



THE BRIDGE



Cross
Cultural
Bridges

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Cooperation Cross Cultural Bridges (CCB)
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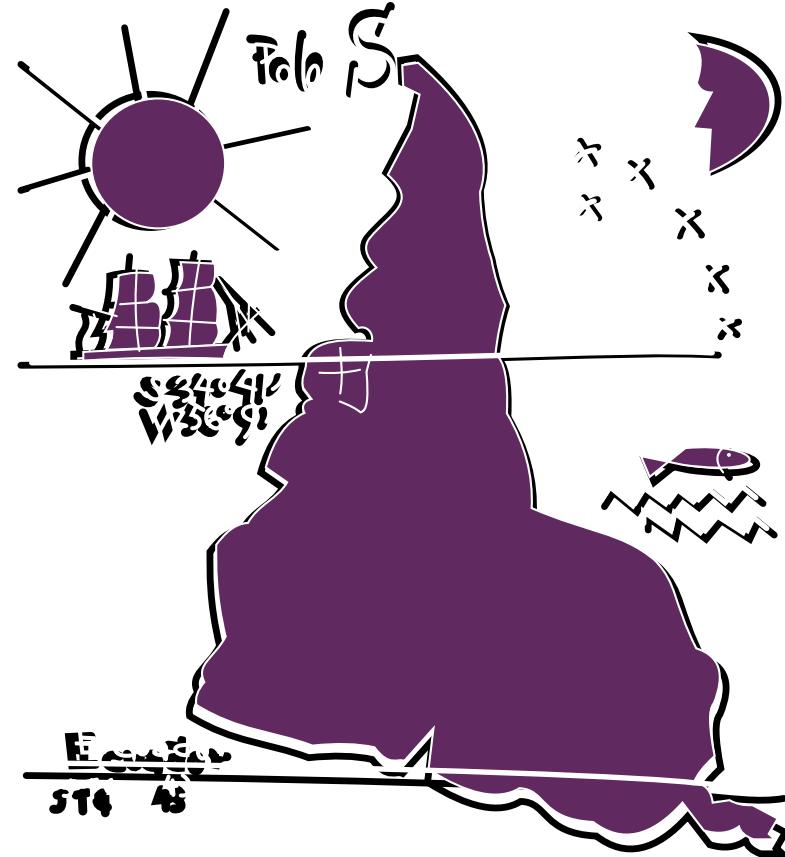
ALTERNATIVE INTEGRATION IN SOUTH AMERICA

Cross Cultural Bridges promotes dialogue between people and cultures at all levels of society. Our mission to inspire and motivate people from different communities to deal positively with diversity and its potential tensions focuses upon the ways in which people, neighbourhoods, municipalities and countries can improve their cross-cultural relations.

This mission lies at the heart of both the work that CCB undertakes at the level of individuals, for example through the Mixed Couples' Project, and of the participation in a large scale project on alternative integration which aims to improve relations among South American countries, as well as the relationship between South America and other continents. At this moment, Henkjan Laats, Gustavo Hernandez and Susanna Daag are working together on the Alternative Integration project in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. They are organizing a number of events to take place before, during and after the Social Forum held in Cochabamba in the second week of December, parallel to the second presidential top meeting of the recently founded "South American Community of Nations".

