



**PEACE
DIALOGUE**

NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATION

2010

**ANNUAL
REVIEW**

VANADZOR 2011

Peace Dialogue Annual Review 2010



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For the period from 2010 to 2012 Peace dialogue's strategy is aimed to establish a group of young men and women, who takes the responsibility and recognizes the importance of their role in achieving the peace in their community, country, and region. This group will be working towards the creation of a society that is aware and accepting of nonviolent solutions to Armenia's conflicts, through the mobilization of their peers and cooperation with active youth groups and civil society organizations from other conflicting and post-conflict countries.

Peace Dialogue
non-governmental
organization



INTRODUCTION

Dear readers,

We are happy to present to you a review of the second year of activities of Peace Dialogue NGO. We are pleased that in the first year of our existence we have had many achievements in Peace Activism. Peace Dialogue's staff has tried its best to achieve the strategic aims that were formed so as to have 'desired impact'. Hopefully, when you read the review you will find that Peace Dialogue's "theory of changes" concentrates on effects and impacts, rather than only on activities. Activism for Peace Dialogue's staff is directly linked with learning process. We continually ask ourselves and always reflect on what we are doing, what we want to change with our activism, and what was changed. We use the method of the learning community, which is

"...the process of changes based on the process of inclusive and participatory approach. The idea of the learning community is a joint dialogical learning process involving people who are involved in activism (target audience) and multiplication of the gained experience and mobilization of new people according to their needs, initiatives and potential."

Based on this, the most valuable achievements for us were the lessons which were learned during the last year, and the small success stories of our organization and the people involved, which we want to share with you in this review.

*Edgar Khachatryan,
Peace Dialogue NGO, Director*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the last 20 years, the South Caucasus has been one of the most troubled regions in the world. After the dissolution of the Soviet empire, this relatively small area was plagued by different ethno-political conflicts. Today, the situation in the region remains unstable and the threat of new violence persists. Currently, the most explosive conflicts in the South Caucasus are the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Georgian-South-Ossetian conflict and the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Due to the complexity of the political and geopolitical background of these conflicts, many different interpretations of the direct and indirect conflicting parties exist nowadays in the world.

Armenia, along with its neighbors in the South Caucasus, has many domestic and foreign policy problems. Today, Armenia maintains official friendly relations with only two of its neighbors, Georgia and Iran (although, a discontent exists among the Armenian population of the Javakheti region of Georgia, concerning the realization of their Human Rights, which also has its ethno-political roots). Relations have been severed with Azerbaijan since the late 1980's due to the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia's claims to its independence. Armenia's relations with its western neighbor Turkey have been overshadowed by long-lasting hostilities due to ethnic cleansings and massacres of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century and Armenia's consistent call on the international community to recognize these as genocide. Several factors feed instability in Armenia: on the one hand, there are unsolved conflicts, blockades from Turkey and Azerbaijan (Turkey wanted to support its Azerbaijan ally), and persisting emigration because of poverty, while on the other hand, there are many internal political problems caused by mistrust

towards governmental authorities, political inertia, and corruption among the political elite and of the judicial system as well as a lack of freedom of the mass media and democratic institutions. However, it has to be pointed out that Armenia's neighbors, such as Azerbaijan, which is in an ongoing state of conflict with Armenia, and Georgia, which has territorial problems related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and conflict with Russia, whose government supports these seceded territories, are facing more or less the same problems.

Despite the heterogeneity of these conflicts, they still have much in common in a geopolitical sense, such as the same geographical location, similar history at some stages of their development, foreign policy factors as well as the actors involved and their interests.

According to its long-term strategy "See Who We Are, Choose Who We Want To Be" the Peace Dialogue Non-governmental organization perceives as starting points to initiate a change process in the South Caucasus region as to:

- Empower and mobilize a group of women and men from conflicting parties as key actors for the process of change through breaking the "culture of silence" in order to broaden and democratize the peace process.
- Overcome the growing scepticism among representatives of conflicting societies about a diplomatic settlement, and the growing belief in a military solution through a proper discussion on the true benefits of a possible alternative transformation of the conflicts based on compromises, and the costs of the non-solution or violent escalation of the conflicts.

- Initiate a community based grassroots process of mobilizing people for non-violent conflict transformation and peacebuilding.
- Transform the perceptions of the 'other' among representatives of conflicting societies;
- Deconstruct the existing gender stereotypes on "warrior", "real" men and the concept that women are to "always be protected."
- Strengthen the capacities of involved peace activists so that they can realize how the media works and to critically analyze the media to resist existing militaristic propaganda.
- Empower civil society organizations and individuals as a movement promoting peace so as to counterbalance the negative approaches used by the governments of the conflicting countries and regions.



2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION

Peacebuilding NGO Peace Dialogue was founded in 2009. Registered in Armenia, it unites members from different countries with a long experience of peace activism in the Caucasus and their own countries, such as Armenia, Russia, Georgia, and Germany. The organization's mission is to support the active participation of civil society in the processes of peaceful conflict transformation on national, regional and international levels as well as to promote the respectful dialogue among members of conflicting societies, with the long-term aim of contributing to peaceful regulation and prevention of new conflicts.

We believe that only through multilevel dialogue can peace be achieved. Dialogue helps us to understand what we aspire to and what we want to change. With the help of dialogue, we will be able to declare our interests, to protect them by joint efforts and to find ways to achieve peace.

The vision of the organization is, through the formation of multilayer dialogue, to create a consciousness among members of society so that they themselves are responsible for peace, that they are vested with the right to demand peace from the authorities.

Peace Dialogue strives to create the conditions for mutual cooperation and support between the members of societies of conflicting parties who learn that there is no alternative except peaceful regulation of the conflicts.

