

Peace for Life's Second People's Forum

20-23 March 2009 | Bogotá, Colombia

Peace for Life 2004-2008

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

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I. Organisational context

A. Understanding *Peace for Life*

Like perhaps all groundbreaking initiatives, *Peace for Life* has struggled since its inception with understanding its nature, identity and role in the international justice and peace front. We first derived our defining impetus in Manila in 2002 when the **International Ecumenical Conference on Terrorism in a Globalised World** resolved to "facilitate a global coalition of ecumenical, inter-religious and multi-faith movements in solidarity, in resistance and opposition to expanding state terrorism and U.S. global hegemony." In 2003, the **Seoul International Workshop**, convened to give flesh to the Manila Conference resolution, formally named this new coalition the "People's Forum on Peace for Life". It envisioned 'the Forum' as people-centred; an ecumenically initiated vehicle for developing a spirituality of resistance; a space to share stories of the voiceless and those faced with threats to life, to listen and analyse, to create alliances and bring people together for common action. At the **First People's Forum** in Davao City in 2004, we formally founded this new formation as simply "Peace for Life" and adopted its foundational principles, which were later embodied in a document called *A Covenant of Self-Understanding and Purpose*.

In this forum, the question of what *Peace for Life* is all about may yet again be a subject of discussion, if not debate. Defining *Peace for Life* is a continuing process. But perhaps we can all agree that ***Peace for Life* is a faith-based movement and forum for peace and justice, engaged in building interfaith solidarity and in mobilising the power of spirituality for the struggle against global hegemony and its life-threatening forces.**

Peace for Life emerged from a conference of "ecumenicals" that, expressly for the first time, came to grips with the reality of a U.S. global empire but knew that institutional limitations would not permit established ecumenical bodies to meet the new challenge of the times. A new movement needed to be born—*Peace for Life*—and on it was placed the enormous responsibility of bringing people of faith to the front lines of Empire resistance. But even the strongest Christian response would be inept against the imperial juggernaut which feeds on religious animosities and fear of 'the other' to propel its hegemonic agenda. Early on, we knew that for the faith community, the challenge of Empire resistance required no less than militant interfaith action and solidarity.

This challenge, which *Peace for Life* has come to embrace and hopes to represent, had been met with both excitement and scepticism and oftentimes generated opposing expectations. Many among our pioneers wanted *Peace for Life* to exhibit a marked distinction from the ecumenical movement whence it came—that it should be a vanguard of new discourse, dynamic, militant and unencumbered by the usual bureaucratic requisites believed to have perpetuated alienated leaderships and transformed ecumenical movements into institutions that approach social justice issues with timidity or, at best, calculated engagement.

The birthing of *Peace for Life* in the context of these exacting demands had thus become a struggle between roots and currency, underlying a complex web of organisational and philosophical issues that to this day continue to nag both staff and leaders of *Peace for Life*. Would the customary organisational models and practices of established ecumenical bodies work for the kind of movement *Peace for Life* hopes to be? What kind of structure would embody a dynamic and militant organisation? Should *Peace for Life* have members? Is *Peace for Life* an interfaith formation? What do we mean by interfaith and faith-based? Muslims and Christians share a common heritage of resistance to empire; what about the Hindus, the Buddhists? Is some parity in representation and participation among members of the major religions required for interfaith solidarity? What about people of other belief systems who resist empire on the basis of convictions considered neither religious nor spiritual? What are the strategies by which *Peace for Life* can mount a faith-based resistance to Empire?

B. Leadership and structure

These questions notwithstanding, the imperative of interfaith solidarity in the struggle against Empire has served as a uniting force for everyone involved in *Peace for Life*. Our founding members, who gathered for the First People's Forum in Davao City in 2004, affirmed that *Peace for Life* is a multi-religious formation and accordingly adopted an organisational structure that called for representation from the different faith traditions. Among *Peace for Life's* founders, majority of which are Christians, are progressive leaders of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and indigenous communities. But while ideal and desired, becoming multi-religious proved to be difficult for a formation that derived from a Christian ecumenical initiative. Consequently, the provisional manner by which we operated prior to the First People's Forum continued throughout much of 2005. During this period, we strived to resolve the organisational implications of becoming an interfaith movement.

By 2006, *Peace for Life's* leadership structure was finally put in place with the creation of the **Continuation Committee**, the intermediate body mandated by the Davao inaugural forum to represent *Peace for Life's* character and constituency and undertake certain functions on the organisation's behalf. This Committee constituted from within its ranks the **Working Group**, a smaller body expected to provide leadership in identifying *Peace for Life's* direction and priorities and undertake an active role in programme implementation in cooperation with the **Secretariat**. From among the members of these decision-making bodies, a team of moderators

were selected who will preside over meetings of the organisation and help project *Peace for Life* as an international movement. Selected to fulfil these functions were Eunice Santana of Puerto Rico as moderator, and Kim Yong-Bock of Korea and Farid Esack of South Africa as co-moderators.

Although the still unresolved issues of orientation affected the extent to which these decision-making bodies actually functioned, formalising *Peace for Life's* structure marked an important step forward as it named the individuals who will share in the responsibility of running the organisation, providing for broader ownership of *Peace for Life's* vision, mission and goals.

