

Peacemakers in Action Podcast Transcript

Show Notes

- [Meet the Peacemakers in Action](#)
- Two volumes of case studies published by Cambridge University Press:
 - [Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution](#)
Edited by David Little (Volume I)
 - [Peacemakers in Action: Volume II, Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding](#)
Edited by Joyce S. Dubensky (Volume II)
- Two new *Peacemaker in Action* Awardees:
 - [Yeny Gloribel Nolasco Quijada](#)
 - [Fatima al-Bahadly](#)
- More about *Network* Interventions: [Peacemaker in Action Network Interventions](#)
- To support Tanenbaum's work, [click here to Donate](#)

Introducing *Peacemakers in Action* (Episode 1) Transcript:

MARK FOWLER: Take a quick look at the news headlines on any given day and you'll be reminded that — around the world — devastating armed conflicts are destroying lives and whole communities, often in the name of religion.

DEMOCRACY NOW: In Sri Lanka, nearly 300 people were killed and more than 500 were injured after a series of bomb attacks tore through churches and luxury hotels across the island nation Sunday.

VOICE OF AMERICA: More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims quickly fled a scorched earth campaign unleashed by the Myanmar military.

VOICE OF AMERICA: We turn our attention to the South Caucasus, where a conflict between majority Christian Armenia and majority Muslim Azerbaijan may be in danger of erupting into all-out war.

MARK FOWLER: Hidden in the news, if reported on at all, are the brave religiously-motivated actors working to bring peace and reconciliation to their people. These inspiring individuals offer critical insights and skills for addressing today's most urgent conflicts. And it's time you heard about them.

With 80 percent of the world's population claiming to identify with some kind of spiritual tenet or faith tradition, religion is truly a powerful force in everyday life, affecting all manner of decision making. Yet, for some reason, we devote precious little time to learning how to navigate the differences in our beliefs — let alone respect them.

As an interfaith minister, I know this problem all too well. And as CEO of Tanenbaum, I get to work on solving it. Since our founding in 1992, Tanenbaum has been a secular, non-sectarian nonprofit that designs trainings and resources to promote justice and build respect for religious differences. We work across many sectors of society, from education to health care, and we partner with corporations to bring this understanding to workplaces around the world.

But one thing we've learned over the years is that there may be no better tool for teaching peace than having living, breathing examples, who model how it's done. That's why we actively seek out such heroes around the world, support their work, connect them with one another, and tell their stories.

We've published two volumes of case studies, profiling religiously-motivated *Peacemakers* — men and women driven by their religious beliefs to end death and destruction, even at the risk of their own life. And we've seen the positive impact these books have had on educators, students, diplomats and others doing humanitarian work. But rather than create another volume of case studies in book form, we're bringing you this podcast series — so you can meet and hear from the *Peacemakers* yourself.

Before we dive into any one person's story, though, it will be helpful for you to understand how Tanenbaum has come to know and work with so many *Peacemakers*. And to get that backstory, I need to turn to my predecessor and friend.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: I'm Joyce Dubensky, and I'm currently the CEO emeritus, senior strategic advisor to Tanenbaum.

MARK FOWLER: Joyce led Tanenbaum for 18 years before stepping down in 2020. And one of her many achievements — along with Tanenbaum Founder and Board President Dr. Georgette Bennett — was the creation of Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action* Program, which consists of a biennial award given to two international *Peacemakers* and the *Network* those awardees have formed.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: The concept of an award for the *Peacemakers in Action* started with a conversation.

MARK FOWLER: It was 1997 and Tanenbaum's founder, Georgette Bennett, was talking with former U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who Tanenbaum had just honored with an award for his life's work in diplomacy.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: And Ambassador Holbrooke said to her "It's very nice that you honor me. But really, the people you should be honoring are people who have never been heard of,

whose lives are at risk. And if you give them an award for their really heroic actions, they can be protected.”

MARK FOWLER: The advice was quickly heeded, as Tanenbaum launched the *Peacemaker in Action* award a year later in 1998.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: And the first one went to Friar Ivo Markovic.

IVO MARKOVIC: I'm Ivo Markovic, Bosnian Franciscan, practical theologian, peace activist.

