

Friends Peace Teams (FPT) 2015-2016 Activity Report For SAYMA

Friends Peace Teams are the peacemakers' equivalent of guerilla units: Ready to strike where needed using resources at hand to help free people with people. It is not part of a hierarchical regular "army," under "command and control" structure, but rather units of facilitators able to mobilize local, indigenous peoples to self-initiated action to bring peace and harmony to communities where there is violence and hostility.

Friends Peace Teams (FPT) as a formal organization grew out of a discussion group at the 1993 FGC Gathering at Stillwater, OK on the plight of Bosnia, then a newly formed country under attack by its neighbors in the former Yugoslavia. The discussion group resulted in a Quaker consultation in 1994, which instituted FPT. In the years since, teams have created networks of cooperative individuals and groups in villages, towns and cities in central Africa, Central America, and stretches from western Pacific archipelagoes to Nepal and Bhutan. Teams support Friends with leadings to work in peacemaking and reconciliation efforts as well as conducting HROC (Healing and Reconciling Our Communities), AVP Alternatives to Violence Project), trauma healing workshops and developing partners and facilitators for these.

Currently the FPT umbrella includes three "initiatives": The African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) begun in 1998, Peacebuilding en las Américas (PLA) in 2009, and the Asia West Pacific Initiative (AWPI) in 2012.

The newest initiative, AWPI, works in Indonesia, the Philippines, Aceh, Sumatra, Java, Nepal, Israel. It has seen breakthroughs in producing ceramic water filters in partnership with Society of Health, Education, Environment and Peace (SHEEP)-Indonesia. Last month the SHEEP lab produced filters that achieved 98.6 percent clean water. The technological innovation combines micro-biology with ceramic research to produce inexpensive water filters in regions notorious for filthy, unclean, and unhealthy water supplies. SHEEP has trained native potters to produce these filters with the mantra: water filters manufactured in Indonesia for Indonesians.

In addition AWPI continued its peace training of people, children and developing facilitators with AVP materials. To get a flavor of their work, here is a description of an AVP basic workshop in Tamiang Aceh:

The group began larger, but got much smaller after the first morning when the police, military, and intelligence officials burst open the doors hollering, "Deport them! Deport them now!" The facilitators all said that watching Nadine handle them was the best lesson in AVP they could have gotten. She smiled, invited them to join the workshop, offered them a manual, collected up the passports and sat quietly as they read them over. She talked to the quiet, "buff" guy. "No, immigration says I can't use a work visa since we're not paid, we're not 'working'. Strange, yeah?" "No participants aren't paid either, no transportation money, no sitting fee, no allowance, but they're here. Strange, yeah?" "Yes." he said with amazement. They escorted us to the police station like they were going to arrest us, but then did not take us in the front door (it would have to be official at that point), but rather took us around to the driver's license office... Hmmm... someone thinks they're going to get a bribe from me! In 35 years I have never paid a bribe in Indonesia; it won't start now. By the time we got back to the workshop, only a few preschool teachers and a couple youth organizers from the mosque were there. Along with the facilitation team we had a great workshop and everyone learned a lot.

Nadine Hoover began the initiative nine years ago.

Val Liveoak began PLA. She has resigned as coordinator but refutes the notions that she is going into retirement. PLA works in Columbia as well as Central America. It has conducted workshops in conjunction with such groups as Co-Madres, an organization in El Salvador that supports family members of the "disappeared"; Plan International, a child-centered community development organization working to promote and protect children's rights; Maryknoll Lay

Missioners, who work with youth and adolescents in communities or high risks and violence; Comunidad La Esperanza, a free middle school for at risk youth in Guatemala; Colegio Los Amigos, a Quaker school in Guatemala; American Friends Service Committee (AFSC); Guarema Village Health; the Franciscan Sisters, Misericordia Tejedoras de Sueños (Mercy Dreamweavers), a woman's empowerment group funded by the Sisters of Mercy in Honduras; and Proyecto Paz y Justicia, a program of the Mennonite Peace and Justice Project.

All told, PLA has conducted 53 workshops (AVP basic, advanced, training for facilitators, Tff, trauma healing) with 831 participants. In Barranquilla, Columbia, local facilitators had set a goal of bring AVP to the personnel of a local health clinic. By December 63 doctors, nurses and administrators had completed the basic workshop and 20 healthcare workers, the advanced workshop.

The African Great Lakes Initiative is the oldest of the FPT initiatives and was started by David Zarembka 18 years ago. It has established communal networks in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Congo. He has assembled climate change data that indicates the four-year drought that occurred in Syria during 2006 to 2011 and drove millions from the farming countryside into the cities portends what is soon to happen in east and central Africa as the area becomes drier with more frequent and severe drought, often followed by major flooding.

Along with AVP, the initiative conducts many HROC 3-day workshops. A Burundi government education agency has asked HROC to conduct 40 workshops in the 27 high schools in Bujumbura. HROC is also conducting Peace Dialogues supported by AFSC and a citizen reporter project funded by the Carter Center. Workshops are also asked for in Uganda settlements by the America Refugee Committee (ARC) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Mennonite Central Committee in Chad and the Search for Common Ground in Nigeria are sending people to attend the July HROC International Training in Rwanda.

In February David Zarembka and a AGLI team accompanied a trained team from a Mennonite church in Boise, Idaho who conducted HROC workshops in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Congo. One night several people from the Turkana tribe were chased after attempting to steal. One was caught and lynched about two blocks from the Friends church where the team was staying.

More stories and information on FPT are available from various websites. The Friends Peace Teams web site is at <http://friendspeaceteams.org> . The Asian West Pacific web site is at <http://fpt-awp.org/index.php?q=content-about> . More about the African Great Lakes Initiative is at <http://www.aglifpt.org>. And accounts of Peacebuilding en las Américas (PLA) is on the FPT site here: <http://friendspeaceteams.org/our-actions/americas/>.