

## **Confronting Violence: Civil Courage and Collective Action**

*Dear Readers,*

*This issue, like several others recently, is the fruit of an internal CCTS seminar. This latest one was held, under the above title, in response to recent discussions in committee meetings about the needs of partners living in violent situations or under repressive regimes. What are the options open to them for confronting and transforming the violence they experience? How can we support them?*

*In this seminar, held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007, we began with the choices and actions of local actors. Andrew Rigby made a short presentation on factors supporting 'courageous resistance' to injustice, based on his reading of a recent publication by K. Thalhammer et al. This presentation was followed by a brief discussion.*

*Louise Winstanley, a former volunteer with Peace Brigades International, then introduced a PBI film entitled 'Hasta La Ultima Piedra' (Until The Final Stone), which depicts the struggles of a community in Colombia to establish a violence-free zone in the midst of civil war. This, too, was followed by discussion.*

*After lunch our focus shifted to the role of external support, with two short accounts of 'accompaniment', from Louise Winstanley of Peace Brigades International and Floresca Karanasou of EAPPI – WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.*

*In the wide-ranging discussion that ensued, the group then considered what can be achieved by those confronting violence, how courageous local actors can best be supported by the organisations for which we work, and associated dilemmas.*

*The following report was written by Bridget Walker.*

### **Courageous Resistance: The Power of Ordinary People**

by Kristina E. Thalhammer, Paula L. O'Loughlin, Myron Peretz Glazer, Penina Migdal Glazer, Sam McFarland, Sharon Toffey Shepela, and Nathan Stoltzfus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Andrew Rigby summarised the substance of the book, talking about courageous resisters, resistance by collectivities, and the different factors involved in courageous resistance.

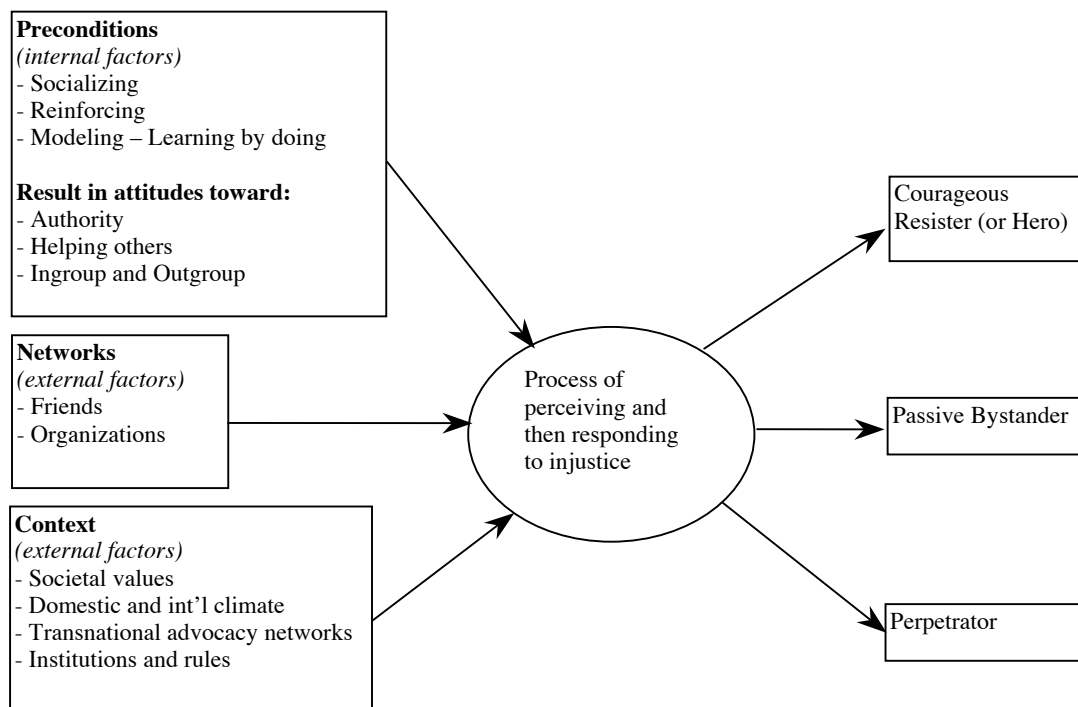
Courageous resisters are defined as those who act against injustice and on behalf of others at significant risk or cost to themselves. Their actions usually result from conscious decisions and are sustained over time.

