



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
THINKING OF THE WORLD

**ENGAGING  
DIASPORA**  
in development  
Tapping Our Trans-Local Potential for Change

## **Report on Dialogue 4:**

### *Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles*

July 13, 2011

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street

#### **Overview**

The fourth dialogue of the *Engaging Diaspora in Development* series took place on Wednesday, July 13, 2011, “Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles.” The power of connection and engagement between members of diverse diaspora and other members of the Canadian public was apparent at the dialogue. All 137 people in attendance seemed to share a commitment to create change in their Canadian and globally located communities.

#### **Agenda**

The dialogue covered three core themes (see Appendix 1):

- (1) the diaspora’s capacity to transform conflict and bring about increased human security in regions of attachment,
- (2) how diaspora play an effective and legitimate role in gaining global support for human rights and security, and
- (3) the possibilities and roles for creating greater human security and transforming conflict.

In order to frame the dialogue participants and members of the public were provided access to a background paper *Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles: A Backgrounder*-- prepared for the dialogue, by James Busumtwi-Sam, associate professor in the Department of Political Science, and Director (acting) of the Development & Sustainability Program at SFU (see Appendix 2).

#### **Media**

The human insecurity and peacebuilding briefing paper also formed part of a series of five blogs that were posted on the Engaging Diaspora in Development Wordpress site (see Appendix 3).

There were several members of the media present, including Kathleen Flaherty, who is recording all five sessions for the CBC Ideas series.

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The event was a video recording of the event is available on the website – [http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/event\\_human\\_sec\\_and\\_peacebuilding.htm](http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/event_human_sec_and_peacebuilding.htm). In addition, there was a live Twitter feed - [http://twitter.com/#!/SFU\\_Diaspora](http://twitter.com/#!/SFU_Diaspora)

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#### *Summary of Proceedings*



Participants interacting while making their name tags just before the dialogue.

**Shaheen Nanji**, Director of International Development at SFU and Co-Director of the Engaging Diaspora in Development project acknowledged that the dialogue centre is on First Nations territory and welcomed members of the diaspora in British Columbia who escaped civil unrest or conditions of personal insecurity before arriving in Canada. The evening encompassed a number of stories of how people are working to transform conflict and raise awareness about human insecurity in their regions of origin. Three central questions were explored:

- What have diaspora accomplished in terms of transforming conflict and increasing human security in regions of attachment?
- What are the effective and legitimate roles of diaspora in gaining support for human rights and security?
- What are the possibilities for peace building-- from formal to informal approaches to transforming conflict, reconciliation and supporting good governance?

**Dr. Joanna Ashworth**, Senior Researcher in the Centre for Sustainable Community Development and Co-Director of the Engaging Diaspora in Development project was the lead moderator for the dialogue. She began by introducing the program and recognizing both newcomers and those who have participated throughout the dialogue series. As a way to prepare for the dialogue, she invited participants to share their views on what would make this dialogue successful. Participants identified equality, respect, providing content, speaking personally, and really listening well with openness and generosity as key elements for a successful dialogue; this served as a good guide to the dialogue that unfolded over the two hours that followed. Joanna then invited **Dr. James Busumtwi-Sam**, an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Sciences at SFU and academic advisor to the Engaging Diaspora in Development project to provide a conceptual framework for peacebuilding and the role of diaspora.

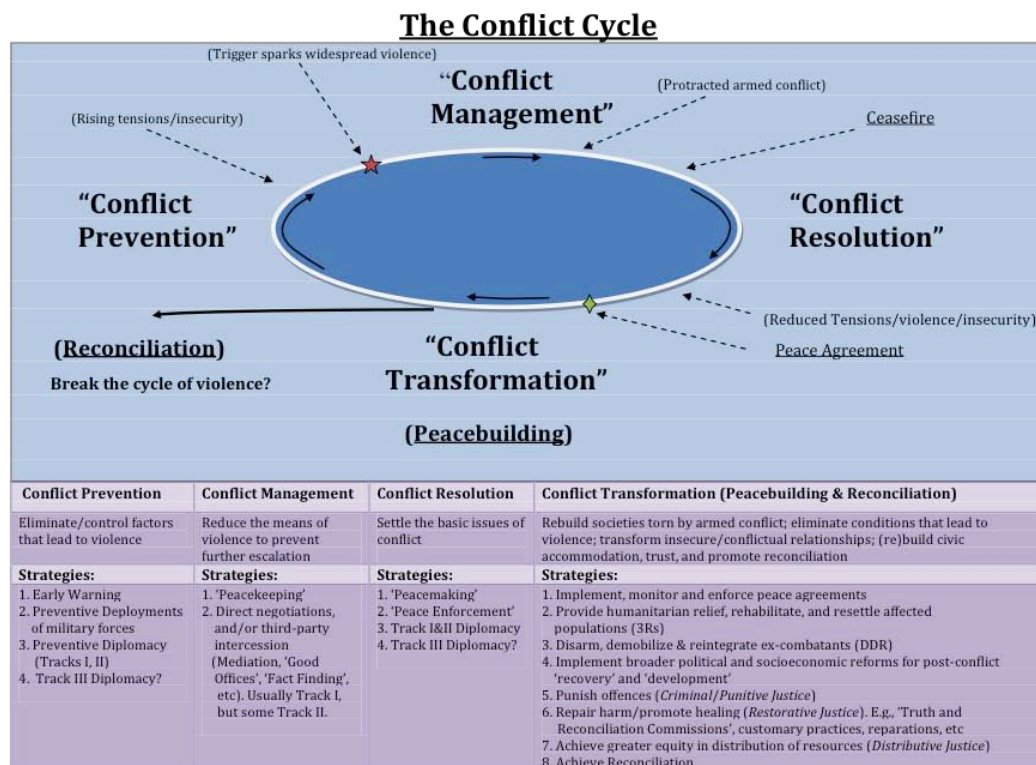
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Dr. James Busumtwi-Sam

