

VOICES FROM THE SOUTH



THE
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The Missing “Peaces”: Highlights from Karibu Seminar on the Limitations of the Global North’s Peace Agenda

Norway, along with many other nations in the Global North, often describes itself as being committed to an international peace and development agenda. This is demonstrated in a variety of approaches, ranging from humanitarian intervention and military support, to supporting peace negotiations, to providing humanitarian assistance in crisis areas, to supporting projects aimed at strengthening the respect for human rights and the development of stronger democracies. The question remains, however, of what are the limitations and possible harmful side effects of these various types of peace initiatives?

In October 2014, Karibu and the Church of Norway’s Council on International and Ecumenical Affairs invited four voices from various settings and experiences in the Global South to a conversation on the challenges of the Global North’s peace agenda, where we asked the question “what are the missing ‘peaces’”? In this month’s “Voices from the South,” we highlight some of the main perspectives and conclusions raised during this conversation in an abridged summary. A full transcript of the conversation is available on request.

Beverly Keene: Jubilee South, Argentina

Michel Nseir: World Council of Churches, Lebanon/Switzerland

Kolade Fadahunsi: Kairos Nigeria, Nigeria

Nadia al-Baghdady: Iraqi Social Forum, Iraq

Beverly Keene: It is fairly common in the discourse of social movements and popular organizations in Latin America to think of peace, and to conceive of peace-building strategies, from within much more comprehensive and integrated perspective of life than that is more commonplace in the North.

Peace from our perspective is not

something that is conceived of as the absence of conflict. Peace is actually about how we confront and address conflict, since conflict can be a part of everyday life for individuals, for communities, in nation states, regions, and globally.

The kind of the conflicts that most impact the lives of Latin American peoples today tend to be *economic and social conflicts*. These are less about military or security issues, but the issues that face people on a daily basis: economic domination and environmental degradation. We look very much at economic models imposed on peoples. We look at ways at which natural resources are threatened and how this is a threat to everyday peace. These types of issues must be addressed

The Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

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“The Global North often fronts a peace agenda that focuses on confronting conflict by sitting on it, oppressing it, or controlling it.”

- Beverly Keene

when we talk about building peace.

One of the limitations of the Northern peace agenda, from this perspective, is that it seems to be much more focused on questions of militarization. Not to say that this is not an important part of conflict! This is the most critical type of conflict that needs to resolve in many parts of the world, in order to address other justice issues in society.

But if we limit ourselves to solely militarization and war, and don't look at the other conflicts that exist in society, it will be really difficult to actually find an agenda of peace.

The main conflict in many Latin American settings is over means of survival: access to land, access to water, and access to the economy for jobs and income levels for dignified livelihood. In this arena, there is a wide spread conviction among popular movements that we are at a very critical moment. A moment in time in which the economic decisions are being made are increasingly being removed from the peoples influence. This means that peace for peoples in the region is further and further a reality from day to day life.

We don't confront the conflicts that deal with control and use of resources, and popular participation in the decisions made about these resources. The Global North often fronts a

peace agenda that instead focuses confronting conflict by sitting on it, oppressing it, or controlling it.

Michel Nseir: What you were describing as a tendency of the North to control or manage conflicts rather than looking at their root causes applies also to the Middle East, where we are witnessing real deep wars over the last 50 years. This is real war, real military conflict that is boiling all over the region and is having global implications.

This situation in the region has created turmoil, in which humanitarian aid is crucial for literally millions of people in many countries in the Middle East.

In Syria, for example, latest UN reports mention no less than 9 million displaced people. Hundreds of thousands have been killed, injured, tortured, imprisoned, and millions have lost loved ones in the violence. Iraq is even worse, because the armed conflict is much older. Therefore, humanitarian and development aid have become crucial and a necessity for the survival of millions of people who depend on it.

Yet one of the many problems of this humanitarian assistance is that there is no "neutral" aid. Aid serves in each situation for different purposes.

