



Contact:

Rebekah Walter, Tanenbaum
phone: 212-967-7707 x 112
email: rwalter@tanenbaum.org
fax: 212-967-9001
web: www.tanenbaum.org

AS TENSIONS GROW IN NEARBY SERBIA,
HERO FROM BOSNIAN WAR HOSTS RELIGIOUS PEACE-PRACTITIONERS,
WHO ARE CHANGING THE GLOBAL FACE OF CONFLICT

Tanenbaum's Global Peacemaker-Practitioners Convene for Trainings and Strategy Meetings

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – Oct. 22, 2007 – Recent violence in Kosovo is renewing fears that the region may be facing sectarian conflicts similar to those that plagued the Balkans in the mid-1990s. But there is another path also at work in this post-conflict region. In stark contrast to last month's bombings, regional religious and political leaders are gathering this week in Sarajevo with grassroots peacemaker-practitioners from around the world, men and women who have been identified by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding as *Peacemakers in Action*. This groundbreaking "working retreat" includes behind-the-scenes players in recent high-profile conflicts including the ceasefire between the Spanish government and ETA separatists, the recent release of political prisoners in Ethiopia, among others. Convened by Tanenbaum, the week-long series of trainings will focus on newly identified techniques used by religiously motivated individuals for ending intractable and violent hostilities. It will be kicked off tonight with a public ceremony by the Bosnian Presidency announcing Tanenbaum's five newest *Peacemakers*, who hail from Syria, Israel, Pakistan and Uganda.

Bosniak President Haris Silajdžić hailed the effort, noting, "Tanenbaum's initiative, *Peacemakers in Action*, comes at a time when the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community as a whole face the challenge and responsibility of restoring the truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the country, the only guarantee of peace and stability in this very important part of the world." The awards to the new *Peacemakers* will be presented by the Bosnian Presidency.

Sarajevo-based Friar Markovic and his interreligious Non-Governmental Organization, *Oci u Oci*, are hosting the *Peacemakers in Action* Working Retreat. As a local hero and the first individual recognized by Tanenbaum in its *Peacemaker* program, Friar Ivo is welcoming 17 members of Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action* and *Women's Peace Initiative* network for the week-long working retreat that ends this Friday. Friar Ivo described

his vision for the convening, “The goal of the *Peacemakers* is...to [provide] an inspiring opportunity to [learn] responses to violence throughout the world, stimulated from living faith in different religious communities.” Tanenbaum President, Dr. Georgette Bennett, agrees. “Tanenbaum has been able to analyze and identify specialized techniques being used by our *Peacemaker Practitioners*. Through that analysis, we identified relevant skills that the *Peacemakers* could teach each other. This week, for example, the trainings include a session by our Nigerian *Peacemakers* on how to resolve conflicts using an interreligious perspective, and another by Father Alex Reid of Northern Ireland on how to encourage paramilitaries to agree to ceasefires.” Other topics include how to create sustainable development through an interreligious perspective as well as practical skills in running small peacemaking NGOs. These sessions will be led by the Tanenbaum *Peacemaker* practitioners, many of whom have had remarkable successes in some of the world’s most intractable conflicts. Participants will learn skills that they can use upon their return to their home countries, within the region and globally.

Tanenbaum’s *Peacemakers in Action* initiative recognizes relatively unknown, religiously motivated men and women who risk their lives in armed conflicts around the world, including in Sudan, Colombia, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, West Papua, El Salvador, Afghanistan and more. They go beyond dialogue, putting themselves on the front lines of strife.

The 2006 and 2007 *Peacemaker in Action* Awards will be presented to Betty Oyella-Bigombe of Uganda and Azhar Hussain, a Pakistani-American. Through its recently launched *Women’s Peace Initiative*, which recognizes religious women peacemakers in the Middle East/North Africa region, Tanenbaum will give awards to Hind Kabawat of Syria and co-recipients Osnat Aram-Daphna and Najeeba Sirhan of Israel—one Jewish and one Muslim Arab, who work together in the Galilee. According to Tanenbaum Executive Vice President Joyce Dubensky, “the Retreat is one of the few forums, if not the only one, in which religious peacemaker practitioners are focused on using religion to directly confront violent conflict. Religion is a powerful force – just look at the horror and destruction done in its name. At Tanenbaum, we work to harness that force for peace, reconciliation and understanding and to do so through action, not just talk.”

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding (www.tanenbaum.org) is a non-sectarian organization dedicated to building understanding and thereby defusing the verbal and physical violence that people do to one another in the name of religion. Founded in 1992, Tanenbaum conducts practical programs that change and improve how people treat one another in schools, workplaces, healthcare settings and in areas of armed conflict.

Oci u Oci (www.pontamina.ba) is a non-governmental organization established in 1996 as a positive response to the widespread despair and ethno-religious hatred infecting the society of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Realizing that religions have the capacity to fuel conflict but also to contribute to its resolution, Oci u Oci works to emphasize and reinforce the aspects of religious tradition that are wholesome, peaceful, and life-affirming. It seeks to uncover common ground between traditions and encourages dialogue between religious communities by facilitating information exchange and ecumenical cooperation. Oci u Oci supported by a wide range of religious and secular bodies, but remains independent in its programming.