Due to limited resources and in order to maximise opportunities, organisational meetings were scheduled with other activities: the first meeting of the Continuation Committee was held in conjunction with *Peace for Life* activities during the anti-WTO protests in Hong Kong in December 2005; while the Working Group met twice: in May 2006 during the *Peace for Life* solidarity mission to Nepal, and in January 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya where we participated in the World Social Forum and the World Forum on Theology and Liberation. Caucuses on organisational matters among members of the Continuation Committee and the Working Group were also organised during the assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia in Thailand in April 2005, the Summer Interfaith Institute in Vancouver in August 2007, and the *Peace for Life* Conference on Justice for Palestine in Jordan in November 2007.

Communication and exchange of information among our members have taken place primarily through E-mail and the mailing lists that we maintain. The caucuses and informal gatherings we organise during activities we participate in also proved to be an effective means of consolidating our network as they have become occasions to bond, update one another on PFL-related work, sustain conversation on the movement's continuing concerns, as well as share new insights on current issues, including those being addressed by the activity where the caucus is organised.

C. Institutional partnerships

When our founders agreed to build and promote *Peace for Life* as a multi-religious movement, concern was raised over the decision's ramifications on *Peace for Life's* traditional ecumenical partnerships, namely with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) which, along with the NCCs in the Philippines and Korea, formed the core group of institutions that facilitated the establishment of *Peace for Life*. The concern pertained to the institutional support, financial and otherwise, that these ecumenical bodies have been able to provide *Peace for Life* as an ecumenical initiative.

Peace for Life has no long-term funding commitment but receives financial support on a programme basis from the Karibu Foundation in Norway, the United Church of Canada (UCC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and other church-based institutions. Other partners that have supported *Peace for Life* in the past include the National Council of Churches in Australia-

Christian World Service, United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, Anglican Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church of the USA, and Christian Aid in the United Kingdom. Church organisations have also expressed support in terms of participation in the activities we organise, but churches as a general rule can only provide modest assistance.

We have been unable to access resources managed by traditional agencies or so-called specialised ministries because many of them have become quite conservative politically and ideologically. A number of European agencies, for example, have received *Peace for Life's* position on global issues like terrorism and corporate globalisation as left-leaning and anti-American. Some even questioned WCC's and CCA's support for *Peace for Life*, arguing that the positions we have taken on various issues cannot be upheld by the churches. Moreover, *Peace for Life* had become associated with, and in fact largely initiated by, the Philippine churches from which funding has long been withdrawn by the agencies on claims that the former are supporting local left-wing groups.

There is undeniably a perception that *Peace for Life* “leans towards the ideological Left”, and as a consequence, our funding proposals tend to be rejected by big funding agencies. We continue to be affected negatively by the prejudicial questions raised by certain donor agencies against *Peace for Life*. But fortunately, there remain institutions that have steadfastly stood by *Peace for Life*, respected its independence and allowed it to maintain an uncompromising stand on its stated principles and to undertake the imperatives of its objectives without being constrained by the proscriptions that come with institutional affiliations. One such institution is the Karibu Foundation, whose support and accompaniment since *Peace for Life's* inception could well represent a model of genuine partnership.

The same is true of *Peace for Life's* founding institutions. Despite pressures from the agencies, the WCC has continued to lend strong support for *Peace for Life*. And this, we must say, is thanks in great measure to one person in particular – **Clement John**, one of the leading lights of *Peace for Life*, a former WCC executive without whose efforts and collaboration *Peace for Life* might never have come to being. Clement was a pillar in the founding of *Peace for Life*. In his capacity as director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and by his personal unwavering commitment to progressive ecumenism, Clement helped win the support of the WCC for what was then and continues to be a contentious proposition to build a movement that promises to mobilise faith-based resistance to the US Empire.

And while the CCA has been more vulnerable to institutional pressures, no ties have been severed either as *Peace for Life* continues to have programme relations with CCA executive staff. We have also maintained since the beginning a special relationship with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), which hosts the office of our Secretariat in its headquarters in Quezon City and provides financial administration services through its Treasurer's Office. Our proximity also helped develop between our staff mutual programme and logistical support on projects and activities addressing common concerns.

Three meetings that took place in 2005 offered helpful guidelines in approaching the issue of *Peace for Life's* institutional relationships—the caucus in Chiang Mai and ad hoc Working Group meeting in Bangkok in April, and the Continuation Committee meeting in December. There was consensus in all these meetings that while it is important to strengthen our linkages with church-related institutions whose support, interest and recognition have helped boost *Peace for Life's* standing and credibility, especially with donor agencies, we must work harder to earn the recognition of the people from which *Peace for Life* as a movement will derive its institutional dimension. The people's agenda must be the basis of defining *Peace for Life's* relationship with ecumenical institutions and funding partners.

II. Activities and projects

A. *Peace for Life* as a people's forum

The People's Forum, as we can glean from the brief review of our history, is intrinsic in the mandate of *Peace for Life*. We vested upon this gathering the function of a regular assembly, an occasion to evaluate our work and formulate new strategies that will enable us to achieve our mission and goals. But more than an organisational conference, the People's Forum, organised always in partnership with local groups, is a public gathering where we, members and partners, gather to address global issues from the perspective of interfaith solidarity and local struggles.