James shared a diagram of the cycle of conflict to help the audience visualize this complex issue.



Prepared by: James Busumtwi-Sam (Simon Fraser University) 2011

His presentation focused on conflict transformation and the role diaspora plays in this transformation. He stated that "The main challenge of peacebuilding begins after the peace agreement has been signed."

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Although there is limited academic research on the topic of diaspora and its contribution to peacebuilding, it is well-known that individuals, as part of diaspora, are making important contributions and working to overcome many challenges. James noted that there are often divisions and fragmentations among the diaspora and acknowledged that diaspora contributions may not always be possible. Even though the challenge of engaging diaspora in a meaningful way remains, it is important to recognize that by engaging certain individuals in the diaspora, we are delegitimizing others. He continued by saying that there are many ways that diaspora engage in conflict transformation. Using the Three Track Diplomacy framework, James made some key distinctions between Track I, II and III (Track I being official agents of the state, Track II being NGO's and other civil society organizations, and Track III being individuals who work informally at the grassroots level). "Diaspora may be involved at any of these three levels and can be very effective agents of change," James asserted. More on his framework can be accessed on this blog post: <http://engagingdiaspora.wordpress.com/2011/07/11/human-insecurity-peacebuilding-background/>

With this framework in place, the evening continued with the first storyteller, **Juliane Okot Bitek**, a



Writer Juliane Okot Bitek reading "The Things We Carried".

writer born to Ugandan parents while they were exiled in Kenya. She currently lives in Vancouver. Juliane read a piece called "The Things We Carried" from "The Dry Season," a work in progress. This reading described the experiences of three women who were kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army, a guerrilla group that has terrorized northern Uganda, Sudan, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1987. Juliane noted that the women who were pulled from their homes carry with them a heavy burden, including the rejection of their own people when they return home to their villages. *"On return to Uganda, these women discover, much like the experiences of the diasporic people who return home, that the place and the people who remained static and often perfect in their memory, has ceased to exist."*

The next guest speaker, **Ritendra Tamang**, is from Nepal and is a researcher with the Vancouver-based Network for Development and Democracy with an interest in anthropology, international development and migration. Ritendra spoke about Nepalese and Bhutanese diaspora activism in the USA and Canada and how these actions have been successful in making a greater impact back in Nepal and Bhutan. He mentioned the active role that Nepalese diaspora has had in pressuring the US Congress and the United Nations in paying attention to human rights. After years of lobbying for this cause, the Nepalese diaspora accomplished their goal of persuading the US Congress to issue an official letter condemning the human rights abuses and violations occurring in Nepal and pledging for the restoration of the democratic process in the country. This action had tremendous impact.



Ritendra Tamang

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In Vancouver, where more than 1,200 Nepalese citizens reside, the diaspora have funded many projects related to capacity building and economic development to support post-conflict reconstruction in Nepal and to contribute to the peacebuilding process. Bhutanese diaspora, although smaller, have voiced human rights violations against their people in Nepal who have been marginalized while living there for many years as refugees. Part of the activities undertaken by the Bhutanese diaspora led to Canada's approving refugee status for 2,500 Bhutanese citizens since 2008.

**Kawa Jabary** shared his first-hand experience of political activism for peacebuilding in Iraq. He was born in the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq and after being arrested in 1994 for his political activities, Kawa fled to Turkey and finally settled in Canada as a refugee. Since he left, he has been back to his country a few times where he has made attempts to reach political activists in an effort to build a democratic, non-violent movement on the ground. Unfortunately it has not been easy.

"What I've noticed is that the responsibility does not lie only on politicians. The culture of that region is influenced by violence." In his last visit to Iraq, Kawa experienced what could have been another civil war. Activists organizing rallies were convinced that the only alternative to remove corrupted individuals from power was through violent means. Kawa was glad that the violence didn't lead to a civil war, but he witnessed corruption and injustice in the way people were treated. "Demonstrators didn't get what they went to the streets for. They were forced to go back home, many of them were arrested and some of them were put in jail and have been forced to stop organizing rallies in the future." Kawa noted that in spite of these human rights violations the Western media took no notice. To learn more about Kawa's last experience in Iraq, read his blog post: <http://engagingdiaspora.wordpress.com/2011/07/12/kawa-peacebuilding-culture/>



