

Summary Report **TANENBAUM**

Photo: Ghassan F. Nakad



Photo: The Day After (TDA)

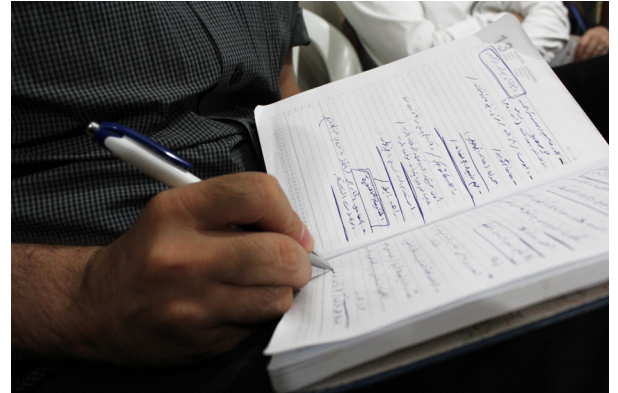


Photo: TDA

The Syria Intervention

© 2015 by TANENBAUM | Center for Interreligious Understanding

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of Tanenbaum, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

TANENBAUM | Center for Interreligious Understanding
254 West 31st Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.967.7707 | Tanenbaum.org

Greetings,

Tanenbaum is delighted to present this Summary Report of a three-pronged intervention by our *Peacemakers in Action Network*. The first two initiatives occurred in January 2014 and February 2014, respectively, in Amman, Jordan. The success of those two interventions led to the emergence of a third intervention in August 2014 – this time in Turkey. The crisis in Syria has destroyed the lives of countless, innocent Syrians, killing hundreds of thousands and displacing millions from their homes. With no end in sight, this intractable war has left far too many souls without any hope for a better future.

Rising from the seemingly endless cycle of negativity and horror are the uplifting stories inspiring a much different reality. Today, behind the scenes, and without much support, there are individuals working tirelessly to bring peace to their homeland. These brave souls – Syrian activists from all walks of life – are actively preparing for peace and for a post-conflict Syria. They have chosen to fight for humanity. Uninterested in power or weapons, they seek only reconciliation and justice.

To enhance their effectiveness, mobilize vast networks and achieve their goals, these activists have sought the expertise and counsel of international *Peacemakers* who have also struggled and persevered through civil war in their own countries. In response, Hind Kabawat, a Syrian lawyer and Tanenbaum *Peacemaker*, convened 160 of these peace activists from Syria for workshops in conflict resolution, transitional justice and civil society building. Leveraging her fellow Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* and their *Network*, Hind invited Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge from South Africa and Friar

Ivo Markovic from Bosnia-Herzegovina to serve as both instructors and inspirations, drawing on their experiences in building peace and reconciliation amid prolonged armed conflict.

During Nozizwe's intervention, the Syrian peace activists were introduced to the distinction between retributive and restorative forms of justice, as well as to South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission. Friar Ivo's lectures on reconciliation were so powerful during the second intervention that word spread amongst the activists, and he was asked to share the Bosnian model once more in the subsequent training in Turkey.

The Charter of the Tanenbaum *Peacemakers' Network* – to contribute toward the transformation of conflicts and the reconciliation of people by building a more peaceful, just and sustainable world – was evident again in Jordan and Turkey, just as it was in Nigeria, Honduras and South Africa in recent years. We look forward to sharing many more interventions with you, testaments to the selfless efforts of the *Peacemakers* and their dedication to peace.

In Friendship,



Joyce S. Dubensky
CEO

TANENBAUM Center for Interreligious Understanding



Photo: Ghassan F. Nakad

Tanenbaum overcomes religious ignorance, intolerance and hate in two key arenas: armed conflicts through our *Peacemakers in Action*, and in daily life (education, health care and the workplace). A secular, non-sectarian, not-for-profit organization, Tanenbaum supports religiously motivated local peace activists based in conflict zones around the world. With over 15 years in this still emerging field of religion, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, Tanenbaum's leadership is widely recognized.

The organization's work in peacebuilding and conflict resolution began at the urging of the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. Understanding the power of focusing attention on religiously motivated peacemakers around the world who – without recognition from Track I diplomats or the public – are easily marginalized or killed, Ambassador Holbrooke called on Tanenbaum to recognize them. Tanenbaum started with an award but quickly established the *Peacemakers in Action* program, through which we have recognized 28 *Peacemakers in Action* in 21 conflict zones around the world. To promote their efforts, Tanenbaum documents and publicizes the work of these unsung religious peacemakers through in-depth case studies detailing their stories and techniques. To enhance their individual capacity, Tanenbaum also regularly convenes the *Peacemakers* at week-long Summits (formerly referred to as "Working Retreats") where they share information, effective techniques, strategize on potential interventions and develop a community among people who are often isolated and alone.

The *Peacemakers in Action* Network

At the 2007 Summit, Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers* concluded that they could increase their impact by collective action and by finding opportunities to collaborate with one another.

The idea was simple: to create a *Network* made up of Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action*. Through the creation of a formal *Network*, each *Peacemaker* would be able to provide and receive support from colleagues in a profession that is rarely recognized as a real vocation, often lonely, full of adversity and always hazardous. Even more importantly, such a *Network* would enable them to leverage the valuable resources they are for one another.