The **First People's Forum**, held on November 28 to December 4, 2004 in Davao City, Philippines, served as *Peace for Life's* inaugural assembly. Held in Muslim Mindanao, the resource-rich but conflict-ridden southern region of the Philippines, the Davao Forum sought to address the challenge of peace in the context of a world where religious divides are exploited and exacerbated in order to advance an agenda of global economic and military domination. Its theme, "Sowing Seeds of Peace in the Era of Empire: Christians in Solidarity with Muslims", highlighted the critical need to build interfaith solidarity in the Islamic context of war and peace, and recognised the urgency of coming together in the face of the flagrant misuse of religion for profit and as an excuse for war by the U.S. Empire and its allies. It affirmed *Peace for Life* as a place for people whose varied spiritualities—regardless of creed—are nurtured as collective resource for resistance to all forms of injustice. The Davao Forum clarified *Peace for Life's* interfaith agenda in the context of empire.

Today, four years later, we are holding our **Second People's Forum** in Colombia. The choice for Colombia as venue for this Forum derives partly from a recognition of the apparent parallels between Colombia's social struggles, its overall socio-political context, and those of the Philippines. Being in Colombia, as in the Philippines, offers an opportunity to experience a situation where the ruling system's interests coincide with the dictates of empire, and where the government itself turns against its own people and tramples upon their aspirations for justice and freedom. It is in this kind of concrete reality that we hope to situate our concept of

solidarity for peace. However, the theme for this people's forum, "Without Fear of Empire: Global People's Resistance", underscores the other significance of Colombia for *Peace for Life*: being in Colombia also situates our movement in the context of resistance, being in a region of increasingly expanding autonomy from the United States, where popular progressive movements gain ground among the people and nations catapult to positions of power nationalist leaders believed to be of the stuff that can stand against the forces of global empire.

The people's agenda define *Peace for Life's* agenda as a movement. The Davao Forum in 2004 sharpened our agenda for interfaith action and solidarity in the struggle against empire. Today here in Colombia, we hope this general assembly, as a people's forum for sharing struggles and aspirations, can help us sharpen our agenda of faith-based resistance to empire.

B. Building solidarities and our spirituality of resistance

Manila 2002 envisioned *Peace for Life* as a solidarity movement where victims' voices are heard and shared; as an organisation that forges ties with local groups in areas where conflicts and victims are. We saw *Peace for Life's* potential to be such a movement when our partners in the Philippines, Nepal, India, Colombia and Palestine, whose people have been variously victimised by state terror, marginalisation and exploitation, provided *Peace for Life* with opportunities to be involved in and contribute to their struggles for peace and justice and for their right to life.

Nepal: Interfaith cooperation for peace and democracy

On May 26-31, 2006, *Peace for Life* organised the **International Solidarity Mission for Peace in Nepal** to support the peace-building process in the country in the wake of nationwide protests against the monarchy and popular outcry for the restoration of democracy. The country's faith community—Hindus, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Bahai and Kirat—led by the Inter-religious Council Nepal, has played a key role in the peace-building process. The cooperation and mutual respect among these religious groups helped the people of Nepal—a land of many religions and ethnicities—overcome divides and collectively reach their common goal for peace. But the secularisation of Nepali society that came with abolition of the monarchical system brought about complex challenges for interfaith initiatives, minoritised religious communities and the indigenous nationalities, which have been largely excluded from the country's mainstream economic and political life. The *Peace for Life* team summarised the findings of the solidarity mission in a communiqué, which, among others, challenged the US, India and UK not to meddle in Nepal's internal affairs. The team also observed that the people of Nepal have already achieved a level of political awareness and sophistication unseen at any time in their history and, hence, are in the best position to chart their own political future. Our follow-through plan of action on Nepal included an international information campaign and a tri-country program involving sharing of experiences on the peace process among the conflict-ridden countries of Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Philippines: Engaging the international community to end killings

In July 2006, the *Peace for Life* secretariat organised a public forum which involved participants of the theological consultation on Empire organised by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Manila. The event drew the attention of WARC on the issue of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, prompting a strongly-worded statement condemning the executions. Less than three months later, on October 3, Bishop Alberto Ramento, who spoke at the forum on the churches' prophetic response to the tyrannical regime of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, was brutally murdered in his convent. Bishop Ramento, former Supreme Bishop of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* and founding member of *Peace for Life*, was popularly honoured as the "Bishop of the Poor Peasants and Workers".

The issue of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines became a focus of our international solidarity campaign, especially during the second half of 2006. We were in particular involved with two initiatives:

(1) *Ecumenical Voice for Peace and Human Rights in the Philippines* – a high-level Philippine delegation visit to Canada and the US in March 2007, led by Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes to present the NCCP report entitled "Let the Stones Cry Out: An Ecumenical Report on Human Rights in the Philippines and a Call to Action" to church leaders, legislators and UN officials. The report was launched at the International Ecumenical Conference on Human Rights in the Philippines held in Washington, DC. Many of those responsible for organising the advocacy event, led by Levi Bautista, were members of *Peace for Life*.