Kawa Jabary

The last featured speaker, **Reena Lazar**, is the Executive Director of the Vancouver-based organization *Peace it Together*. Reena inspired the audience by telling the story of Israeli and Palestinian youth joining forces together in Canada to participate in a dialogue and filmmaking program with Canadian counterparts. "We unite youth from opposite sides of the spectrum," said Reena. Through dialogue and the production of short films about the conflict, *Peace it Together* uses filmmaking as a tool to engage, educate and empower, and to present alternative views of the conflict to broader audiences around the world. Reena presented a short film of the current filmmaking camp, which showed some of the ways these youth begin to build trust in each other, and in so doing, make it possible to begin the process of peacebuilding:

<http://www.youtube.com/embed/y5lv6MdVTey>



Reena Lazar



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It's a unique opportunity for these young people to be able to exchange their thoughts and ideas in a safe and enabling environment such as Canada. Diaspora have an important contribution to make in facilitating peacebuilding processes. Reena noted that "You can't make peace with your enemy without your enemy. But it would be impossible for them to do this back in Israel or Palestine. That is why Canada and Canadians play such an important role." More information about the *Peace it Together* project, samples of their videos and details of the upcoming film screening can be found on our blog: <http://engagingdiaspora.wordpress.com/2011/07/09/canada-bridging-peace/>



The guest speakers' presentations generated a stimulating conversation and exchange in response to questions such as "what excites you, what inspires you, what stood out for you?" The audience provided their view in relation to the issue of fragmentation that occurs both within diaspora, but also between the diaspora and local actors who sometimes view diaspora as a competing or disconnected force. As well, the question of **justice and reconciliation was raised as an important aspect of peacebuilding – diaspora need to be part of this process.** As well, the observation that international development and conflict resolution in one's country of origin are not unlinked to immigration and settlement issues. Without successfully settling and integrating in Canada, immigrants and refugees often feel that they are not able to support peacebuilding efforts back home and may also be justifiably concerned about their own personal security. The

issue of fear was acknowledged, as many diaspora groups are afraid to tell their own stories because of uncertainty about their safety both in Canada and in their home country.

An important and heartfelt question was raised about the role of Canadian companies as well as Canadian and US foreign policy in contributing to human insecurity and conflict in the regions where refugees are fleeing from. As well, there was a strong message from those in attendance that the university must play a leadership role in research, teaching, and public engagement when it comes to addressing social injustice and human rights violations. Many from the African diaspora suggested that there must be greater focus on the African perspective and that taking a country by country approach to the challenges was ineffective.

To bring closure to the dialogue, **Professor Robert Anderson**, from the School of Communication at SFU, referred to the illustrated historical timeline prepared for the dialogue that shows where major regional conflicts have occurred and continue to occur around the world.

Bob noted that the conflicts, the voices, and the stories illustrated on the timeline remind us that insecurity is a



Historical timeline of regional conflicts around the world, prepared by SFU students Taylor Smith and Kareen Wong

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continuously evolving condition and that diaspora carry this insecurity with them. And it may take one, two, three generations or more to transform this insecurity. “Transformation may occur by organizing and mobilizing. I am pretty confident that those in the diaspora who learn skills of organization will succeed in the long term.”



The dialogue was full of questions as well as deep, and at times painful, emotion. We did not reach consensus about what the right way is for diaspora to engage in peacebuilding but we did learn from the many stories that people care deeply and are working very hard to create peace. The evening was a moment in time that attempted to bring different worlds together, to understand each other's views and experiences.

The evening ended with a beautiful poem by Juliane Okot Bitek called “Scars” that speaks of the deep impact left by war, conflict and human insecurity on many diaspora who have left their homelands. The poem captured the feeling in the room of compassion and respect for those who have suffered, those present at the dialogue, and those in other parts of the world. The poem by Juliane read, “My words are like scars that remind me of the sharp pain of the moment ... These stories must be told, must be told, must be told.” Even though the formal program ended at 9 pm, the conversation continued at the reception.

Join us for the final dialogue in the series “Diasporic Contributions to Development” on September 14 from 6:30 - 9:00pm at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue (580 West Hastings). This dialogue will explore the contribution of diaspora to development work in the global south.

Visit our website to learn more and to register: <http://www.sfu.ca/diaspora>


Follow our blog series on Wordpress: <http://engagingdiaspora.wordpress.com>



# Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping Our Trans-Local Potential for Change

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### Appendix I: Agenda



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### Dialogue Program

## Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles

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**Wednesday, July 13, 2011 6:30 - 9:00 PM**  
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street

#### Project Co-Directors

**Joanna Ashworth**  
Centre for Sustainable Community Development, SFU

**Shaheen Nanji**  
International Development, SFU

#### Dialogue Planning Committee:

**Robert Anderson**  
School of Communication, SFU

**James Busumtwi-Sam**  
Department of Political Science, SFU

**Nadia Chaney**  
Poet, Artist, Educator

**Hanna Cho**  
Museum of Vancouver

**Alexander Dawson**  
Department of History, SFU

**June Francis**  
Faculty of Business Administration, SFU

**Joe Knockaert**  
Former Director of CIDA, Pacific Region


**Tamarah Prevost**  
School of Communication, SFU

**Sophia Sithole**  
School of Communication, SFU

**Umeeda Switlo**  
CUSO-VSO

**Scott Young**  
Asia Pacific Foundation

Project Coordinator: **Mignon Alphonso**  
Research Assistant: **Chloë Straw**  
Research Assistant: **Rosamelia Andrade**  
Social Media Coordinator: **Jinny To**  
Program Assistant: **Kris Nordgren**  
Map Design: **Taylor Smith and Kareen Wong**