The factors facilitating courageous resistance relate both to the individual and to the external context. The individual's orientation to authority is important – courageous resisters have a commitment to values rather than rules and roles. Their attitude to others is inclusive. Societal values, the nature of the institutions and the climate in both the domestic and the international sphere can be facilitating factors. External facilitating factors may include existing role models and networks that affirm the legitimacy of resistance and offer information, advice and resources to support action.

An example of courageous resistance by a collectivity is that of Le Chambon, in France, at the time of the German occupation. This was a close knit community, physically separated from others. The members were Protestants in a Catholic culture. They had experience of persecution and had developed a culture of independence and self reliance. There was strong community leadership. The external factors included anonymous support from outside sources: a German officer alerted them to raids and there was international support from Quakers and others.

Another example, mentioned in the group, was that of a Caribbean island which campaigned against an inappropriate external development initiative. The campaign took place within the context of an international climate of concern about indigenous peoples and it was successful.

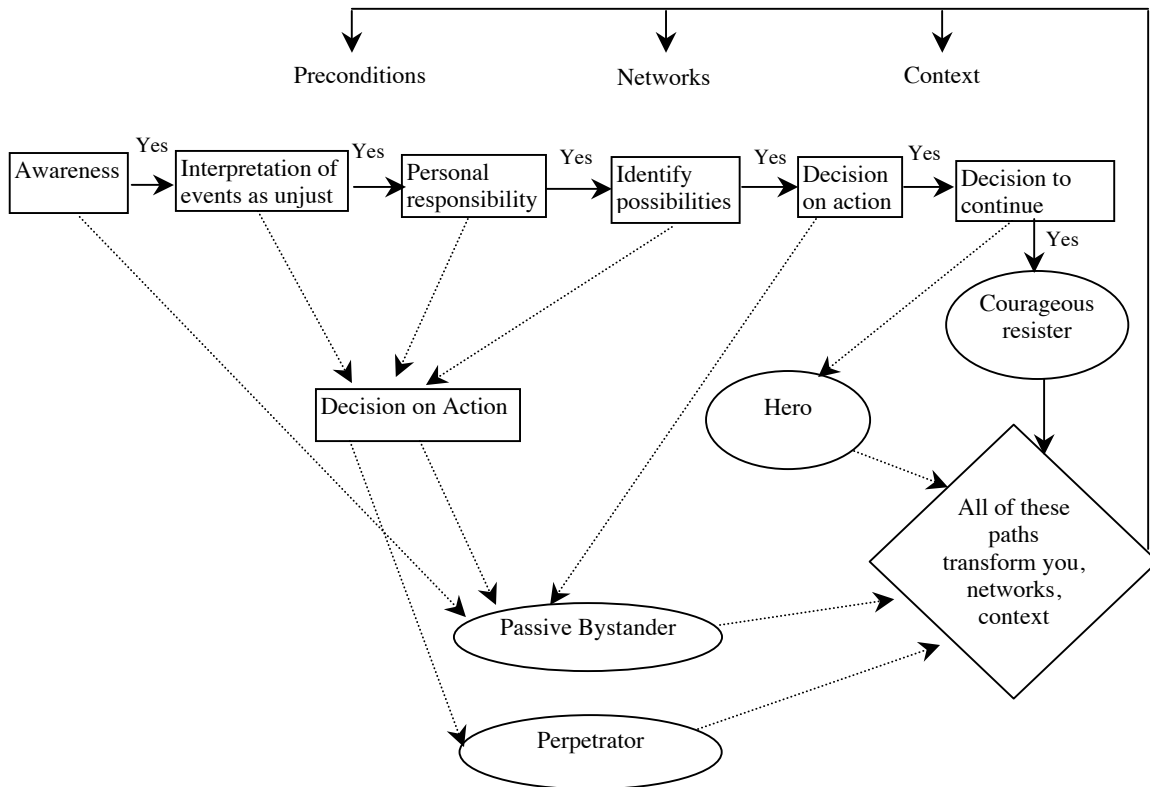
The diagram below<sup>1</sup> illustrates the factors affecting the process of responding to injustice.