Because each *Peacemaker* has done their work in a unique part of the world, and within a specific conflict area, the strategies, ideas and approaches to peacebuilding within the *Network* are as diverse as its membership. This diversity of experience provides a wealth of knowledge and information that can be exchanged from *Peacemaker* to *Peacemaker* and contextualized to impact conflicts across the globe. Recognizing this untapped resource, the *Peacemakers* chose Tanenbaum to facilitate their affiliation and charged us to work with a subcommittee of the *Peacemakers* to lay out the framework for such a *Network*.

At the *Peacemakers in Action* Summit in August, 2011, the *Peacemakers* made their decision official, writing and signing a Charter to formalize their commitment. The Charter recites the *Network's* official purpose: "to contribute toward the transformation of conflicts and the reconciliation of people in building a more peaceful, just and sustainable world."

Since the *Network's* founding, the *Peacemakers* have supported each other through collaborative projects and interventions in Honduras, South Africa, Colombia, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Indonesia. Like almost all of the *Network* initiatives before it, the beginnings of what would later become the Syria *Network* intervention occurred at a Summit – a summer week in 2013 spent at the Stony Point Retreat Center in Stony Point, New York.

Stony Point Summit: A *Peacemaker* Intervention Emerges

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, *Peacemaker* Hind Kabawat, a Syrian Christian, has worked tirelessly to help end the bloodshed. At the 2013 Summit of Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in*

“The three *Peacemakers* concluded that, together, they could bring much needed experience and expertise to Syrian peace activists.”



*Peacemaker Hind Kabawat
of Syria*

Action in Stony Point, New York, Hind shared her heartbreak about the ongoing violence in her homeland. In return, she received support and encouragement from her fellow peace activists; they inspired her to continue the difficult work of sowing peace in a land besieged by war. To put words to action, Hind and her fellow *Peacemakers* began exploring how the *Network* could reinforce her work. It was here that Hind first spoke with *Peacemakers* Friar Ivo Markovic from Bosnia and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge from South Africa about their experiences working for peace and rebuilding civil society after years of oppression and warfare in their countries.

From these conversations, the three *Peacemakers* concluded that, together, they could bring much needed experience and expertise to Syrian peace activists preparing for the hard work of rebuilding their torn country. They identified two critical steps to Hind's peacebuilding approach. First, it was paramount to develop a series of trainings on conflict resolution and civil society building for Syrian peace activists. Second, to invite Friar Ivo and Nozizwe as role models, subject matter experts and inspirational catalysts who could share their experiences, successes and challenges when working to achieve similar outcomes in their formerly war weary nations. And with this, the Syrian *Peacemaker* interventions were conceived.

About the *Peacemakers* in the Syrian Intervention(s)

Peacemaker Hind Kabawat, honored with the *Peacemakers in Action* award in 2007, is a Syrian Christian currently residing in Washington D.C. A trained lawyer, she now works as a Senior Program Officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace and as an international peace-builder. Hind has been a strong supporter for peace and democracy in Syria. Initially, like many Syrians, she believed that President Bashar Al-Assad would work with demonstrators on reform. However, instead of dialogue, Assad responded with violent force, resulting in peaceful demonstrators taking up arms against the government. Hind's view of President Assad therefore shifted, and today she counts herself among the opposition, praying for an end to the bloodshed and for a free Syria.



*Peacemaker Nozizwe
Madlala-Routledge of
South Africa*

As a Christian, Hind is viewed as an enigma to many Westerners who believe that the conflict is divided along religious lines, with Syria's Christian and Alawite populations – minority sects within the country fearing political marginalization and possibly deadly retribution – siding with Assad, while its Sunni population makes up the opposition. Hind counters this generalization, stating that “there are many Christian Syrians who are, in fact, playing a pivotal role in opposition to the regime.”

Peacemaker Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge of South Africa is a Quaker who helped design the framework for South Africa's constitution and later served both as the Deputy Minister of Health and of Defense. Nozizwe was honored with the *Peacemakers in Action* award in 2002. An ardent anti-apartheid activist during the 1980's and 1990's, she was a powerful voice for peaceful resistance and was imprisoned on three separate occasions, suffering for a year in solitary confinement during her final stint in prison. Today, Nozizwe works as the founder and Executive Director of Embrace Dignity, an NGO advocating for legal reform that recognizes prostitution as violence against women and supporting women seeking to exit.

Nozizwe brought a critically important perspective to the Syrians currently living through a similar struggle. Serving as a powerful female role model, she provided much needed guidance to the activists, who are forming a growing network and seeking international support for their efforts much like the African National Congress (ANC) was able to achieve in South Africa.

Peacemaker Friar Ivo Markovic, Tanenbaum's first *Peacemaker in Action* in 1998, is a Bosnian Franciscan who worked for peace at great personal risk during the Bosnian war from 1992-1994. Since that time, he has been a champion for reconciliation among the Balkans' many ethnic and religious groups. A strong proponent of arts-inspired peacemaking initiatives, in 1996 Friar Ivo founded the Pontanima Choir, an interreligious choir based in Sarajevo.

The conflict in Bosnia and Syria share many similarities – massacres, the destruction of historic cities, a refugee crisis and regional proxy battles – thus making Friar Ivo's lived experience as a peacebuilder a powerful example for the Syrian activists.

Conflict in Syria

In 2011, Syrians, much like their neighbors in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, proactively voiced dissatisfaction with the ruling government, yearning for a more open and inclusive democratic process. Almost four bloody years later, Syria is still embroiled in a brutal civil war that has claimed the lives of nearly 200,000, while creating over 3 million refugees and 6,400,000 internally displaced Syrians.