MARK FOWLER: A Catholic Bosnian Croat, Friar Ivo was a force for reconciliation in the midst of the violent, sectarian conflict following the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1992. Sometimes he played the role of advocate, encouraging his fellow Christians to appeal to local politicians, trying to get them to not inflame the violence. Other times, he raised awareness of the conflict to the outside world or served as a mediator, bringing disparate groups together. But, by 1998, three years after the war in Bosnia had ended, Ivo was at a real low point.

IVO MARKOVIC: I was very exhausted, really. I had a feeling that all my work was in vain, useless.

MARK FOWLER: Peacebuilding can be tiring, thankless work. So, it seems Tanenbaum's award came along at just the right time for Ivo.

IVO MARKOVIC: The Tanenbaum *Peacemakers in Action* Award had a very positive effect on me personally, and generally encouraged me to keep working on my peace mission.

MARK FOWLER: Having been such an outspoken figure in Bosnia, Ivo was often criticized by the media and other leading public figures.

IVO MARKOVIC: But when I received the award witnessed by Kofi Annan and Richard Holbrooke, really, it gave strength to my person and a better position in society. I became more popular. So that was important. [Laughs]

MARK FOWLER: After Ivo became Tanenbaum's first *Peacemaker in Action* awardee, we continued to award religious peace actors. Over time, we began giving the award to two recipients every two years. By 2007, it was time to publish our first volume of case studies. By 2007, it was time to publish our first volume of case studies.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: We try to tell their story from a young age, and then we do a critical analysis, taking their story and mapping it onto the theories that have developed in the field of religious peacebuilding because it is an emerging field that has really come into its own in the last 20 years.

MARK FOWLER: Part of that analysis in the first volume of case studies included identifying 10 techniques used by religious *Peacemakers*.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: And it was in the second volume where we began to really consider how the 10 techniques that they used were not all unique to religious peacebuilders. They

were also being used by secular peacebuilders, by people doing humanitarian work, by people doing development work, by people doing security work.

MARK FOWLER: And this realization helped us further define what makes religious peacemaking its own field.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: We came to understand religious peacebuilding as unique because of the motivation of the peace builders — of how they saw the universe and the humanity they saw in other people. But always what they are doing involves peacebuilding.

MARK FOWLER: As of right now, Spring 2021, we have awarded 34 *Peacemakers in Action* from 23 different conflict zones, including our most recent awardees Yeny Nolasco from El Salvador and Fatimah Al Bahadly from Iraq.

AZZA KARAM: I think that what Tanenbaum does is precious. It has such a unique way of researching, identifying and in many ways honoring these *Peacemakers*.

MARK FOWLER: This is Azza Karam, secretary general of Religions for Peace and a member of Tanenbaum's Peacebuilding Program Advisory Council.

AZZA KARAM: Wisdom means nothing, if we don't know it. And what the Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* award helps all do is actually identify those giving the wisdom, those holding the wisdom, and therefore to be able to learn from them. And I'm just incredibly grateful to feel privileged to be part of that process.

MARK FOWLER: So, how do we select recipients, you might be wondering? Well, the process has evolved a bit over the years, but it begins by soliciting nominations from around the globe following five basic criteria:

- Our *Peacemakers* must be religiously driven to pursue peace;
- They must work, or have worked, in an armed conflict and at the local level;
- They have to have their lives or freedom at risk;
- and finally, they must be relatively unknown. In other words, not a Desmond Tutu or Malala.

After the nominations come in, Tanenbaum's staff reviews and ranks the top 15 candidates according to the five criteria. Then, from that list, our Program Advisory Council, a group of scholars and experts in the field of religious peacebuilding, select the two winners — one of whom must be a woman.

MARIA IDA "DENG" GIGUIENTO: When Tanenbaum actually called me, I was surprised. It's the first time that I get recognized for what I was doing.

MARK FOWLER: This is 2015 *Peacemaker in Action* awardee Maria Ida Giguiento, known to all as Deng — a peacebuilder in the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao, where she has worked for more than 20 years creating alliances among conflicting Christian, Muslim and Indigenous groups.

MARIA IDA "DENG" GIGUIENTO: For somebody who is not used to the limelight, it has helped me a lot. It's something that helps me feel more confident, more sure of myself.