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<sup>1</sup> This diagram, and the one that follows, are taken from the book

The process of making choices at the cross roads was illustrated as below:



However, resistance does not always result from conscious decisions. People can also ‘drift’ into resistance. They make a series of small decisions, such as helping a trusted friend, unaware of the larger consequences. Eventually resistance becomes habitual. The examples of Wallenberg and Schindler were suggested as people who drifted or stumbled into a situation they had been outside. Their sense of duty and values outweighed other factors and shaped their actions.

In the discussion that followed, the role of fear, shame and anger was explored. In situations of violence and oppression it is remarkable that some people do overcome fear to risk taking action to resist. Those who are afraid to act may then feel deeply ashamed. One participant gave the example of a group of NGO workers who were members of the ethnic-Albanian majority in Kosovo. After the NATO action, when Serb or Roma people were being attacked in public places, they were appalled and sickened but felt unable to intervene for fear of inviting injury to themselves. Through a series of workshops they built enough trust among themselves to own these experiences and the shame that went with them, and to discuss ways in which they might find the courage to act if the situation arose again, by preparing themselves psychologically and identifying ways of reducing the risk involved.

Fear may be multi-faceted. It may be disabling and lead to passivity. Responses may depend on how much is at stake. Fear of the alternative, if no action is taken, may outweigh current terrors. The risk is assessed and, if there is even greater fear of what might happen, this leads to resistance. Fear may also be driven out by anger. The example was given of Southern Rhodesia under Ian Smith, where there was a powerful silent anger. In South Africa people said ‘We are fighting for our dignity’. This was stronger than fear.

## **Hasta La Ultima Piedra (Until the Last Stone)**

Louise Winstanley introduced this film, which records the initiative of the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, established in 1997 in Colombia in response to ongoing violence in the region. The inhabitants of the community of San Jose de Apartado, located in the municipality of Apartado, were forcibly displaced in the course of 1996 and 1997 as the paramilitaries and the army sought to wrest military control of the Antioquia region from the FARC.

There has been violent internal conflict in Colombia for more than 40 years. Jan Egeland, the UN Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, described the situation in Colombia as 'by far the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of the Western hemisphere.' He was referring, among other things, to the numbers of displaced people in the country, which currently lie at between 3.5 and 4 million. All sides in the conflict – government forces, the paramilitaries and the guerrilla groups – commit atrocities. However, the paramilitaries commit by far the greater number of human rights abuses.

It should be noted that people in Colombia are terrorised into displacement. Although many people have been killed, terror has been the main method employed, particularly by paramilitary groups. Louise said that she would always remember being told about a member of the community of Cacarica, in the region of Choco. This young man, Mario Lopez, had his head chopped off by the paramilitaries. They then played football with his head, forcing the horrified community to watch. Following this killing, and the dumping of the bodies of many other community members in the river, they were too afraid to stay in their homes and became displaced.

The people of San Jose de Apartado were the first to declare themselves a Peace Community. It was their way of trying to live outside the ongoing internal conflict. They declared themselves to be neutral, and refused to have anything to do with the violence and the conflict, or with any of the armed actors. These included the army, police, guerrillas and paramilitaries.

The community was attacked the week following the declaration. It is the perception of the Colombian state that anyone who is not for them is against them. This community was therefore assumed to support the FARC guerrillas. The latter have a similar attitude. The community of San Jose de Apartado wants nothing to do with violence and conflict; they simply want to live in peace.

