



Reintegration and Prevention: breaking the cycle of violence for ex-combatants and vulnerable children and youth

September 30th to October 5th, 2007 in Cartagena, Colombia

The use of child soldiers and young combatants in armed insurgencies, militias and resistance movements is a staggering and growing problem in regions as diverse as The DR Congo, Sri Lanka and Colombia. Well over 300,000 young people under the age of 18 are currently fighting in wars or have recently been demobilized. At the same time, the number of children emerging from these traumatic circumstances has dramatically increased.

How can our communities help young combatants leave the fighting? How can former child soldiers receive the services and support they need to reintegrate into society? What are the roles and responsibilities of different sectors – education, business, government, religious communities, NGO's and others -- in providing these services? How can we work together to make sure our society is ready to welcome home these former combatants? How can we work together at home and around the world to break this cycle of violence and prevent the exploitation of young people by armed groups and militias?



To explore and answer these questions, the Goldin Institute partnered with the Centro Mundial de Investigación y Capacitación para la Solución de Conflictos (Centro Mundial) to convene a global forum on the theme of *Reintegration & Prevention: Breaking the Cycle of Violence for Ex-Combatants and Vulnerable Children and Youth*. This unique gathering brought together teams of engaged leaders struggling to address these issues from over twenty cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, DR Congo, El Salvador, Haiti, Israel, Kenya, Liberia, the Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and the United States.



The program of the 2007 Goldin Institute was developed in consultation with our partner organizations in Colombia. Through presentations, on-site demonstrations, small group workshops and a wide variety of formal and informal discussions, the agenda enabled all participants to:

- Share experiences and knowledge
- Learn from peers and fellow activists from around the world
- Design innovative programs to meet the needs of their communities
- Create opportunities for future cross-city collaboration.

launching a national platform

The forum also served as a catalyst to promote the launch of a national platform in Colombia to engage social, private and public sectors throughout the country to promote co-existence, reconciliation and peace-building efforts. This national platform will serve as a leader in the efforts to reintegrate former combatants by providing the skills, services and connections necessary to re-enter Colombian society. The national platform is also leading groundbreaking efforts to prevent the victimization of vulnerable young people in armed combat and in building the understanding and commitment within the nation to welcome exploited young people back into society.

art exhibit

Another unique aspect of the 2007 Goldin Institute global forum was the creation of an art exhibit highlighting the works of art emerging from Colombia's ongoing armed conflict. Curated by Centro Mundial and the Fundacion Social and hosted in the Mapfre Auditorium, this exhibit "told the story" of displacement through the art, poetry, writing and voices of displaced young people and reintegrated former young combatants.



course on reintegration & prevention

Leading up the global forum, all participants were invited to take an online course on the theme of reintegration and prevention designed by the Goldin Institute and Centro Mundial. This four-week course was offered in English and Spanish and offered learners materials and interactions covering: the global context of the child soldier issue including key terms and dynamics; insight into the Colombian experience and expertise; innovative efforts that are working to better the lives of young former combatants; and a wrap-up session that prepared participants for the global forum in Cartagena.



Each week engaged participants through:

- **Readings:** each session offered a selected set of readings that participants analyzed and discussed
- **Reflections:** each week offered an interactive question and answer session encouraging reflection and facilitating a deeper understanding of the theme
- **Discussion:** a seminar component was provided each week to enable dialogue between participants and experts in the field through a discussion board.

The pre-Institute course marks the beginning of Goldin Institute's commitment to developing an educational platform that offers courses on a number of different issues that members of our network are passionately working on in the field. Based on the insights, materials and resources gained through the 2007 global forum, this course will now be augmented and made available through the Goldin Institute Online's educational platform.

overview of topics



The 2007 Global Forum explored the following topics during the event:

- Relationship building between participants from around the world through appreciative inquiry interviews, small-group discussions and team-building workshops.
- Listening to the experiences of young former combatants through a unique art exhibit and presentations by former soldiers from Colombia and around the world.
- Understanding the global context, key terms and the international framework for leading reintegration and prevention efforts.
- Learning from the Colombian context, highlighting the unique efforts of reintegration in the midst of on-going armed conflict and the creation of a national platform to coordinate and expand efforts. These sessions were led by local leaders from a variety of organizations and communities and included the opportunity to learn about programs first-hand through site visits.
- Sharing experiences, challenges and innovative efforts from cities around the world through workshops, presentations and discussions led by international participants as well as an innovative “Fair of Best Practices”.
- Creating effective strategies to promote reintegration and prevention within each country and globally through workshops and discussions on designing and leading programs and innovative uses of technology to leverage the impact of initiatives.

