

Sustainability is a great challenge for peacebuilding in a region known for never-ending wars. This creates peace donor fatigue. When the media broadcast stories about conflict, then money flows to the area, but when these broadcasts stop so does the money. This makes it difficult to plan for long-lasting peace and sustainable development, and the cycles of conflict continue.

Another challenge that intersectionality work highlighted is the need to deal with perceptions of superiority and inferiority among participants, including clergy. People who came from different “levels” (high level, mid-level, grassroots level) had to find a way to connect and respect one another. In the end, they used the local metaphor “One finger cannot wash the face” to encourage connection and peace among the leadership.

Fidele Lumeya is Co-founder and Senior Researcher at Congo Ubuntu Peacebuilding Center, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and COO of the Congolese American Council for Peace and Development.

GI Rights Hotline: Expanding the Peacemaking Arena

In 1994 a group of agencies and individuals in the United States, who were providing counsel to active duty military personnel, gathered to form the GI Rights Hotline.⁵ The Hotline is a free phone counseling service that anyone in the military can call if they are seeking information about military regulations or practices related to difficulties they are experiencing. While the primary initiative for the Hotline came from agencies in the peace movement with years of experience in draft counseling, today’s counselors include a wide variety of people, including veterans, who are concerned about protecting the rights, health, and well-being of military personnel in the midst of a system that can be very dehumanizing.

I began participating in the Hotline as a counselor in 2001, while working as a peace educator for Mennonite Central Committee U.S. (MCC). One of my first calls came from a young soldier in Japan who had become a conscientious objector to war and was seeking a discharge based on her

⁵ For information, see www.girightshotline.org.

commitment to Buddhist principles of nonviolence. At the time I thought this type of engagement with U.S. military personnel was new and unique for Mennonites. But years later, while digging through the archives of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO, now known as the Center on Conscience & War), I learned that work like this had actually begun fifty years earlier.

It was during the Korean War and its aftermath that U.S. soldiers whose conscientious objector applications had been denied, or those who had become conscientious objectors after enlisting, began contacting Historic Peace Church leaders at NSBRO for help. At the time there were no provisions in military regulations for conscientious objector discharges.

As early as 1950, J. Harold Sherk of the MCC Peace Section was appointed to a committee under NSBRO auspices to seek a meeting with Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall to press for the establishment of a conscientious objector discharge from the military. During the course of the war and after, NSBRO repeatedly contacted military officials regarding specific CO cases in the hope of helping them find a way out of the military.⁶ It was not until a decade later, in 1962, that the U.S. military service branches adopted regulations providing an honorable discharge for conscientious objectors to war.

While the GI Rights Hotline did not spring directly from this early work, much of the initial concern was centered on assisting soldiers seeking a discharge for reasons of conscience. However, today's Hotline handles calls related to a broad range of issues. Calls may take many forms, as these examples suggest:

- I enlisted while I was still in high school and I'm supposed to report for basic training next month. But now I've decided that I really want to go to college. Can I withdraw?
- My daughter is in basic training and she is miserable. She is depressed, anxious, and is desperate to get out. Can she?
- I've been home on leave and was supposed to return to my base last week. I don't want to go back. What will happen to me?

⁶ See <http://civilianpublicservice.org/storycontinues/hotline/advocacy>.

- I've had two deployments and have been diagnosed with PTSD. They've given me lots of drugs but it's not helping. I have suicidal thoughts.
- I no longer believe the military is right for me. I don't even want to train with my gun anymore. I wonder if I am a conscientious objector.

All of these types of calls and many more are handled by roughly twenty counselors scattered across the country. We meet annually for additional training and mutual support. It is not unusual to work with conscientious objectors for up to a year, with repeated phone calls and e-mails to review their application narrative. We may even testify at a conscientious objector's hearing to vouch for their sincerity. In some cases we continue relating as friends after a successful discharge.

The Hotline is not about stopping wars, but about supporting people who are struggling amidst a large and sometimes oppressive military culture that stirs deep questions about purpose, morality, identity, and allegiance. Military personnel often carry the trauma of war deep inside their souls and face important decisions about their future. Hotline counselors help them reflect on the values they hold dear and outline potential options for them to consider. A veteran friend once told me, "If you want to be a peacemaker and you are not talking to soldiers, you are not thinking nearly big enough." The Hotline enlarges my thinking and expands the arena of peacemaking.

Titus Peachey retired from his Peace Education role at Mennonite Central Committee US in 2016. He now volunteers with local and national peace and justice organizations from his home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

PAYRA: Adult Peace Education in Bangladesh

PAYRA (meaning "dove" in Bengali) is an initiative of Mennonite Central Committee Bangladesh that has emerged from grassroots efforts to train local communities in peacebuilding and conflict transformation skills. Many of the initial efforts have been, and continue to be, coupled with multi-sector