

The rescue of James Loney, Harmeet Singh Sooden, and Norman Kember in Iraq, and the death of Tom Fox, has focused attention on the Christian Peacemaker Teams. Not all the attention has been flattering. There have been questions raised about the role of nonviolent peacemakers in a conflict zone. Critics have suggested that peacemakers are naive and cannot make a contribution. It is important to understand the benefits of the presence of nonviolent peace teams in order to understand why they are there.

## Making space for peace through their presence

In his lifetime, Gandhi developed the concept of the 'shanti sena' or peace army. This vision has contributed to the formation of many peace team organizations based on nonviolence. At any one time there may be hundreds of peace team members placed in a dozen or more conflict zones, each person working within this framework of making space for peace through their presence.

Each organization has its own safety protocols, its own criteria for selecting volunteers and for choosing deployments. Each provides training and support for its team members, and although there are many commonalities among these peace teams, there are also features unique to each group.

Many of us passionately believe in the power of nonviolent presence. This passion has led to the formation of the newest peace team orga-

# Why PEACE TEAMS risk THEIR Lives

(Adapted from an opinion editorial in the *Toronto Star* on March 29, 2006)

By Lyn Adamson

nization, the Nonviolent Peaceforce ([www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org](http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org)), which has placed 25 team members in Sri Lanka. NP has plans to expand this unarmed presence to many other conflict zones where there is a need.

Like CPT in Iraq, Nonviolent Peaceforce teams live and work in Sri Lankan communities most threatened by violence stemming from Sri Lanka's decades-long civil war. Without an international presence, people in conflict zones like Iraq and Sri Lanka will be left to suffer the ill effects of the occupation and the armed chaos alone.

The most important aspect of international peace teams' presence in conflict zones is its message: there are internationals, including Americans, Britons, and many others, who care about what is happening to you, who are working to get the word out about what you are suffering and to put pressure on for due process and respect for international human rights. They are doing this through nonviolent presence, and are willing to take some risks to do this.

We can never know how many Iraqis have been moved in a positive way by CPT's presence, although we do know that their work has encouraged the formation of a Muslim Peacemakers Team, which is working at bridging the Shia-Sunni divide.

This is a role that cannot be played by the military or police; that is, working with civil society organizations to develop the social infrastructure so needed to rebuild a war torn country, and showing international support for threatened individuals, organizations and communities.

In Sri Lanka, Nonviolent Peaceforce is seeing the beginnings of a re-emergence of civil society in communities where fear of violence had driven it underground. Dialogues between different groups caught up in the conflict have begun to replace communal violence.

Nonviolent Peaceforce has reviewed its work in the field many times and will continue to do so. Other peace teams go through the

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# TWELFTH ANNIVERSARY OF Havana Quaker Unprogrammed Group

By Mercedes Soca Gil  
Translation: Teresa Dovalpage

The Havana Unprogrammed Group was officially established twelve years ago, on 27 March 1994. In 1991, Heredio Santos, a pastor from my childhood church in Banes, had suggested that I found a Programmed group in Havana. Pastor Santos had given me a copy of Rufus Jones's book, where I discovered the early Quaker testimonies and worship practice. Then I also realised that silent worship spoke more deeply to 'my (spiritual) condition,' quoting George Fox. This was the beginning of a process that ended up, two years afterward, with our group's official recognition.

In 1993, we made contact with Margaret de Rivera from Orland Monthly Meeting, in Maine. She had come to Cuba as a member of the *Pastors for Peace* caravan. Along with others, my partner, Juan Vazquez Martin, and I, fasted for eight days in front of United States Interest Section in Havana. We did so to express our support for the caravan members, who had been stopped at the U.S./Mexico border. After we shared with Margaret de Rivera the idea of creating a silent meeting, she promised to return the following year with books that would help us start.

In February 1994 we decided to bring our project to the attention of Cuba Yearly Meeting. We were not able to attend that meeting, which took place in the Eastern region, due to transportation problems. We

sent our application and Pastor Santos read it. At the beginning, many people were against it, but others said that nothing in the Quaker discipline prevented the creation of our meeting in Havana. Finally, by consensus, they accepted our group as an experimental project.

In March 1994, Margaret de Rivera returned to Cuba with lots of books and a great dose of enthusiasm. We had had some previous meetings with other people who were interested in our project. On the

twentieth of March, a lecture on Quakerism was given at the Episcopal Church in Havana. On the twenty-seventh, we founded the Havana group as "experimen-

tal." Later on, it was called "Havana worship and study group." Five years ago, when a programmed group was founded in Havana, the Yearly Meeting accepted us as the "Havana Unprogrammed Group."

From the beginning, we were supported by Rev. Juan Ramón de la Paz, Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral, and Rev. Raúl Suárez, director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, both from Havana.

During these twelve years, we had been growing stronger spiritually in the Christian faith, thanks to the individual and collective unprogrammed worship experience. In my opinion, Quaker mysticism is very similar to the early Christians' faith. Also, I discovered Quaker literature, which is both fresh and wise.

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PHOTO BY MERCEDES SOCA GIL

# GOING in the RIGHT DIRECTION at a REASONABLE CLIP

BY ED ABBOTT

**A**s a boy I frequently accompanied my father in the horse-drawn cutter over snow-covered roads beneath a star-studded sky, as we returned from the evening church service. Sometimes, when impatient with our progress on the six-mile trip home, I would rattle the reins on the horse's back or reach for the whip. Dad's words have remained with me: "There is no need to rattle the reins or use the whip if the horse is going in the right direction at a reasonable clip."

I am now long retired from my work as Medical Officer of Health. I recall how valuable Dad's advice was in dealing with staff over the years. There is no need to exert authority if one's programme is going in the right direction at a reasonable clip.

Once the Municipality hired an American efficiency expert to report on all departments. His report on the Health Department was critical of me for not keeping staff on a tight rein. When I went before Council, I told of Dad teaching me to drive the

horse, saying, "There is no need to rattle the reins or use the whip if the horse is going in the right direction at a reasonable clip."

"That," I said, "is how I run my department."

Council members, who had grown up in rural Ontario, agreed, and I heard no more from the efficiency expert. 🐾

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same process. Is the benefit worth the risk? Do we believe that the only ones who should take risks for peace are armed men and women in uniforms?

We know that active nonviolence has transformed violent conflict in many parts of the world: in India, in the U.S. civil rights movement, in the campaign against apartheid. Lives have been lost in these struggles. These must be measured against

the gains that have been achieved. Ultimately society must put an end to war. To do so we must build a culture of peace and respect for human rights. We cannot attain this by staying inside a bubble of safety. Taking risks will be necessary.

Gandhi challenged us to 'be the change you wish to see in the world'. Gandhi also said: 'Nonviolence in my lifetime is at the same stage as electricity was in Edison's time: to be refined'. We all know too well

the devastation of war. We would do well to support the development of nonviolent alternatives, and to see what can be accomplished by them. 🐾

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Over the years, we have come to call ourselves Universalists, due to a new perspective of being more inclusive, and to the perception of "that of God" in us and beyond. This new spiritual condition has created conflicts between our group and our Yearly Meeting, which is Christocentric according to its *Faith and Practice*.

What can we do, from a practical standpoint, to develop our Havana Unprogrammed worship group, and those who come to be guided by the Light? We need help and advice about how Quakers proceed in cases like this one. We believe if the Religious Society of Friends could solve these diversity problems, it would also be setting an example for the rest of the world. 🐾

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