The following pages summarize the sessions that enabled participants to explore these topics.

summary of daily sessions

Sunday, September 30th opening plenary

The weeklong Institute meeting began with an opening plenary at the Salon Vicente Martinez Martelo in the Mayor's office. Participants were welcomed by German Bula, Executive Director of Centro Mundial and Diane Goldin, founder of the Goldin Institute, whose comments helped to frame the discussions for the week. Participants used the evening to get to know each other through informal discussion.

Monday, October 1st local and international presentations

Monday morning was kicked off with a series of presentations from a handful of organizations based in Colombia that helped sponsor the event and have played an active role in running programs related to the theme of the event. Many of the presentations illustrated the cross sector relationships necessary to address the myriad of issues that have come out of the armed conflict in Colombia. These presentations often touched on the how organizations worked with national and municipal government to support the reintegration of former combatants. Many of these organizations are part of the Concordia a National System for Reconciliation and a culture of Peace, which was organized by the Centro Mundial.



The afternoon session focused on the global dimensions of the theme and innovative programs through presentations led by international teams who shared past experiences,

projects and current initiatives. Many of the groups discussed their grassroots efforts in working with young people to stem the cycle of violence within their own communities. All of the presentations covered a wide variety of professional and personal experiences.

Tuesday, October 2nd local presentations and plenary session

The second day of the Institute meeting focused on the Colombian context. There were a series of presentations and workshops from local grassroots organizers in Colombia. The presentations covered a wide spectrum of topics that related to the armed conflict. The international participants were able to further learn from their Colombian partner's challenges and successes in the field and what they have done to shape public policy and perception to support the reintegration of former combatants. Participants learned of pioneering efforts and models that could be adapted for use in their home regions.



Following these sessions, participants gathered in small-group discussions to reflect on global dynamics of reintegration efforts in conflict and post-conflict areas of the world. This time was also used to capture innovative practices that could be shared and refined amongst the teams.

Questions that the facilitator-led breakout groups discussed were:

- What would be the characteristics of a child that has been successfully integrated?
- How do you train people to be successful counselors and advisors when working with children and young adults?
- How is your organization working to provide opportunities as a way of stopping cycles of violence?
- How have your organizations worked to help communities welcome former combatants?
- At what point in the reintegration process do young people stop being victims and start being held accountable?

Following the breakout groups, each group reported back their insights regarding each question. The reports from each groups shed light on the common challenges and opportunities of working with at risk youth.



In response to the first question regarding the characteristics of successful integration, many of the participants agreed that the characteristics include positive

self-esteem, emotional control, reduced aggressiveness, respect for others and the community, and a readiness to start a new life.

When asked about the role of their organizations in stopping the cycle of violence, participants specifically highlighted the relation between socioeconomic vulnerability and violence and called for cross-sector partnerships to provide economic opportunities to vulnerable youth to keep them from returning to violence as an option. Many of the organizations represented in the breakout groups tried to provide economic opportunities through education and training, as well as helping youth develop and leverage their artistic and creative talents as ways to make money.

One productive area of discussion concerned the nature and dynamics of the societies that former young combatants are trying to integrate into. A few participants felt that society itself is just as violent – or at times more violent -- than the armed groups. Groups discussed ways that young former soldiers could rise above the violence already present in society rather than integrating them into another violent environment. Given the unique experiences and leadership qualities that many former combatants have, what role might they play in building more peaceful and just societies?