(2) *Permanent People's Tribunal Second Session on the Philippines* – a symbolic tribunal held in The Hague immediately following the US initiative. It sought to draw international public attention to the mounting death-squad killings and human rights abuses in the country. The court's 13-page verdict found both Macapagal-Arroyo and Bush Jr. and their respective governments guilty of gross and systematic violations of the Filipino people's civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and the right to national sovereignty and national liberation. It also denounced the extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances, massacres and torture as "crimes against humanity". *Peace for Life* was part of the Philippine Initiating Group for the tribunal.

Colombia: Linking Empire and state terror through the people's court

Unabated extrajudicial killings of peasants, trade unionists, youths and political dissidents by death squads let loose by the US-funded military are not peculiar to the Philippines. Colombia is one other country where a dirty war is being waged with gross impunity and where a similarly explosive social situation predominates pervasive rural poverty and landlessness, a highly stratified society dominated by an entrenched elite, massive social dislocations caused by western-inspired neo-liberal globalization. As in the Philippines, the empire-backed regime in Colombia is battling a long-running insurgency by communist-led guerrillas. It is in this context that our Bogota-based partner *Proyecto Vida y Justicia*, under the leadership of Lilia Solano, organised opinion tribunals or symbolic people's courts to hear the testimonies of victims of

state crimes: the International Tribunal Against Impunity: The Cases of Ciudad Bolívar and Cazucá (25 Nov 2006, Bogotá); International Opinion Tribunal on Forced Displacement in Colombia (21-23 Nov 2007, Bogotá); and the International Opinion Tribunal on Human Rights Violations in Colombia (15-17 Sep 2008, Brussels). *Peace for Life* has been involved in these initiatives through members who served in the international tribunals as jurors.

India: Multicultural celebration of life and shared struggles

We planned to hold a regular international peace festival that would promote a culture of peace and encourage the expression of creative forms of resistance to cultural domination and homogenisation. As celebratory events that make use of popular cultural forms and media, peace festivals are also meant to engage the youth in just social causes and introduce meaningful alternatives to the mono-culture imposed by western-driven globalisation. We sponsored our first International Peace Festival in Mumbai, India on December 1-3, 2006 addressing the theme, "Celebrating Life, our Common Humanity, and Resistance to Empire and War". The Mumbai peace festival, which drew some 2,000 participants including a wide range of artists and cultural activists from all over India, enabled citizens groups, peace movements, social and cultural activists to identify from their history and culture positive signs and values that people can live together.

Organising the festival facilitated the setting up of a new broad platform for peace in India, the *Forum on Justice and Peace*, which comprised local organisations (led by the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism) that came together to undertake the project. The festival's statement, "Mumbai Declaration on Justice and Peace: Agenda for Action", affirmed the importance of cultural expressions as an "inexhaustible fountainhead from which we derive inspiration and sustenance for our groups and movements". It recognised that peace-making requires building a broad platform based on interfaith, intercultural and inter-ideological solidarity in resistance to empire, war and neo-liberal globalisation; and translating the wisdom and insights from traditions, cultures, religions and philosophies into a language that will speak to and motivate the broadest sections of the people.

Occupied Palestine & Iraq: Tackling the issue of Middle East peace and global empire

We in *Peace for Life* have long recognised the centrality of the Middle East question in our agenda to mobilise faith-based resistance to the US Empire. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, as a microcosm of the larger problem of global hegemonic power, is both a watershed and a critical locus of this resistance. Its religious dimension also brings to fore the necessity of forging solidarity among the faith communities.

We thus embarked on a project addressing this issue beginning with the *Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage and Solidarity Mission to Palestine-Israel* on November 4-12, 2007. It aimed to bring on board our faith-based network especially from the South in the global campaign to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine; to give an inter-religious testimony to justice and peace in Palestine-Israel; and to help sharpen the methodology of interfaith work based on interfaith solidarity. The seven-day peace mission was capped by an International Conference on Justice

for Palestine held in Amman, Jordan. In its final statement entitled “Pledge of Commitment: People of Faith with Palestine in Struggle”, the Amman conference declared that “[f]or the US Empire, the ‘primary, vital focus’ is the Middle East; Occupied Palestine is at the center of this imperial project and dreams of conquest.” The Pledge of Commitment called for “key focused actions to strengthen a counter-imperial faith in solidarity with Palestine and all those who suffer under empire.”

Our Secretariat has also been active in local advocacy work on the Palestine issue. In response to the WCC-led International Church Action for Peace in Palestine/Israel (ICAPPI) to commemorate the 40th year of illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, *Peace for Life* and the NCCP held an Ecumenical Prayer and Breakfast Forum on Palestine at the NCCP Compound in June, with Working Group member Kathryn Poethig as one of the speakers. In July, we organised another forum on Palestine, this time to take advantage of the Manila visit of David Wildman, who is an active member of the steering committee for the US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation, a broad-based interfaith and human-rights campaign for Palestine. The following year, June 2008, we once again collaborated with local ecumenical groups to organise a public discussion and prayer vigil marking the 60th anniversary of *Al-Naqba* (1948 Palestinian Catastrophe).

The US invasion and occupation of Iraq is also within the ambit of our concern on Middle East peace. Since 2004, we have issued several statements on the issue, with the Secretariat active in local campaigns protesting the Iraq War. In April 2007, we participated in the 2007 International Peace Conference in Manila: A Philippine-Japan Citizens Gathering in Support of the Iraqi Peoples Call to End the US Occupation of Iraq.

