have resulted in no Second World War of course because the seeds of the Second World War were in the First and there was a very strong peace movement at that time and I think now is the time to remember that. I would like to see that every village and town which now has a cenotaph having a peace symbol to celebrate the pacifists and the people that were shot because they "deserted" because of the traumatic effects of war on them at the time. They were called cowards and so on, and that these people should be remembered as well. .

MB That sounds like a wonderful idea. Have any particular people, books or events been important influences in your peacemaking journey. It sounds like World War Two was very important for your peacemaking journey.

AR The most recent one is Nonviolence: the History of a Dangerous Idea By Mark Kurlansky. But the books of Naomi Klein such as the Shock Doctrine and Nicholson Baker Human Smoke and the works of Chomsky have also been interesting reads at this time which give an insight into world politics and also the role of the media.

MB Well thank you ever so much Arfon, it's been great talking to you and good luck with all your campaigns!



Demolished Palestinian house

My feeling is that the presence of organisations like 'New Profile' are very important in the current climate of a militarized society. I don't know that there is anyone else asking the questions that they're asking. No society should get used to seeing armed soldiers on public transport and on every street corner.

The experience was challenging and wonderful and we hope you'll visit the blog to read more about their experiences (www.storiesofpeace.blogspot.com). The delegates are also available for talks and workshops across the UK for groups interested to hear about the delegation, and Palestine and Israel – please email the office (office@for.org.uk) for more information. Like many people we are horrified by the recent events in Gaza and would encourage all readers to encourage the British government to take action, by writing to your MP through www.writetothem.com asking the UK government to put pressure on Israel and Hamas to stop the violence.

Visit http://www.avaaz.org/en/gaza_time_for_peace/?cl=161620838&v=2605 and sign the petition calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

The seemingly competing claim for justice on the one hand and the call to reconcile on the other is just one of the tensions that arise when we address the whole issue of reconciliation, making it a difficult and complex area. Other aspects that need to be considered when we think about reconciliation include forgiveness, sacrifice, truth, suffering, repentance, grace, love and for Christians, the atonement – all huge, difficult and complex issues themselves needing careful exposition when applying them to the political and economic sphere. How these relate to reconciliation will be explored in future articles.

But we shouldn't be paralyzed by the awesome task of reconciliation. We need to remind ourselves that miracles do happen – the deaf hear and the blind see. Reconciliation has happened/will happen. Mary Grey argues that we shouldn't await a grand plan or mighty resource. "What's needed", she says "is the small acts of courage by many people, people who take risks in the name of peace and reconciliation."¹² This then is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5, 17-19) to which we are called today.

1 Wells, Harold, *Theology for Reconciliation: Biblical Perspectives on Forgiveness and Grace*, The

Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenges to the Church, Eds. Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, Orbis, New York, 1997, p3

2 Moltmann, Jurgen, *Justice for victims and perpetrators*, *Reformed World*, Vol 44, No 1, (March 1994)

3 Schreiter, Robert J.; *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Orbis, New York, 1992. Attributes this to Jose Comblin.

4 Ibid. P25

5 Baum, Geoffrey, *A Theological Afterword*, *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenges to the Church*, Eds. Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, Orbis, New York, 1997, p189.

6 Schreiter, 1992, p21

7 Baum, p189

8 Dr David Porter, *ECONI*

9 Appleby, R. Scott, *Towards a Theology and Praxis of Reconciliation*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Winters/Spring 2002, Vol 39, p140

10 Grey, Mary *To Rwanda and Back: Liberation Spirituality and Reconciliation*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2007, p33

11 Schrieter, 1992, p19

12 Grey, p107

What you can do

Join FoR - its Free!!

As FoR member Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." To build real change for peace and justice in our world we need to work together. The Fellowship of Reconciliation has always recognized the importance of working with others. Why not join us? For more details on becoming a Member or a supporter of FoR, please use the reply slip below or see www.for.org.uk/join.

Donate to International Peacemakers

Through our international contacts we are able to directly help small grassroots groups who are working nonviolently for peace and justice in regions of conflict. Our International Peacemakers Fund (IPF) makes grants to such groups. In addition, because administration is covered by a Trust every penny you donate will go directly to grassroots nonviolence projects. Please send your donation to 'Fellowship of Reconciliation (IPF)'. For more details see www.for.org.uk/ipf

Support FoR's Campaigns

FoR seeks to challenge the causes and structures that lead to violent conflict. In addition we aim to be advocates for the victims of war and conflict by enabling their voices to

be heard. Currently we are campaigning on the military research being undertaken in British universities through our 'Study War No More' campaign; we are supporting the people of West Papua in their struggle for independence through the 'Papua: Land of Peace' campaign; and we shall shortly be launching a new campaign to call for the reallocation of military spending. For more details on these campaigns see www.for.org.uk/campaigns or contact us at the office.

Email News

About once a month FoR sends out an email newsletter with details of coming events, publications, resources and other information in relation to building peace in our world. You can see a copy of the latest FoR email news on our website www.for.org.uk, where you can sign up for further issues.

Join FoR Young Peacemakers Network

FoR is committed to supporting young peacemakers and one way we do this is through our Young Peacemakers Network. YPN is an association of young people (18- 30ish) interested in peace and conflict issues. If you are interested, please use the reply slip below to receive more information and an invite to a YPN gathering.

Invite an FoR Speaker

FoR is always very happy to provide a speaker for your church, school or group to speak about our work or about peace and conflict issues in general. Ideally we would like at least six weeks notice but you can always contact us to see if we have someone available. Please contact us at the office on 01865 250 781 or email office@for.org.uk

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- I would like to subscribe to FoR's monthly Email News
- Please send me more details about the Young Peacemakers Network

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