However, since the community proclaimed themselves to be a Peace Community in 1997, San Jose de Apartado has experienced continued human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. These acts of violence have been carried out by FARC, the Colombian Army and the paramilitaries. More than 450 people from this community have been murdered since 1997. There have been 33 investigations and only one person charged. Witnesses have been murdered, or have had to displace. The Community decided that they would no longer co-operate with the Colombian state in these investigations, because not only were these crimes committed with impunity but the investigations often brought only further death or displacement to community members. The Community also rejected the proposal that a police unit be established in their village, since the police were armed and this would make the village a target for the FARC. Fearing that they would be turned into a human shield against the guerrillas, the villagers decided to leave, thus losing their homes and what goods they could not carry with them. They reconstructed their village about twenty minutes down the road from San Jose, and called the new village Sanjosecito (little San Jose). Their decision to move was vindicated when a guerrilla attack was launched on the police station.

The film shows how the intensity of the violent conflict brought the people together and strengthened their bonds with one another. In the words of one speaker '*my* problem has become *our* problem'. They undertake joint work and have established a decision-making council, whose members are elected. They sell cocoa, bananas and coffee through fair trade channels. They are enabled to move around safely through the accompaniment of PBI on the road between San Jose and Apartado.

In February 2005 the community experienced several brutal murders. Luis Eduardo Guerra, one of the community leaders, was killed along with his wife and eleven year old son. The following day a leader of los Malatos, Alfonso Tuberquia, was murdered, together with his wife, their eighteen month old baby and three year old daughter, and a farm worker. Following this the community went through a period of exhaustion and despair, but was re-energised by collective determination to resist, even if this meant their own deaths. Those who had died would not have died in vain. In the words of one speaker, they went from 'we've had enough' to 'they'll have to take us out dead'. The film takes its title from a line of stones, which the community has set up as a memorial to those who have died. Each stone is marked with a name of one of the dead. The community is determined to resist until the death of its last member, the very last stone.

When the Community first organised and declared themselves to be a Peace Community they were supported by the Catholic Interecclesial Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP). (This Commission now works with other 'peace communities' calling themselves Humanitarian Zones and based in Choco.) They continue to be supported by the Catholic Church. Part of the organisation of their protection has been the international accompaniment of Peace Brigades International. The US Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR) also provides accompaniment. In addition they have obtained special protection measures from the InterAmerican Committee of Human Rights (IACHR). The EU has made resolutions in favour of the Community and various countries have brought the situation of the killing to the attention of the UN. They have also won several international awards.

### **Responses to the film**

The film was deeply moving and inspiring, showing how a sense of community develops, and how precious it is because of the high price that is paid for resistance and the degree of courage needed for people to remain committed. The community includes both the living and the dead. The victims are named and remembered with pride for their resistance. The eloquence with which the community members spoke, their determination and clarity of purpose and action, were impressive.

There was some discussion about what was not visible in the film. The community appears to have no problems and it would be interesting to learn more about what goes on beneath the united front: what tensions are there and how are they handled, do individuals have to make sacrifices for the common good? How are decisions made? What is the gender and age balance in the power equation?

The film also raised questions about the role of other players in the situation. How is the community regarded by the military and the guerrillas? What does the world look like to them? The community has a collective approach; how is this to be separated from the rhetoric of FARC?

There was some discussion of the role of international players. When the EU passes resolutions, what significance does this have on the ground? When leaders get targeted, where does responsibility lie? In response to these questions, Louise said that the different peace communities are linked with one another and with international and national organisations in a web of protection, in which PBI plays a part. The special protection measures directed by the IACHR mean that when the community makes a report to the court about the violations, the court requests a response from the Colombian government and the government must respond. This does put some restraint on the situation. PBI's accompaniment of the leaders and FoR's accompaniment of the community provide visible presence on the ground of the interest of governments, NGOs and solidarity groups, in what happens to this community. This, alongside the network of international support that they have built up and the pressure from the IACHR protects the community and reduces the number of deaths.

