

Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference

Session 1: Experience of nonviolence - Reflection Bishop Taban

Pat Gaffney: Katarina from Croatia. Very well known in our Pax Christi family. Very well known in Croatia for her work for peace and nonviolence after the recent wars there in the 1990s, and founder of what became a very special peace center there, the Osijek Peace Center. Well known for training, for outreach work, for facilitating the process of peace, reconciliation and nonviolence. And has served also with Pax Christi on the international board and is now really a consultant in many ways to Pax Christi.

Bishop Taban, known to many already, from Southern Sudan. He has a wonderful website, The Holy Trinity Peace Village. I encourage you all to look at it. Which is a village he helped to set up in Kuron. And it's inspirational to read about the work of his community and their outreach and the way in which they are building the spirituality and practice of nonviolence. The danger of websites is that you find out information about people that they might not want to share. And I discovered a letter on your website, Bishop, I'm going to expose this now. Because in May of this year you're going to celebrate your 80th birthday, isn't that right?

[Audience applause]

So, our four resource people. Very different geographical contexts, different political contexts, different stories and experiences. And I'm going to invite Bishop Taban to begin our reflection. And I will give you the microphone, Bishop, give you a minute's notice when we'd like you to draw your reflection to an end. Thank you.

Bishop Paride Taban: Thank you very much for being among you, for having invited me. I wouldn't like to take all my time in introduction. I think I have given my paper but in this paper you might find a lot of other things. I would like to give you from what is not written here. First, when it says nonviolence, is to be a person of nonviolence. And I have been in the, for three decades, in the war, from 1955 when I was a student [inaudible]. The second, from 1964-72 when I was a priest and from '83 to 2005 as a bishop and even at present. But one thing, I never left the country, I worked with the people. And I was in the middle of people, with the people, for the people. And because my motto as a priest was "Help your Brothers and Sisters in their Difficulties," and I wanted to [inaudible]. And the second is when I was made bishop my motto is "God is Love." And I want myself to be surrounded with love. And for this I have brokered reconciliation between two rebel groups in 1991 to 1992 and I founded the New Sudan Council of Churches, and I was the first president of the New Sudan Council of Churches and founded also the Sudan Ecumenical Forum where John Ashworth is here. And of course 2013 there was war. And was also a rebel group with the government in [inaudible] and it's one of the most peaceful areas now.

And because I retired, eight years before my age of retirement to found the Peace Village in order to stop tribalism. And now this Peace Village an oasis of peace in South Sudan. And in 2013 I got an award from Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN in Geneva, for this. And it was given by a [inaudible] that award, and many other awards.

But what I want to say, for peace to be really a person of nonviolence, you must have love, and you must have patience, and you must have the spirit of forgiveness. And must be a shepherd.

And pastoral work, that is why I say the church must be more pastoral than diplomatic. And that [inaudible]. Because people need love. People need to be surrounded by love and forgiveness. The rebels put me in prison for 100 days, living on boiled maize and [inaudible] water, and cooking and excreting in public. I forgave them. I look at them just like what I did to my mother when I was a child. I forgave them. And now for forgiving them, all of them love me. In all these people in the South Sudan, they look at me like their father and their mother because I have forgiven them. They mistreated me in my body for years and lies so on and [inaudible] as a bishop. But I could, I forgave them. I forgive you because you are very important, you are going to be liberating the people of South Sudan. If I destroy you nobody can liberate this people of South Sudan, I forgave them. And now the only person who can meet the two groups, both the government and opposition party is myself. When I go to the president, he embrace[s] me and I can talk with him. When I go to the leader of the rebels he also embrace[s] me. And that is the way of nonviolence. So to be a person of nonviolence is to have impartiality. Be impartial. Not neutral, impartial. And help create love for the people. And be a shepherd. And a shepherd is one who loves all the sheep. And that's what Jesus has showed us.

And so, I would like to say, you have already what I have written, I'm sharing with you what I have not written. And I also see our bishops of South Sudan. Most of the bishops, they remained with their people in the South Sudan. They never were [inaudible] and they suffer with them up to now. So, showing that great love, dare to be a shepherd. So I would like to say, what today makes people to continue in violence is fear. I have a [inaudible] with me here. Written by John Paul II who made me a bishop. "Non abbiate paura," "Don't be afraid," Even today, the leopards, even very difficult because they fear. They have to be assisted to get out here to be confident and have trust. To be a person of nonviolence is to have trust, trust in people and people trust in you. So, I would like to be in [inaudible]. I'm ready to share with you, and at present the war in South Sudan. What we need to help people to get out of their fear because of lot of crime has been committed and everybody is afraid to say, "I am wrong, I am sorry." We have [inaudible] my [inaudible] every day for 20 years, I say these words, love, joy, peace, patient, compassion, sympathy, kindness, closeness, gentleness, self-control. Humility, poverty, forgiveness, mercy, trust, unity, [inaudible] and faithful. And then I have other eight: I love you, I miss you, Thank you, I forgive, we forget together, I was wrong, I am sorry. Thank you.

Pat Gaffney: You have one more minute.

Bishop Paride Taban: That is what I want and every day I got out of my [inaudible] every day for over 20 years I get up and run around 1,000 times, do [inaudible] 100 times, and walk fast 1,000 times, and jump, and make, jump like frog, pushup 20 times, and stand on one leg 100 times and this is to get rid of my trauma and [inaudible]. And to do this, how to live among these people is to be able to learn to live with inevitable situations. Thank you.

[Applause]