### Dialogue Purpose


This dialogue is part of an ongoing public engagement series that examines the unique role of the diaspora resident in Vancouver who are committed financially and personally to development activities in the global south. Diaspora-driven development efforts have a powerful impact in the global south that reverberates here in Metro Vancouver. While often informal or grassroots, these initiatives demonstrate the benefits and unique strengths of the diaspora – cultural awareness of communities of origin and residence, fluency working in dual cultures, awareness of local issues and concerns (trans-local), and long-term personal commitment to projects and communities.

Many diaspora communities and individuals in BC have escaped civil unrest and/or conditions of personal insecurity in their countries of origin, or the countries where they lived, before arriving in Canada. From this safer refuge many work tirelessly to transform conflict and raise awareness about human insecurity in their regions of attachment.

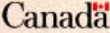
Funding support provided by:



Canadian International Development Agency




Agence canadienne de développement international




Canada

This project is undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).  
Ce projet est réalisé avec l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada accordé par l'entremise de l'Agence canadienne de développement international (ACDI).


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with special thanks to Bruce and Lis Welch Community Fund.

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### Program

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6:30 pm Welcome

*Dr. Joanna Ashworth & Ms. Shaheen Nanji*  
Co-Directors, Engaging Diaspora in Development Project

### Exploring Diaspora Contributions to Peacebuilding

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*Dr. James Busumtwi-Sam*, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

### Diaspora Experiences

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**Featured presenters / storytellers reflect on enabling factors, limitations, and lessons in conflict transformations and peacebuilding.**

*Juliane Okot Bitek, Uganda*  
*Ritendra Tamang, Nepal and Bhutan*  
*Kawa Jabary, Northern Iraq*  
*Reena Lazar, Israeli and Palestinian Youth Project*

### Dialogue - All

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*What have diasporas accomplished in terms of transforming conflict and increasing human security in regions of attachment?*

*What are the effective and legitimate roles of diaspora in gaining support for human rights and security?*

*What are the possibilities for peacebuilding -- from formal to informal approaches to transforming conflict, reconciliation, and supporting good governance in regions of attachment?*

### Final Reflections - Weaving Stories and Theories Together

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*Dr. Robert Anderson*, Professor, School of Communication

### A CLOSING POEM - JULIANE OKOT BITEK

9:00 pm      Adjourn

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**Reception to follow in atrium**



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### Speakers

**ROBERT ANDERSON, Ph.D.** (Chicago) is a Professor at the School of Communication at SFU. His primary interests include Negotiation and Dialogue as Communication, International Development and Communication, Communication in Conflict and Intervention, and Communication in the History of Science and Technology.

**JOANNA ASHWORTH, EdD** is Associate Director for the Bolivia Community Economic Development project and advises community organizations throughout BC on multicultural dialogue planning. She is a senior research associate at the Centre for Sustainable Community Development. Joanna is also co-director of the Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change project.

**JULIANE OKOT BITEK** comes to a diasporic identity quite honestly – she was born to Ugandan exiles in Kenya. She has Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art and a Master's in English. This fall, she begins her doctorate as a Liu Scholar at UBC. Julianne lives with her family in Vancouver.

**JAMES BUSUMTWI-SAM, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor specializing in International Relations and Comparative Development in the Department of Political Science at SFU. His primary interests include International Organization, the Political Economy of Development and Security, and International Relations theory. His regional specialization is African politics and development. He has published on international organizations and regional security, the political economy of macroeconomic policy reform and financial liberalization in developing countries, and international financial institutions.

**KAWA JABARY** was born in Northern Iraq, the Kurdish region. He was arrested for political activities against the Kurdish Regional Government in 1994. After Kawa was released, he left Iraq for Turkey. In Turkey, he was given a political refugee status and sent to Canada. Kawa has been in Canada since 1997. He completed an undergraduate degree, majoring in political science at SFU. This coming September, he will begin a masters program in political science.

**REENA LAZAR** is one of the founders and the Executive Director of the Peace it Together Society. Peace it Together unites young people from opposing sides of a conflict to co-create films that are then used as educational and empowerment tools in the conflict region and around the world. The third dialogue and filmmaking program focusing on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict takes place from July 7-August 4, 2011 and will bring together three delegations of 10 Israeli, Palestinian and Canadian university students to British Columbia. Now that Peace it Together has successfully tested their model in one context, they will be replicating it to other areas of conflict over the next several years. Visit: [www.peaceittogether.com](http://www.peaceittogether.com)

**SHAHEEN NANJI** is Director of International Development and Faculty Engagement at SFU. She co-directs Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change and oversees CIDA projects in China and Kenya. Shaheen is working on a Master of Arts in International Studies, with a focus on diasporic influences on development. Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Shaheen moved to Vancouver in 1989 and has firsthand understanding of the ways diaspora communities seek to give back to their birth nations.