But in the early days, the Syrian demonstrators were demanding reform within the existing governmental structure. Some of the major grievances that drew Syrian citizens to the streets in protest included:

- The centralization of power within the hands of a small elite group led by President Assad;
- Slow economic reforms, unemployment and state control of the market;
- Uneven distribution of resources and economic opportunities;
- State control of public life, individual expression and association;
- Government corruption and lack of accountability.

During the spring of 2011, the Syrian state responded to those fledgling, peaceful demonstrations with force. With structural reforms well outside of Assad's political agenda, the Syrian government quickly ordered security forces to open fire on protesters. Within months, hundreds were killed. For many, it was this action that de-legitimized Assad. For others, it stimulated them to take a stand and participate in the demonstrations. As a result, what began as a government effort to use force to stop protests quickly turned into a full scale military response. But as the violence and tension grew, Assad lost more credibility, including among some from within his own military. In July 2011, members of the Syrian military refused to open fire on civilians; instead, they joined the ranks of the demonstrators and helped form the Free Syrian Army (FSA). No longer believing that change could occur in the existing regime, the FSA set out to depose Assad and create a new government. Success has eluded them, and since

“Throughout the conflict, there have been numerous reports of human rights violations, war crimes and wide use of indiscriminate weapons.”



those early days, the Syrian conflict has escalated into a cruel civil war of attrition, with violent extremism emerging and no side clearly gaining the upper hand.

War Crimes

Throughout the conflict, there have been numerous reports of human rights violations, war crimes and wide use of indiscriminate weapons (e.g., chemical weapons, cluster bombs, incendiary weapons and ballistic weapons). Such reports implicate both the Syrian government and the rebel groups of killing civilians, executions, kidnappings, torture and the use of rape as a weapon of war.

In January 2014, a Syrian defector smuggled 55,000 photos out of the country that substantiated the reports, providing evidence that “Syria has systematically tortured and executed about 11,000 detainees since the start of the uprising.” The defector, a former Syrian police photographer, revealed pictures depicting torture, including people being strangled, beaten with batons and wires, starved, placed in painful stress positions, sexually assaulted, having their fingernails pulled, and suffering electrocution, mock execution and mutilation.

Humanitarian Crisis

By October 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had registered 3,026,038 Syrian refugees, most of whom had sought sanctuary in surrounding countries, i.e., Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Additionally, many others still within Syria had been displaced. In fact, the United States Agency for International Development counted nearly 6,400,000 internally displaced persons still residing within Syria.

Syrian Women and Children

The violence has included horrific torture and rape of Syrian women and children. According to a February 2014 U.N. report, “Syrian children have been subjected to unspeakable suffering” since the beginning of the conflict, “with the government and allied militia responsible for countless killings, maiming and torture, and the opposition for recruiting youngsters for combat and using terror tactics in civilian areas.” The U.N. has not only gathered evidence that rape has been used as a weapon of war but, also, that domestic violence and sexual abuse are rampant in the sprawling refugee camps.

A July 2014 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN-HCR) report, “Woman Alone: The fight for survival by Syria’s refugee women,” details the plight of Syrian women, who have fled their homes and the violence in their country. Most of the women interviewed are now “head of household” and 65% have had to move “at least once since arriving in their host country, mainly due to poor living conditions, safety concerns, an inability to pay the rent, or moving to their own place after living with relatives or friends.”

Although women marched alongside their male counterparts in the beginning of the conflict, they were often marginalized in political or official processes designed to bring about peace and democracy. Despite this, Syrian women continue to speak out across their country and from afar, calling for peace in their broken land. *Peacemaker* Hind Kabawat and the women activists in her trainings are brave testaments.

Armed Opposition Groups, Extremist Elements and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

“...domestic violence and sexual abuse are rampant in the sprawling refugee camps.”

As of this writing, some observers are estimating that there are as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups in Syria commanding approximately 100,000 troops. The vast majority of these groups are small and locally based, while others have grown substantially since the beginning of the conflict and operate throughout the country. Many have developed alliances based on ideology or a political agenda and now claim a wide network of affiliates fighting across Syria.

Complicating matters is the alarming number of violent extremist groups among the opposition, such as the Al-Qaeda affiliate, Al-Nusra Front, and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS), whose fighters are responsible for some of the most gruesome human rights violations perpetrated on the opposition side. Many rebel groups subscribing to differing ideologies have openly targeted one another, leading to significant internal strife within the Syrian opposition. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, for example, in one brief period between January 3, 2014 and January 15, 2014, over 1,069 people were killed from rebel infighting, significantly weakening opposition forces and allowing Assad to make military gains.

By June 2014, ISIS had launched successful attacks inside Iraq and expanded its control within Syria. As fighting persisted, ISIS was reported to have committed war crimes and mass atrocities, causing large numbers of civilian deaths. Tragically, its violence went further, including mass executions of up to 250 Syrian Army soldiers near Tabqa Air base in August 2014.

Additionally, ISIS is forcing people in areas it controls to convert to Islam, persecuting religious minorities such as Shia Muslims, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Christians and Yazidis. An October 2014 UN report, for example, documented that up to 500 women and girls were taken by ISIS to Iraq's Nineveh region, where "150 unmarried girls and women, predominantly from the Yazidi and Christian communities, were reportedly transported to Syria, either to be given to ISIS fighters as a reward or to be sold as sex slaves."