MARK FOWLER: While it's hard to imagine someone who has stared down the barrel of a gun needing a confidence boost, it goes to show how little recognition most *Peacemakers* receive. Tanenbaum's award is just one small step toward honoring the work of religious peacebuilders in our global society. But increased public recognition isn't all that comes with the award. *Peacemakers* also receive \$15,000 to reinforce their work and membership into a worldwide practitioners' network, consisting of all previous Tanenbaum *Peacemakers*. They call it the *Peacemakers in Action Network* — and it's maybe the most powerful component of the award. Yet, at the same time, as Joyce recalls, it's also something Tanenbaum never planned for.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: Bringing the *Peacemakers* together, I think happened opportunistically.

MARK FOWLER: Prince Hassan of Jordan, a serious advocate for peacebuilding, heard about Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers* and thought it would be a good idea to bring them together and offer them some sort of training that might enhance their work. So, in 2004, he invited them to Jordan. Over the several-day gathering that took place in Amman, the dozen or so *Peacemakers* heard from a number of speakers Tanenbaum brought in — ranging from a UN spokesperson to a Newsweek bureau chief.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: But what happened was that the *Peacemakers* began to know each other a little bit and meet with each other.

MARK FOWLER: The training was completely overshadowed by the camaraderie these unique individuals began to form. For many of the *Peacemakers*, it was rare to meet others who not only shared the same values and principles, but also had similar experiences taking risks for those same values and principles.

IVO MARKOVIC: It was really a blessing to have opportunity to travel, to meet *Peacemakers*, inspire with their faith, to compare our experiences.

MARK FOWLER: Wanting to build on the connections our *Peacemakers* formed in Amman, Tanenbaum made a point of holding a working retreat every 2-3 years. By the third retreat in 2007, the *Peacemakers* were becoming a really tight group. Joyce recalls, at one point, how Dr. Bill Lowrey, a *Peacemaker* who worked in the part of Sudan that is now South Sudan, turned to the group and said...

JOYCE DUBENSKY: “You know, we call ourselves a network, but we're not. What we are is a group of individuals, who are happy to see one another when we do, brought together periodically by Tannenbaum, where we learn a little bit and then go back to our lives.” And he said, “There's a question for us. Do we want to be a network? Do we want to have a purpose and a commitment? And really work together for peace in addition to the work that we do in our respective communities?”

MARK FOWLER: Out of the discussion that ensued emerged a commitment to formalize their relationship.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: That, I think, was the pivotal moment where things changed, and we really began thinking about what would it be to be an active *Peacemakers Network*.

MARK FOWLER: Over the next few years, they formed a committee — with some outside experts recommended by Tanenbaum — to figure out how they would structure their relationships to support ongoing engagement and collective action. Then, at the next working retreat in 2011, they finalized their plans.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: By the end of the week, they had selected a leadership council, defined a new mission for this network, and it was unanimously adopted as an activity that the *Peacemakers* present wanted.

MARK FOWLER: Even before formalizing the network, however, the *Peacemakers* had begun to collaborate. In 2009, a delegation of Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* were invited to Jerusalem, where they participated in a panel discussion on "Religion as a force for Reconciliation." Then, in 2011, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye organized a delegation of their fellow *Peacemakers* to reach out to Nigerian communities ahead of a potentially violent election season.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: We helped get them there — a Muslim from Pakistan, a Jewish man who had worked in Israel for 25 years and a Christian from Sarajevo.

MARK FOWLER: As they traveled the country, these *Peacemakers* spoke to all sectors of society. Ivo Markovic recalls the experience well.

IVO MARKOVIC: Mostly we counseled the *Peacemakers*, media workers, journalists, politicians, organizers of elections, mediating to them our experiences from regions we came from.

MARK FOWLER: Basically, they were offering any wisdom they could on how to maintain peace during an election.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: The result was that it contributed to less violence in the country before that election than had been occurring up until then.

MARK FOWLER: For Yehezkel Landau, the Israeli member of the delegation, the highlight was when the group appeared on Nigerian television.

YEHEZKEL LANDAU: One of the things I got to do was blow my ram's horn, my shofar, which is a liturgical instrument in Judaism.

MARK FOWLER: This was significant because the shofar is blown not only on the high holidays, but also in connection with the 50th year of a Jubilee cycle. And it just so happened that 2010 marked the 50th year of Nigeria's independence.

YEHEZKEL LANDAU: I hope that helped people see that we really cared for them and that we wanted to help them as best we could as outsiders to see their own conflict from a different perspective. And not as an us versus them binary conflict that had no hope of being healed or reconciled.