We work in four main fields:

- *Development of civil peacebuilding potential;*
- *Strengthening of respect for human rights and democratic values;*
- *Promotion of civil peace initiatives;*
- *Advocacy on behalf of victims of conflicts.*

We are convinced that the maintenance of sustainable peace requires equal participation by every member of society. Integration of gender aspects into peace work, enhancement of the role of women in peace work and their participation in decision making in peace processes are the strategic aims of our organization.

From our point of view, the concept of peace is not static. On the contrary, the peacebuilding process is a dynamic social and political process based on society's changing needs. Women's and men's expectations of social processes differ depending on their different social roles in society. Consequently, disregard of the needs of one gender group in peace work makes this process deficient. Therefore, we believe that the integration of gender needs can be achieved through the equal participation of women and men in peacebuilding processes.

In the short period of its existence, the organization's office in Vanadzor has united active young leaders from the community who have experienced peace activism. The organization staff consists of people who have various capacities in project management, conflict transformation workshops, monitoring and evaluation skills, journalistic skills and have access to different groups in the community. Before the organization was even founded, they had been actively involved with work in the

community in various areas including in civil society development and conflict transformation programs.

Peace Dialogue has five staff members and four volunteers whose main value is the desire and willingness to break the “culture of silence” and militaristic and nationalistic propaganda where it exists in Armenia through dialogical communication and mutual learning with the society.

Peace Dialogue is involved and is affiliated with several international peace networks, such as: Omnibus 1325 International Peace Building Network, UNOY (United Network of Youth Peace Builders), and the Black Sea Peace Platform. Apart from these Peace Dialogue is partnering with very well known international institutions and organizations such as: IKV Pax Christi (Netherlands), OWEN (Germany), PATRIR (Romania), IFOR (Austria), Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation (USA), and CMI (Crisis Management Initiative, Finland). NGOs we have partnered with in the Caucasus include: Women of Don (Russia), Fund Sukhumi (Georgia), AFON (Russia), Silent World (Azerbaijan), and Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Azerbaijan National Committee.



3. SITUATION ANALYSIS AS INITIAL POINT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Negotiation Process and Domestic Political and gender related social Impact:

Although official negotiations for peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Minsk Process) were launched, negotiations are deadlocked and there is a risk of re-escalation of the conflict. The Armenian and Azeri regimes monopolize the negotiations, meaning that they are fully accountable for the results of settlement of the conflict, be they negative or positive. The regimes promise their populations a 'maximal' solution of the conflict, risking fierce societal opposition if they accept compromises. The regimes use the conflict and risk of re-escalation as an effective mask for covering their internal problems: lack of legitimacy, corruption. The radical opposition uses the same facts to fight against the government and behaves even more nationalistically than the government itself. Although, almost every day young soldiers die or are injured on the border-line.

After the continued lack of success in the negotiations and the failure to deliver any concrete result over the past 15 years, the belief that the conflict can be solved peacefully through diplomatic means is decreasing in the societies involved in the conflict. Even in the few cases in which there are active civil peace initiatives in Armenia, they are centered in Yerevan, leaving the outlying regions uninvolved. In the case of peace activism and peace development in Armenia, civil society has a very passive role. Many civil society organizations supporting the opposition movement in

Armenia also support its nationalistic approach, again using the conflicts as tools for fighting against the current regime.

Huge investments in military capacities create the belief that the conflict can be solved through a larger and larger military. Militaristic propaganda strongly impacts the younger generation, which has never had an opportunity for direct contact with representatives from the opposite side. In fact, this propaganda and state-cultivated enemy image forms the younger generation's entire world outlook. For many years before the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began, Armenian society cultivated a strong image of itself as a "victim" of everything, from outside enemies to natural disasters. However, under the influence of state propaganda, the majority of Armenian society now considers itself a winner of the conflict and thinks that in case of a new war Armenia will win again; because their sons died in Karabakh, there is no land to give back to the enemy. The message is that the time to be a victim has passed, because now Armenia is a "winner." As a result, youth who have never experienced war grow up seeing the idea of heroes of the Karabakh war, becoming an easy target for militarization.

These issues are more visible when viewed from the perspective of social roles of women and men in society. Because in Armenian society men are mainly perceived as providers and protectors of the family--society demands that they fit this image. The previously mentioned economic situation, however, doesn't give a space for men to play their social role. Because of this contradiction, men become easy targets for military recruitment; men perceive the military as their only chance to improve their social state, and to show to society that they are heroes and strong enough to protect their family and country. Because of the revival of women's traditional role and image



as those who are weak and need to be protected, women actively support these men's roles as protectors and heroes.

Vanadzor; Local Impact: From the cease-fire in 1994 until now Vanadzor, along with the rest of Armenia, has been suffering from the consequences of the above-mentioned situation. The conflict was worsened due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 1988 "Spitak" earthquake that destroyed much of the infrastructure in Northern Armenia, almost totally destroying Gyumri, severely damaged Vanadzor, and necessitating in the closing of the country's nuclear power plant. Furthermore, Turkey and Azerbaijan began their blockade of Armenia, leaving the country without any economic activity, electricity, or gas. Many still suffer from war and earthquake traumas, part of the

population is still living in temporary housing, and in Vanadzor in particular, all of the Soviet factories have closed down, leaving the majority of Vanadzor's population unemployed and living in poverty (although many still hope and wait in vain that they will someday reopen). The majority of Armenian families survive only because they are supported by remittances through the Armenian Diaspora or worker migrants abroad.

Summarizing the above, we have a situation in Vanadzor where the majority of youth are indifferent towards war; because they never directly experienced the evils of war, they consider themselves only as winners and believe that in case of a new war Armenia will win once again. This is why they rarely oppose militarization and perceive the conflict as something very far from their own reality - they believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an issue for politicians to decide, not them, and don't realize the importance of society's involvement in non-violent solution of conflicts. Many youths are unemployed and have no space for their self-expression and for the spending of their free time and feel themselves useless in society. Therefore, many young people, being under the pressure of militaristic propaganda, join nationalistic oriented movements to be able to strive for seemingly obtained winnings through any means.