**RITENDRA TAMANG** is from Nepal and holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco and an MA in Communication Studies from the University of Western Sydney, Australia. Ritendra's research focuses on anthropology of intersections of international development and migration in a broader contemporary societal and political context. Ritendra is currently a consultant with Network for Development and Democracy in Vancouver.

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### SCARS by Juliane Okot Bitek

My words are scars that remind me of the sharp pain of the moments that my body was broken into, but retain just enough memory, so I don't forget. Words run through my mind, tumble out of my mouth create whirlwinds of perplexed faces that sit with you around the wang'oo, waiting for the telling at the fire pit.

You don't have to be shot to know that the force of the bullet will pick you up and throw you away. It will numb you and then waken you to the instance of intense burning arising from the trajectory where metal fragments break into joyous pieces of death swimming about inside your blood stream. Here, take these words. Catch the whirlwind in your palm. Rest a bit with me.

In the afternoon, we can count the lines in fallen tree trunks scattered about the landscape. In the afternoon, we shall sit by the river, looking for river ghosts that dart across the banks. In the evening, you can sit by me and hold me up as I let the torrents out. These stories must be told, they must be told, they must be told, they must be told. They are only scars after all, not like open flesh in the hot sun, not like broken blisters against rubber boots, bone through skin, a persistent and itchy bald spot on the top of your head after the last idea you could use as otac to balance the jerry can on your head disintegrated into nothing.

My words are the skeletal remains of abii grass, still standing after the burning, still waving with the afternoon breeze; waiting, waiting for you to touch it so it can crumble into wisps of ash in your palm and take you back with the distinct smell of the smoke from the fires of the last dry season.

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### Suggestions?

#### *Seeking stories of Trans-local leaders*

Are you or someone you know doing exemplary development work in the Global South while based in the Metro Vancouver area?

Please email us at [diasporas-info@sfu.ca](mailto:diasporas-info@sfu.ca)

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### Next dialogue in the series: *Diasporic Contributions to Development*

Wednesday, September 14, 2011 6:30 – 9:00 PM

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

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**Appendix 2: Background Paper**

***Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles***

**A Backgrounder**

**James Busumtwi-Sam, Simon Fraser University**

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Achieving 'security' means different things to different people but in general it involves protecting certain core values (human life, livelihoods, property, etc.) from harm. The notion of 'human security' attempts to redefine the traditional approach to security in international affairs from a preoccupation with state/national security to include the security of individuals and groups. The term 'peacebuilding' includes a wide range of activities undertaken to transform a hitherto insecure and conflictual situation/relationship, prevent violence, and achieve accommodation or reconciliation between individuals and groups at the community, regional and national levels.

That there is a relationship between 'development' (or the lack thereof) and 'insecurity' is by now well established. Twenty-five of the world's 35 poorest countries have experienced a major armed conflict in the last three decades. Since the early 1990s policymakers, practitioners, and scholars have attempted to develop a formula to build and sustain peace, and enhance human security in the aftermath of armed conflict. UN agencies and the major bilateral and multilateral aid donors adopted a formula that



Photo: UN photo /Stuart Price  
UN Peacekeepers on Patrol in Abyei, Sudan

generally entailed internationally supported efforts to monitor and enforce peace agreements; provide humanitarian relief, rehabilitate and resettle affected populations; and disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate ex-combatants. The strategy also included broader political and socioeconomic reforms designed to promote a particular type of development centred on democratic governance and a market economy.

In addition to multilateral agencies and governments, by the mid-1990s some of the major international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had also become key players in peacebuilding efforts, and were

actively recruited as partners by official agencies. The premise was that strengthening civil society was a key ingredient in successful peacebuilding, with NGOs as vital players in the emergence of domestic civil societies in post-conflict situations. In this context NGOs were deemed to possess several advantages (compared to official agencies) including their relative speed and efficiency in delivering emergency aid; ability to mobilize local resources; and ability to help create alternative means of economic and social exchange and reproduction at the local level, thereby facilitating 'local ownership' of initiatives for recovery.

Putting aside for now questions about the overall effectiveness and viability of this peacebuilding formula, when we consider the range of official and civic actors and activities involved in peacebuilding



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and conflict transformation, it's surprising that to date the role of diaspora has received little attention. When attention is paid it usually has been to highlight the negatives in terms of how diasporic transnational networks help support and finance warring factions 'back home'. Diaspora have largely been viewed with suspicion and mistrust by 'home' and 'host' country governments alike, and aside from a few notable exceptions, have not been seen as partners in peacebuilding.

To be sure, some of these issues and concerns are valid, and it cannot be assumed that diaspora activities will always have a positive impact on peacebuilding in places of origin. Diaspora groups are not internally homogeneous but experience internal divisions and dissent; and such internal divisions may be intensified in some 'conflict-generated' diaspora groups supporting different sides in a far-away conflict. Historically also, some diaspora groups have been used by 'host'-country governments in covert operations against their 'home' governments. Perhaps the most well-known example of a not-so-covert operation was the abortive 1961 "Bay of Pigs" invasion of Cuba. More recently, in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, some diaspora organizations and networks were accused of being witting or unwitting conduits for the transfer of funds to support terrorism.