Palestine is a classic and sad exam-

ple. Without aid, millions of people will be affected and the Palestinian Authority will collapse. At the same time, international aid is serving to uphold the occupation instead of obliging Israel to be accountable for its illegal occupation, and work to dismantle its matrix. We are therefore paying for the occupation to continue.

Another main problem related to humanitarian aid is that it also becomes an institutionalized business. Broadly, more than 50-60% of aid goes recycled into our northern countries when we send expatriates to work in these places in the peace business. The people on the ground are then getting the bare minimum.

So in this way, peace-making projects of humanitarian and development aid should be accompanied with complete strong measures of advocacy and governance. Otherwise, we will continue to manage and contain conflicts rather than looking at the root causes.

Kolade Fadahunsi: In Nigeria, we are still feeling the adverse effects of Globalization in the forms of growing inequality in our society. Currently, you can see two different societies in our country: You see one area where there great houses, multinationals, great schools, water, big cars. Then suddenly you are in areas where there is no water, no electricity, no communication. One is a secure area, the other is a slum.

The wealthy communities are able to bring in security experts from outside the country, to build barricades and to arm them with small weapons to "protect" their investments. This is usually supported by the multinational companies who benefit from

the profits made in the current insecurity; those who have chosen that their "interest" is to protect the wealthy areas from the poor people.

So for many of us in Nigeria, we perceive this "peace agenda" of the Global North and their multinational companies as an economic agenda, and one the Global North's peace agenda wants to protect. They want to protect the economic growth of the Global North, and will chose the side of those trying to uphold this system of inequality rather than those who question it.

Nadia al-Baghdady: I can absolutely relate to what is being said here already from our experience in Iraq. When we talk about this peace agenda in Iraq, we should probably call it a "control agenda". It's an agenda that is set up by the collation of the Global North, who appear to really only care about its own issues.

In Iraq for example, after the blockade imposed on the country by President Bush Senior in the 90s, the rule of Sadaam, and then the American occupation of the country for 10 years, the Iraqi people were mentally at the lowest point possible. We had no communication, no internet. No means to development our dreams, our desires, and education.

We were then told its time for us to "decide our own government". Yet in the last election, held in April, the newly formed government had to get blessings from the U.S. and neighbouring countries in order to operate. The foreign powers still affect who gets to be our prime minister, who is our defence minister, with an imposed democratic system that categorizes us into different ethnic and religious quota groups.

We are still a politically and economically occupied in Iraq, all in the name of "peace".

Beverly Keene: Again, I think a limita-

tion of the "peace agenda" is that it really does focus on managing conflict or controlling it. This agenda of peace is also a question of peace "for whom", since it is clear that belongs to only to some. We need a peace agenda that puts peoples' livelihoods and the survival of mother Earth at the heart of decision-making, and to include the very peoples whose livelihoods we think are concerned about in the decision-making, then there is no peace.

Michel Nseir: I would say that there is a race between a "country's own interest" peace-agenda, and the interests of the grassroots communities who are suffering. So, if Norway and/or any other country working for peace building want to actually have transformative peace-agenda, they all need to shift their attention to the fundamental and existential needs of the grassroots of these affected countries and give them priority over their own interests. We can then achieve something.

Nadia al-Baghdady: I also think that our world is divided into developed countries and underdeveloped countries. We need to therefore build bridges here to bring balances in these forces. The development countries already have the resources or have used our resources. In an ideal world, therefore, they have to be willing to use these resources- or give up these resources- in order to bringing balance and real peace back for all people. ■

A full transcript of the conversation from Karibu's and the Church of Norway's seminar, "The Missing Peaces: Challenges of the Global North's Peace Agenda," including conversations of the UN Peace Keeping Mission to Haiti, the recent war in Gaza, and the military occupation of Iraq, is available on request at voices@karibu.no. For more information from the panelists, contact:

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