Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA

This issue of the GPS Newsletter deals with conflict and conflict resolution at the community level by presenting two different approaches: the first conceptual and the second an ongoing effort in practice to foster more constructive relationships at the community level. The first article was originally prepared by Dr. Krishna Kumar for the Global Peace Services USA Workshop on "Nonviolent Action: Concept and Practice," May 4, 2013. The paper is being presented in two parts, with the first part included in this issue of the Newsletter and the second part to be included in the next issue. Drawing on literature and experience, the paper sets out a framework for nonviolent action at the community level. Dr. Kumar is a highly respected and widely published author on issues related to conflict, conflict resolution, governance and the evaluation of donor efforts to address these issues. The second article moves to concrete efforts to resolve long-standing tension and conflict at the community level. The subject is building relationships among Turks and Armenians to foster peace. This is an issue that has eluded resolution at the political level but it continues to be timely. The author is Avideh Mayville, a Senior Program Associate at HasNa, Inc. She received her MA in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University and will begin her Ph.D. studies in Sociology at George Mason University in the fall of 2013. HasNa, Inc. is a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, and has promoted community level efforts for constructive relationships in selected portions of the Eastern Middle East and Caucasus, with particular focus on communities in Turkey and Armenia. We hope you will find these articles illuminating and provocative.

Community Level Nonviolent Actions to Promote Change

Students of nonviolence have documented thousands of cases in which individuals and groups have employed nonviolent methods to promote social, economic and political change. They have also identified numerous methods that were used in different social and political circumstances. An excellent example of the recent scholarship on this subject is a volume entitled "Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles" edited by Maciej Bartknowski and published by Lynne Rienner in 2013. Although not all nonviolent actions succeeded in achieving their objectives, there is ample documentation to show how these methods have been used and what lessons can be drawn from past experience.

This paper draws from substantial literature on nonviolence to provide a framework that focuses on community level nonviolent actions rather than on liberation movements. The underlying premise is that nonviolent actions can be employed to accomplish a wide array of objectives at the community level. Some may undertake these actions to fight injustice and exploitation, while others utilize them to protest governmental actions and to seek suitable changes in existing government's programs and procedures.

Still others may undertake nonviolent actions to prevent inter-group identity conflicts or to promote peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of violence and bloodshed. The paper is organized into two sections. The first section deals with the planning and conduct of nonviolent actions, while the second gives examples of methods. The discussion is illustrative and not exhaustive. The objective is simply to initiate a discussion among workshop participants.

Planning and Organizing Nonviolent Action

1. Study of the Problem

The first step is the study of the problem, its nature and its underlying and proximate causes. To understand the problem and its different facets, activists may interview people, review articles and other published or unpublished documents, and in some cases even gather fresh data themselves. The intent is not to write an academic paper but to explore the problem in-depth so that appropriate actions may be launched.

For example, leaders in an urban community want to undertake nonviolent action to reduce, if not to eliminate, gang violence that plagues their community. They will seek answers to questions such as: How many gangs exist in the community? What are the family backgrounds, educational levels and ethnic origins of their members? What motivates some youth to join gangs? What is the nature of police surveillance? What resources are available to the community to deal with the problem? What actions are being taken by the authorities and other organizations to deal with this problem? Based on the answers to these questions, they would formulate a strategy for nonviolent action. If they find that most members come from a marginalized ethnic group, which has recently migrated, they may develop a program of outreach to this group in addition to other nonviolent actions such as public meetings, peace marches and vigils, and other programs designed to mobilize public opinion against gang violence.

There is also a need for continual study and critical reflection. Gandhi always emphasized that nonviolent activists should have an open mind, which involved the search of what he called "truth."

2. Realistic, Specific Goals

For the success of nonviolent actions, it is necessary that their objectives are both realistic and specific. They should be realistic in the sense that they are achievable in the given environment with available resources. They should be specific in the sense that they can be translated into concrete plans. For example, in a war-torn society in which two groups bitterly fought each other, as was the case in Bosnia and Rwanda, the goal of promoting social reconciliation is not always realistic, as the wounds of physical and psychological violence are too fresh in the minds of the people. On the other hand, the objective of promoting co-existence by fighting misinformation and false propaganda is more achievable. A voluntary organization can monitor printed and electronic media and develop a coherent strategy for action. It may (a) release its findings to the public, (b) initiate public education programs to educate the members of the two ethic groups, (c) organize boycotts of the media outlets which disseminate misleading and inflammatory news and commentary, and even (d) set up media outlets which provide objective analysis and interpretation of the news and information.

