

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Spring 2001

Bringing Peace Services to the United Nations

by Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen

At the United Nations in New York, GPS board member Mary Evelyn Jegen represents Pax Christi International, which has consultative status with the UN. Pax Christi's testimony before the Social Development Commission, written by Mary Evelyn, urges the UN to develop links between its development and peace agendas. In particular, it advocates that the UN promote a study of nonviolent peace services. A shortened version of the statement follows.

Pax Christi International thanks the Commission and the Secretariat for this opportunity to address the commission. Pax Christi is an organization with a history of more than fifty years. For well over twenty years we have had consultative status with ECOSOC. We have members in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. We recognize that the theme for this thirty-ninth session of the commission is most relevant to the concerns we are addressing. The work of this commission is crucial in keeping alive the commitments of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and of the five-year review of the World Summit. We urge a development of methodology in the work of the commission through linkages with efforts at sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security. We have given examples in each of these three areas in our written statement, and here will focus on the linkages between social development and peace and security. We know that the commission can contribute by analysis of these linkages and also by promoting the widespread dissemination of accounts of good practices.

Child soldiers as a worst form of child labor
The Commission for Social Development can

take leadership in calling attention to good practices in accord with the ILO Convention on Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This convention came into force only last year. Now is the time to research and hold up models of compliance with the convention. We want to call your attention to the treatment of child soldiers in the ILO Convention. The ILO convention includes child soldiers as one of the worst forms of child labour. Child soldiers means any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups other than

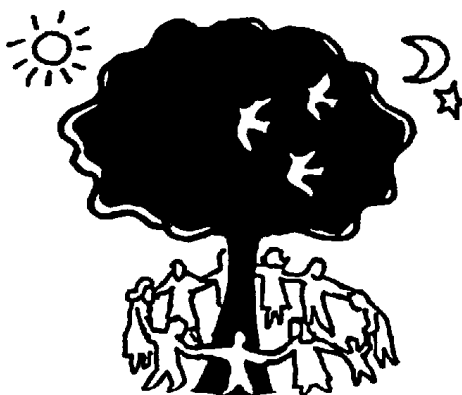
purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or who has carried arms. This indeed is an area of great concern regarding social protection and the reduction of vulnerability -- the

priority theme of this session of your commission.

The arms trade as a destroyer of social development

The arms trade is another major factor working against social protection and social development. Some industrialized states which built up enormous arsenals

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during the Cold War now equip intrastate wars which ravage entire societies and make a mockery of social development. We would like to see the commission become an effective voice for the victims of this lethal trade. We are convinced that your commission can bring an essential perspective into deliberations on the arms trade, namely, the perspective of the innocent victims who are mostly women and children.

Education and training for nonviolent peace services

Internationally there are increasing efforts to provide professional-level training for ways of preventing armed conflicts. We advocate ways based on education and training for peace services grounded on non-violence. There is a growing international movement fostering these ways. We request that the commission sponsor a study of this emerging movement as a good practice in social development. Pax Christi has been following the development of non-violent peace services and would be pleased to be of assistance to the commission in this study.

We place considerable hope in the potential of your commission to promote development with a human face, always attentive to the most vulnerable members of our human family. ■

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published quarterly. GPS-USA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current Board members are: Clara Doyle, John Eriksson, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Bill Price, Mindy Reiser, Tricia Sullivan and Harry Yeide. We welcome contributions and comments.

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Experiments in Truth: A Young Activist's Thoughts

by Rachel Napolitano, Peace Power 2000 participant

Here are some reflections I had while preparing to go the School of the Americas protest last November in Georgia. The Xavier University student body was divided over whether or not student government funds should be used to fund the trip to the protest if some students had the opportunity to break the law and might, in fact, do so while on a school-sponsored trip. Last year we were denied funding, but this year we won monies to pay some of the costs. Some student senators objected because civil disobedience is disrespectful of law. I have tried to address this line of reasoning in these reflections.

I also wanted to say that I am thankful for all the reflections during Peace Power. Time for reflection was a favorite part of the month, for me. Sometimes people do not tie spirituality into social justice issues, which can leave my soul hungering for spiritual nourishment when addressing issues of social justice.

Nonviolence is a very effective tool to empower people. Civil disobedience is one tool of nonviolence crafting social change.

During the Civil Rights Movement, U.S. citizens, including lots of college students, changed America through nonviolence. Though many in their position would feel powerless against the "system," they found power in demonstrating peacefully.