Working for the peace transformation of conflicts, all those above mentioned challenges directly affects Peace Dialogue's activities. It is very difficult for the organization to resist against strong nationalistic and militaristic propaganda existing in Armenia. The activities of such organizations as Peace Dialogue preserved by societies as wasting time or in worst cases it may be considered as a betrayal act towards Nagorno Karabakh.





4. KEY ACTORS AND PEACE DIALOGUE'S EXPECTED IMPACT FOR THE PERIOD 2010 - 2012

In the reporting period the main key actors' groups, involved in the activities of Peace Dialogue NGO in the community, were the young men and women from Vanadzor (age: 18 – 30 people who has an access to different local groups of students, schoolchildren, youth clubs, art - clubs, journalists, NGOs...).

For the period from 2010 to 2012 Peace dialogue's strategy is aimed at establishing a group of young men and women (key actors) in Vanadzor, who take responsibility and recognize the importance of their role in achieving peace in their community, country, and region, who will be working towards the creation of a society that is aware and accepting of nonviolent solutions to Armenia's conflicts, through the mobilization of their peers and cooperation with active youth groups and civil society organizations from other conflicting and post-conflict countries.

We intend to start the process of change from the community level and then make it broader with the support of our colleagues and partners in the Caucasus and in Balkans' post-conflict area, as well as partners in Western Europe: in Germany, Austria, Finland, in the Netherlands, etc.

For this period we strive at achieving the following changes in Armenia and particularly in Vanadzor:

- Peace Dialogue has become a centre for the self expression for creative youth from the community who strives to break the “culture of silence” and militaristic and nationalistic propaganda where it exists in Armenia. The organization has an access to fresh and creative ideas of empowered staff and is better able to work with society so as to more efficiently accomplish future aims.
- There exists a group of young key actors working towards the creation of a society accepting of non-violent transformation of Armenia's conflicts based on different needs and potential of men and women, and respect towards diversities. They mobilize and encourage their peers in universities, schools, youth and art clubs, media organisations and NGOs in Armenia for peace activism according to their interests, and cooperate with active youth groups and civil society organizations from neighbouring countries and regions, as well as other countries in conflicts and post-conflict countries.
- There are several local groups: students, schoolchildren, youth and art clubs’ representatives, young journalists and NGO representatives in Armenia that realize the costs of the non-solution or violent escalation of the conflicts, who recognize their important role and responsibility in peaceful transformation of the conflicts. They are able to critically analyze the work of the media and not to be influenced and used by nationalistic and militaristic propaganda. These groups are strong enough that decision makers perceive them as important actors and involve them in regular discussions towards the peaceful regulation to Armenia’s conflicts.
- There is a dialogue between young community members and civil society actors. NGOs involve many young actors and they share their experience with each other, handing over responsibilities with them.



5. ACHIEVED OUTCOMES

During its activities in 2010, Peace Dialogue has achieved the following outcomes in four strategic directions:

Development of civil peacebuilding potential:

- The space was created for various youth groups from countries and regions involved in conflict, for establishing dialogue between them through several joint youth trainings and seminars in various places in the Caucasus and Europe

through the joint projects of Peace Dialogue and its partners from Armenia, the Caucasus, and in Europe.

- Based on capacities gained during the educational Peace Activism of Peace Dialogue and its partners, involved youth from conflicting and post-conflict countries and regions in the Caucasus and their peers in various European countries initiated both joint and separate projects aimed towards peace building and non-violent conflict transformation.
- Due to various activities of Peace Dialogue focused on the media, the capacity for critical analysis of the work of media outlets in Armenia was developed amongst a group of twenty young people from Vanadzor.
- The staff of Peace Dialogue possessed various capacities in project management, monitoring and evaluation, and gender issues.

Promotion of civil peace initiatives:

- The representatives (NGOs, local governments, political parties) of regional cities, particularly Vanadzor and Spitak, were involved in discussions regarding Armenian-Turkish relations, through the organization of public discussions jointly with international media organization IWPR.
- As a follow up of Peace Dialogue's activism in the community, particularly through participation in the "One day with my friends" project, several creative youth groups in Vanadzor came with their own initiatives, including educational activities, workshops, hip hop and rock concerts, music videos, and music albums.

- More than twenty people have expressed their willingness to be involved in the activities of Peace Dialogue, and a group consisting of eighty youngsters in the community are informed and interested in the activities of the organization.
- Through the participation of the “One day with my friends” photo contest, Vanadzor youth have used photography as an analysis tool in presenting their daily life, problems, and concerns to their peers in the community and in Germany. They plan also to present their stories and photos to their peers in the wider Caucasus, Europe, and Latin America through the projects of Peace Dialogue and its partners.

Strengthening of respect for human rights and democratic values:

- The analysis of the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, obstacles, and successes of civil society working in the peace building and gender issues in Armenia and the Caucasus were presented to international organizations, policy makers, and representatives of civil society from various European countries during the participation in conferences organized by OWEN NGO and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany along with Omnibus 1325 International Peacebuilding Network’s members (including Peace Dialogue).
- Through the participation, as an Omnibus 1325 Network member organization, in the international conference “Gender Counts” and “Coping with Crises, Ending Armed Conflict”, organized by OWEN NGO and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany, the information was acquired and perspectives were exchanged on gender and power relations in conflict transformation using

experiences of civil society representatives from Germany and four conflict regions - Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.