3. Formulating Strategy

While many nonviolent movements started spontaneously, formulation of a coherent strategy usually contributes to effective nonviolent actions. Gene Sharp has suggested:

> Competent strategic planning requires not only an understanding of the conflict situation itself, but also an in-depth understanding of why this technique can wield great power, the major characteristics of nonviolent struggle, the many methods that maybe applied, and the dynamics and mechanisms at work in actual struggles of this technique when applied against repressive regimes. (*Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, 2005)

However, the strategy should be flexible and should not constrain nonviolent actions. In many cases, an

initial strategy may change in response to changes in the environment or in the behavior of the opponents. Activists should constantly revisit it as nonviolent action proceeds.

4. Organizing for Action

The final and most critical step is to develop an organizational entity to coordinate the activities of constituent individuals and groups, raise resources, negotiate with opponents, modify original strategy and plans and take all other actions that are necessary to achieve the objectives of nonviolent action. Organizations can be formal or informal depending upon the situation. While formal organizations have a fixed set of rules, procedures and structures, in informal organizations roles and responsibilities of different actors are not precisely defined. Both have their strengths and limitations. Formal organizations usually lighten up management work, provide a clear direction to activities and minimize confusion in communicating with outside groups. But large formal organizations can also become excessively bureaucratic. On the other hand, informal groups encourage peoples' participation, minimize leadership rivalries and help to recruit new members. Whether formal or informal, nonviolent groups should be organized on democratic principles.

(Part II, *Nonviolent Methods,* will be in the next issue of *GPS Newsletter)*

Krishna Kumar, Ph.D.

Logical connections: How building relationships among Turks and Armenians fosters peace

In early May this year, twelve Turkish and Armenian young men and women, aged 17 to 22, came to Washington, DC through HasNa, Inc. to create digital stories of their shared histories. Wide-eyed and full of excitement, the teens spent nearly every waking moment together for the duration of the two week program, taking photographs, recording sounds, and filming their experiences. They bonded over being foreigners in DC, marveling at some of the stark differences between "American" culture and their own, realizing how similar they were as Armenians and Turks.

It is difficult to measure precisely those moments that reflect a change in attitude and openness to those whom you have been taught are your adversaries. HasNa, Inc. –a Washington, DC–based non-governmental organization (NGO) espouses the philosophy that changing attitudes and forging connections from the grassroots will eventually flow upward towards the decision makers in society. While there is no magical formula for building peace to resolve seemingly intractable conflicts, programming that brings individuals from so-called adversarial communities to learn, grow and prosper together is a start.

A history of reconciliation attempts

In spite of numerous official attempts at reconciliation, political tensions between Turkey and Armenia have persisted for over a century. The failure of the most recent protocols, signed by Ankara and Yerevan in 2009, shows the stubborn hold that a historical conflict can exert upon attempts at reconciliation.

Conflicts that have attained a level of "negative peace," where there is no violence, but no real constructive relationships between populations, remain in social limbo. Purposefully segregated communities, who do not organize against each other, but remain in a state of silent resolve over their divisions, cease to progress beyond their current state.

While the Turkish and Armenian governments are unable to sort out their differences, those living in the border communities must live with the reverberations of failed political discourse. If there is to be any sort of reconciliation, it would be best built upon a stable foundation of cooperation at the local level.

Obviously, systemic changes are needed to guarantee positive relations between Turkey and Armenia, but genuine change requires more than policy changes. Locals must not only alter perceptions of the "other," but must have some comprehension of the benefits of cooperation, and the will to build productive relationships.

This is where HasNa, Inc. works to make an impact. Our interpretation of peacebuilding is based upon identifying areas in which change and growth are ready to happen, but waiting for the stimulus to occur. We seek to provide the impetus to build cooperative and productive relationships on the grassroots level through programs that involve training, practice, and exposure to what could be.

By providing the opportunity to build bridges that already make sense, to create and strengthen ties that would exist were it not for the divisions between Turkey and Armenia, we seek to establish a natural foundation for cooperation.