Sometimes during peaceful protests, participants broke laws to make a statement. Breaking a law was, and always will be a personal choice to challenge an evil law or to symbolically challenge a greater evil. Acts of civil disobedience are performed with the greatest respect for law. This is because there are differences between this kind of illegal act and speeding, for example. When speeding, you try not to get caught.

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A Journey of Compassionate Listening

by Scott Diehl, Peace Power 2000 participant

Recently I visited Israel and Palestine as a member of a delegation of eight Jews and Christians from across the United States. Our purpose was to listen compassionately to both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to share what we had heard.

Sponsored by MidEast Citizen Diplomacy, the Compassionate Listening Project is based on the premise that peace requires the hard work of meeting one's enemy -- the beautiful, God-created human being, and acknowledging one another's pain and suffering. Rabbi Phil Bentley, a strong advocate of compassionate listening, once stated, "There is a Jewish saying that we were given two ears but only one tongue to teach us that we should listen twice as much as we speak. The key to all good human relations is in listening. For this reason, the work of the Compassionate Listening Project is peacemaking at its very best, and also its most practical."

As volunteer peacemakers, as adults interwoven in a team, we had to combine our past experiences together with our education, culture, religious beliefs, and stereotypes. We wanted to build a foundation that involves listening without passing judgment on the feelings of others. We needed to understand from direct contacts the grievances on both sides of this protracted conflict. Finding lasting peace does not come from the barrel of a gun, but through eye-to-eye and ear-to-ear communication, an open dialogue of true understanding.

Over the first few days in Palestinian East Jerusalem, talking to both Israeli Jews and Muslim Palestinians, we experienced that each appreciated being heard by a respectful listener. Prior to landing in Israel, I thought that my agenda was to help persuade an end to the madness of war. I couldn't have been further from the truth. First, I needed to hear their voices, listen to

their heartfelt stories, and hear their gut-wrenching pain.

My mission seemed simple on the surface, yet it was complex and difficult, to listen with the heart, from one caring human being to another. We were here in this small corner of the world to help foster the understanding that brings about peace, and begin building up the spirit of all people, and to stop demonizing people and cultures just because we don't understand them or the language they speak. We must allow our fears of others to subside, to allow the love of God's creations to flow into our hearts and kindle a burning desire for peace and reconciliation.

Many people we met throughout our ten days in the "Holy Land of fear" reiterated the profound sense of fear from both sides. Story after story testified to their truths of suffering in a land that both relish as their homeland, based on history, religion and tradition. I felt an overwhelming sense of empathy for both sides.

As the day drew near for us to leave, I had a revelation or a dream for peace here and everywhere around the world. Let us simply stop the madness of war perpetuating our fears and hatred. Let us, one person at a time, start building up a new history for the future. It is time for all of us to come together and sit at the table of humanity, as one united people searching for understanding, caring, and love, as one race, the human race who desire safety, security and peace. Let us talk, hear, see and be acknowledged as unique individuals created by a higher power to help, serve, and protect one another.

In closing, to quote, Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, who led our delegation, "If we can muster the courage to see with two eyes, we have a chance of finding our way through this darkness." ■

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Civil disobedience, on the other hand, is meant to be noticed. Protesters expect to be punished and accept the consequences of breaking the law.

Acts of civil disobedience, combined with other nonviolent methods of protest empowered a disadvantaged sector of society to secure civil rights in America. In this way, nonviolence is an empowering tool.

To be fair, violence can also empower, but violent conduct is an indication of perceived powerlessness. This is interesting, because obvious forms of violence are often performed by those whom we see as powerful; countries and gangs, for example. Using violence is an indication of powerlessness, nevertheless.

Unless the United States felt threatened by another country or world leader, we would not go to war. Unless the government loses faith in its diplomacy efforts, the military would not be used. The U.S., like many nations, uses the military to empower the nation.

The military is often used to intimidate rogue leaders or to engage in combat. Both of these actions are forms of violence and are utilized as empowering tools. Government officials will readily admit in

the vaguest terms possible that the U.S. will not use the armed forces unless as a "last resort."

Similarly, gang members would not resort to violence if they perceived education and job opportunities as ways out. They do not perceive these things as means to ends consisting of economic, social and personal security.

Acting nonviolently builds a sense of empowerment, which, cyclically, fosters a tendency toward nonviolence. On the other hand, having a powerless perception of yourself and your community fosters a tendency toward violence "as a last resort."■

SAVE THE DATES!

**GPS Annual Gathering
Washington DC area
September 29, 2001**

**GPS on the road
Visiting Cincinnati on
April 26, 2001**

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