International Response & Geneva Talks

From the beginning, efforts to apply pressure on the Syrian government and end the conflict have been stifled by geo-political interests and various actors, including the United States (pro-opposition), Russia and China (pro-government). Regional powers, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, have sided with the Syrian government or opposition forces, often along the Shia-Sunni divide. Money, weapons and fighters continue to pour into Syria to support various regional interests. Meanwhile, Syria's neighbors, including Lebanon, Turkey

and Jordan, currently shelter nearly 3 million Syrian refugees, straining local economies and communities.

Since January 2012, there have been two unsuccessful rounds of negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition in Geneva, Switzerland. Despite broad international support, these Geneva peace conferences have failed to produce any agreements or much needed relief for the embattled Syrian people.

Training Peace Activists in Jordan and Turkey: Lessons from South Africa and Bosnia

Now in its fourth year, the conflict in Syria has claimed over 190,000 lives and shows few signs of letting up. The rise of the Islamic State, known as Daesh in the region, and the Assad regime's determined hold onto power continue to demoralize Syrians. Despite the gravity of the situation, the conflict in Syria will – one day – come to an end. And then, the difficult work of rebuilding a shattered society will begin.

Since the outset of the conflict, *Peacemaker* Hind Kabawat has been an ardent supporter of a peaceful transition to genuine democracy. Her activities have included organizing humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees, running workshops in conflict resolution and using the media to tell the story behind the headlines – how ordinary Syrians cope with the realities of war.



Peacemaker Hind Kabawat of Syria

Tanenbaum and Hind's fellow *Peacemakers* have been supportive of her work. This was exemplified by statements and action. In 2013, the community of *Peacemakers* created and signed a *Network State-*

ment of Solidarity calling for an end to the Syrian conflict, and engaged in broad international advocacy on behalf of peace. Beyond taking a stand together, the *Peacemakers Network* held Syrian interventions, where several of Hind's fellow-peace activists seized the opportunity to work alongside her on-the-ground.

The idea for this effort originally evolved among the *Peacemakers* at the 2013 Summit. The idea was simple. Hind was working with 80 Syrians with support from the Center for Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. With Tanenbaum's further assistance, she could enhance that program with an intervention that provided trainings for Syrian peace activists based on the experiences of Nozizwe and Friar Ivo.



“The ultimate goal of the Syria intervention was to help bring peace to Syria by addressing issues of state violence, extremism and sectarianism. “

The ultimate goal of the Syria intervention was to help bring peace to Syria by addressing issues of state violence, extremism and sectarianism. To achieve that goal, the intervention had the following short-term and long-term objectives:

- 1) To develop Syrian activists' skills in nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution, negotiation tactics and transitional justice (short-term);
- 2) To empower and build the capacity of Syrian activists to broaden coalitions and social networks in order to strengthen civil society, including through train-the-trainer programs (short-term);
- 3) To prepare Syrian activists for a post-war Syria in which they will lead reconciliation efforts throughout the country across various religious, sectarian and gender divides (long-term).

To do this, Hind Kabawat developed and delivered a series of trainings to Syrian peace activists in Jordan and Turkey (separate trainings in Jordan occurred from January 19 – 24, 2014 and February 22 – 28, 2014; and in Turkey from August 13 – 16, 2014). Each course trained Syrian peace activists from different regions of the country, religious traditions, ethnic backgrounds and social/ political classes. *Peacemakers* Friar Ivo Markovic and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge supported these efforts by delivering trainings to different cohorts of the trainees; they shared their respective country's experiences,

serving both as expert instructors and powerful role models. Upon completing the course, alumni returned home and visited refugee

camps to offer similar trainings to fellow peace activists, thereby amplifying the impact of the projects substantially.

In total, 80 participants represented this diverse group of Syrian trainees. The activists came from Christian, Alawite and Sunni traditions; Arab, Kurdish and Chechen ethnicities; professions of law, education and business; and from cities and towns throughout Syria. There was a good mix of younger and older activists, all very active within Syria, ranging between 20 and 55 years old.

Lessons from South Africa: Nozizwe's Story

Peacemaker Summits are where the Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* convene and where most *Network* interventions are born. At these weeklong convenings, the *Peacemakers* share stories, exchange ideas and learn from each other's experiences. As Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge explained, however, it's hard to know what a *Peacemaker* is like in his or her home environment; but in Jordan, working closely with Hind Kabawat - watching her interact with "her people" during the Syria intervention, Nozizwe had the "opportunity to discover who Hind is" and felt "privileged" to really know her.

Nozizwe traveled from South Africa to the Middle East, arriving in Amman, Jordan on January 19, 2014. For the next five days, she bonded with Hind and 20 Syrian peace activists, whom she described as a mix of Syrian people who were "working together, sharing the same space and the same wish for the violence to end."

Until her session on Wednesday, Nozizwe maintained the posture of an observer so she could better understand her participants. She engaged in activities only when it would give her more insight into the unique and specific needs of the participants. On her first day, a Sunday, Nozizwe observed the activists as they engaged in role-playing during basic conflict resolution training. In a moment of serendipity, she later discovered that the young woman facilitating the role-playing exercise had actually received her own training from a South African, an instructor Nozizwe knew personally.

Later that day, Nozizwe joined the activists during negotiation training, participating in various simulations helped her prepare for her own training the following Wednesday. In the evening, Hind made arrangements for Nozizwe to visit the Zaatari Refugee Camp. Meanwhile, Nozizwe ate dinner with the activists, exchanging stories and coming to know to them personally.