- The representatives of the Vanadzor community and audience of MIG TV in Vanadzor were informed about gender issues and its relations with human rights and democracy as well as the influence of gender issues on civil society developments in Armenia, and activities done by Peace Dialogue in this direction were presented through the on-air TV program.
- The dialogue and programs for future collaboration among civil society representatives working in the area of community based youth, peace, and gender work from the Caucasus, Germany, and Bosnia Herzegovina were established through the projects implemented by Peace Dialogue as an Omnibus 1325 Network member organization and its German partner OWEN.

Advocacy on behalf of victims of conflicts:

- Various groups of youth and civil society representatives from the Vanadzor community were informed about the impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh War on the lives of ordinary people involved in the conflict through the film “Neither War nor Peace” made by Peace Dialogue’s employee, journalist Vahagn Atonyan and his Azerbaijani colleague Asef Guliev.





6. IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES IN 2010

Below is the chart of the implemented activities presented:

Development of civil peacebuilding potential:

The strategic direction is aimed at empowering the people in becoming important actors for Peace.

Seminar: “The Role of Youth from the South Caucasus in Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts: Possibilities of Participants (May 1-2, 2010)

The aim of the seminar held in Kutasi, Georgia, was the active involvement of youth from the conflicting regions in the South Caucasus in peacebuilding processes. The seminar was organized by the Fund Sukhumi in partnership with Peace Dialogue and Women for Development NGO from Armenia, and Silent World from Azerbaijan. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=274&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

International Training Course “Connecting Peace – Connecting Active Non-violence (August 30 - September 5, 2010)

The aim of the international training course held by IFOR Austria, with the cooperation of Peace Dialogue in Armenia and PATRIR in Romania was to get together young representatives of peace NGOs from Austria, Bosnia Herzegovina, UK, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Georgia, and Armenia who are actively involved in peacebuilding activity, get acquainted with the conflicts in which the mentioned countries are involved and come with joint initiatives. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=311&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

Workshop: “Media Roles” (September 18 -19, 2010)

The workshop organized by Peace Dialogue was aimed to find out modern mass media’s impact on perceptions of youth about their social roles and how youth become the agents of this influence. The workshop was organized in the framework of Peace Dialogue’s strategy “See who we are, choose who

we want to be.” See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=313&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

Workshop: “The Impact of Conflict of the Growth of Violence in the Society and Families”

(November 26-27, 2010)

The aim of the workshop session was to find out the participant’s perceptions and attitudes towards the violence and its manifestations on their societies and to develop together possible ways for the prevention of the violent conflicts. The workshop was organized by the Fund Sukhumi in partnership with Peace Dialogue and Women for Development NGO from Armenia, and Silent World from Azerbaijan. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=324&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

Project: “Youth Leaders for Peace” (November 2010 -December 2011)

This project by CMI Finland in partnership with Peace NGOs from the South Caucasus, was founded by the European Union, and is aimed at empowering youth from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh for becoming active peace actors for the peaceful regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The project is ongoing and will be continued until 2012. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=326&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

The Discussion Series in the English Club (November 2010 -December 2011)

The discussion series in the English club have been held in Peace Dialogue’s office since November, 2010, and have the aim of improving the communication skills in English of the members and the volunteers of the NGO by organizing discussions on various actual topics such as: domestic violence, gender equality, the role of youth in political developments... See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=321&TopicId=4&Language=Eng

Promotion of civil peace initiatives:

The aim of this strategic direction is the promotion of peace initiatives coming from societies and creation of necessary conditions for their implementation as a contribution to the peace process.

Project “Mountains of Peace” (October 2009 - October 2010)

The website www.mountainsofpeace.org / www.gorymira.org is a project of IKV Pax Christi. The website focuses on the two conflicts IKV Pax Christi is involved in: the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh and the Georgian - South-Ossetian conflict. The aims of the website are: 1. To stimulate a safe and respectful sharing of visions and ideas on the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh and the Georgian - South-Ossetian conflict; 2. To provide a safe and respectful meeting space for both/all sides to virtually meet; 3. To provide a link between the region and the outer world. See more: www.mountainsofpeace.org

Public Discussion: “Significant Changes in Turkey’s Foreign Policy and Recent Developments in Armenian-Turkish Relations” Discussion in Spitak (February 26, 2010)

The Public Discussion was initiated and implemented by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting’s (IWPR) Armenian branch, with the collaboration of Peace Dialogue NGO. The discussion was aimed to overcome Yerevan’s monopoly on discussions of external policies of Armenia, to increase the participation of those who live in the regions in the processes of Armenian-Turkish relations and in political developments, and make heard the voices of those who live in the regions. See more: http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=255&TopicId=6&Language=Eng

Workshop: “See Who We Are, Choose Who We Want to Be” (May 18, 2010)

The “See Who We Are, Choose Who We Want To Be” workshop was held in Vanadzor and was organized by Peace Dialogue NGO as the first step of its three year strategy of the same name. The workshop was aimed at creating a space for the young participants to discuss what kind of stereotypical images of male and female roles exist in Vanadzor’s society, how the participants perceive their own roles in society, what the roles are that society demands from them, and what the roles are that participants want for themselves. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=276&TopicId=6&Language=Eng

Project: “One Day with My Friends” (July – October, 2010)

The project was aimed to mobilize Vanadzor youth towards peace activism. The goals of the project were to study the interests, potential, and concerns of Vanadzor youth from their photos and to provide a space for them for creative self-realization and further involvement in the activities of Peace Dialogue NGO. As a follow-up of the project the “One Day With My Friends” photo exhibition of Vanadzor youth’s photos was organized in Berlin to present their perceptions about the problems in their community and daily life to people who supported the project in Germany. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=297&TopicId=6&Language=Eng;
http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=315&TopicId=6&Language=Eng;
<http://vimeo.com/16470216>

Freedom Workshops: Yerevan – Vanadzor (November 6,13, 2010)

The aim of the freedom seminar was to give a space for a small group of mature people from Yerevan and Vanadzor to share their own understanding of freedom and explore deep into this concept. Also, it was a good opportunity for freedom seeking people get together and become acquainted with each other. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=318&TopicId=6&Language=Eng

Strengthening of respect for human rights and democratic values:

The direction is aimed at supporting the formation of civil societies in which human rights and democratic values are respected.