By the same token, however, we should not assume that diasporic impacts on peacebuilding are always negative. They can be positive. My argument here is straightforward: to the extent that strengthening civil societies is seen as a key component in successful peacebuilding, then diaspora should be viewed as a unique facet or component of civil societies and should be more fully engaged. While traditional NGOs certainly are key actors, they are not the only important actors. Diaspora groups and networks, although often much smaller, less well established, somewhat more spontaneous and amorphous and often with less resources than many well established NGOs, are emerging as important actors in civil societies – in host countries, transnationally, and in countries of origin.

Diaspora possess an important quality that differentiates them from traditional NGOs. They often combine strong links and attachments to the place of origin with experiences obtained in the place of settlement. Much more than NGOs, which are often firmly located in and associated with particular nations (usually developed Western nations) even though they operate internationally, contemporary diaspora are by definition linked or attached to two or more places/locations simultaneously. The issue isn't just one of enhanced diasporic mobility across national boundaries spawned by globalization, but rather about the enduring connectedness they maintain between, and more importantly their embeddedness within, these places.

Embeddedness (i.e., enmeshed in socio-cultural norms, relations, and networks) is often cited in social capital research as a key factor generating trust and establishing and stabilizing expectations. In this respect, diaspora may possess several comparative advantages in peacebuilding (in addition to those NGOs are said to possess). They may have greater knowledge of and sensitivity to local customs and traditions in places of origin than traditional NGOs and official aid agencies. These customary norms and practices may be harnessed in support of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Diaspora may also have a better and more nuanced understanding of the conflict and the broader context within which it has occurred that may enable them to 'see' things from a different perspective. And to the extent that contemporary diaspora maintain strong links to places of origin, and in some cases harbor aspirations of 'return', they may have a greater stake in seeing successful outcomes of peacebuilding processes.

Diaspora activities in peacebuilding and conflict transformation can engage the place of origin and/or of settlement in a variety of ways. The most obvious is channelling resources mobilized in host countries for humanitarian relief and to support a wider range of peace and human security related

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socioeconomic development activities (health, education, etc) in places of origin. In addition, diaspora civic, political, and diplomatic engagement can also have positive impacts on peacebuilding. In 'host' countries, for example, diasporic civic activism may help raise awareness of issues; and well-organized interest articulation may influence public policy. To the extent that some diasporic groups operate via elaborate transnational networks linking members in several host countries, these activities may also have an impact transnationally and internationally. In places of origin, civic and political engagement may be direct, as when diasporic individuals return 'home' to become political office holders at various levels of government. Political involvement in places of origin may also occur indirectly through the fostering of dialogue among disputing parties, involvement in peace conferences, and assisting in election processes and monitoring.

The perceptive reader will notice the rather frequent use of the word 'may' in reference to positive diasporic contributions. The reason is that not enough research has been done to provide definitive answers. Yet the evidence suggests that even though they have received little official and scholarly recognition, diaspora organizations, networks, and in many cases individuals, are already actively working in innovative and spontaneous ways to promote peace and transform conflict.

The key challenge is to find ways to enhance the positive diasporic impacts on peacebuilding/conflict transformation and harness the untapped potential, while at the same time provide safeguards against the negative impacts. This is an issue that demands further research and fuller engagement by public agencies and civic organizations involved in peacebuilding.

Learn more about creative ways diaspora from diverse parts of the globe are transforming human insecurity and peacebuilding at the public dialogue on July 13.

Register here: <http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/>

## **Holding the Mirror: On Writing “The Dry Season” through the Diasporic Lens**

**Author:** Juliane Okot Bitek **Posted:** Jul 6th, 2011



*This post was written by Juliane Okot Bitek, storyteller and author of upcoming book “The Dry Season”. “The Dry Season” is a non-fiction book based on the experience of three women who were kidnapped by the Lord’s Resistance Army, a guerrilla group that terrorized northern Uganda, Sudan, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1987. All photos by Lara Rosenoff.*

The pull to return and belong; to change and yet remain the authentic self, is what most distinguishes us, the people of the diaspora, from those who refer to themselves as native born. In that tension is the quality that we of the diaspora have an uncanny recognition for; within ourselves and others who struggle with it. It is also a place of empowerment and agency, where we can claim both sides of the divide while maintaining a Janus perspective. For me, as one who holds the mirror and is the image in the mirror, this is the place from which I recognize the women survivors of the Lord’s Resistance Army. These women, all kidnapped as girls and trained as rebel fighters become adults, all the while maintaining what little childhood memory they have. They are my sisters, cousins, daughters, friends, neighbours — these are my kinfolk, the women from my homeland. They are me and I am them.



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On return to Uganda, these women discover, much like the experience of the diasporic people who return home, that the place and the people who remained static and often perfect in their memory, have ceased to exist. The relegation of home as imaginary forces that second place of attachment, often for the first time, as an option to this strange location, this place that should be, but isn't the place we thought we knew for so long. From the *The Dry Season*, it is apparent that these women sometimes reminisce about that place, that time where they knew what to expect, where they knew that they were needed — to carry things, cook, clean, fight, and bear children. Here, at home, they no longer belong, many of them having been ostracized by their neighbours, and sometimes their families as well. We know this feeling well, we of the diaspora. Many of us have spent much time grieving for lost familial connections, sometimes reaching out to vague memories and having no familiar hand grab on to ours.