On Monday, January 20, Nozizwe attended workshops and later joined the activists for meals, which included a birthday celebration for a cleric, also a student of Hind's. One of the more interesting aspects of the day's activities was a guest appearance by an advisor to a pro-government Minister. Trusting Hind, the official had agreed to the visit the training site, where he engaged in a lively discussion with the activists. Strong feelings were expressed on both sides, but in a civil manner.

*Peacemaker Nozizwe
Madlala-Routledge of
South Africa*



The next day, Nozizwe listened to the activists tell their stories. There was a visit to a cultural site and then cause for more celebration, as an Alawite woman and a Sunni man wed, a joyous occasion demonstrating love and interfaith harmony in a land strained by sectarian differences.

On Wednesday, January 22, Nozizwe led her own training on transitional justice for 20 Syrian activists. Drawing on South Africa's experience after Apartheid, she presented her messages to students primarily from Aleppo and Idlib. According to Hind, they loved her.

In addition to a more traditional slide show presentation, Nozizwe screened two films, one about the negotiations process in South Africa and the other about the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation,

which investigated human rights violations by both the government and liberation movements during Apartheid.

In her discussion with the students, Nozizwe talked about two types of justice – retributive and restorative – and how a holistic approach to transitional justice can complement concepts of retribution and restoration. While prosecuting perpetrators of gross human rights violations is a key form of justice, there are times when amnesty is crucial to reconciliation. Nozizwe also outlined the basis for truth and reconciliation commissions (e.g., minimum requirements for international legitimacy, limitations and realistic goals), making sure the activists understood that you do not realize justice in the traditional sense. In addition to providing a living example of transition from violent, repressive authoritarian rule to more inclusive democracy, Nozizwe affirmed the importance of the role of women in negotiation, justice and reconciliation processes. Quoting Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the South African Executive Director of UN Women, she told the activists, “We cannot win with half of the team left outside of the game.”

Nozizwe wanted the activists to realize that she had experienced the same kind of unimaginable situation in her home country. She had been in pain, engulfed in hate, and was even hopeless. She had even spent a year isolated, in solitary confinement. Nevertheless, Nozizwe challenged the activists to move past feelings of loss and revenge and to believe that “things can and will change.” Their inspiration was standing right in front of them.

“It was all about giving people the skills for appropriate responses to normal daily violence, but also the violence of the state. I think the point was for them to realize that they have something to strive for together, even though they are still divided.”

At the end of her week with Hind and the activists in Jordan, Nozizwe felt encouraged by the progress she witnessed over the course of just a few short days. She believes the Syrians who participated

in her session will come to appreciate how much they all have in common from being together, and will further pursue the concept of transitional justice when they “go back to their communities and replicate what they have learned in the workshop.”

Lessons from Bosnia-Herzegovina: Friar Ivo Inspires

On February 22, 2014, Friar Ivo Markovic landed in Amman, Jordan, where he would deliver his seminars on reconciliation and share invaluable moments with the Syrian activists for six days. When recalling his first encounter with the activists, Friar Ivo used the words “depression” and “disappointment” to describe the “orientation” of the Syrians. He sensed a “feeling of powerlessness” from the men and women who would be his new students.

Similar to Nozizwe, Friar Ivo had a couple of days to become acclimated to his new environment before conducting his first training. He had the opportunity to join Hind and the activists on a trip to the Dead Sea on the first day. It was during this excursion that Friar Ivo got to know the students.

The next day, Hind and Friar Ivo traveled north to the Syrian-Jordan border, visiting a hospital in Irbid. Carrying a “big suitcase full of medicine,” as well as toys for the children in the hospital, the two *Peacemakers* presented their gifts to the staff and patients. Looking back, they describe it as an uplifting moment for everyone.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2014 and Thursday, February 27, 2014, Friar Ivo gave his seminars to two different groups of activists, ultimately training 40 activists. His theme was “Reconciliation from the Bosnian experience.” Friar Ivo’s homeland, much like Syria today, had served as the stage for proxy battles among competing regional powers; and the Bosnian people, just like many present-day Syrians, were divided and without hope.

The horrors of the war in Syria were very real and personal for the activists. Two girls had been affected by the chemical attack in Mo-adamiya in August 2013, witnessing the death of their peers. They

**The horrors of
the war in Syria
were very real
and personal for
the activists.**

asked Friar Ivo how they could overcome their anger and suppress the desire for revenge. The *Peacemaker* explained that such feelings can lead to counterproductive behavior, as hate breeds more hate and revenge leads to more revenge. Instead, Friar Ivo encouraged – and inspired – the activists to seek justice against those responsible for such war crimes; but, as he reminded his students, not everyone, because you cannot punish everyone just because they were on the other side.

Friar Ivo stressed the importance of nonviolent solutions during his sessions. Fully understanding the nature of violent conflict, he reinforced the point that the activists would not be able to achieve their goals through war. Though he had personally experienced the loss of loved ones in war and an immediate desire for revenge, he had not taken that path. Indeed, Friar Ivo's experiences in Bosnia had taught him that "peaceful actions, nonviolent actions and negotiations" were stronger than war itself. His model centered on his belief that "peace is stronger than violence." Presenting a jarring hypothetical, Friar Ivo posited a scenario in which the opposition made peace with Assad and his government, much like his own people had come to (peace) terms with former President Slobodan Milošević in the former Yugoslavia.

Friar Ivo's experiences in Bosnia had taught him that "peaceful actions, nonviolent actions and negotiations" were stronger than war itself.

