PEACEMAKERS IN ACTION: STRONGER TOGETHER

Every Tanenbaum Peacemaker is a powerful force for peace in his or her home country. But there is something that makes them even stronger – cooperation. Bringing the Peacemakers together, whether it’s to learn from one another or to undertake joint peacebuilding efforts, increases their effectiveness, so we’re dedicated to helping them do that. This past December, a Delegation of Peacemakers met in Nigeria to proactively work for a peaceful presidential election. And this August, the Fourth Peacemakers in Action Working Retreat will take place in New Jersey.

The Delegation is the first event of its kind sponsored by Tanenbaum and it’s great success makes us certain that it will not be the last. Three Peacemakers, representing each of the Abrahamic faiths, participated: Friar Ivo Markovic, a Franciscan Catholic from Bosnia, Yehezkel Landau, a Jewish Israeli-American, and Azhar Hussain, a Muslim who works in Pakistan.

They joined fellow Peacemakers, Nigerians Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa for one intense week in sites of anticipated violence: the cities of Abuja, Jos, and Kaduna. They shared two goals: to prevent violence in the run-up to contentious presidential elections; and to strengthen the peace movement that Pastor James and Imam Ashafa have been constructing for more than a decade.

And advance those goals they did. In a week of seminars, media appearances, and meetings with key government and religious leaders, the Peacemakers solidified new partnerships within Nigeria and across borders, reached new audiences with messages of peace, and shared new ideas on how to address some of Nigeria’s greatest challenges. The immediate responses showing encouraging signs of a lasting impact, setting a strong precedent for future collaborations.

While smaller-scale Delegations provide an agile strategy for cross-border collaborations, we’ve found that there is no substitute for a full Working Retreat. This August, Tanenbaum will host the Fourth Working Retreat at Drew University in New Jersey, which brings together all our Peacemakers for a week of training, sharing and collaboration.

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THE LANGUAGE OF HATE

Tanenbaum is all about combating religious intolerance, religious ignorance and religious hate. We believe that fostering division and hate is unacceptable in any form. I’m sure that most of you would agree.

And yet, there are words we use every day, phrases that we repeat, mantras of our politics, media and daily life that fuel division. Too often, what we say has a negative inference – and too often, we don’t realize it.

Let me be clear. I am not promoting political correctness. Rather, I am promoting respect, saying what we really mean, and recognizing the power of our words.

Consider the word Islamophobia. We use that term as though it is describing hatred being perpetrated on followers of Islam. But the word masks the truth of that reality. It really means irrational fear of a belief system – Islam. It thus references a belief system but is not about the very real people who are suffering because of hatred based on what they believe. We should use the language that names the problem. What we are talking about is not Islamophobia. It is anti-Muslim hatred.

Another example is the word tolerance. Tanenbaum does not promote tolerance. To us, that means holding your nose, sticking it high in the air, and assuming an attitude of, “Okay, I must, I will tolerate your.” Rather, we promote respect. Tolerance is not a solution to religious ignorance, bias and hate. Respect is.

When we use the words that say what we mean, when we use words that name the problem and the solution, we know what we must do. It’s time to end all anti-religion hatred. It’s time to build a society that honors our common humanity.

And this takes all of us. Thank you for standing with Tanenbaum.

Tanenbaum is grateful for the support of the de Rothschild Foundations and looks forward to a long and fruitful relationship. “We share the same approach toward building innovative models,” says Firoz. “I also want philanthropy to be practical, and I feel very confident that this project will bring about tangible results.”

Why am I drawn to Tanenbaum? Passion and action.

Tanenbaum comes to philanthropy from a career in investment banking. “Banking,” he states, “was a means to engage in a career that focused on development and social impact. In the back of my mind, I knew that at some point, I would make the shift to development or philanthropy, using the professional tools I’d gained in the banking world to make a difference.”

Make a difference he has, using his skills to help shape the future new strategies that have enhanced our impact.)

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Make a difference he has, using his skills to help shape the agenda and future plans of the de Rothschild Foundations. Under his leadership, the Foundations have defined four action areas under the broad rubric of “education”: arts and culture, health care, social entrepreneurship and cross-cultural dialogue.

Firoz explains that the Foundation’s support for Tanenbaum’s religious diversity in health care work with the Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital, “unites three areas – education, medical care and cross-cultural dialogue.” Tanenbaum helps me to build synergies between those areas of focus.”

He continues: “After having been exposed to Tanenbaum, I felt that this was a very practical program. It’s about engaging the medical sphere at large to take multiple identities into account. It’s about an ongoing project, it addresses a significant and difficult question – what is the limit of a doctor’s responsibilities?”

Firoz is also heavily involved with other important initiatives of the Foundation, including the Ariane de Rothschild Fellowship program. Designed to explore the relationship between social entrepreneurship and cross-cultural dialogue, the Fellowship brings together social entrepreneurs from the U.S., U.K. and France who define themselves as culturally Muslim or Jewish for two weeks of business training and cross-cultural dialogue.

“There has been a significant improvement in the Fellows’ professional abilities,” reports Firoz. (Tanenbaum agrees. In 2010, Tanenbaum Assistant Program Director for our Workplace and Health Care programs, Rachel Marlyles, was chosen as one of the Fellows, and she brought back new strategies that have enhanced our impact.)

At our three prior Working Retreats, we’ve seen that they are most value-added when the Peacemakers have time to learn directly from one another: their methods have been tested and proven in the real world, and their models are often replicable. At this year’s Working Retreat, therefore, we’ll be facilitating those encounters along with providing training in valuable skills and technologies. In all, thirteen working sessions are planned.

For our friends, there will also be an opportunity to meet and mingle with the Peacemakers at a special reception at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City on August 9th, for more information or to purchase tickets, contact Guilaine Belzaine at gbelzaine@tanenbaum.org or 212-967-7707 x112. Tanenbaum will also be updating the blog from the Working Retreat, so you can track its progress.

We could not be prouder to be associated with the brave women and men who are our Peacemakers in Action. We are privileged to work so closely with them and to provide them with additional resources to help them succeed.