Louise drew attention to the broader context of a culture of violence in Central and South America, where massive numbers of people have been killed (for instance in Guatemala 2% and Salvador 1%). The cost of resistance in Colombia has been high, but it could serve as a model for other countries. There are other communities that have declared humanitarian zones, along the lines of

the Peace Community, but if the community of San Jose did not exist, others would also become much easier targets. San Jose has a very wide network of international support and is well known across the globe – much more so than the other communities.

Behind the violence there are powerful economic interests at stake in Colombia, such as logging, mining and palm oil companies. There is growing evidence of a pattern of economic interests fuelling forced displacement and other human rights violations in the region. This has triggered investigations by the Attorney-General's Office.

## **Models of Accompaniment**

### **The resistance mechanisms of communities that PBI accompanies in Colombia**

The communities of Jiguamiando and Curbarado that PBI accompanies in Colombia have developed similar strategies to those of the Peace Communities in building resistance to displacement and protection of the lives of their communities. They have formed what they call Humanitarian Zones (HMZ). There is a network of national support which includes:

- 1) The Commission Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (CIJP), made up of lawyers, priests & nuns, teachers, and human rights defenders. Members of this organisation live with the communities. They are documenting the abuses, for the IACHR among others, that have taken place in the past and they send out urgent actions when violations are threatened.
- 2) With the help of CIJP the government has been persuaded to form an intergovernmental commission of verification of the palm oil exploitation. This involves government departments, national & international NGOs, lawyers groups, such as the Colombian Commission of Jurists, palm companies and international observers – in the form of PBI. The commission seeks verification of the actions of the palm companies, planting palm trees on what was rich bio diverse rainforest, stealing communally held lands and displacing communities in the process.
- 3) Special protection measures are taken by the IACHR. The communities also use the mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Council and Rapporteurs.
- 4) PBI volunteers accompany CIJP to enable the Commission to go in and out of this very remote, tropical part of Colombia, so that the Communities are supported physically, legally and spiritually. The HMZ themselves also have international solidarity groups living with them.

A complex network of national and international support has been developed, involving both civil society solidarity organisations and international legal mechanisms to ensure safety and to create the space to resist.

Resistance has been costly but there have been real achievements. The Community have kept their dignity. They are not living in poverty in the urban slums. They are still in the rural area and have not lost their land completely but are able to continue with subsistence farming. This has slowed the process of forced removals from the land. They have demonstrated a process of resistance and a model for living which has been adopted in different ways by other communities around the country. Their resistance has also brought into the open issues which have been masked by the internal conflict, such as economic interests in exploiting the land for palm oil, gold, other minerals, and the wealth of the region's biodiversity.

## **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine/Israel (EAPPI)**

Floresca Karanàsou, Middle East Programme Manager at Quaker Peace and Social Witness, talked about the purpose and practice of this programme initiative, the protection mechanisms of accompaniment, and the civil courage of people who engage in acts of resistance in violent situations.

She began with a brief account of the background from which the programme had emerged. The second intifada, which began seven years ago, had been very bloody. There had been three failed attempts at the UN Security Council to set up a peacekeeping or protection force. Representatives from Palestinian and Israeli civil society went to international partners seeking protection for civilians in the conflict, and international advocacy. The Heads of Churches in Jerusalem went to the World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel began in the autumn of 2002.

QPSW had begun its own, smaller, human rights observers' project earlier in 2002. As the only church in the UK implementing such a programme, QPSW was asked by other Churches and church-related organisations to be the implementing partner of a broader partnership in the UK & the republic of Ireland to join the international EAPPI. Eleven countries are involved currently: Canada, Eire, Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the USA. The South African EAPPI is financed by Sweden. The North Americans have the least resources and send the fewest EAs – a problem given the importance of advocacy in the US. EAPPI uses the word 'accompaniment' in the same way as PBI, meaning protection by presence. When 'Ecumenical Accompaniers' return from the field they are committed to a certain amount of public speaking and to advocacy with MPs, government bodies and senior officials in the Churches.

Accompaniers serve for a period of three months and are active in six different localities - two villages and four cities. The Local Reference Group, which advises WCC-EAPPI staff, includes the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, Palestinian organisations and peace activists, and Israeli peace groups.