As a practitioner of the arts, Friar Ivo founded Pontanima, an inter-religious choir based in Sarajevo, in 1996. He therefore introduced

As a result of the civil war in Syria, there are 3,026,038 Syrian refugees at the time of this writing.

music and theater to the activists as an unorthodox, but effective, peacebuilding technique for bringing opposing sides together to find common ground in non-threatening environments. Recalling this part of his training, Hind recounted the incredible moment when everyone burst into song, singing “Allahu Akbar” and “Hallelujah” together. To mobilize such approaches to peacebuilding in Syria, Friar Ivo implored his students to become educators themselves. As leaders and organizers within their communities, the activists will ultimately have to inspire their fellow Syrians to overcome their differences so they can choose reconciliation and peace over violence and war.

By the end of the week, and in stark contrast to his initial impressions, Friar Ivo believed the Syrian activists had changed. Instead of despair, they had hope, exuding the mentality of “I can do something, we can do something.” Friar Ivo had inspired them.

The *Peacemakers* Visit Zaatari Refugee Camp

As a result of the civil war in Syria, there are 3,026,038 Syrian refugees at the time of this writing. Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, which opened on July 28, 2012, is home to a registered 80,230 Syrian refugees, mostly from Da’ara Governorate in Syria. Unofficial statistics indicate that the actual number of refugees is 120,000. The camp is evenly split between men and women but over 55% of its population is under the age of 18. Zaatari has enjoyed some success in offering education – in 2013, 18,000 children were enrolled in the camp’s schools – but it has also experienced periods of violence, as well as extremely difficult living conditions. And this makes learning difficult.

Both Nozizwe and Friar Ivo had opportunities to visit Zaatari Refugee Camp during their stays in Jordan.

Nozizwe traveled to the camp with Hind’s daughter, Nousha, who – like her mother – works closely with Syrian activists and refugees in the Middle East. Barred from meeting the refugees in their homes, Nozizwe interacted with school children “just going about getting an education.” They also encountered people outside and in the camp’s street stalls. For Nozizwe, her most moving experience at Zaatari occurred when she met “young people” who were being confined



TDA



TDA

at the camp's detention center for getting into trouble. Having been subjected to horrific violence back home in Syria, they behaved poorly in the camp. But even as this troubled her, Nowzize remained optimistic, observing that the refugees were "trying to find ways to keep themselves occupied in positive ways."

Friar Ivo's first impression of Zaatari, a dreary-looking desert camp from the outside looking in, was not a good one. But once inside, he found that life was better organized than he had expected it would be. He came across people working with children – children who were "playing in the streets." Friar Ivo compared the Syrian children and their life in the camp with his experiences dealing with children in Bosnia, where such camps weren't nearly as "professional" during the war years in the 1990's.

Better conditions at Zaatari Refugee Camp, especially when it comes to education, have been attributed to the millions of dollars of aid money that has funded various programs over the past few years, including contributions made by the European Union.

Days in Istanbul and Gaziantep: Unanticipated Rewards of the *Network*

A second phase of the Syrian intervention occurred on August 13 – 16, 2014 in Turkey. This particular project was designed to build on Hind's ongoing efforts in the region and the prior workshops conducted in Jordan with Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge and Friar Ivo Markovic. Based on those trainings, the Syrian activists called on Hind to provide another phase of workshops. Always willing to help her countrymen and countrywomen, especially during these dark days of civil war, Hind obliged and prepared new trainings in conflict resolution, transitional justice and dealing with extremism. With Tanenbaum, she once again leveraged the *Network* and brought her fellow *Peacemaker*, Friar Ivo, to Turkey to help her.

Friar Ivo arrived in Istanbul on August 12, 2014, where he would stay for three days. Working closely with The Day After organization (TDA), a Syrian-led civil society organization based in Turkey, Hind helped organize a special interfaith event for the next evening. Fifty attendees squeezed into a small room, where Friar Ivo and two other

prominent religious leaders, Sheikh Jawdat Said from Syria and Rabbi Marc Gopin from the United States, spoke for three hours about the conflict in Syria.

It was a provocative discussion. Sheikh Said put blame on both sides for the years of violence. From his perspective, the Syrian Government was using the opposition's (violent) responses to its own crimes as "a justification for an escalation of the aggression by the regime." Examining the role of religion in the conflict, Rabbi Gopin explained that "religion is always at its worst" when those in power are able to co-opt religion to further advance their political agendas.

Echoing Hind, Friar Ivo lamented how religion and identity have been manipulated by groups more interested in armed conflict than peace. For him, this is the critical challenge faced by the Syrians in their struggle for peace. But he believes that, despite this reality, religious leaders can and must have a positive impact. This theme was reflected by the other speakers as well. They stressed that instead of dividing Syrians, respected leaders of different faiths can serve as role models, defending the rule of law, promoting tolerance and paving the way toward a safer environment for people to interact with each other.

The next day, August 14, Friar Ivo conducted his four-hour training for 20 Syrian peace activists in Istanbul. With Hind translating, he related his experiences in Bosnia to the current Syrian situation, speaking about transitional justice, extremism, war crimes and arts-inspired peacemaking methodology. At the end of the session, Friar Ivo lightened the mood, showcasing a movie and various paintings he had with him.

Learning from the questions posed in Jordan, Friar Ivo came prepared to talk about specific examples from the Bosnian war years, including some of the communications strategies he had used and his international outreach. He also discussed which peacebuilding approaches worked for various NGOs and religious organizations in his homeland.

