

TANENBAUM CENTER'S

# Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution

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Foreword by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Kidnapped and left naked on the side of the road. ...*

*Your wife insists that you not go out alone at night – because you may never return. ...*

*Unable to stop prisoners from starving themselves to death, you collapse. ...*

*A year in solitary confinement. ...*

*Despite the danger of being caught by the Taliban, you hold secret schools to teach young girls how to read and value themselves. ...*

*Motivated by your religion, you collaborate with your enemy, even though you still want to kill him.*

These are moments in the lives of the Tanenbaum Center's *Peacemakers in Action*, men and women whose religious beliefs have moved them to risk everything in areas of armed conflict to create communities of peace. Hidden in the news – if reported on at all – their brave stories are rarely told. And yet, their successes and strategies carry urgent lessons for resolving today's deadliest conflicts.

*Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* shares the experiences of 16 remarkable religious men and women who have put their lives on the line to bring peace to their people. Recipients of the Tanenbaum Center's *Peacemaker Awards*, they hail from Israel and Palestine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, the Balkans, South Africa, Nigeria, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, and West Papua.

Drawing from their religious beliefs and practices, they have crafted highly effective peacemaking techniques that can be studied, learned and implemented by others. From their stories, we see the proof that local religious leaders can play an urgently needed role in stopping today's wars.

## WHY RELIGIOUS PEACEMAKERS?

Today's diplomats confront religiously fueled battles that are destroying lives, threatening the security of communities and sowing the seeds for more years of violence. Seated at the diplomatic tables, however, they often report feeling disconnected from what is motivating the people involved in the conflicts. This book demonstrates how some local religious leaders are working for the same goals as diplomats, and can help fill in the gaps with their first hand knowledge of the people. It highlights the specific qualities that set religious peacemakers apart, showing how they strengthen the impact of their secular counterparts.

Whether as members of clergy or active lay leaders, the *Peacemakers'* religious identities have afforded them respect and an ability to reach multiple actors in the community: militants in Northern Ireland, tribal heads in Sudan, victims in Bosnia, and even opposing religious groups in the Middle East. Their lasting, on-the-ground presence has given them far-reaching networks, credibility to lead, as well as intimate knowledge of what their communities need to make peace possible.

Religion motivates them, strengthening their commitment and giving them the strength to stay – even when everyone else has given up. Often victims themselves, their faith has enabled them to forgive and to find pragmatic ways to get others to see humanity in the “other”, and thereby move away from hatred and violence.

## TECHNIQUES IN RELIGIOUS PEACEMAKING

Religious peacemakers are a critical – but unrecognized – component of Track II (citizen) diplomacy. This book tests this thesis through years of research, personal interviews and careful analysis of the *Peacemakers'* work in armed conflicts. And the findings support the conclusion that such religious men and women are key players in finding solutions to the tensions and violence that haunt us.

Ten religious peacemaking techniques are identified, demonstrating a variety of ways in which religious resources have been used as practical tools in resolving conflict. Perhaps surprisingly, *Peacemakers* on opposite corners of the world were found to be using similar methods, each adapted to meet the particular cultural and political realities of their communities.

The following outlines each technique and offers just a few of the examples featured in the book:

### **1. Utilizing religious texts as authoritative resources on peace**

Sakena Yacoobi used the Qu'ran as the basis for teaching about human rights and empowerment during Taliban rule in Afghanistan, while the Rev. Roy Magee reached militant men in Northern Ireland by drawing on their religious traditions.

### **2. Activating the power of the pulpit**

As a priest in El Salvador, Jose “Chencho” Alas used his sermons to raise awareness of the rights of peasants. Others used religious spaces as “neutral” bases for mediating among different parties, and for physically protecting the victims of violence.

### **3. Calling upon religious and cultural rituals and traditions**

The Rev. Bill Lowrey used local rituals that held power among the Nuer and Dinka

tribes of southern Sudan, while Dr. Ephraim Isaac tapped into Ethiopia's centuries-old social system of elders to create a network of traditional mediators.