Mega-initiatives in the heart of ecologically fragile indigenous territories

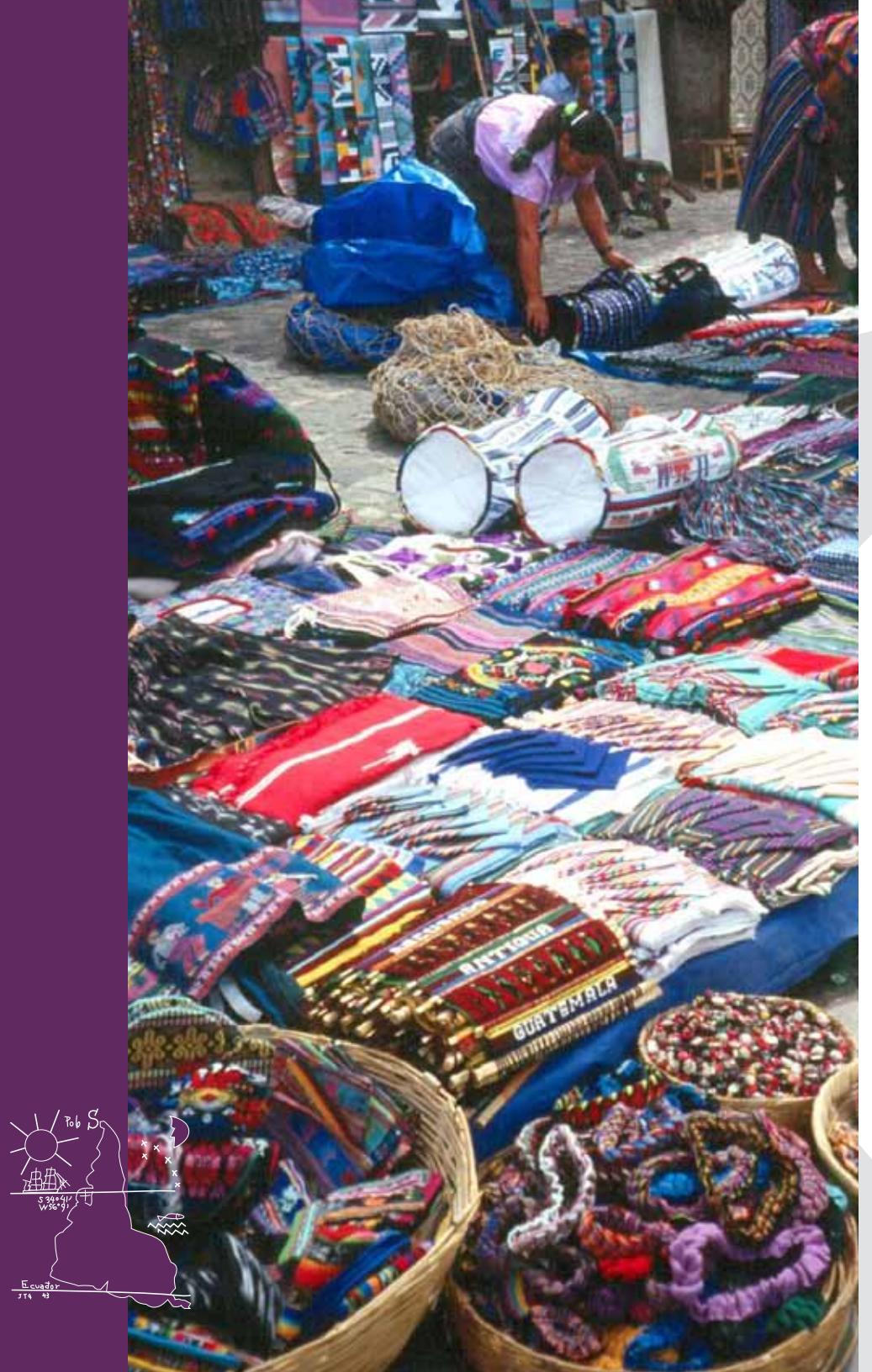
In CCB, we concentrate our efforts on two thematic areas. The first of these is the study of the social and environmental impacts of the Initiative for Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), a mega-initiative that focuses on the most ecologically fragile areas of South America with many indigenous habitants. IIRSA came into being in 2000, when the twelve governments of South America agreed upon a list of 335 infrastructural projects in transport, energy and telecommunications, representing an estimated investment of \$US 37.470 million. IIRSA is financed by a number of international investment agencies, including the Inter American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the



European Investment Bank. In our view, it is irresponsible to plan and execute large-scale infrastructural projects without any sustainable projections regarding integration in South-America.

The second main area of CCB's work relates to the promotion of indigenous peoples' participation in formulating proposals about South American integration. Historically, indigenous peoples have been excluded in decision-making processes concerning integration. It is our belief that indigenous people can and should contribute to these processes, and that they will be able to suggest proposals that promote social inclusiveness and have a positive environmental impact. The added value of Cross Cultural Bridges in the aforementioned processes lies in the knowledge that we can bring of lessons learned from the experiences of integration projects in other continents such as the European Union. We also aim to incorporate principles such as conflict transformation, crossing paradigms, and social learning into the decision making processes.





Promoting an “other, alternative,” environmentally sound integration

To conclude, the alternative integration project does not simply promote integration among countries; it promotes an “other, alternative,” environmentally and socially sound integration. Globalization, increased relationships between countries, and multicultural societies are realities of our time, whether we like it or not. We feel that through our vision and our cross-cultural background, we can contribute towards efforts that try to avoid that these realities result in violent conflict, economic inequality, and environmental degradation.

Henkjan Laats,

Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 2006



REQUEST FOR DONATIONS

Like any other organization, Cross Cultural Bridges needs financing in order to implement its activities..

Unlike many other organizations, our request for donations is not only a financial one!! Donations enable us to act independently from any other instances, which is one of the principles of our organisation.

The people who offer us donations show solidarity with our plea for dialogue between cultures and a

social and environmental sound world.

Our ideal is that Cross Cultural Bridges will not only be an organisation that implements activities, but also asocial movement with a collective voice in the local and global struggle against intolerance.

WE THANK YOU IN ADVANCE

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FOREWORD

"A world without difference and/or challenges is very plain ... To make the most of our lives we should perfect co-existence where we accept every difference and challenge, and work towards pursuit of happiness for all."

