

You Give Women a Voice

Women Lead the Way to Peace

Carrell Cataya Magno, known as “Caca” by her colleagues, is no stranger to armed conflict. She grew up in conflict-affected Maguindanao, the Philippines, watching her mother distribute food, develop adult literacy and organize women to speak up in the community. Her mother’s role as a humanitarian aid worker inspired Caca to do what she does now in South Sudan—protect civilians and train women to speak up in community decisions, particularly related to conflict prevention.

“Our [Filipino] culture was similar to South Sudan back then. When I was a child, I saw that women didn’t really participate in community life. I believe my mom was one of the agents of change in our community. I would see her gather women together to discuss important issues, but also have fun and bond together,” Caca said.

The vast majority of women in South Sudan are not part of the national conversation on peace. Slowly, things are changing.

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) trains women to take on leadership roles. Just last year, several Women’s Peacekeeping Teams gathered in the capital for an advocacy conference. They are creating a national network of women, working to end gender-based violence and tribalism over national unity.

They are asserting their rights. “Before, women didn’t talk about how they felt, even when they were beaten, they would

Caca leads an awareness session on early forced marriages.



just keep silent. I think these days, women approach men about how they feel and are able to express what they need. They find ways in which men would listen to them,” Caca commented.

Home-grown Solutions

Most recently, the farming community of greater Mundri where Caca works faces ongoing attacks by armed cattle keepers. Violent cattle raids claimed three lives as well as displaced many from their homes in the past few months. Civilians live in constant fear of the next attack and displacement.

When Caca’s team visited the displaced women and asked what they could do to



Caca facilitates a training on nonviolent communication with the local Women's Protection Team.

reduce cattle-raiding in their community, the women themselves suggested that they could talk to the mothers of the cattle keepers about ending the violence.

Even the chief was intrigued. “He said for all his years as a chief, it was the first time he encountered a non-governmental organization consulting the women on how they can contribute to reducing the impact of cattle migration and cattle raiding in their community. It was interesting for a chief to acknowledge that women have a role in reducing violence in their community.”

Caca believes this solution will have an impact. She has observed that mothers can

influence their children and are generally respected by them. But before they bring the mothers together, Caca's team want to provide support—on how to communicate nonviolently, build peace, manage and resolve conflict. The communities have had a long-standing dispute with one another and the NP team wants to make sure the women are prepared to have a peaceful dialogue.

When you support Nonviolent Peaceforce, you are preparing the women of Mundri to lead the way to peace. Mothers are talking to one another and working together to bring an end to cattle raids, in spite of their differences. ➔

Whose Voices are We Missing?

Hearing everyone's perspectives

Earlier this year, NP presented at the Commission on the Status of Women at the UN in New York. There were rows of empty chairs and tables that should have been filled with women's rights advocates and representatives of non-governmental and humanitarian organizations—people who

were denied entry into the U.S.

Sunday, one of NP's South Sudanese protection officers who was denied a visa said, “I wanted to talk about the long, severe situation South Sudanese women have been put through during this man-

made conflict and other deep rooted cultural marginalization of women. On behalf of rural women in South Sudan, I want to bring awareness to how we've been affected by discrimination and sexually abused as a weapon of war. We are not equally represented in family values or in local court. We are viewed as property by men and aren't allowed to have access to education or work. There's no access to information."



Caca and team in their landcruiser.

"These women that we work with," Caca says, "they dream that violence will stop. They dream about freedom, especially related to economic empowerment and education for their children. As we've worked with them, they tell us how they have changed from our trainings. Some of them would say that before, they were really shy and afraid to talk in public in front of so many people, but now they are more confident. Some dream of speaking English and communicating with others outside their country to share their experiences."

It is important and valuable to hear directly from women living in situations of violence, especially those who have taken it upon themselves to create peaceful change.

Their stories of resilience and community organizing provide hope and are a reminder of the power of grassroots peacebuilding. If they are silenced, how will the world learn about their struggles and the changes needed to bring an end to violent conflict? Without their voices, we fail to understand the urgency to work for peace. ➡

Art, Peace and Taking Action

Helen and Raj Desai are Nonviolent Peaceforce monthly sustaining supporters and members of our Legacy Circle, a group of generous people committed to protecting civilians for generations to come.

Helen was an art history professor and docent of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Art and peace are both important to Helen. In addition to giving to peace efforts, Helen believes in taking action herself. She believes that peace means being a good steward of the earth.

"When you say peace, it's related to Mother Earth," says Helen.

Helen and Raj started a recycling program

in their San Francisco neighborhood in 1970. They opened up their garage every month and people brought recyclables to them. Later, they started the recycling system at apartment buildings and Raj's office building.

Over the next few years, the Desai's decided to join anti-nuclear protests against the construction of Diablo Canyon, a nuclear power plant. They were trained by David Hartsough, who later co-founded Nonviolent Peaceforce. Helen was arrested three times for nonviolent civil disobedience.

"I don't separate nonviolence and peace. They go together. Every time I went to jail, I

took a biography of Mahatma Gandhi, the premier founder of Satyagraha (nonviolent action), with me. That was always important to me.”

Nowadays, Helen calls herself a couch activist. She keeps up on her knowledge of global events and support of different organizations, including Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Helen’s vision for the world is that women will do well, “if we keep on rallying and doing it from our homeland or our house or our couch even.” She would say, “To help people is to make yourself happy. We have to go on educating others. Women are rising up all over the world and they’re asking for their voice to be heard. And Nonviolent Peaceforce helps very, very much with this.”

“Naturally, we started giving because we were friends with David,” Helen says, but “Nonviolent Peaceforce is doing very wonderful work with people who are on the very edge of war or violence. You’re still

going.”

Every gift counts. Generous donors like Helen and Raj Desai give power to Nonviolent Peaceforce’s work.

Thank you Helen and Raj! ➡



Raj and Helen in their living room in San Francisco.

Your Gift Gives Women a Voice

Through your support of Nonviolent Peaceforce, more women are taking leadership positions to advocate for peace and security in their communities. Often, women have to overcome many barriers to attend training. They may have to take a break from their jobs or caring for their children and home. Your gift removes obstacles for women to develop leadership skills and become leaders for peace.

\$10

Can cover meals for a day for one leader in training

\$30

Can pay for a one night stay for a leader in training

\$80

Can cover transportation for one leader in training

\$150

Can cover the cost of trained facilitators to mentor emerging leaders

\$500

Can cover the expenses for the formation of a Women’s Protection Team

If you would like to learn more about leaving a gift to Nonviolent Peaceforce through your will, trust or retirement fund, please contact the U.S. Office at info@nonviolentpeaceforce.org or 612-871-0005.

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