#### **4. Organizing religious debates – and then discovering common ground**

Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa organized a debate between their religious communities in Nigeria, and during the one year of planning it, discovered their shared values.

#### **5. Using peace education as the foundation for a sustainable peace**

Despite vandalism and government resistance, Abuna Elias Chacour built schools that teach Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze students how to live together in their shared land in the Galilee.

#### **6. Mainstreaming religious peacemaking through the written word**

Father Alex Reid used his vast intellect and communication skills to write a series of documents that eventually led to Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement, while Father Sava Janjic became known as the "cybermonk" for his truth telling during the Kosovo War.

#### **7. Creating philosophies of nonviolence and zones of peace**

The Rev. Benny Giay in West Papua created a zone of peace based on an intimate understanding of indigenous ideas on peace, justice and the environment. Thousands of miles away in El Salvador, Chench Alas did the same in his community, his peacemaking path mirroring the tactics of his unknown colleague.

#### **8. Mobilizing interfaith outreach as a tool for peacebuilding**

Orthodox Rabbi Menachem Froman built relationships with Arab Muslims based on their shared respect for religion. Alimamy Koroma harnessed Sierra Leone's already positive Christian-Muslim relations to mobilize religious leaders as effective mediators in the civil war.

#### **9. Awakening the global community**

Understanding the multiple sides of conflict, Yehezkel Landau teaches seminarians in the U.S. after spending 25 years working with Israelis and Palestinians. The Rev. Benny Giay writes and publishes extensively for the international community on the West Papuan struggle for dignity and freedom.

#### **10. Adapting secular practices with deep-seated religious beliefs in justice.**

Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, as the first Quaker Deputy Minister of Defense of South Africa (considered an oxymoron by some), drew upon international laws and other secular sources to encourage the inclusion of women in peacemaking, while Friar Ivo Markovic translated Western lessons on conflict resolution into Croatian.

### **RELIGIOUS PEACEMAKERS: A NEW VOCATION**

Today, the Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* have begun applying their rich techniques in new contexts and in new ways. Father Reid of Northern Ireland now works in the Basque region, where recently he labored behind the scenes to bring about the ETA ceasefire. *Peacemakers* in Africa are mobilizing to bring their religious peacemaking insights and skills to conflict situations in neighboring countries.

As David Little demonstrates in the final chapter, studying the *Peacemakers* gives new insight into religion and conflict, shattering common oversimplifications. First, religious fervor does not always lead to violent conflict; channeled correctly, it is a powerful resource for peace. Second, religious peacemakers themselves are not strangers to violence. The individuals in this book are at great risk for the work they do – they have been abducted, tortured, jailed, abandoned, and blacklisted. Yet they continue, because for them the pursuit of justice and peace is a sacred priority represented in each of their traditions.

These individuals of faith are not only a source of inspiration, but also provide a blueprint that others can follow. And their work is evidence that religious peacemaking must be recognized not as an aberration, but as a *vocation*.

As such, it is time to provide the training and support required to prepare young students of religion to become religious peacemakers. Today's seminarians, future rabbis, imams, and young practicing Buddhists, among others, can be tomorrow's peacemakers – if we give them the option.

Seminaries, madrasas, and yeshivas need to establish programs to train our future religious leaders in skills that support their unique ability to mobilize communities toward reconciliation. Simultaneously, universities with programs in international affairs and conflict resolution need to teach our future diplomats and government officials how to tap into the unique insight and skills of these on-the-ground religious peace experts.

Peace may often seem illusive. But recognizing religious peacemakers as important partners for official and unofficial diplomats is essential to ensuring that peace becomes a reality. The *Peacemakers* in this volume provide us with the roadmap. Now it is up to us to follow it.

*To learn more about Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution (Cambridge University Press, March 2007), go to [www.tanenbaum.org](http://www.tanenbaum.org).*

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