Acts of resistance are carried out in the struggle to hold on to the land and avoid displacement in the face of construction of roads, settlements and the 'barrier' that has been built by Israel, which cuts many Palestinians off from their fertile land. For the first 20 years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, in the Palestinian resistance there was 'steadfastness' i.e. non-cooperation with the occupation authorities. Then there was the first uprising or *intifada* (1987-92), which was a popular mobilisation, unarmed and nonviolent, except for stone throwing. The second uprising (which began in 2000) was mostly violent and was led by armed groups affiliated to different parties, and the nonviolent actions have received very little attention. No resistance has succeeded in reversing Israeli occupation policies (e.g. settlement expansion or the building of the barrier), so those Palestinians who can afford it now take legal cases against the Israeli authorities to the Israeli courts. Very few rulings have been favourable to Palestinians and even fewer have been implemented by the Israeli authorities. There have been very few successful prosecutions of settler violence.

International advocacy is regarded by Palestinians as essential, as it is assumed that the conflict can end only with international pressure on Israel to change its policies and withdraw from the Occupied Territories. The EU is a major focus for advocacy, since it is Israel's largest trading partner.

So far the international community (meaning here international organisations and some individual states) has not applied pressure on Israel effectively. The International Court of Justice gave an advisory opinion in the summer of 2005, according to which the barrier should be dismantled and erected on Israeli territory, and compensation paid to Palestinians. This advisory opinion was adopted by the UN General Assembly, but no action was agreed by it or by any other UN body to press Israel to abide by this ruling. Those in power are aware of the situation but there is a lack of political will for change.

Why then do people continue the struggle? This is the only way to hang on to the land, and land is key to this conflict and to Palestinian livelihood. At the local level acts of resistance, which continue, include actions by Israeli peace groups and Palestinians working together, for instance to gather the harvest, providing protection to Palestinian farmers who are attacked or prevented from accessing their land by settlers or the Israeli army.

International solidarity networks, EAPPI accompaniers and international conferences are used by those who have faith that 'the international community' will do something. In one place where villagers had suffered at the hands of vigilantes, EAPPI has provided protection since 2003. An example of the kind of 'small victory' that this presence achieves comes from the village of Jayyous, which has been cut off from its most fertile land by the barrier. One day a villager, who had a permit to go to his land through a barrier gate, was refused permission by soldiers to take his tractor through. They said that the rules forbade it. EAPPI checked the rules with the Israeli Humanitarian Hotline and informed the villagers of Jayyous that tractors could indeed go through the barrier gate as long as the drivers had permits. The next day all the villagers with tractors turned up at the gate, en masse, to force the implementation of the rule, and they got through. Similar 'small victories' are scored at checkpoints and in areas where Palestinians live near settlers, when EAs challenge abusive behaviour, prevarication or arbitrary orders. Incident reports, and monitoring logs of checkpoints and barrier gates produced by the EAPPI, are used by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The WCC programme has a 2013 horizon. EAPPI in the UK and Ireland runs to 2008, when it is hoped its life will be extended.

During the discussion that followed Floresca's presentation, a question was asked about other international groups active in the region. These include the International Solidarity Movement, the Christian Peacemakers Team and the International Women's Peace Service. All have different mandates and emphases. They have to work together and to avoid overlap or conflict, focussing on tasks rather than geography, and co-ordination has improved.

The ultimate vision of the programme is of a peace process that leads to the resolution of the conflict on the basis of international law. It is unlikely, however, that the occupation will be lifted in the near future. Governments and others have made a commitment to the dismantlement of the settlements and a return to the 1967 borders. They should be held accountable to this commitment. The occupation must be named for what it is. It is important to struggle for transparency and human rights, irrespective of the outcome.

