



Interfaith Cooperation Forum Justpeace Newsletter

August, 2016

.....



Rachel Bergen taught a class at SOP in Siem Reap, Cambodia on Social Media as a tool for social justice and community transformation. (Photo by Rachel Bergen)

MCC worker Rachel Bergen finishes term at ICF

by [Rachel Bergen](#) on July 16

Just a couple of weeks ago, I finished my year-long term as a participant of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Serving and Learning Together (SALT) where I worked as a writer and editor for ICF.

Although I'm very happy to return home to my family and friends after a year away, I'm saddened to leave behind the many friends I've met through ICF.

One of the many lessons I've learned in Cambodia was humbling myself to listen, rather than impose my beliefs, values and traditions on people. In this quiet, contemplative space, I've learned to make more room for difference.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in his book, *The Dignity of Difference*, that “God creates difference; therefore it is in one-who-is-different that we meet God.” I have found this to be true during my year living in Cambodia and in my work with ICF.

As I’ve met SOP alumni and written and edited articles about them, I’ve learned a great deal about how difficult it is to make space for difference, but how important it is. It is in you, SOP alumni, that I see God.

Rabbi Sacks says, “The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognize God’s image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.”

Although I disagree with Sacks’ gendering of God (God is too big to be either male or female), I agree with his premise. How often have we reduced a person to see them just by what makes them different and used it as a reason to alienate ourselves from them and perpetuate conflict? How often has this happened at SOP? I’ve observed how miraculous it is when people let go of their preconceived ideas and make space for difference.

All this is to say, thank you ICF and members of the network for all you’ve taught me over the last year and for showing me a reflection of God. I’ll never forget my experience working with you.

After a month and a half at home resting and reconnecting with my family in Western Canada, I will begin work at Mennonite Central Committee Canada as a staff writer out of their Winnipeg office in central Canada.

Peace!

Rachel Bergen



Mini SOP participants present their final project. (Photo by Max Ediger)

China hosts Mini SOP in Cambodia

by [Max Ediger](#) on August 01

From July 18 to 28, a group of 22 friends from the Guangzhou YMCA visited Cambodia. The visit was initiated by Yolanda You, an SOP 2015 alumna and facilitated by Ms. Jessie Tsang.

For three and a half days the group visited historical sites around Phnom Penh and spent time at YMCA slum projects where they played games with the children and enjoyed homestays.

On the 21st they boarded a bus for Siem Reap to participate in a five-day mini-SOP organized by ICF. The shortened course included discussions on conflict management, resolution and transformation, Socratic circles, discussions on identities, critical and creative thinking, engagement, dialogue and transformation.

Short field trips were also included to help participants reflect more deeply on what they were learning in the sessions. The first visit was to the Cambodian Circus, Phare. Here they observed how music, drama, art and acrobatics can be effectively used to tell important stories which can move people to transformation.

The second was a visit to the War Museum to learn about the consequences of allowing conflicts to escalate to violence and war.

Even though the time was very short, many of the participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn through the creative processes of SOP. This was the first time for ICF to have a program directly related to China and we look forward to more engagements with Chinese friends in the future.



Karen internally displaced people at Ei Tu Hta camp. (Photo by Saw Mort)

Donors to Stop Rations for Displaced Karen in 2017

by [Saw Mort](#) on July 01

Ei Tu Hta (IDP) camp is located in Mutraw district, on the banks of the Salween River, its total population is 3,352 people living in 475 houses. The camp was set up in 2006 when the Burmese Government military in the Nay Pyi Daw area occupied the Karen National Union areas, including the Taw Oo district (Brigade 2) and Klerlweehtu district (Brigade 3). The displaced people of Ei Tu Hta are from Taw Oo district, Klerlweehtu District and Mutraw District.

Today, 10 years later, residents are concerned and worried about their futures as international food donors have said they will stop funding the camp in 2017. This has forced many of the camp residents, unable to provide for themselves off of the poor farming land on the surrounding mountains to consider moving back to land that is land mined and occupied by the Burmese Army.

“We would like to ask the international countries to put pressure on the Burmese government’s military to leave from our areas. If the Burmese military stayed away from our areas, our Karen people would return to our places and earn our living in freedom and in peace. And we would no longer need the free contribution of food - we can depend on ourselves for our living,” says Saw Lah Pwe Moo, the secretary of Ei Tu Hta camp.