An organization is born

HasNa, Inc. was founded in 1998 by Nevzer Stacey, and was named in honor of her parents, Hasan and Naciye. Born in Istanbul to an Iranian father and Turkish mother, Ms. Stacey came to the United States to attend university and then pursued a career at the U.S. Department of Education and the National Academy of Sciences, while serving as a volunteer mediator for the Washington, DC government. In the United States, Ms. Stacey observed people of different backgrounds working, living, and growing together in positive ways. In Turkey and Cyprus, people seemed more intent on drawing lines and working against each other, even when doing so was to the very detriment of their own communities. Through establishing HasNa, Inc., Ms. Stacey sought to find a way to foster a culture of integrated cooperation in societies where

divisions seem to be the biggest impediment to progress. Given her roots, Turkey and Cyprus seemed like the right place to start.

HasNa, Inc. began by focusing on small-scale programming to promote maximum local impact through the cooperation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and Turks and Kurds, Our training programs work to strengthen mediums for change on the community level, ranging from innovations in farming for diverse agricultural communities in Turkey to citizen journalism to create a local, unbiased bi-communal news outlet in Cyprus. We do this by combining training in conflict resolution with professional development.

Supporting these endeavors, HasNa, Inc.'s board and staff are comprised of a diverse group of individuals with roots in Turkey, Armenia, Iran, and the United States committed to building peace in the region. Our small staff of six brings a mixture of skills to the table, with backgrounds in project management, international peace and conflict resolution, and international education.

HasNa, Inc. engages in a wide variety of programs, working exclusively with local organizations to identify issues that provide opportunity for community growth and understanding. We do not believe in a one size fits all approach, and tweak our training model as necessary for each program. However, the one common element in all of our programs is training in effective communication skills. HasNa, Inc. has been working for many years with the Center for Dispute Settlement, customizing communications training for each group that we host. These training sessions are designed to address both personal and professional conflicts each group is likely to encounter.

While the majority of our programs involve participants who have a working knowledge of English so that they may communicate with one another, we do not allow language to act as a constraint on those with whom we work. If necessary, we use interpreters during training programs. Almost all of our programs revolve around a Washington, DC-based training component, in part to provide a neutral ground to establish trust. Moreover, most of our participants

remark on the diversity of people living and working together peacefully in Washington, DC, which is something that they are not used to seeing and complements the purpose of our programming. After years of working in Cyprus and southeastern Turkey, the next logical step was to expand our programming areas to include an Armenia-Turkey initiative.

Expanding to Turkey and Armenia

In the fall of 2012, HasNa, Inc. embarked on the first of three programs aimed at building positive relationships between Turks and Armenians. Currently, the trip from Kars, Turkey to Gyumri, Armenia takes about three hours to cover roughly one hundred and twenty miles. Due to relations between Turkey and Armenia, one must travel the length of the border and go through Georgia to reach the country next door. In actuality, Kars and Gyumri are about forty miles apart.

However, the barriers built from this last century of conflict do not change the fact that Gyumri and Kars share a deep common cultural heritage, physically manifested in the architecture of the border communities. From the cracked fissures of these buildings, HasNa's first Turkey-Armenia program was born. *Crafting Peace* brought together thirteen Turkish and Armenian stonemasons, architects, and other stakeholders with an interest in preserving historical buildings in September 2012. The participants embarked on an intensive training program designed to hone their skills and understanding of restoration and how to use historical spaces for cultural activities. Since the training ended, the participants have been working on the restoration of buildings in Kars and Gyumri, as well as holding additional training sessions to share what they learned with others in their communities.

HasNa's second program took place in October 2012, which trained Turkish and Armenian women entrepreneurs primarily from Diyarbakir, Turkey and Gyumri, Armenia. The success of these women as entrepreneurs in their communities is critical in that women have a significantly higher level of unemployment and earn less than men in both

countries. Our program focused on resolving conflicts the women may face in personal and professional environments, as well as helping them develop better business skills. The women are currently in the process of applying to fund joint endeavors, most notably the establishment of a centralized cross-border network of women entrepreneurs serving to provide resources, training, and connections to the women entrepreneurs across Turkey and Armenia.