Martin Komakech, co-founder of Cross Cultural Bridges.

We proudly announce the first edition of the magazine "The Bridge", the voice of our non-profit organisation Cross Cultural Bridges (CCB). It is a bi-annual magazine for persons and communities concerned about the increasing tensions among people from different cultures in their neighbourhood, country and at the global level; and who believe that these tensions can be turned into constructive learning experiences setting the foundation for dialogue-building and intercultural toleration. CCB believes that there is a tendency that people prioritize their own culture at the cost of others, taking for granted Huntington's 'clash of cultures'. We believe that such an attitude will lead to a never-ending cycle of violent conflicts and that a revised and improved dialogue among cultures is needed in order to avoid this doom scenario.

Cross Cultural Bridges hopes that this magazine will become a source of inspiration for people who share our preoccupation. There are several ingredients of CCB which may make these expectations reality.

One of our characteristics is that we are a group of people from both the South and the North, all of us with an extensive experience in "crossing cultures" in our personal as well as in our professional lives. The first project of CCB, financed by the municipality in Wageningen, Holland emphasized the importance of personal experiences in crossing cultures. Specifically, the project explored the potential of "mixed couples" (a concept indeed proving to be difficult to define but in short consisting of two

partners from different cultures), as a positive factor in social conflicts in multicultural societies. In this first edition of The Bridge, our Project manager, Erik Sauer writes about the experiences of the "Mixed Couples" project.

Furthermore, we share the conviction that "development cooperation" should be reborn as a relation between the South and the North based on mutual respect and equal terms and be directed towards a common social and environmental well-being. As a first reflection on this theme, our Director Henkjan Laats presents the readers with an article about a "renewed cooperation between Europe and South America".

Another reflection by Cross Cultural Bridges is that for an improved dialogue among cultures we need to try to understand people of other cultures, and at the same time be aware that we never will be able to understand other cultures. Tierno Bokar, an African philosopher who lived in the beginning of the twentieth century, pointed out that there is my truth, there is your truth, and that there is the Truth. For the dialogue among cultures, we take this principle of Tierno Bokar as a starting point.

Other principles of Cross Cultural Bridges, such as "dealing positively with diversity and its potential tensions", "being creative and innovative", "ownership of the process and active participation by local communities", "conflict transformation", "redefining intervention, combining fields of action that normally operate separately", "going beyond soft or hard", and "being a catalyst in society" are explained in our webpage: www.crossculturalbridges.org.

At this moment, the main activity of CCB is supporting alternative integration processes in South America, and in-between South America and Europe. Since August 2006, founding members Henkjan Laats, Gustavo Hernandez and Susanna Daag are working on this theme in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. CCB holds that, between and within continents, numerous "integration" models exist, influencing the relations among societies and its people. In most cases these "integration" models place their emphasis on economical relations and infrastructure, while themes such as participation, social welfare and environment get little attention. Regarding the theme

of integration between countries and continents, CCB departs from the notion that the relations between countries and continents need to change to a more equal and environmentally sustainable character, and that for this a dialogue among cultures is needed based on new principles. This magazine includes an article by Gustavo Hernandez and Henkjan Laats about the CCB activities in alternative integration.

As a part of the alternative integration project our co-director Gustavo Hernandez makes a brief comment on a discourse by the foreign minister of Bolivia David Choquehuanca at a continental meeting of indigenous people from North and South America in La Paz. Although Cross Cultural Bridges is politically independent, we believe it is crucial to go beyond existing "paradigms" such as capitalism, concentrating its attention on money, and socialism, on the other hand, on people. Therefore we give importance to the proposal of "good living" by Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, and David Choquehuanca. This proposal concentrates its attentions on LIFE, and argues that we should "live well" but not "live better".

Furthermore in this magazine, Martin Komakech, our violent conflict's expert, reflects on the human rights situation within violent social conflicts in Uganda, emphasizing the need for a cross-cultural dialogue, and communications coordinator Susanna Daag describes a recent CCB research project which compares the social situation of "Third Age" members in Europe and South America, looking for possibilities of exchange between both continents. We hope you enjoy reading the first Bridge and look forward to your comments.

Henkjan Laats, Gustavo Hernandez, Erik Sauer, Susanna Daag, and Martin Komakech
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CROSS
CULTURAL
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MIXED COUPLES AS BRIDGEBUILDERS, THE NETHERLANDS

The first project executed by CCB was the Mixed Couples project in the municipality of Wageningen, a small university city in The Netherlands with about 35.000 inhabitants. It counts with a multicultural population (\pm 11% non-western), with the Wageningen University receiving yearly many students from different parts of the world. What is more, as in the rest of Holland, the local society has through time absorbed international refugees as well as foreign labour workers. A lot of them have obtained Dutch nationality and some have found a partner of Dutch origin. A special group in Wageningen is that of the Dutch development workers who have studied in Wageningen and found their partner abroad.