Conference: “Gender Counts” International Conference: 10 Years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 - “Retrospective, Challenges and Perspectives” (March 24-26, 2010)

The “Gender Counts” international conference was held in March of 2010 in Berlin. A group of Omnibus 1325 Network members have been participating in the conference organized by Peace Dialogue’s partner in Germany OWEN e.V. The conference was aimed to analyze different experiences in the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, as well as to understand the needs of local actors in conflict transformation strategies and reconciliation work, in the development of democratic societies, in

conflict and post-conflict regions. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=317&TopicId=5&Language=Eng

TV Program: “Gender and Gender Equality” – Held on MIG TV (April 14, 2010)

Edgar Khachatryan, the director of “Peace Dialogue” NGO, was the guest of “Gender and Gender equality” program within the framework of the TV project “Our rights” on Vanadzor’s “MIG-TV”. The aim of “Our rights” project is to increase the level of Vanadzor citizen’s legal awareness towards human rights by informing people. The guests of the live broadcast, along with project’s experts, have presented to the TV audience the idea of Gender, its connection with human rights and democracy, and its influence on social and political developments in Armenia. The topic of women participation in peacebuilding activities in Armenia were touched upon by Edgar Khachatryan, taking into consideration the fact that UN’s 1325 resolution on promotion of women’s active participation in all operations on peaceful resolution and reconciliation on conflicts was approved by Armenian, Azerbaijani and Minsk Group Co-chair countries' governments. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=269&TopicId=5&Language=Eng

Study Trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina (October, 2010)

The members of Omnibus 1325 International Peacebuilding Network from the Caucasus and Germany visited Bosnia - Herzegovina and met the civil society representatives working in the direction of peacebuilding in this post-conflict country. The project “Study trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina” was an initiative of OWEN e.V. from Berlin. The project was aimed at establishing a dialogue within the civil society representatives from the Caucasus, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina with the long term goal to increase the active participation of women and youth involved in grassroots peacebuilding activities in the Caucasus and Germany through becoming familiar with the best practices, lessons learned and challenges faced in the post-conflict Balkan area. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=327&TopicId=5&Language=Eng

The International Conference: “Coping with Crises, Ending Armed Conflict: Peace Promoting Strategies of Women and Men” (October, 2010)

Ten years after the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security”, the Gunda Werner Institute (GWI) of the Heinrich Böll Foundation has organized the international conference "Coping with Crises, Ending Armed Conflict". The conference's purpose was to critically take stock of the implementation of Resolution 1325, and ask about the relevance of this as a universal tool for specific country cases on the ground. During conference Dr. Marina Grasse from NGO OWEN in Germany and Edgar Khachatryan from Peace Dialogue NGO in Vanadzor, Armenia presented their experience in peace education and activism based on the experiences of the international peace building network Omnibus 1325 in the workshop "1325 and the transnational cooperation of civil society". See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=317&TopicId=5&Language=Eng

Advocacy on behalf of victims of conflicts:

In the framework of this strategic direction Peace Dialogue is advocating for all victims of conflict, including refugees, relatives and families of missing persons, POWs, ex-combatants, etc...

The Screening Discussion of the Documentary “Neither War nor Peace” (August 2, 2010;

August 27, 2010)

The screening discussion of the documentary “Neither War nor Peace” was held at Crossing Roads NGO and Zangak social service center for the young leader groups of the organizations. The documentary made by the journalist Vahagn Antonyan from Peace Dialogue NGO and his Azeri colleague Asef Guliyev in the framework of the project "Principles and Criteria of Conflict Reporting" supported by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation. The film is about the impact of Nagorno-Karabakh War on the destiny and life of ordinary people from Armenia and Azerbaijan. The aim of the discussions was to provide a space for young participants to analyze the documentary and to reflect on their perceptions and visions about the different aspects of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's impact on their own life. See more:

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=293&TopicId=7&Language=Eng;

http://peacedialogue.am/english/activity_more.php?SID=2&AID=305&TopicId=7&Language=Eng;

<http://vimeo.com/18781418>





Edgar Khachatryan

Caroline Krucke

Marie Grosse

7. LESSONS LEARNED FROM OBSTACLES RELATED TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT'S CONTEXT AND ITS IMPACT ON CURRENT NGO ACTIVITIES

Through the work of the organization's four primary strategic directions, the following lessons were learned:

- The involvement and participation of Peace Dialogue staff in organizing various international and regional courses and training sessions aimed in providing capacity and knowledge in peace activism for various groups. Through these events we learned that, very often, there were no participants from the conflicting regions themselves, such as people living in Nagorno-Karabagh, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia. The conclusion from this for Peace Dialogue is that in plans for future activities, it must plan to involve these groups.
- Educational projects aimed to empower the civil peace potential rarely have the ability to engage the participants in follow up projects. In the future plans of Peace Dialogue, there will be a consistent effort to provide the space for participants to stay connected.
- Especially for the young people involved in Peace Dialogue's activities, they very often avoid discussing politics. They explain this aversion by saying that there is no use discussing it, because they cannot change anything. For the next period of its

activities, Peace Dialogue plans to use various methodologies to overcome the “culture of silence” among the citizens of conflicting countries and regions that suffer from a lack of democracy.