Probing anew the nexus between economy, ecology and Empire

For *Peace for Life*, the fundamental ethical values of justice, equality, human dignity, human rights and integrity of all creation represent an essential resource in the task of peacebuilding and resisting hegemony. In December 2005, at the roundtable on “WTO, the Empire and Religious Wars: Taking the Faith Communities to the Front Lines”, *Peace for Life* addressed the links between empire and its institutional instruments, (e.g., WTO), individualist money culture, and religious wars. The roundtable was held in Hong Kong on December 13-17, 2005 to coincide with the WTO 6th Ministerial Conference, and to join the thousands of protesters belonging to the growing global alliance against free-market globalisation.

In October 2008, we co-organised with the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) a national consultation that, based on a case study of the Philippine experience, looked into the impacts of mass tourism on people’s lives, social structures and the environment. The consultation examined the colonial roots tourism, and concluded that it maintains the same unequal trading relationships, dependencies, and division of labour that characterise global capitalism, with the added dimension of overtly commodifying everything—natural resources and ecosystems, national patrimony, cultural heritage, and even women and children—for short-term gains.

C. Continuing engagement with world ecumenical bodies and social movements

WCC: Participation and discourse on common agenda

Peace for Life organised a very well-received *mutirao* offering (workshop cum cultural event) at the WCC general assembly held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006. Many appreciated the cultural presentation, high level of discourse and animated exchanges during the event, which tackled the theme "Tales of Exploitation and Heroism: Christians, Muslims and the Empire". It was unexpectedly well-attended in part because the crucial global issues of war (for control of resources under the pretext of war on terror) and the project of empire-building were not directly and adequately addressed during the assembly proper. We also organised a solidarity dinner and caucus for some 25 members of *Peace for Life* who were invited to the assembly in various capacities. The caucus gave us an opportunity to strategise on ways of promoting progressive ecumenical and theological discourse in the assembly particularly on issues of globalisation, war on terror, and empire. Elected to key posts in the WCC at this assembly were *Peace for Life* Continuation Committee members: Rev. Ofelia Ortega of Cuba and Dr. Soritua Nababan of Indonesia as presidents for Caribbean/Latin America and Asia respectively; and Rev. Gregor Henderson of Australia and Carmencita Karagdag to the Central Committee.

Peace for Life is also pursuing a more focused engagement with the WCC on the issue of Palestine. We have participated, since 2007, in the WCC-convened week of action for just peace in Palestine-Israel which takes place in the first week of June each year. For 2009, the coordinated advocacy initiative, now on its fourth year and newly renamed as the **World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel**, will take place on June 4-10. The joint actions are coordinated by the **Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum**, a new ecumenical vehicle launched by the WCC at the International Peace Conference on "Churches Together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East", held in Amman, Jordan on June 18-20, 2007. In our presentations at the conference, Dr Kim Yong-Bock and I highlighted the whole issue of global empire in today's context of imperial wars and religious conflicts. David Wildman served as resource person on economic actions, sharing his extensive experience in organising advocacy campaigns for divestment and boycotts to help strengthen Palestinian civil resistance. The conference issued the **Amman Call**, which put forth the plea of Palestinian Christians to churches around the world to take action.

***Peace for Life* at the World Social Forum**

Members and staff of *Peace for Life* have previously attended events of the World Social Forum, either as participants or resource persons, but it was in the 2006 Polycentric WSF in Karachi that *Peace for Life* organised its very first WSF activity. We conducted a discussion-workshop on the theme "Different Faiths, Common Struggles: Solidarity in the Face of Empire and Injustice" in cooperation with the Church of Pakistan. The workshop drew the participation of religious leaders (Muslims and Christians), social activists and academics from Pakistan as it explored concrete ways of building Christian-Muslim solidarity. The activity proved to be a very useful learning experience on the critical issues facing the Pakistani Christians and the social movements, and opened the possibility of a continuing active working relationship with groups in Pakistan that share *Peace for Life's* vision.

The positive experience in Karachi gave the *Peace for Life* Secretariat confidence to initiate a fuller programme consisting of two activities (a roundtable and a storytelling session) for the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, Kenya; and a workshop at the World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL) which was held also in Nairobi immediately preceding the WSF. For the WFTL, we organised a workshop on January 19 on the theme “Interfaith Solidarity and Liberating Theology from Empire”, with Kim Yong-Bock, Farid Esack, Kathryn Poethig, and Ulrich Duchrow as speakers; while Pfl Moderator Eunice Santana addressed the topic “Spirituality and Respect for Diversity” at WFTL’s closing plenary.

Our activities in Nairobi represent the first major participation of *Peace for Life* in the WSF process. We in fact succeeded in organising highly appreciated and hugely well-attended gatherings. The first forum on January 21 tackled the subject, “Different Beliefs, Common Struggles: Solidarity in the Face of Empire”. Speakers, aside from those who spoke in the WFTL workshop, included Alejandro Bendaña, Nancy Cardoso Pereira and Deenabandhu Manchala. An exceptionally large and lively crowd attended the women’s festival held on January 24 on the theme, “Women’s Struggles and Heroisms: Narratives, Music and Movements”. Co-sponsored by *Women for Change in Zambia* headed by WG member Emily Sikazwe, the forum-festival was led by leading feminists from the Pfl network: Chung Hyung Kyung, Norma Dollaga, Denise Nadeau and Kathryn Poethig. Gracing both Pfl events with an inspirational speech was former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda.