MARK FOWLER: Many Nigerians were in fact touched by the delegation's efforts, and that helped Imam Ashafa and Pastor James gain greater access and recognition for their own work in Nigeria.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: They said it was very useful for them in their country and very meaningful for people to see a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew together as peacemakers from around the world caring about this and working together.

MARK FOWLER: Given the success of these collaborations, the *Peacemakers* decided to make them a formal part of their network, and started calling them *Peacemaker Interventions*.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: At the next working retreat, we began talking about having interventions. Tanenbaum's role was to support a local activity of a peace builder by bringing other *Peacemakers in Action* who could help them achieve their goals. And we've done a number of them since then.

MARK FOWLER: Eleven to be precise, taking place in a dozen or so countries.

MARIA IDA "DENG" GIGUIENTO: As members of Tanenbaum, I think that working together really made us closer.

MARK FOWLER: This is Deng from the Philippines, again.

MARIA IDA "DENG" GIGUIENTO: The way we would laugh together, the way we would, you know, like, relate with each other, it seems like we've known each other for years.

MARK FOWLER: Just like the Network itself, the interventions are something Tanenbaum never planned for when we created our *Peacemakers in Action* Award 23 years ago. It's just another happy outcome of bringing these incredible people together.

JOYCE DUBENSKY: They've come to know each other not only through the retreats, but through ongoing calls and even a WhatsApp group, and by knowing each other, they can ask a *Peacemaker* who makes a difference in their country and in their community to come and help them.

MARK FOWLER: That's exactly what Ivo Markovic did in 2019, when he invited Indonesian *Peacemaker* Jacky Manuputty to Bosnia. Like Ivo, Jacky is a Christian minister, with lots of experience doing interfaith peacebuilding. In particular, it was helpful for Ivo to see how Christians and Muslims work together in Indonesia, which then led him to rethink his own approach to working with Muslims in Bosnia.

IVO MARKOVIC: We Europeans and especially Americans, we feel so superior to this Asia, we think that we are better. But they have so fine projects in Indonesia that we Europeans and you Americans have something to learn from them.

MARK FOWLER: In one of our later episodes this season, we'll actually explore Jacky Manuputty's work in Indonesia up close — along with his dramatic personal transformation from blessing Christian fighters heading into battle to then later brokering peace at the highest levels.

JACKLEVYN “JACKY” MANUPUTTY: It always haunts me and remind me that “Hey, you have homework ... You have to pay back because you were the one, the religious leader, religious actor who used and manipulate the power of divine intervention to mobilize people to kill one another. It's like a nightmare.”

MARK FOWLER: But first — in our next episode — we're going to hear from Sri Lankan *Peacemaker* Dishani Jayaweera — another one of Ivo's dear friends.

IVO MARKOVIC: Dishani Jayaweera is a person you can't help loving her. She is a very dear person, really surrender the compassionate, happy, full of dynamic joy, enthusiastic, coming from Buddhist spirituality.

MARK FOWLER: In Dishani's episode, we'll hear her story of growing up during Sri Lanka's civil war, struggling to find a way to apply her passion for justice and ultimately succeeding in building a powerful network of dedicated local peacebuilders.

DISHANI JAYAWEERA: My dream is to build a movement, right? How small it is, okay. But it is quality too. It is practicing totally different principles in life than what we are practicing, and based on love. Deeper love. And on that deeper love we will talk about politics, economy and even about your enemy.

MARK FOWLER: We're also going to have bonus episodes that bring religious scholars and conflict analysts into the conversation, helping to underscore the value and unique contributions of each *Peacemaker*.

So, join us over the next four episodes, as we give voice and recognition to the brave and inspiring people bringing peace to our world.

You can subscribe to *Peacemakers in Action* wherever you listen to podcasts. And, if you want to give us a little boost, leave us a rating and review on [Apple Podcasts](#). It helps others find the show.

We also encourage you to visit our website, tanenbaum.org, where we have lots of additional resources related to this episode, including a full transcript. You can also learn more about our *Peacemaker in Action* award, the *Peacemakers in Action Network* and past case studies. And, if you'd like to support our work — so that we can make more episodes like this one — please visit our [donate page](#).

Now for the credits:

I'm your host, Mark Fowler, Tanenbaum CEO.

This episode was written, edited and produced by Bryan Farrell.

Tanenbaum Peacebuilding Assistant Director and series creator Janie Dumbleton, served as Co-producer, along with Tanenbaum *Peacemakers in Action Network* Coordinator Élie Khoury.

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