- During the activities of Peace Dialogue, we witnessed the distrust of the older generation towards the younger one. The older generation does not want to consider the needs and interests of youth – considering it unimportant. For the next period, Peace Dialogue will recognize the crucial importance of establishing dialogue between involved key actors with representatives of the older generation.
- Peace Dialogue, during the reporting period, saw the distrust and lack of willingness of decision makers in involving themselves in activities of NGOs, particularly in activities led by youth. After analyzing the context and understanding the importance of human relations in the Caucasus, there is an obvious need to overcome this obstacle during the upcoming period of activity, Peace Dialogue plans to bring to the issue a human dimension so decision makers can be involved not necessarily as officials, but as family members.
- We found out also that there is a distorted understanding of gender among Armenian society and the Caucasus even among well-known experts. People often do not see the linkage between gender issues and peace building. Peace Dialogue intends to address this issue through the transformation of perceptions of gender and gender related problems in the societies of conflicting countries.
- During the activities, Peace Dialogue has discovered that societies and ordinary people of the conflicting parties are rarely informed about the efforts of peace organizations and do not realize the necessity of their activism. Therefore, the next conclusion is that it is crucial to report to society (through media events, regular

meetings, etc.) even small achievements and/or challenges in order to be seen as being legitimate and trusted in the community in which we are working.

- We have noticed that peace activists in the Caucasus have too global of a vision towards peace building activities. These activities become primarily focused more and more on a small group of participants rather than the broader society. These groups have only very few chances to share their experience throughout the communities in which they live because of the lack of demand towards peace activism in societies. Our conclusion from these measures is that there is a need to prepare society on the local level for upcoming dialogue with representatives of conflicting parties.



8. WHICH STEPS ARE PLANNED FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

For 2011, Peace Dialogue plans active work in the framework of its “See who we are, choose who we want to be” strategy. For this year, Peace Dialogue plans to organize several empowering training courses for youth in the community, which will be followed by supporting the youth in the preparation and implementation of their peace projects. Also, plans for 2011 include involving youth groups in implementing several discussions towards the peaceful regulation of Armenia’s conflicts with the participation of the older generation (the participant’s own parents, representatives of various NGOs/political parties in the community). With the support of Armenian and international volunteers, Peace Dialogue intends to empower its staff and young key actors for the upcoming peace activism as well as for the institutional development of the organization. The majority of the previously mentioned lessons learned have become a basis for Peace Dialogue’s “Let’s see, let’s choose, let’s change” project, which Peace Dialogue plans to implement in the next reporting period. The project includes a capacity building part for youth from Vanadzor through giving them the methodologies for mobilizing their peers for peace activism. Also, the project has a component for supporting youth in their own peace initiatives.



9. ANNEXES

Annex 1

Caucasus Edition

Journal of Conflict Transformation

Measurements for Patriotism

By Edgar Khachatryan

This piece is an attempt to critically analyze the understanding of patriotism and its reflections of the societies of countries in conflict and regions in crisis.

The idea to prepare this piece arose after a small screening discussion in one of the NGOs in Vanadzor, Armenia by Peace Dialogue. The discussion was launched around the documentary “Neither War Nor Peace¹” created by the joint efforts of a member of Peace Dialogue and his Azeri colleague journalist. The documentary tells about the tragedies of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and its impact on the lives of ordinary people from Armenia and Azerbaijan who were in the center of events in the conflict. During the discussion, the

¹ <http://vimeo.com/18781418>

participants often touched upon the topic of patriotism and problems of patriotic education for the young generation.

Many of the participants, mainly youths, were sure that real patriotism needed to be shown. "It's not enough to just love the motherland, this love should be proved." From my perspective, many expressions of participants were closer to nationalism than to patriotism itself. According to them, a "real patriot" should not try to justify the enemy's view, especially when the issue supposedly relates to the security of the nation.

One participant after the screening discussion asked, "What does this documentary give me? Does this mean that we should not make sacrifices to protect our country? Wouldn't it be better to indoctrinate new generations of patriots from their youth? ...Patriots who are willing to give their lives for their country?" Actually, the fact that the participants had ideas such as this pushed me towards trying to understand the border dividing these two concepts between patriotism and nationalism.

According to Wikipedia's definition², patriotism is a love and devotion to a country or homeland for no other reason than of being the resident there. My brief internet research did not give me other, more detailed definitions or one very different than the aforementioned. "Patriotism however, has had different meanings over time and its meaning is highly dependent on the context, geography, and philosophy," continues Wikipedia. When analyzing the characteristics of patriotism, I am taking into consideration that patriotism is a feeling. As a consequence, it impacts human behaviour

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotism>

as in any feeling. Patriotism is also defined by Merriam-Webster³ nearly the same way, but it adds that patriotism is also the “devotion or love for one’s country.” I believe this definition does not capture the true essence of the meaning of patriotism. This definition would be perfect if there were not other conditions factored in this complex equation, but it seems that patriotism is a double-edged sword. So, the more a person loves their country, the more they hate everyone who is not of their country. In other words, they tend to become close-minded toward other cultures and groups.

However, in situations of crisis, when the borders between “us” and “them” is especially visible, the state war rhetoric and propaganda start to actively form and dictate the criteria of patriotism and is easily adopted by the populations divided by conflicts. Adopted by societies, these criteria then become social norms for the given societies. The norms become the determining characteristic of these societies, showing the borders between “us” and “them.” Society starts to require these criteria from its members. In other words, it sounds very easy to say, “If you don’t hate ‘them,’ you are not a patriot or you are not a part of ‘us.’

For me, it sounds foolish when the society where I live demands from me the approval of my love towards my country and dictates to me how to “correctly” love my homeland. How would it sound if my society told me how to correctly show my feelings towards my family? Or, how would it sound if the fact that I don’t hate the neighbours in my apartment building is perceived by my society as an unreal love to my family?