The role of mixed couples in a multicultural society

The challenge of CCB was to find out what specific role mixed couples could play in a multicultural society. This question was based on the idea that interculturality plays an important role in the relationship of mixed couples, both in a positive and negative sense. On the one hand cultural barriers often are a cause of interrelational problems. On the other hand interculturality is often experienced as an enriching aspect within the relationship. Now, what is this experience of mixed couples at the micro-level worth and could it somehow be extrapolated to a larger scale? In our search for answers to these questions we decided to design a small project. We started with an open workshop in the community centre of Wageningen's most multicultural neighbourhood (around seventeen nationalities). With several mixed couples we worked out a list of interesting topics on interculturality and a small group took this as a starting point for following activities.

Five monthly activities were designed, with different themes:

- How does the 'outer world' perceive mixed couples and how can you influence this perception?
- How do mixed couples perceive their own intercultural relation? Do cultural differences play a bigger role than personal differences?
- What are the do's and do not's for non-Dutch natives in order to feel happy in The Netherlands? How can the Dutch partner play a stimulating role?
- How do children deal with their intercultural background? How do they experience their identity, their nationality? How can parents stimulate a positive self-image?
- How do mixed couples deal with conflicts and can we learn from them to the favour of the multicultural society as a whole?

As these are rather serious questions and people still had to be motivated to participate we decided to go for a light, easy accessible approach. We looked for a variety of cultural and social activities in which the specific theme was treated. We

showed a film that treated an intercultural relation and the outer world's reaction to it. We displayed a documentary portraying, in a very close and critical way, two mixed couples and we invited the documentary makers to comment on it. The Municipality of Wageningen showed interest in the project and decided to subsidize it.

For CCB it was a very positive learning experience. It showed us that it does work well to combine rather serious discussion themes with lighter cultural and social activities. The major restriction was that the project was implemented by volunteers, who had to combine the project with busy jobs, and it was difficult to motivate mixed couples to dedicate various Sunday afternoons to this activity. We hope that we will be able to continue this activity on a more professional basis in which we concentrate on the role of mixed couples in the management of intercultural conflicts and how we can learn from mixed couples in favor of the multicultural society as a whole.

*Erik Sauer,
Wageningen, The Netherlands, 2006*

The idea of Cross Cultural Bridges was born in 2002, when Gustavo Hernandez and Henkjan Laats made a first design for a project on "multicultural leaders" in Peru, The Netherlands and the United States. Around Christmas 2004, the idea of Cross Cultural Bridges, first named Cross Cultural Solutions, was concretized in Amsterdam and Venice. Early 2005, Susanna Daag from Sweden, Martin Komakech from Uganda, Erik Sauer from the Netherlands, Gustavo Hernandez from Peru and Henkjan Laats from the Netherlands, founded Cross Cultural Bridges. The same year, the organisation was registered in the Chamber of Commerce in Arnhem and in November 2005, CCB implemented its first project on "mixed couples", sponsored by the Municipality of Wageningen. In 2006, CCB launched its web page, www.crossculturalbridges.org, its statute was elaborated, and the organisation was registered as a foundation.

Since August 2006, founding members Gustavo Hernandez, Henkjan Laats and Susanna Daag are working on the theme of socially and environmentally sound integration in South America, and the relation between Europe and South America. Martin Komakech is working on Human Rights Defence in Uganda and Erik Sauer is active within the field of fair trade between Latin America and Europe. All the founding members have experience in living in several countries as well as "crossing cultures" in both their personal and professional lives.



THIRD AGE IN BOLIVIA AND SWEDEN: A CROSS CULTURAL PROPOSAL FOR INTER-GENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

The Birth of a Project

In late spring 2006 the first sketches of a project proposal on the Third Age were put on paper by two CCB members¹ and the Swedish senior researcher Lars Ljungstrom. The initial plans for the project evolved from discussions about the need for a human touch in old peoples' homes and the lack of stimulation and inclusion into society of the elderly in Sweden, and about, conversely, their inclusion in the South, particularly within the family but also within other realms of society, coupled with, on the other hand, growing societal and political concerns about pension systems and other social rights for older generations in South America.

Taking as point of departure the mission and vision of CCB, the initial idea was to

present a project of South-North cooperation through a proposal of dialogue and exchange of lessons learned between South America and Europe and more specifically Bolivia and Sweden. The theme proposed was "alternatives" for persons belonging to the Third Age² group, through a comparative study on the ways in which different societies include or exclude persons belonging to this age group, and how an exchange in experience could improve not only the conditions of the persons concerned but also how it could help to improve understanding between older and younger generations. Also in line with CCB's project policy, the need to see the project as an activity both at the micro (private) and macro (political) level was emphasized. An historical as well as a cross-cultural approach was applied, the latter meaning in this sense a comparison between two countries from the South and the North. With his cross-disciplinary academic and work experience in social psychology, and his knowledge and interest in Latin America, Lars Ljungstrom was seen as an inspiring and creative addition to the CCB team, sharing also the value of having had experience in crossing cultures and generations both on a personal and professional level.