Peace for Life’s engagement in the WSF process had become occasions to promote the movement’s interfaith agenda, which developed from the theme of our inaugural assembly in 2004, “Sowing Seeds of Peace in the Era of Empire: Christians in Solidarity with Muslims”. Pakistan and Kenya, where some of the most serious conflicts are believed to have a religious dimension, offered a unique opportunity to better situate the idea of inter-religious and inter-ethnic solidarity in the context of war and peace and in the kind of concrete realities that *Peace for Life* hopes to address as a peace movement.

Sharing in WARC’s theological critique of Empire

In July 2006, the *Peace for Life* Secretariat, along with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, hosted the international theological consultation on global empire convened by the Geneva-based World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). The event issued a landmark declaration which posited what is yet the strongest and most comprehensive theological critique of empire ever undertaken. Apart from hosting the event, *Peace for Life* also made a strong impact in the consultation in terms of participation. Half of the theologians who came were *Peace for Life* members, most of whom currently sit in the Continuation Committee: Chris Ferguson, Ninan Koshy, Ulrich Duchrow, Bishop Erme Camba, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, Omega Bula, Kim Yong Bock, and Carmencita Karagdag. Rev. Dr. Seong Won Park, leading organiser of the event and WARC’s outgoing executive secretary for Cooperation and Witness, is a founding member of *Peace for Life*.

Following the consultation, the *Peace for Life* secretariat organised a public forum on “Theology in the Era of Empire”, featuring *Peace for Life* participants in the WARC consultation as speakers. Attended by more than 300 Filipino church leaders and activists as well as theology professors and seminary students, the forum provided an opportunity for local Christians to participate in the discourse on empire and discuss contemporary issues in theology with an international group of theologians and leaders of the global ecumenical movement. The forum also served as a venue for the first public announcement of the Manila Declaration on Ecumenical Faith Stance Against Global Empire.

Taking part in the Oikotree Movement

At the invitation of the executive staff of WARC, WCC and the Council for World Mission (CWM), *Peace for Life* hosted the colloquium and launch event of the *Oikotree Movement* in Manila on December 11-16, 2008. Oikotree is a joint initiative of WARC, WCC and CWM, three of the largest international ecumenical organisations representing the worldwide community of churches, to create a common space where those seeking to live faithfully in the midst of economic injustice and ecological destruction can raise their voices and work for alternatives to the current unjust systems. The movement aims to take two parallel ecumenical processes to a further level of people’s participation and activism: the Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth (known as the Accra Confession), initiated by WARC in 2004 and carried forward jointly with CWM; and the Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (known as the AGAPE process), initiated by the WCC in 1998 and which, through the Poverty, Wealth and Ecology study framework, is now being pursued with greater focus on ecological debt, wealth creation and their relation to poverty and ecological injustice. *Peace for Life*, which maintains active links with WARC, WCC and CWM at the international level, welcomed their invitation to host Oikotree’s ceremonial launching as an opportunity to address, both locally and internationally, the issue of ecological justice—one of Pfl’s priority concerns. The Philippines, where our secretariat is based, served as an ideal venue for the historic occasion because of the significant work of local ecumenical related movements for economic and ecological justice.

D. Articulating perspectives and visions of *peace*

One of *Peace for Life*’s stated goals is to engage the faith community in the shaping, articulation and living out of visions of ‘peace for life’, with its programmes focusing on the education and cultural reorientation of people. This task implies a renewal of thinking and development of new discourse and theories in which *Peace for Life* itself must be engaged, particularly in reclaiming the original meanings of such basic concepts as peace, security, justice and human rights, where peace and justice are presented and promoted as imperatives, not alternatives.

People’s Charter on Peace for Life

The project to draft a **People’s Charter on Peace for Life** (a.k.a. Peace Charter) is an independent but Pfl-related initiative of the Advanced Institute for the Integral Study of Life, an alternative graduate college in Seoul headed by Dr. Kim Yong-Bock. The idea for a Peace Charter originated in the 2002 Manila Conference where the proposal to establish *Peace for Life*

first emerged. The project was based on the finding that existing treaties, the UN charter, international instruments and many interstate agreements do not address the menacing nature of war today. New dimensions on the question of peace are emerging in the context of the expansion of the global empire which, unlike past empires, seeks total global hegemony. Peace can no longer be understood in a fragmented way. For example, the ecological question cannot be separated from the question of peace. Hegemony by the empire invades every aspect of human life, including culture, communication and the natural environment. This new geopolitical context underscores the need to rediscover the true meaning of peace and to affirm a new commitment to peacemaking.

But while many declarations and statements on peace are available, there were few models for a peace charter. Moreover, people-oriented legal practitioners, rights defenders and social activists are looking for ethical standards that articulate peace from the perspective of the people. The People's Charter on Peace for Life aims to respond to this need. It will speak of the peace of the people, drawing from the various philosophical traditions of religious/cultural communities and from visions emerging from those victimised by wars and social injustice. Drafting and adopting the Charter will be implemented on the basis of solidarity of all religions, the process serving to deepen the experience of interfaith solidarity.