³ <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=96252>

The dictated criteria of patriotism are changeable, and depend on the selected enemy. For instance, Soviet propaganda told that “official Soviet Society” (we), who had an enemy under the image of the US (them), and those whose voices were about good relations with the US were perceived as non-patriots. After the collapse of the USSR, the images of the motherland as well as the images of the enemy and “us vs. them,” were transformed. As a consequence, the criteria of patriotism in our societies were also changed. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in Armenian and Azeri societies, those who strive for reconciliation and peace are perceived as non-patriots – even traitors. Today, even those responsible for war crimes against each other’s societies during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are seen as patriots and heroes because of a simple reason: They killed the enemy and protected “us” from “them.”

My conclusion is very simple: in the situation of conflicts and crises, the border existing in society’s perception towards patriotism and nationalism is intentionally erased with militaristic rhetoric. Who does this? “In time of war, the loudest patriots are the greatest profiteers,” said August Bebe⁴, in his speech to the Reichstag in November, 1870.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August_Bebel

Annex 2



Caucasus: OMNIBUS 1325 and its passengers

By Vahagn Antonyan

Nearly twenty young men and women crowded into a narrow room on the first floor of an apartment building, stealing furtive glances at each other in an attempt to size up one another while the trainer Azad wrote the theme of the meeting on the small blackboard.

A little later, he and the other trainer Albert started the “Gender Ideals in the Family and Society” workshop with round of introductions: Georgian, Armenian, Azeri youth read each other’s names (Suren, Givi, Aynura) and listened with interest to the stories about the meanings of the participants’ names. Organized by Alla Bezhentseva, the workshop was being held in the town of Marneuli, Georgia, in the office of an NGO, the Union of Azeri Women of Georgia. It was Alla, who as a trainer invited Azad Isazade from Azerbaijan and Albert Voskanyan from Nagorno Karabakh.

Kvemo-Kartli is a region of Georgia. Living here are Georgians, who in this region form a minority to the ethnic Azeris and Armenians in some areas. Relations between these three

ethnic groups on the surface often appear smooth despite the many internal controversies.

“The project is directed towards the most vulnerable groups of Kvemo-Kartli ethnic minorities: youth and women. Earlier, I invited Sajida and Vafa from Azerbaijan for similar ‘activization’ seminars in Bolnisi and Algeti, and Susana from Armenia for the seminar in Tsalka. All of those people I became familiar with while studying in a three-year course Omnibus 1325 organized by the German organization OWEN,” said Alla Bezhentseva, the director of the Union of Russian Women of Georgia NGO.

But the most creative pair of trainers is the pair of Azad Isazade and Albert Voskanyan, former military men, officers who both fought in the Nagorno Karabakh war in opposing armies. Now they are cooperating; jointly teaching and calling for peace. Some years ago, Albert and Azad were no exceptions and shared the feelings of their respective societies. But during the last few years, many things have changed to a large extent thanks due to the Omnibus 1325 course. Now they are participants in the network of the same name.

“There wasn’t a bus!”

What is Omnibus 1325? “It’s an ongoing journey, a learning process from and with men and women about life and reality, perspectives, views, needs, wishes, dreams, and potential for promoting peace through peaceful means, learning what peace and peacemaking means for other people in their specific context.” This is how colourful the Mobile Peace Academy Omnibus 1325 is according to Marina Grasse from the German organization OWEN, at whose initiative the course in 2006 was launched.

“Open for women and men who in different ways are involved in the field of gender, women’s issues, conflict transformation, human rights from the South and North Caucasus where it could be experienced, that dialogue is possible and that through dialogue we can learn about us and about ‘the others’.” This was Marina Grasse’s main intention.

“Many people ask us if there really was a bus. The answer is, “No, there wasn’t!” Omnibus is a symbol meaning “for everyone”, says the research worker of the Omnibus, Dana Jirouš.

The Beginning

In 2006, after reviewing many applications a few participants from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Osetia, Nagorno Karabakh, and the Russian Federation (Chechnya, Dagestan, Novocherkassk) were selected. 67 participants were chosen for the basic course held in two – northern and southern – subgroups.

20 participants were joined the advanced course of the Academy: they were involved in peace building and educational activities, had a definite influence in their society, and they would multiply their knowledge gained during the courses in their societies. Similar separate courses were organized in Germany at the local level, for young multipliers who work on intercultural dialogue between the German majority and the minority of migrants.

The Progress

As in every group, everything was not flowing smoothly here as well, especially if we consider the fact how much the members of the group differed in ethnical, cultural, and religious aspects. Also if we add the fact that they were from the countries involved in conflicts, the picture becomes more complete. But everybody was united by the idea of reaching peace in the Caucasus, and the many meetings, conversations, and discussions in Georgia, Sochi, Istanbul, Trabzon, Berlin, Potsdam and other places, and joint education during years accomplished the goal.

“Probably we have told each other thousands of stories, including very painful ones. There were also tears, many times people weren’t able to stand the emotional pressure”, tells expert Azad Isazade, psychologist of the Crises Center of Women in Baku. “When I was fighting in Kharabakh, in the nineties, I would never ever have thought that there will come a time when I will not only be a partner with Albert, a Kharabakhian Armenian, but also that we would be friends. But now I can proudly say that all of us in the group are friends in the real sense of the word.”

Albert’s and Azad’s “Unique Duet”

“Albert and Azad’s duet is unique”, says Alla Bezhentseva, adding: “The fighters of the past are themselves propagating peace. For me the best result of peacebuilding was when two Azeri young girls living in Georgia approached Albert and told him that they couldn’t imagine that Armenians were so kind.”

“We are not ashamed to look into each other’s eyes because we did nothing to be ashamed of during the war. Albert, for instance, was busy with locating Azeri prisoners of war and missing soldiers in Armenian held territory,” continues Azad.

“Now, sometimes we are joking with each other in a way that even the best of friends cannot always do with each other. We have many things in common: we are about the same age, 54, were raised in the same city – Baku – almost the same neighbourhood, and have many common acquaintances. We were adversaries during the war, but even if that sounds strange, even that unifies us,” says Albert Voskanyan.