¹Gustavo Hernandez and Susanna Daag, both at the time living and working in Sweden.

²In Sweden this group of people includes broadly the generation of 1940. In Latin America due to differences in life expectancy but also social differences this group is seen as somewhat older.



Three Justification of the research project can be mentioned for the project:

^o The demographic and economic importance of the Third Age group in Sweden and in Latin America. Whereas this is more applicable to “the ageing Europe”,³ this point is also relevant to South America, where many countries are facing a new stage of change in demographic patterns.

^o Previous studies on the situation of elderly people do not tackle the research issue of the current project.⁴

^o The comprehensive question of the type of tensions concerning Third Age in Sweden and Latin America. In Sweden the debate mainly centres around the treatment of the elderly in old peoples’ homes and the exclusion of senior persons from the workplace, in order to give way for the new generations;⁵ but the said group is also affected in other aspects such as politics, and in public activities e.g., in cafés, libraries, and sports halls. In Latin America there is a growing debate about the exclusion of the elderly from the social welfare net, due to lacking or insufficient social pension systems.

Key research issues include intergenerational (political) conflicts and individual reactions on public eldercare. Furthermore, the project seeks to discover what we can learn from a cross culturally defined concept of Third Age and why it is essential to know and understand its content and components. How does this differ in Europe and in Latin America, where only recently the theme has become a political topic? Whereas in Sweden, the Third Age group is guaranteed a number of rights by the welfare system,

they face more informal social marginalisation, as they are excluded from the work life as well as other social aspects in the private sphere and even in the family. The low priority that is given to old age in national policies in Latin America has compelled older adults to depend more on their own efforts, organization, and leadership, as well as on support from their families and the community, in order to meet their basic needs.

The motivation for CCB

Having previously implemented a project on the bridgebuilding of mixed couples at the local level, as well as currently working on alternative integration processes on an regional/international level in Latin America, the theme of Third Age and intergenerational understanding was considered a highly important and meaningful next step for CCB, in line both with its mission and vision as well as its core values. For in the eyes of

the CCB founders, ‘cross-cultural’ does not only infer a horizontal understanding, in this case between Sweden (Europe) and Bolivia (Latin America) but also an understanding and dialogue on a vertical level between the local and the global as well as between generations.

It is our belief that whereas the North has advanced in social policies for the elderly, it could learn a great deal from the South when it comes to respect and appreciation of the knowledge and experience of the senior adults of society and vice versa. CCB is confident that increased participation and inclusion of senior adults in both Sweden and Bolivia are essential in facilitating a new intergenerational social contract needed in the new demographic, economic and social contexts arising.

Where do we go from here?

Currently, more thorough research is being conducted by the Swedish researcher, in particular about the historical and present Third Age situation in Sweden and Latin America, and a project proposal is being prepared for fundraising purposes. Planned activities for 2007 include: the budgeting for research and a Swedish pilot study; the presentation of the project to interested organizations; the design of an interview guide; the performance of a pilot study and result evaluation and further discussion of a future full scale project.

Susanna Daag, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia,
Lars Ljungstrom, Stockholm, Sweden, 2006

³ Due inter alia to decreasing birthrates and extended life expectancy it is estimated that in 2025, approximately 21 percent of the population in Europe will be above 65 years old.

⁴ The results of many Swedish studies bring up the problems of reorganisations and work stress as well as many practical issues, which are not significant for problems of Third Age, ut for job satisfaction overall, irrelevant of age or work place.

⁵ The Swedish debate on the large 1940's generation “eating up” all the welfare money and the young generation having to pay for it, the lack of stimulation and inclusion of the elderly.





DIALOGUE: AN EFFECTIVE AVENUE TO PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

According to some schools of thought, conflict is something that man experiences in day-to-day life. Not all conflicts are violent and not all are negative; they rather have to do with understanding and appreciating differences. We know this whenever we make any decision or choice between options we negotiate within ourselves, without affecting physically or having an adverse affect on innocent bystanders. We also seemingly and unconsciously are mindful of making the internal conflict become public. Ultimately we resolve the dilemma or conflict and walk away with a smile on our faces, with the thought that we have made the best of the situation before us.