It seems as if nothing is being achieved through democratic processes. What then should we and our organisations do to support resistance and struggle? There was discussion about the practicability and value of advocacy. Charities have restrictions on campaigning. It is still easier for the churches, if they are in agreement about the campaign. INGOs have become professionalised and are concerned about their funding, so selling stories of struggle is not easy. It is important not to give up on holding government to account. Parliamentary committees have drawn the same conclusions as INGOs about the situation. There can be no effective economic development in the Occupied Territories unless the restrictions on movement are lifted. At present there is increasing aid and also increasing poverty. There must be engagement with Hamas. Perhaps there may be hope for change with a new leadership in the British government.

## **What can we and should we do?**

The issue of whose responsibility it was to take what kind of action was debated more generally. It was suggested that we do not share the dilemmas of those living in situations of violent conflict and our role is to see how best we can support their struggle. It is not up to us to propose nonviolent direct action to others who are 'on the edge' when we do not bear the consequences and cannot support those who do.

One participant noted that his organisation had been asked by its potential donor to make a commitment not to encourage nonviolent direct action in its Zimbabwe programme. To make such a request is to misunderstand the nature of civil society organisations. In the Colombia film it was clear that the community was not taking orders from INGOs. In Zimbabwe, grass roots groups are driven by the situation on the ground.

There was some debate about whether we ourselves were, or were not, 'on the edge' – at a critical point that called for resistance. The argument was put forward that we are, in that we are at a critical point for decisions that will determine the future but do not realise it because no one is pointing a gun at us. How, then are things going to change and what can we and our organisations do?

Our organisations may present a challenge themselves. When organisations are structurally conformist it is important to identify what can be done within this framework. For instance, a member of one organisation said that its public affairs spokesperson might be encouraged to talk more in political circles about power realities and cleavages which contradict the 'moralistic, corporatist assumptions' of the US and the EU. These assume an uncontested, legitimate consensus or 'moral majority', entitled to force particular outcomes, in international negotiations, on those defined as rogues because of their failure to follow the prescribed script. He instanced the unquestioned presumption that Russia would comply with a western policy agenda over Serbia and Kosovo. This has been refuted by a resurgent Russia, under Putin, pursuing its own interests for its own reasons and backing Serbia to the hilt. The hypocritical diplomacy surrounding the alleged Iranian nuclear weapons programme was subject to the same criticism and played directly into the hands of Ahmadinejad and the radicals in Iran.

Within organisations that have become 'sclerotic', individuals need to be more radical. We need to 'speak truth to power' within our own organisations. The approach shaped by 'logframes' (logical framework analysis), now used widely and required by many funding bodies, dilutes the radical vision. The funding agenda distorts what we have to say. Transforming reality and building peace has become part of a technical script. Governments have their own agendas, and we should question whether we should be sharing them at all. It is increasingly clear that the order we have now is not sustainable. In this context, talk of sustainable peace is verging on fraud.

Tony Benn once said that we all recognise the need for freedom of speech, but what about the freedom to be heard? Where do you go with your voice? Direct action can be a powerful form of communication.

In the Colombia film someone goes and speaks at the UN. NGOs can facilitate such actions, i.e. amplify the voices of those who struggle nonviolently for freedom and equality, so that they are heard in international forums. With globalisation it is increasingly important to work both locally and internationally to support resistance. We must keep on with the struggle.

On this note, the seminar was brought to a close, with thanks to the speakers for their presentations and to the participants for their contributions.

## Major CCTS Seminar

We are planning a large, open seminar on Thursday 5 June 2008 at Friends House. Details will be published in the next issue of the Review, but please keep this date free in your diaries.

### *About the CCTS*

The Committee for Conflict Transformation Support (CCTS) consists of UK-based organizations and individuals who are working in partnership with local actors to prevent violence or transform social and political conflict.

## *CCTS: Member Organisations*

Conciliation Resources, London

Quaker Peace & Social Witness, London

Responding to Conflict, Birmingham

War Resisters International, London

Centre for Peace & Reconciliation Studies,  
Coventry University

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and  
Peace, London

Peace Direct

Moldovan Initiative Committee of  
Management, Belfast

Action for Conflict Transformation

One World Trust

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