What’s so Special about this Course?

The approach of this three-year course was different than the approaches used before. The basic approach adopted was the ‘Gestalt’ pedagogy. Also Paulo Freire’s approach was accepted and used in South America. These methodologies that form the basis of Omnibus 1325, envisage that everybody comes with own experiences; nobody is empty, and each one is able to learn and educate even a trainer.

“The entire educational process was based on dialogues. I realized that my life experience is interesting for other participants. Only after I gradually started to understand that genuine dialogue is, when all of us add our own contributions to the process and are learning from each other,” says one of the course participants, the director of Peace Dialogue NGO Edgar Khachatryan.

“Previously, we were occupied with matters of gender and peace along a trajectory given by our hearts. But the study at the Academy systematized what we had felt and gave us more concrete sense on the topic.” This is what Isazade believes.

After passing the course, the participants, who were also trainers in the past, generally revised their pedagogical and methodological approaches, realized mistakes and false

steps that they had done before, and are now trying to translate into practice the knowledge they received in their everyday work.

“For me, Omnibus is an opportunity for free thinking. It gives me not abstract knowledge, but an opportunity to realize the gravity and influence of my routine work; tools for self-awareness,” says Edgar.

08.08.08: The Crisis

Whether internal or external in nature, tough moments turned out to be unavoidable also for Omnibus 1325. For all of them, the first meeting after August 8, 2008 was a real turning point. This was when the Omnibus network met for the first time following the armed conflict over South Ossetia between Georgia and Russia.

Almost all participants mentioned that it was the most difficult time period for the network. Everyone was against the war; they all wished to talk with one voice, to condemn the war and to publish a joint press release. However, people from South Ossetia, Georgia, and Russian Federation had a different sense of what was happening and also in which words the press release would be written.

“There was in fact a situation that made us feel a great disappointment. It seemed that nothing was achieved, all had failed and that was the end,” recalls Barelkowska.

“I had a very difficult time. The sound of bombs exploding in Georgia in August was only just fading away and there were Russian troops on Georgian territory. The propaganda of both countries led people to oppose each other vigorously. A difficult meeting lay

ahead of us, a hard discussion could not be avoided. On an emotional level, it was very difficult; everything came out, with tears and feelings. I received such an unexpected warmth and support, especially from the German participants,” recounts Alla Gamakharia of the Fund Sukhumi in Kutaisi, Georgia.

The situation in the region at that time was so strained that one was not able to exclude even the beginning of new Armenian-Azeri conflict.

“During the discussion, in a heated atmosphere, Vafa (from Azerbaijan), before taking to silent meditation, jumped up suddenly and screamed: ‘But I don’t want to lose my friends!’ Her behaviour was so natural and anxious in that minute, that I recall thinking that she is a real friend with whom I could have a true friendship,” says Edgar Khachatryan, and continues: “It forced me to think that business relations is not the only thing connecting me with them but they are almost relatives to me and I feel the same. I don’t want to lose my friends. The society of Azerbaijan is not something abstract for me, an enemy, but my first association is of my friends and I can’t perceive the Azeri society, which also is including Azad, Sajida, and Vafa, as an enemy society.”

Omnibus without its Locomotive, OWEN

In 2009, after the completion of the project, the participants of the courses decided to continue their joint work by founding International Peace Building Network Omnibus 1325. The latter is not a union of NGOs but the union of individuals; it is based on individual friendship and mutual confidence. It’s a union of a group of people who, as the main motivator of the Omnibus, Marina Grasse mentions “have a dream of living in peace and they feel responsible for it.”

“We all feel worried how it will be without any material support from Germany because the course project has come to an end,” says Joanna Barelkowska.

But the motivation was found to work together and to continue the cooperation amongst all the participants; with one voice it was decided to continue joint activities.

“It is the success of all of us that the network is living and working effectively, even without its engine, OWEN,” continues Joanna. “The distinctiveness of the network is that participants trust each other so much that they are ready to cooperate through their own initiative without any support. I am proud of that so much. We all can be proud with that.”

Present: Comprehensive Cooperative ties

Now participants of the International Peacebuilding network Omnibus 1325 are actively working in their home countries.

“Nobody heard about the word ‘gender’ in Nagorno Karabakh as of 2006. Our organization for already one year is working in that direction. We aspire that the women’s role increases in the social life of Nagorno Karabakh and that the women’s resources will be used for peaceful aims so that they can defend their rights and participate in the work of nation building,” says Albert Voskanyan, director of the Centre of Civilian Initiatives, Stepanakert, Nagorno Karabakh.

Despite the borders and conflicts, they are cooperating with each other multilaterally. The participants of the network feel each other’s needs, according to Marina Grasse, not

because they are weak and alone, but that it's possible to reach greater successes through using the potential of all.

Aside from Azad, Albert, Susana, Sajida, Vafa, and Alla's cooperation, there are many examples of cooperation as well. Azad Isazade is cooperating with Inna Ayrapetyan, a member of the Women's Centre Sintem in Chechnya. They support each other with advice and an active exchange of experience and information.

The participant of the German course of Omnibus Inga Luther cooperates with her colleagues from Latin America. There are also cooperative ties between Alla Gamakharia and Valentina Cherevatenko (from Russian Federation, Women of Don NGO), Edgar and Marina and their respective organizations Peace Dialogue and OWEN. The participants also are in intensive correspondence within the network; everyday they are exchanging information and news.

Epilogue: The Future

The most colourful perception about the future of the four-year old network founded amidst many difficulties and still taking its first few steps has been given by Alla Bezhentseva, who says: "The Omnibus is a newly born child who is still taking his first steps. Until now – correct steps. But you never know what it will become in the future. He needs good friends, he needs to pass through a good school and not be isolated."

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