Ei Tu Ta camp receives only rice and salt. Every month, each adult gets 12 kilos of rice and 0.15 kilo of salt. For each child, under five years, they get six kilos of rice and 0.05 kilo of salt a month. The assistance comes through the Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD).

The camp residents also worry about the presence of military in the area.

“It seems the peace negotiations in the country are good. We asked them to reduce the Burmese military in our areas and for them to return to their land, but instead of reducing and returning to their land, they brought in more military to our land. They have reinforced their camps and brought in more rations and arms to our land. Seeing this makes us dissatisfied,” says Naw Kay Paw, a resident of the camp.

“The new government must reduce their military in our land, and should not bring in more ammunition. They should return the military to their own territory. If that happened the villagers would go back to their homeland,” they added.

Saw Mort (SOP 2007) is producing a video about the Ei Tu Hta camp. This information is taken from his video script.



The students of the Katalia, Rajabari school which Mohammad Mijanur Rahman helped establish. (Photo by Mohammad Mijanur Rahman)

Fighting for Education

by **Mohammad Mijanur Rahman** on July 01

I grew up in a village called Katalia, Rajabari. Nearly 2000 people live in this village and it is approximately 6 kilometres squared. Different types of people lives there. Some of

them are Hindus, Christians, and the majority are Muslim. This is actually a forested area, and education is very low. I never found an educated person in this village when I lived there. Most of them are day labourer, rickshaw pullers, and farmer. People are fighting for education.

These days some student is studying in school and at the college level. When I was in SOP I learn that education is so important for human beings. When there is a lack of education, many conflicts happen, including land issues, personal conflicts, torture, child labour, etc.

Now I have received SOP training, I feel I can have an effect on my village. Always I feel I need to do structural transformation. My job is in the city, but when I get holiday I go back to my village and organiz youth for positive transformation workshops. We founded a school for kids this year. This is very simple open space school. Now I am leading this school, with five youth members. Our members are interfaith. I am trying to organize an interfaith peace school for the future. In my school I always try to make decision through dialogue.

Mohammad Mijanur Rahman is a SOP 2013 alumnus from Mymensingh, Bangaldesh and now serves as Bangladesh's National Forum coordinator.



The Philippines National Forum meets in Davao City, Mindanao. (Photo by A-esha Ampatuan "Ashang" Afdal)

Philippines holds National Forum Meeting

by [Rachel Bergen](#) on August 01

Seven members of the Philippines National Forum met in Davao City, Mindanao from July 30-31 to reflect on the past year and make decisions regarding programming and work in

the region. During this time the forum elected Abdurazaq “Razz” Madale as their new National Coordinator, succeeding Tirmizy Abdullah.

As a group, the forum decided to host a mini-SOP next February and to hold a one-week workshop on journalism for education and advocacy before their national forum meeting next year. This workshop would most likely take place in late July. At the conclusion of this workshop, the forum expressed the hope of forming a communication team that uses videos, photographs and articles for education and advocacy of issues in the Philippines.

They also plan to take part in this year's regional campaign in September focusing on the thoughts of children about peace. Many of the SOP alumni at this meeting are working with children, so this year's theme is good for them. A-asha Ampatuan “Ashang” Afdal will produce an interview outline, and Rene Bundozan, Razz and Noraisa Saban will select children to be interviewed. Mohalidin “Mhodz” Suga will conduct video interviews in August and plans to produce a video by September.

COMING UP
Justpeace Events

Laos Human Rights Workshop September 11-17

ICF Re-Envisioning Meeting September 26-30 in Hong Kong at the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs head office in the Kowloon area.

Announcements
Exciting news from within the ICF family

Shreeram Chaudhari, an SOP 2006 alumnus recently got a job as Project Coordinator for Help Society Nepal working on the SHAHAKARYA project which is supported by the European Union for three years. The project covers the Dang, Bardiya and Kailai areas. The key objective of the project is to advocate for the right to food and right to freedom for Kamaiyas and Kamlaharis. Congratulations, Shreeram!



Interfaith Cooperation Forum
#52C Street 123, Phnom Penh, Cambodia