There are other conflicts between individuals, groups or man and the environment, affecting third parties to the conflict who are not directly involved but become directly affected. It is these kinds of conflicts that man grapples with more. Just as we handle our internal conflicts seemingly through reason and internal dialogue rather than internal violence, we too can borrow that approach for other types of conflict. This does not in any way imply that internal conflicts resolved through internal dialogue results in the best outcomes but at least the effects seem or appear less adverse on third parties. The dialogue may also go beyond the individual, especially where the first internal dialogue did not yield positive results. This dialogue resembles consultation and is positive since it has evolved as non-violent.

Uganda has experienced political conflicts every decade since her independence in 1962. I do not intend to discuss all the conflicts but rather to focus on the current conflict in northern Uganda that is or is becoming Africa's longest conflict. The conflict, an armed civil strife, is between the Government of Uganda led by Yoweri Museveni and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels led by Joseph Kony. As the conflict has taken place mainly within the Acholi sub-region inhabited by the Acholi tribe of northern Uganda, especially since Joseph Kony comes from the region, the Acholi have been the most affected third party to the conflict. Both of the main parties to the conflict have largely used the Acholi population to fight against each other by recruiting them through various methods. This implies that both sides have injured the Acholi and caused suffering and injustices that have left the population bitter towards them both.

Despite the fact that the conflict began about 20 years ago, in 1986, with much abuse taking place in the earlier years, the international community's response towards the violations is inadequate. For over 50 years civil society has been advocating for an end to impunity particularly by state actors protected by their proximity to the powers that be. This has culminated in the International Criminal Court (ICC) coming into force from July 2002 through the Rome Statute. The international community hopes to achieve individual responsibility for



crimes against humanity among others and an end to impunity. What is the challenge in the northern Uganda conflict? The conflict has lasted 20 years and the ICC's mandate can only deal with the last four years, thus spearing the animal at the tail. Based on the capacity of dialogue to reach resolved positions within oneself, there is hope. Since the beginning of the conflict members of civil society - mainly from Acholi - have maintained their opposition to military means, privileging dialogue. The Tradition of the Acholi people resolves conflicts with a "sitting," where both parties come together to jointly address their concerns. This involves a third party mediator acceptable to both sides, truth finding and the longer term effect of restoration of relationships that goes beyond short term punitive measures. Studies of such cultures from different parts of the world and allowance of these cultures to develop could help change approaches at international level. In some of these cultures there was neither death penalty nor imprisonment, but processes of acceptance, punishment, sacrifice and respect leading to stronger relationships between the conflicting parties.

Looking back at the 20-year conflict, dialogue has been dotted sparsely and not given a chance until early this year. In April 2006 the world was informed that the South Sudanese former rebels, having recently signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Khartoum government, had made contact with the ICC indicted LRA leaders offering an olive branch. The LRA have been based in south Sudan and had only recently set up new bases in the DR Congo. Prior to this we had seen attempts at dialogue between the fighting parties on only two main occasions: in



1988 with a rushed outcome that did not end the conflict but split the rebels, in 1993 - cut short by a 7-day ultimatum by government demanding the rebels' assembly so as to rapidly reach a conclusion. This teaches us that dialogue cannot be rushed, as understanding is paramount.

Other initiatives from civil society have focused on trying to convince the government of Uganda to pursue dialogue as well as reaching out to the rebels in several ways. This current initiative is the first time a foreign government has taken active part in mediating the talks and has some leverage over both parties. As a confidence builder through Acholi traditions a large group of Acholi leaders were facilitated to travel to the rebel hideout in Garamba forest DR Congo, to meet with the rebel chief. Many people criticised the action, asking why victims should meet with rebels. But this is culturally based so as to stop a cycle of violence. Acholi people have been victims of both sides and by the same token would not talk to their government, but they do and thus actually participate in nation building.

The initiative by the South Sudan leaders eventually culminated in the on-going Juba Peace talks between the government of Uganda and the LRA rebels. The conflict appears to have reached a stalemate with neither side able to get rid of the other, while endless suffering to the innocent civilians continues, hence the resort to negotiated settlement. The peace talks agenda has been drawn with only the two sides as mentioned and the mediator role of the Sudanese. This is the usual trend of peace negotiations around the world. The rest of the persons present including traditional leaders are there as observers.

However there is a need for a different approach especially where none of the sides represents the interests of the most affected people. It would be more effective to the local populations to include their cultural leaders to play an active role in the peace negotiations, especially since they can be representatives who have no political or other interests or lineages, except to their local populations. Traditional approaches married together or integrated into the more formal approaches may have a much better effect on the outcome of the negotiations in the interests of the people especially against the backdrop of all sides claiming to represent the people's interests.

Some of the fruits of the on-going peace negotiations in Juba, south Sudan, have lead to the Acholi sub-region being free of conflict since the LRA rebels moved out of Uganda in mid-September 2006. For the first time in 20 years signs of real peace can be seen and the population displaced into IDP camps around the sub-region can begin to return to their places of origin.