The women return to a society that has been internally displaced, living in camps and completely dependent on international food. We, of the diaspora, remember times that we too, had to depend on government handouts and how that made us feel. And yet, we also know now that we can never return home because it has become a perfect and intangible place — it doesn't and can't exist. We're left bereft after this loss, and then finally come to understand that this is a place of agency and the place that only we can occupy; where only we can hold the mirror to the light, or angled away towards the shadows; where our pose is what will be remembered by those who look. So we hold up our heads and speak up a little louder.

As they adjust to this new way of being, the women of *The Dry Season* are transplanted back to another time, a time that is difficult to discuss, explain or even articulate to an audience that was victimized by the same rebel group that these women belonged to. In text, all dialogue is possible. And for the first time in my life, I recognize that it is the combination of my diasporic lens and interest in the creative arts that allows me to contribute towards the creation of a space where people can see themselves and be seen as authentic, and as people who can belong.

*Juliane will be a speaker at "Human Insecurity And Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives And Roles", a public dialogue at SFU's Wosk Centre for Dialogue on July 13, 2011 at 6:30pm. This is a free public event, but [RSVP is required here](#).*

## The Dialogue Series: What have we learned so far?

Author: Chloë Straw Posted: Jun 30th, 2011



*This post was written by Chloë Straw, Project Research Assistant.*

As we gear up for our fourth in a series of [five public dialogues](#), we wanted to take a look back at some of the things we've learned so far through the Engaging Diaspora for Development Project. A guiding theme for us, which has both come out of and reinforced the importance of public dialogue, has been the power of personal narrative in evoking change. The following are some of the lessons we've learned through your stories.

### **DIASPORA ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED AND PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE**

Members of the diaspora are uniquely positioned for development work as a result of having local knowledge and expertise in two very distinct locales. They bring the perspective of the developing world in addition to a [transnational perspective](#). They understand the [marketplace](#) within the context of the global village and can be effective at ["tropicalizing" Canadian know-how](#) to better serve projects in the Global South. They are effective at working as "connectors" — using their networks to connect resources, human capital and donors with projects and, in turn, bringing back the stories of real impacts that are being seen. They work to inform and engage other Canadians to inspire action and promote solidarity.

The work of diaspora also has an important looping effect, with results being seen both in communities overseas and here in Canada. The lived experiences that diaspora bring and share can help to reinvigorate the way we do things here in Canada. They can support our institutions in being more self-reflective and to be more critical in thinking about why our systems are the way they are; they can also do this on an individual level, helping Canadians to engage empathetically and really comprehend the effects that their lives and national policies have on individuals and communities in the Global South.

Diaspora are among those pointing to the need to incorporate more indigenous knowledge into our health and education systems, to broaden our perspectives and approaches and really think about how a system is functioning before it is exported to another country. They can inform government policies, specifically around how Canada does aid work.

Also, they can improve the formal monitoring and reporting of project impacts to bring greater legitimacy to the work they are doing. Through reporting back real examples and figures, they can bring more awareness to the realities on the ground in the Global South and attract more funding.





### **HOW CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT DIASPORA?**

Through the dialogues we have managed to engage constructively about how the work of diaspora might be strengthened. A major theme that has emerged is the need for more synergies and collaboration amongst diaspora groups. Rather than competing for funding, organizations working towards the same aims can band together, thereby strengthening funding proposals and doing away with any gaps in services.

Another theme has been the great difficulty on the part of [young diaspora](#) in being recognized for their work and the need to give more weight and formal acknowledgement to the work and impacts that these young people are having.

Finally, many discussions have centered around the notion of identity formation as it occurs for members of the diaspora. With the boundaries that form identity varying depending on the context in which one finds her or himself in any given moment, the process can, at times, cause personal conflict. We have heard it said countless times that being able to tell one's story is so important, that hearing from others who've experienced similar realities and personal transformations is the basis on which community can be created and that's what we're here to do. May the storytelling continue.

*The next dialogue, "Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding", will be on July 13th, 2011. For more information and to register please [visit our website](#).*

## Canada as the Platform: Bridging the Dialogue on Peace

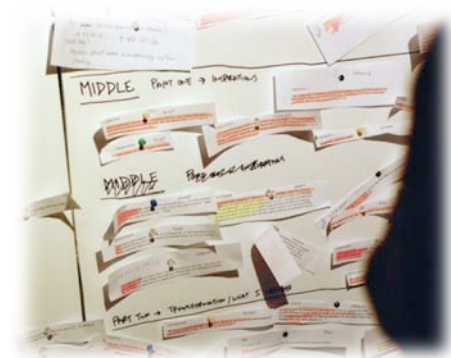
**Author:** Rosamelia Andrade **Posted:** Jul 9th, 2011



Peace it Together Filmmaking Summer Program 2008.