The first workshop on the Peace Charter was held on December 11-12, 2005 in Hong Kong just prior to the first meeting of the PFL Continuation Committee. The project was discussed at the CC meeting, and some suggestions were formulated. The first workshop for the project was held in October 2006 in Hwacheon, Korea. The workshop adopted an outline for the Peace Charter based on presentations on a peace charter from various perspectives. In July 2007, a three-person drafting group met in Hong Kong and worked on the first draft of the Charter. This was further revised and presented at the International Workshop in Hwacheon at the end of October 2007.

The final draft of the Peace Charter was completed and adopted at this Workshop, and is now being circulated for further enrichment and adoption. The Peace Charter will be offered for adoption to other groups, which may revise the draft for their own use. The drafting group is also exploring various other action models and mechanisms, like hearings and international tribunals on war crimes, to disseminate, propagate and, once adopted, implement the Charter.

Programme on women, war and Empire

Still in the stage of conceptualisation is *Peace for Life's* programme on women, war and Empire. The concept paper for the project is undergoing review. There had been plans since the 2004 inaugural forum to hold a Women and War Consultation in Lebanon, possibly in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches and the Asia Women's Program of the United Methodist Church. The plan has now been subsumed within a fuller programme on women where the Consultation would be among the programme components.

The recommendation to have a full programme on women was partly in response to a challenge posed by some of our women members to avoid a reductionist or fragmentist approach in addressing women's issues in relation to Empire and instead mainstream the feminist perspective in the work of *Peace for Life*. Like all minority perspectives, the feminist perspective is universal, integral and historical. There is also the recognition that while women have been seen at the front lines of anti-globalisation and anti-war actions, there remains very little awareness of their work and actual contribution to peacebuilding at the community level.

We already set out to implement one of the activities planned under the programme: the festival of women's stories of suffering, struggle and heroism which we organised at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. The activity was organised in collaboration with *Women for Change in Zambia*, headed by PFL Working Group member Emily Sikazwe; and led by leading feminists from the PFL network: Chung Hyung Kyung, Norma Dollaga, Denise Nadeau and Kathryn Poethig.

III. Moving forward

The preceding 'report' on our work over the past four years shows that *Peace for Life* excites a lot of people. This is probably because *Peace for Life* offers something new: the possibility of building a front of resistance to Empire that is driven by faith and spirituality, yet does not distinguish the religious creed that compels one to act towards this end. It provides the space where the liberating imperatives of faith—any faith—can be expressed and acted upon.

Ownership of *Peace for Life* is thus steadily expanding. There is now a **critical mass** of people who have come to own and invest in *Peace for Life* and its vision. They are members and partners in many parts of the world who in various degrees became involved in our initiatives and have come to appreciate the role that an organisation like *Peace for Life* can play in the struggle for peace and justice.

The participation of an increasing number of people has helped us resolve many of the issues that have heretofore hampered our work, including those that affect the way we identify the priorities, strategies and plans that would help bring us closer to our stated objectives.

A. Some clarity on issues of identity

The 'peace for life' concept

Why call this formation 'Peace for Life' is a question that has been uttered many times, but not always openly, especially by those who have come to be involved in our movement after the 2002 Manila Conference. We are neither proposing a change of name, nor are we suggesting a discussion of its meanings. But it may well serve our purpose today to affirm (or re-affirm) that our name befits our reason for being. The explanation of the term 'peace for life' in the

introduction to the draft People's Charter on Peace for Life is perhaps succinct enough: "[Peace for life'] is comparatively a new concept underlining the interlocking of life and peace. Peace is for fullness of life. Life in its fullness demands a life of dignity and for that peace is essential. Fullness of life means peace, justice and freedom."

Peace for Life as an 'interfaith' formation

Peace for Life remains predominantly Christian, and its links with anti-empire non-Christian faith-based groups are so few that the interfaith requirement in the composition of PFL's leadership bodies will be impossible to achieve. Of the 51 regular members of the Continuation Committee, only seven (7) are non-Christians: 4 Muslims, 2 representing Indigenous Peoples, and 1 Buddhist. Two of them (both Muslims) sit in the Working Group. But while evidently lopsided, the numbers, far from being a hampering issue, had served as a challenge for *Peace for Life* to exert greater effort in reaching out to more faith groups. Moreover, as our experience in Nepal, India and Palestine had shown, the lopsided representation of the major religions in *Peace for Life* has not prevented us from engaging in solidarity with people of different faiths.

We observe, however, that since the inaugural forum in Davao in 2004, a general agreement appears to have taken shape on the following points:

- *Peace for Life* is a **faith-based** organisation, regardless of the balance of representation among different faith groups. Our constituency consists of **people of faith**—individuals and groups whose faith or spirituality drive and form the basis of their actions and stance on issues. Any person or group driven by faith—regardless of creed—to resist Empire and its life-threatening forces may be part of *Peace for Life*.
- *Peace for Life* engages in **interfaith solidarity** as a key form of resistance to Empire. Through interfaith solidarity, we challenge the empire's use of religion and the practice and doctrine of 'othering'. And we prefer to say "interfaith" as opposed to "multifaith/multireligious" to de-emphasise multiplicity and place greater importance on the relationship and interaction that take place in genuine solidarity.