Some of his counsel at first seems counter-intuitive. For example, when he noted how dialogue can lead to confrontation because

“people are [so] full of emotions and pain.” But there are ways to get around this:

“Sometimes it is better to take people for a walk or to a concert. That’s what happens with art. You take people out of life - in prayer, in concerts. And then they start different communications without any mentioning of the problems and conflicts they have. Now they meet as human beings in one environment fully different than everyday life. And then they come back in dialogue, and it is extremely different.”

During the conversations about extremism that emerged throughout the trip, ISIS featured prominently. It was the subject on Friar Ivo’s lips when he arrived in Turkey. One of his first questions for Hind was how a Free Syrian Army officer he had befriended in Jordan was faring. Hind sadly shared that the officer, whom Friar Ivo describes as a “very dear man,” had been kidnapped and killed by ISIS because he was seen as a moderate figure. Even though Friar Ivo was shocked to hear the devastating news, he took it as a sobering reminder of how dangerous the local environment is for the Syrian peace activists.

During his training, the subject emerged again. Friar Ivo provided advice and compared his experiences from the Balkan wars. He advised the activists to avoid contact with members of ISIS at all costs. Because ISIS targets the same people the activists are trying to help, disenfranchised Syrians suffering from a lack of education and employment, hopeless people “just looking for a sense of life,” it poses a risk for the activists. He also noted how, much like in Bosnia, the Syrian government has taken advantage of the rise of violent extremists, allowing competing groups to fight among themselves in strategically unimportant territory.

For Hind, ISIS is yet another cruel challenge for her people to overcome.

“The activists feel like they used to have one enemy, and now they see that they have two enemies.” - Hind Kabawat

One of the extremist tactics of oppression is systematic rape, a war

crime Friar Ivo knows all too well. This was also true for the Syrian activists, some of whom had family members who had been raped. Speaking from experience, Friar Ivo spoke about trauma relief and the importance of fighting the natural urge to take revenge against such unspeakable crimes.

All of the questions and the discussion evoked vivid memories. But perhaps the hardest was when the Syrian activists asked Fr. Ivo what they should do when they returned to their homes in Syria after the training. Understanding the myriad of threats they face in their war-torn country, Friar Ivo simply said, stay connected and “just survive” for now.

After finishing his training session in Istanbul, Friar Ivo boarded a plane that night for Gaziantep, a city in southeast Turkey, and home to over 200,000 Syrian refugees. Only there for one full day, Hind made sure Friar Ivo’s trip would be productive and impactful.

During the day, Friar Ivo met with members of the opposition, including leaders in the Free Syrian Army. Hind’s goal was for Friar Ivo to impress upon the group the importance of “defending minorities and civil security.”

Friar Ivo described the meeting as “great” and invited the opposition members to send a representative group to Bosnia to speak with both military and economic advisors from his country. He also especially remembered some of the people he met. Like the economic adviser, who explained that he and his colleagues were trying to “open new workplaces” and “find jobs for tens of thousands of people.” And the Syrian Christian man, who openly criticized religious leaders who had cooperated with President Assad.

In the evening, Friar Ivo concluded his visit to Gaziantep. Again, in coordination with TDA, Hind arranged for Friar Ivo to lecture at a special three-hour event. Moderated by Wael Sawah, TDA’s Executive Director, Friar Ivo spoke to a large audience, including local politicians, NGO representatives and the media. In front of 100 guests – Alawites, Christians and Sunnis – he explained to the Syrians that “the model of Bosnia could be their model.” After his 30-minute speech, Friar Ivo engaged in a lively question and answer session, as

TDA



“the short-term goal is to connect people together – to get them to work together and build bridges in all areas – to build a network.”

TDA



well as various interviews with the press.

The next morning, a tired Friar Ivo returned to Sarajevo. It was an exhausting trip, just like the one to Jordan, but fulfilling. When asked why the *Peacemakers* do what they do, Friar Ivo responded, “That is our work. For me, it is a vocation. Not a job!”

Making an Impact: Intervention Outcomes for Syrian Peace Activists

Hind Kabawat wants nothing more than a democratic, peaceful Syria, and she is determined to help her fellow Syrians realize that goal. When Hind developed the trainings for her workshops, she had three main objectives. She wanted the Syrian peace activists: to develop conflict resolution skills; to empower and build the capacity of the activists to broaden regional coalitions and social networks; and to prepare themselves to lead reconciliation efforts across sectarian divides in a post-war Syria.

By inviting her fellow *Peacemakers* to participate in her programs in Jordan and Turkey, Hind sought to ensure that the activists would learn about transitional justice, reconciliation and the importance of working together to find peaceful solutions to extremely difficult problems. To assess the impact of the trainings, Hind and her partners at the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution designed and implemented pre-training and post-training participant questionnaires, training observations and interviews with selected activists.

The evaluation results for the trainings in Jordan were encouraging. For the weeklong sessions including Nozizwe’s and Friar Ivo’s workshops in Jordan, 90% of the activists rated their understanding of civil society and transitional justice after their training as either a 4 or 5 (on a scale of 1 [low] to 5 [high]), a 26.7% increase from pre-training figures. Using that same scale, 84.3% of activists reported post-survey ratings of a 4 or 5 for their understanding of conflict resolution and mediation skills, a 46% increase from pre-training figures.

