

Peace as a Professional in the 21'st Century Civilian Peace Service Conference – April 3 to 5, 2007

Johan Galtung, the world's leading authority in peace studies and research, and the first person to coin the phrase "peace professional" delivered a ringing endorsement of Canadian efforts to create a Civilian Peace Service (CPS) Canada. The venue was the third Civilian Peace Service Canada conference held from April 3 to 5, 2007. The conference was supported by the Canadian Institute of Conflict Resolution (CICR), Saint Paul University, the Canadian International Institute for Applied Negotiation (CIAN), TRANSCEND International University and McMaster Centre for Peace Studies.

The Honourable Flora MacDonald, amongst others, anchored the discussion graphically in the realities of Afghanistan. The case for a civilian peace service has heightened within Canada and globally within the last 10 years. Yet, since 9/11, Canadians have watched politicians choose military aggression to face issues in Afghanistan and Iraq. As a consequence, a greater number of Canadians are searching for viable alternatives to a military response to aggression. Defining this viable alternative has become the mission of the CPSC.

Active since 2004, the CPSC is working towards recruiting, training, and deploying qualified civilians (peace professionals) to facilitate non-violent resolution of conflict – as one step towards sustainable peace. CPSC works with, and builds on the efforts of others, at home and abroad. The primary focus of this year's conference was an examination of the Values and Competencies required of a peace professional.

The conference explored the concept of a "peace professional" from angles as wide-ranging as the global context, core values and key competencies, recruitment assessment and training, certification, and – above all – strategies to address the challenges involved in creating such a profession. An important part of the discussion stressed the importance of making sure that the process of creating peace professionals does not diminish the contribution of peace volunteers, who can achieve extraordinary results. Their particular skills, often built on humanitarianism which cannot be taught, needs to be part and parcel of the way forward in tapping civilian peace resources.

Dr. Galtung highlighted the need for the role of peace professionals throughout his career. He described his frustration with the contradictory nature of a government approach to conflict that he described as being of "bullets and bombs" and experiencing similar concern with the peace activist movement that he thought was based on "words". Rejecting violence "less on moral grounds than on pragmatic grounds, since violence does not work," he generated the concept of a peace professional which would combine the "idealism of the heart" with the "realism of the brain" to achieve "PEACE BY PEACEFUL MEANS."

Like the health professional, Galtung believes the peace professional "would be available not only to friend and foe alike, but also to uniformed (government) and civilian (non-government) folks alike. S/he would see peace as "a relation among actors, a system,

not a property of one actor alone. The peace professional would engage in dialogues with the actors, but have the actor system at the top of his or her mind.”

Although many national policies and strategies exist, it is recognized that only the people on the ground can ultimately solve their own conflicts. Outside parties become part of the problem if they try to impose answers, or take sides, rather than strengthening local capacities to generate their own solutions. This is where a peace professional comes in.

A pool of peace professionals in Canada, with certified skills and experience across a whole range of areas relevant to the handling of conflicts, including voluntary, could potentially make a huge contribution to the prevention of violent conflict, by providing support to local initiatives. Such a pool could draw on the many people already experienced in handling conflicts here in Canada. It could help individual organizations and Canada respond more coherently and professionally to situations of conflict, at home and abroad.

The CPSC strives to bring together experts in the field of peacebuilding to review the theory and implementation of non-violent approaches to conflict in the local, national and international communities. A White Paper will be distributed for discussion and policy purposes.

For additional information, and copies of conference notes and reports, please contact Gord Breedyk at gbreedyk@rogers.com or at 613-721-9829.

(Note: the CPS Coordinating Committee would like to express sincere thanks to CIAN for its significant support to and participation in the conference – thank you!)