B. Membership and structure

Peace for Life had been affected by a lack of unity on how to address the question of membership and structure. Agreements were reached at various meetings (from Davao 2004, Hong Kong 2005, up to Katmandu 2006), but they have been ambiguous and sometimes even inconsistent, mainly due to a reluctance in taking on any form of organisational rigidity. As a result, flexible and so-called alternative forms (and terms) have been used (e.g., "participants" instead of "members"; "network" instead of "organisation"; "people's forum" instead of "conference" or similar terms; the idea of "moveable membership"; and so on). As previously discussed, this is due in part to expectations that *Peace for Life* represent a viable alternative to already established institutions that once embodied progressive visions but whose social relevance had long been eroded by institutional pressures.

Today's People's Forum will have to come up with clearly formulated organisational policies for *Peace for Life*. The Working Group in its January 2007 meeting tacitly affirmed that *Peace for Life* is an **organisation** with a **movement** character. It is dynamic and engaged in actions advancing the principle of faith-based resistance to Empire and state terror (movement), and it must go about accomplishing this mission in an organised way, with decision-making bodies, accountabilities, simple organisational procedures, and so on (organisation).

C. Local engagement and country focus

For a movement that is relatively young, *Peace for Life* has already amassed a wealth of experience in terms of partnering with country-based organisations in implementing joint projects. In some of these endeavours, *Peace for Life* has served as a catalyst that propelled local processes, such as in the case of India where the peace festival we initiated gave way to the formation of the *Forum on Justice and Peace*. In other cases, such as the Philippines, our role has been largely supportive of established national campaigns. As an international faith-based movement, *Peace for Life's* task is to localise issues obtaining in the global arena; in particular, exposing the nexus between state terror and the imperial agenda of the US and its allies, such as in the case of Nepal, the Philippines and Colombia.

Our engagement in these issues has opened new fronts for *Peace for Life* work—we involved ourselves in people's issues and struggles in the Philippines, Korea, Nepal, India, Palestine, and, to a certain extent, Colombia and Pakistan. We explored the role of religion in their sufferings and struggles, and, where there are connections, drew the links between the people's experiences of victimisation and the geopolitics of global empire-building. In so doing, we initiated solidarities, helped build new local alliances or strengthen existing ones. We planted the seeds of new thinking, faith-based resistance, and genuine solidarity.

How do we continue the accompaniment, sustain the solidarity links and build on initiatives that we have already started while at the same time addressing emerging issues in other countries or in the global arena? How do we embark on new engagements while sustaining existing initiatives? These questions have to do with balancing the twin approaches of consolidation and expansion. Some guidelines have been proposed. Among them:

1. **Priority countries.** Identify countries where *Peace for Life* ought to be focusing on and strive to develop a more significant organisational presence in these countries. (A few members have in fact already expressed interest in building regional or local *Peace for Life* chapters.)
2. **Local partners.** Identify the local partners in these priority countries that will do the connecting, expand and give long life to *Peace for Life* initiatives like the peace festival. The presence of local partners that can be enlisted for collaborative work can also be a criterion in the selection of priority countries.

3. **Systematic follow-through.** Place equal importance on the planned programme and the follow-through work required to sustain the projected impact of the programme. Evaluation and follow-up work are often poorly devised, i.e., if they are planned at all. In India, the creation of the Forum on Justice and Peace will ensure that the work will be sustained.

D. Promoting *Peace for Life*, its issues and discourse

As coordinator of *Peace for Life*, member of the WCC Central Committee and an active member of the Philippine ecumenical movement, I have often been invited to participate in meetings locally and overseas. I have brought the agenda of *Peace for Life* to these gatherings, taking advantage of every opportunity to promote *Peace for Life*, its undertakings and analyses on a variety of current issues. A number of collaborative projects and alliances were forged during these meetings, which had also become occasions for Pfl members and partners who are also participating in these meetings to strengthen ties, continue conversations, and strategise.

We have utilised our participation in international and local gatherings to establish and consolidate linkages with social movements and faith-based networks. We have organised activities at these events, such as our roundtable discussion and storytelling session at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi, and our *mutirao* offering at the WCC General Assembly in Porto Alegre. Our presence was definitely felt at these gatherings.

Our secretariat has also been able to make use of information facilities at our disposal, namely E-mail and the mailing list, to disseminate information about *Peace for Life* and its work, and to sustain communication and exchange of information and ideas among members and partners of the network. The *Peace for Life* website (www.peaceforlife.org), which was nonfunctional for a long time, was reviewed, overhauled, and eventually re-launched. It serves as our online resource site for information about *Peace for Life* and its work, news updates on activities and campaigns being undertaken by members, educational resources, and other information relevant to our work and concerns.

While *Peace for Life* has become more visible and is drawing the interest of an increasing number of people, more systematic and creative work remains to be done in order to promote the new discourse and thinking that have emerged from all our conversations. More work is required to propagate—to those corners of the world where people act on the dictates of their spirituality—what *Peace for Life* stands for, that is, faith-based resistance to hegemony and all forms of injustice.

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