In rating their ability to build coalitions and to work with members of different opposition groups, respectively, the activists registered

a 20% percent increase (from 3.2 pre-training to 4.2 for coalition building post-training) and a 21.6% increase (from 3.22 pre-training to 4.3 for working with members of different opposition groups post-training). When one of the activists trained by Nozizwe brought a fellow trainee to work on crafts in one of the refugee camps just weeks after their workshop, Hind was excited: “the short-term goal is to connect people together – to get them to work together and build bridges in all areas – to build a network.”

The positive impact Friar Ivo had on the activists during the third part of the intervention in Turkey is clearly evident from Tanenbaum’s post-intervention interviews with its *Peacemakers*. The Syrians in Turkey, like those in Jordan, interacted and developed relationships with their fellow peace activists, all from a diverse mix of religious traditions (Christians, Alawites and Sunnis), regions and ages. In addition to their workshops on transitional justice, civil society building and non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, they also saw first-hand how religious leaders – including religiously inspired women – can play an important role in defending the rule of law and forging peace during violent times.

The activists drew inspiration from their encounters with Tanenbaum *Peacemakers*. Many in Turkey shared how they were moved by Friar Ivo’s words and how he had dealt with extremism, revenge and systematic rape in Bosnia, and how he had moved beyond the horror and loss, and found a way forward. Participants confided to Hind that Friar Ivo seemed like a “father figure” and a “mentor.”

Concrete, tangible outcomes from the Syria intervention in Turkey have been reported. Friar Ivo’s workshop in Istanbul inspired a hospital director to open a room in his hospital (on the Syrian/Turkish border) to give people a safe place to exchange ideas. And other activists have leveraged Friar Ivo’s training for their own work with Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) refugee camps to promote conflict resolution and reconciliation among people from differing sects.

Conclusion

The *Peacemakers*’ knowledge, lived experiences and common bond

demonstrate the value of their *Network* around the world. They are a resource, especially where local activists struggle to end civil strife in their communities. As inspirational instructors and living examples of successful conflict mediators in their homelands, the *Peacemakers*, through the *Network*, are ready and willing to work with and learn from each other to help build peace wherever they can.

But they do not provide a quick fix. Ending the tragic Syrian war and achieving peace will take time, energy and fortitude by those dedicated to living together in a united Syria. What lies ahead for the Syrian peace activists is daunting and dangerous. Their work will not be easy. They will have to overcome many obstacles, and their lives will often be at risk.

Today, these activists are more skilled and better prepared to resolve sectarian conflicts and move the healing process forward. The efforts of Hind Kabawat, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge and Friar Ivo Markovic, three Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* representing the *Peacemakers in Action Network*, are one important reason why these brave Syrians now see a light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

Bibliography

AlJazeera. Timeline of Syria's raging war. Accessed on 1/22/15 from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/02/201225111654512841.html>

BBC. Syria accused of torture and 11,000 executions. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25822571>

BBC. Syria crisis: Guide to armed and political opposition. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24403003>

Cumming-Bruce, Nick. 5,500 Iraqis Killed Since Islamic State Began Its Military Drive, U.N. Says. The New York Times. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/middleeast/un-reports-at-least-26000-civilian-casualties-in-iraq-conflict-this-year.html?_r=0

Greenwood, Phoebe. Rape and domestic violence follow Syrian women into refugee camps. The Guardian. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/25/rape-violence-syria-women-refugee-camp>

Haddad, Mohammed and Lauren Williams. Syria: three million tragedies. Al-Jazeera. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2014/06/interactive-syria-life-line-2014619125452612758.html>

Huffington Post. Hind Kabawat. Accessed on 1/23/15 from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hind-kabawat/>

Human Rights Watch. Human Rights in Syria. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <https://www.hrw.org/node/122834>

Kabawat, Hind. Syria's Christian conundrum. CNN. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://global-publicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/08/syrias-christian-conundrum/>

Karouny, Mariam and Sylvia Westall. Video shows Islamic State executes scores of Syrian soldiers. Reuters. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/28/us-syria-crisis-idUSKBN0GS10020140828>

Mroue, Bassem. Syria allows aid into 2 contested areas. Associated Press. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/activists-1069-killed-syrian-rebel-infighting>

Osman, Hibaqq. Where are the Syrian women at the Geneva peace talks? The Guardian. Accessed on 11/05/14 from: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/23/syria-women-geneva-peace-talks>

PBS Newshour. At Home in Zaatari: Life in a Syrian Refugee Camp. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east-july-dec13-zaataricamp_09-07/

Sarkis, Caroline E. Transition to a United Syrian Civil Society: Monitoring and Evaluation Midterm Report April 2014. Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution

Shmulovich, Mishelle. In Zaatari refugee camp, early marriage often trumps school. Al-Monitor.

Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/jordan-zaatari-schools-syrian-refugess.html>

Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. Chapter 2: The Diplomat's Daughter: Pursuing Peace in Syria. *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Volume II* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

The Day After. About TDA. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://tda-sy.org/about-us/about-the-day-after-report/?lang=en>

The Day After. TDA holds a meeting with three religious leaders and proponents of nonviolence. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: http://tda-sy.org/conversation_tda/?lang=en

UNHCR. Woman Alone: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://unhcr.org/womanalonemedia/>

UNHCR. Syria Regional Refugee Response. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

United Nations. First UN report on children in Syria's civil war paints picture of 'unspeakable' horrors. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47077&Cr=syria&Cr1=#.Uw-hyvldXb9>

United Nations. More than 191,000 people killed in Syria with 'no end in sight' – UN. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48535#.VFrZZRxOHs0>

USAID. Syria. Accessed on 11/05/2014 from: <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>