Side by Side: Digital Stories, HasNa's most recent program, brought together the twelve youth mentioned in the beginning of this article. The creation of digital stories through film, photos, and sound is meant to capture the stories of those living in the border communities, and highlight the commonalities between them. The youth recorded their friends and family going about their day to day lives but they also created fictional scenes promoting the concept of peace, which they acted out and recorded. In returning to their home countries, the youth have been presenting their digital stories to their communities on the border regions and are working on plans to pursue other media projects together.

Challenges in grassroots peacebuilding

In our experience, the greatest challenges associated with grassroots peacebuilding have to do with partnerships and the unpredictability of personality dynamics in program planning and implementation.

Partnerships. One of HasNa, Inc.'s strengths is that we work exclusively with NGOs on the ground in the very communities we seek to affect. Generally speaking, people are more incentivized when they are working for their own communities. The main challenge associated with working exclusively with local NGOs is assessing an organization's potential to be a viable partner and understanding how each organization operates within the context of their community

Many NGOs on the ground believe that American-based organizations are inherently wealthy. Some view the potential for partnership as a way to call attention to their own activities and as an additional

source to fund them. Moreover, in short-sighted attempts to raise their status within their own communities, some potential partners purposefully hide issues within their own organizations, even if they serve to benefit from full disclosure. However, there are ways to combat these issues. First, HasNa, Inc. has worked to establish a network of trusted individuals on the ground to provide additional assessments of organizations with which we intend to partner. Second, the prospect of mutually beneficial long-term partnerships works as a motivation to uphold an open and transparent relationship. For these reasons, it is important to lay down expectations and to be explicit about responsibilities when first planning a program in order to surface and combat potential issues.

Program Planning and Implementation. While HasNa, Inc. generally has a very thorough participant selection process, issues among groups of people are inevitable. For our youth programs, we work with our partners to jointly develop an application process to solicit potential participants. For our other programs, we work with our partners to develop criteria for identifying individuals in their communities who would benefit most from participation. We then rely on our partners and other contacts on the ground to help spread the word about the program and identify potential participants. Through this process we attempt to foresee and mitigate any potential issues that may arise during or post program implementation**.**

As our years of implementing training programs have richly demonstrated, every single group of individuals we have trained is unique. There is no formula to predict how people will interact with one another. Every potential clash is an opportunity for growth. In one program, a language barrier is a cause for tension, and in another it makes participants try that much harder to communicate with one another. Rather surprisingly, religion has not been an issue in any of our programs. In our Turkey-Armenia programs, we had only two individuals request information regarding where and when they may practice or attend religious services.

If there is a particularly unruly participant, or overbearing program coordinator, these issues are best addressed in private and on an individual basis.

Every person involved in our programs knows the ultimate goal is to work together, as we make that very clear when planning with partners and selecting participants. Our peacebuilding programs are not for the purpose of pinpointing hot-button differences such as religious differences or the classification of genocide. Our short training programs are designed to set aside the issues which have traditionally caused friction and to focus instead on things our participants have in common, such as their work. Most participants come for the opportunity to advance their careers, understanding that they will be working with Armenians, or Turks, or Kurds, or Greeks. Some participants do indeed harbor stereotypes about the other, but our programs are not about addressing deep-seated issues. Our programs are designed to show these "different" groups of people that they have things in common. In pursuing an opportunity, they inadvertently build personal and professional relationships and wind up caring less about the things that separate them.

Ultimately all human beings are different, and we naturally clash due to our differences. The key to peaceful relations is focusing on the human aspect of those who are designated as "others." In our programs, we respectfully address issues by individual, privately if necessary, and through positive reinforcement of our common goals. That is the best any of us can do. So far, this method has worked for us.

Despite the many challenges associated with our work, we have sought to empower a diverse range of Turks and Armenians who are more interested in working together and focusing on the commonalities they share, rather than the differences they are taught to see. Our next Armenia-Turkey program, set to take place this coming winter, will be a youth program focused on civic engagement designed to build a network of volunteers.

While the groups we train are small, we believe that it is through these community members that change will take root. Through stonemasons, women entrepreneurs, and youth we hope to lay the foundation for a dialogue of peace and cooperation to blossom.

Avideh Mayville

Global Peace Services USA
P.O. Box 27922
Washington, DC 20038-7922
www.GlobalPeaceServices.org