Sustainable and restored relationships appear more powerful a tool than isolation in attaining lasting solutions to conflicts. We need not only to learn from this but also to allow it to develop and teach us as it goes along. Rwanda has developed its judicial system to incorporate "Gacaca," enabling more people to be brought to trial in this short time than the formal justice system could possibly do in say 10 times as many years. The result is that communities are healing together and the prisons are being emptied, without impunity.

*Martin Komakech
Gulu, Uganda, 2006*





A SPEECH BY THE BOLIVIAN CHANCELLOR DAVID CHOQUEHUANCA

On the 8th of October 2006, the “Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala” (former name of the continent now known as the Americas)



was celebrated in the city of La Paz, Bolivia. Organizations coming from fifteen countries of the continent met in order to advance the preparations of the “Social Summit for the Integration of the Peoples” to take place in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, from the 6th to 9th of December 2006, in parallel to the official Presidential Summit of the South American Community of Nations, which was formally launched in 2000. The preparatory work combined political action, dancing and festivity.

The Commission on Economic Organization and Perspective tackled the theme of international commercial agreements and together with these the proposals of solidarity agreements between peoples (for example ALBA on the part of the Venezuelans, and the TCP on the part of the Bolivians). The current process of South American integration, based on the aforementioned models and the indigenous vision, was also analyzed. Of particular importance was the speech of the Bolivian Chancellor, David Choquehuanca, who presented his vision on “living well.” This proposal has begun to be circulated by the government of President Evo Morales as part of his campaign against orthodox “free trade” proposals fundamentally based on the interchange of commodities.

In dealing with commercial agreements between peoples, Choquehuanca emphasized the importance of searching for a horizon even beyond social justice. According to the Chancellor, the petroleum crisis is the crisis of the project of modernity, and facing this, the Bolivians “want to live well, we don’t want to live better, which is what the development programs search for.” In the same way, he pointed out that social justice is excluding because it restricts its reach to the anthropocentric paradigm of the Enlightenment. Notwithstanding, what is important to the Bolivians is life. *To lie, rob, exploit your neighbor, not work, is not to live well. To go against nature could permit to “live better”, but not to live well. We are beyond socialism and capitalism.* He also stated that the current Bolivian process for the ratification of a new Constitution should help the Bolivians to construct not a new society but a new life.

Finally, the chancellor emphasized the necessity of a cultural dialogue through a strategy of alliances between different groups. Our education, he says, should “nurture” our identities. And more than formal education, we should strengthen dialogue understood as a communitarian learning experience, as a complementarity between parties, fathers and sons, students and professionals, without distancing itself from the world looking at it from outside. On the bases of this set of ideas - quite different from Habermas’ model of cultural dialogue between individuals - an economic, social and political interchange of life is proposed to all people as an alternative mode of integration.

Gustavo Hernandez,
Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 2006

RENEWED COOPERATION BETWEEN SOUTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

In the past years, the political situation of South America changed drastically and at this moment most countries have social-democrat governments. In this political conjuncture, South-America and Europe should reconsider their relations. It is convenient for both continents to renew their historical ties, striving towards more equality and justice. South America is looking for a tighter relationship merely for pragmatic reasons; most countries are fed-up with the "backyard" policy of the United States. Until now however, Europe has not responded to these changes in the international political scene, and continues its international politics based on unequal economic and geopolitical relations, "softened" by development cooperation.

New cooperation should be based on mutual respect. Recent global and geopolitical changes increase the need for a more equal relationship, from a viewpoint of both collective and own interest. The dependence of Europe regarding natural resources increases fast and South-American governments are not anymore willing to sell these resources for bottom prices. South-America intensifies internal alliances and alliances with other continents, while many countries in Europe, for example the Netherlands, choose to follow the United States unconditionally, ignoring that, citing Paul Kennedy, the United States are losing their status of a (respected) world power.

Missed opportunity?

A concrete example of new cooperation at a global level is the surge of different "South-South" alliances. An interesting example is the alliance IBSA: India, Brazil, South Africa. This alliance, which came formally into being in 2003, has principles that form an alternative against alliances such as the G8. The alliance is based on three shared principles: "(1) democratic institutions and values; (2) to share the struggle against social injustice; (3) to fight against political and economic uncertainty." .The South-African investigator Lynn White argues: "IBSA is much more than commerce and investment alone: it offers a unique historical opportunity to intensify the South-South dialogue through different forms of cooperation and exchange. It is a more subtle form of development cooperation in a globalized world which stimulates the exchange of knowledge, technology and know-how, among the central countries of the South."

In my opinion, Europe should not regard such initiatives as a threat, but initiate itself suchlike alliances with for example South America, which go beyond existing economic paradigms. Doing so, Europe moves itself towards the global midfield, instead of moving towards the global sidelines, as it is doing in the past years.