*This post was written by Rosamelia Andrade, Project Research Assistant, with additional content from Reena Lazar, Executive Director of Peace it Together.*

When it comes to stimulating dialogue, increasing understanding and building peace amongst individuals who are traditionally considered as “enemies”, filmmaking has tremendous potential. The Vancouver-based organization [Peace it Together](#) strongly believes that filmmaking is a creative way to engage, negotiate and reach consensus while working towards a common goal. The mission of the organization is to empower youth to promote peace through dialogue, filmmaking and multimedia.



Executive Director Reena Lazar was motivated to initiate Peace it Together in 2004 due to her strong Jewish identity and diaspora connection as well as a personal experience with facilitating peace dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian youth. The organization has since brought together young people from Israel and the West Bank of Palestine to connect with Canadian youth in a 30-day filmmaking boot camp where small teams collaborate to produce short films addressing issues of race, conflict, violence and peace. The program begins by building trust within an environment of mutual

respect and understanding.

“Canada provides a neutral and safe environment for these young people to be together, especially because the conflict is so in issues related to the land,” says Reena.



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would not be able to get together in their own countries. Israelis are not allowed to step on the West Bank and Palestinians require a permit to go to Israel. But most of all, Canadian participants play a very important role in this experience because they act as third-party ‘mediators’ and witnesses...Canadians are a bridge that allows for this interaction to happen,” Reena says.

Participants have to show motivation, creativity and leadership. Efforts are made to choose people from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds. An important requirement for Israeli delegates is to participate in the program prior to their mandatory 2-year military service.

Peace it Together believes that if youth have the chance to work with their stated “enemies” they’ll be more inclined to end the cycle of violence later on, while supporting peace and reconciliation.

Participants recognize that these experiences have changed their lives. In [a compelling letter](#) to support the organization’s fundraising efforts, Avner, a 2008 Summer Program participant from Israel, expressed his thoughts about his learning experience: “The seeds we put into the ground now will be our back yard and fields in the future, and if we will invest in peace, in dialogue, in a ground that will enable change today, we will be able to see the harvest and live its fruits in the future.” Avner is currently completing his mandatory military service as a combat soldier in the Israeli Army.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has impacted the lives and hopes of people on both sides of the border. The videos produced by the Israeli and Palestinian participants and supported by their Canadian counterparts, show their beliefs and emotions about a conflict that is equally devastating for both parties.

All the films are available on the [Peace it Together website](#).

*Peace it Together’s 2011 summer program is from July 7 to August 4. The films will premiere on **August 2nd at the Vogue Theatre in Vancouver at 7:00pm** and will include a Q&A session with filmmakers. For more information and to get tickets for the event, visit the Peace it Together [website](#).*

*Meet Reena Lazar, Executive Director of Peace it Together, at **“Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles”**, a public dialogue at SFU’s Wosk Centre for Dialogue on July 13, 2011 at 6:30pm. This is a free public event, but [RSVP is required here](#).*

## **The Effect of Culture on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Iraq**

**Author:** Sophia Sithole **Posted:** Jul 12th, 2011



Kawa Jabary promotes peaceful activism in Iraq as an alternative to the 'culture of violence' commonly seen in demonstrations.

*This post was written by Sophia Sithole, a Political Science and Mathematics student at SFU as well as a member of the Ethiopian and Zimbabwean diaspora in Vancouver.*

Despite going through many changes in the past several years, Iraq is still a place of civil unrest and turmoil. While some leave to escape the chaos, many go back in hope of bringing about change through peace and reconciliation. Kawa Jabary is one of these individuals. Born in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq, he was forced to flee to Turkey as a result of his political activities and eventually settled in Canada as a political refugee. Between work and school, he organizes symposia and workshops with the Metro Vancouver Iraqi diaspora to promote peace in Iraq. Kawa often makes trips back to the Kurdish region of Iraq to support peaceful actions as an alternative to the violent demonstrations, which prevail in the country.

After witnessing civilian unrest during his most recent trip, Kawa shared his view on the problems in Iraq: They are not only rooted in the regime, but are also the result of a political culture of violence. While speaking with local activists he proposed using non-violent action to bring about greater international support. However, even when the authorities were willing to listen, many protesters were skeptical about non-violent negotiations – many believe the only way to make sustainable changes is through forcefully removing local authorities from power. Kawa disagrees; he believes the path to change is through reforms such as political decentralization and constitutional reform. He says, "reforms are more important than simply changing the regime, since you cannot have real changes unless the country is ready".

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Photo: Relief International

Since political expression through violence is deeply ingrained in the culture, Kawa believes that one must influence the culture itself. “You have to influence the culture and in place of violence you need to introduce a culture of tolerance and encourage people to participate in the political system, to gradually consider themselves as equal citizens”. Simply put, it is not a case of changing a regime, but of finding ways to develop an environment of tolerance that supersedes differences. Kawa also believes that to bring about a sense of civic nationalism, the cycle of instability needs to be recognized and the mentality has to be changed. But to change the mentality, the political culture must first be reformed.

*Kawa Jabary will be speaking at “**Human Insecurity and Peacebuilding: Diaspora Perspectives and Roles**”, a public dialogue at the SFU Wosk Centre for Dialogue on July 13. Register [here](#).*