Europe and the Netherlands already can choose new positions regarding some developments that are taking place in South-America.



Lessons by and for the European Union

Since the democratization and the surge of leftist governments in South America during the nineties, its countries have an increased interest in more cooperation among themselves. Many people in South America take the European Union as an example; unfortunately emphasizing economic and infrastructural components without taking into account the social and human rights programs which resulted in more economical equality and social justice within the European Union. In South America many infrastructural projects are planned and implemented that supposedly should promote integration within the continent. Europe finances many of these projects. In practice however, most of these projects have enormous social and environmental impacts, and, according to their critics, they provoke disintegration instead of integration. Positive and negative lessons from the European Union may help to make integration in South America more environmentally and socially friendly. Furthermore, European countries can learn from experiences of integration in South America, in order to take action regarding the problems that are occurring at present in the European Union.

Development cooperation on equal terms

I do not argue that development cooperation should disappear, however I do argue that it should be regarded as an integral part of other kinds of international relations, and therefore should change drastically. Many European countries, among which the Netherlands, prioritized in the past years development funds for Africa and Eastern Europe at the cost of South America, and they did not initiate other, alternative forms of cooperation. This was not favourable for the relation between both continents. In my opinion, the mutual challenge is to investigate how the actual and former relations that were based on development cooperation steadily may be converted in an equal cooperation. In spite of the positive macro-economic and political developments in South America, the gap between the rich and the poor is still bigger than in any other continent, social security is almost absent, democracies are fragile, urban violence is alarming and the environmental impacts of (new) economic activities are enormous. Many previous

South American governments took these “side-effects” for granted or caused them on purpose. Most present South-American governments however consider them as national key problems, and are putting real efforts to fight these problems in cooperation with other continents.

The big money

Europe is the most important business partner of South America. The present trade agreements are merely neoliberal, according to the “classic” North-South logics. A profound change of these agreements is a first step towards a more equal cooperation. Not only governments but also the involved companies are responsible for this. At a commercial level, European multinationals should change their codes of conduct and apply the same standards in Europe and South America. Not only at a long term, but also at a short term such an attitude may be more profitable for the multinationals involved, improving the relation with the country where it is active and the relations with that country’s population. Multinationals that do not do so, confront increasing local resistance, and even risk being expelled from a country.

Looking beyond our own frontiers

A more intensive and a more equal relation between Europe and South-America imply also changing roles and changing alliances at a global level. South-America looks for agreements with Europe and other parts of the world regarding themes such as international law, environment and peace. At the same time, in European countries such as the Netherlands, very few debates take place about existing bilateral and multilateral relations. Instead of thinking from a wider perspective and notwithstanding international conflicts and possible new international alliances, it appears that in the “globalisation era” Europeans tend to think more nation-centric. In my opinion, there is a urgent need for debates that clarify positions such as: is Europe willing to construct equal relationships with the South, is Europe critical or not regarding its relation with the United States, is Europe able to lose its dominant (euro-centric) attitude, is Europe able to learn from other continents, does Europe choose for a mediator’s role in international conflicts, or does it take part in those conflicts?

Getting rid off paradigms

In the first half of 20th century almost no one believed that a level of social equity at a national level could be achieved by democratic means. The Netherlands and Sweden proved in the 1970’s that it is possible to do so. The same sceptics existed regarding the possibility of social equity in Europe. Notwithstanding, partly thanks to the social politics





of the European Union, countries such as Ireland and Spain belong nowadays to the European economical vanguard. The next paradigm that we need to get rid off is our "belief" that some countries in this world are bound to be rich and other countries are bound to be poor, or, even worse, that "rich" countries are rich thanks to the cheap natural resources and cheap labour from "poor" countries. Furthermore, although they probably will not be able to do so, Europeans need to get rid off their sense of superiority and euro-centrism. I perceive that the impossibility to go beyond nested paradigms is one of the main causes why it is so difficult for Europe to see development cooperation as a part of complex relations between countries instead of the mercenary activity that it is now.

Learning from each other

I end my articles with a metaphor. The relation between South America and Europe is like the one of a young woman who flirts with an old man. The old man, however, does not react. Not because he does not want so, but because he did not put on his glasses. It is a pity, because a closer, renewed cooperation between both continents would be beneficial for the well-being of both continents and for the creation of a healthier world order. Such a relationship however only will be successful at the long term if the old man will fresh up his mind, and perceive the young woman not only as beautiful but also as intelligent.

Henkjan Laats, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 2006

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Graphic 7\ LRA soldiers stand guard at an assembly point, south of Juba, Sudan, Sept 20, 2006, Reuters.

Graphic 8: LRA Rebel listening to the Gulu district local government during one of their meetings, The New Vision Newspaper, 21st November 2006

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