The discussions within the groups highlighted a variety of experiences and insights on working with vulnerable youth and the challenges associated with reintegration on a variety of different levels: personal, familial and community.

Wednesday, October 3rd site visits and sharing best practices

On the morning of the third day participants went on a series of site visits in the surrounding areas of Cartagena. These site visits gave international participants the opportunity to experience first-hand the work being done by participating local organizations. These organizations included Ninos De Papel, Fundacion Telefonica, Fundacion Assistir, Pozon Alcadia, Red De Mujeres Comunales, Fundacion Plan Internacional, Nelson Mandela Alcadia, Fescol, and ICBF. The visits were an opportunity to connect the presentations given on the first two days with the day-to day-activities. These visits demonstrated the harsh realities that many displaced people face within Colombia and the tremendous work that is being by the dynamic local organizations participating in the event.



Following the site visits, participants convened at the Mapfre Auditorium where local organizations were able to share more information about their current initiatives through an innovative "fair of best practices". Many of the local organizations that hosted the site visits provided additional information at booths in the auditorium and hosted small group discussions and times for reflection. In addition to distributing literature about their organization, groups displayed artwork and multimedia presentations.

Thursday, October 4th expanding the network & sharing commitments

In the morning, the Goldin Institute led a workshop on building effective partnerships and how to expand the impact of these alliances through innovative uses of communications and technology. Participants collectively assessed the value and impact of their existing networks explored ways to use emerging technology to expand and sustain these partnerships.



Following a brief presentation on this topic, the participants were led through a series of small breakout groups where they created strategies to use new methods and tools for collaboration.

This was followed by a presentation on strategies for building more concrete partnerships and the

technology available to support broad networks for the common good. Following this presentation there was another round of breakout discussions where participants discussed how emerging technologies can be incorporated into their overall strategies and how the Goldin Institute can help support the partnership and technical capacity of its partners.

Breakout #1

- What has been a successful partnership for your organization? What made it successful?
- What resources can your organization share?
- How does that sharing take place (and what are the logistics)?
- What does your organization need with regard to knowledge and expertise?
- What barriers to cooperation exist within your organization?

In summary, the questions related to the challenges that organizations face when trying to effectively manage multiple projects and partnerships generated the most discussion:

- **Technological shortfalls:** participants assessed the need to improve their resources both in terms of physical assets (computers; connectivity; software) and trained, tech-savvy staff. It was often noted that access to technology is limited for most people in the group. In some areas, not only is there a lack of personal computers, there are few public resources such as internet cafes which can be cost prohibitive even if they exist.
- **Political obstacles:** many raised the issue of freedom of speech. For some, there will be an inability to speak freely with a partner who may be monitored by the government, such as in Zimbabwe or Myanmar. Sometimes people are afraid to use technology because of the political situation-people don't feel secure and feel unsure of how they could be tracked by technology.
- **Language barriers:** clearly the language barrier is a real problem in global or regional collaborative efforts. Current technologies that provide translation are unreliable and inaccurate. Providing translation through skilled people is often cost-prohibitive.
- **Bureaucratic barriers:** often, different types of networks are required for different types of organizations-individual Donors, Private Foundations, NGOs, and the UN each require a specific tool set (also local, regional and national government).
- **Donor-related obstacles:** in situations with multiple donors, where geopolitics are in question (as with the Fondwa Haitian Rural University) communication and network management can be a labor-intensive task in light of the multiple reporting structures.

When asked about what makes successful partnerships, many of the groups identified the ability to communicate, sharing mutual goals and mission and an openness to new ideas and differences. Trust and commitment were also emphasized in the discussion groups as a way to sustain partner networks.

Breakout #2

- What strategy does your organization use to share new ideas? When someone has a new idea, how does it get heard?
- What technologies do you use to disseminate new information?
- How do you manage your projects? What kinds of processes do you have in place to sustain momentum, allocate resources, and manage timelines? What has worked well?
- What strategies do you use to measure the success of your knowledge sharing and ultimately the implementation of initiatives?
- After establishing multiple partnerships, what strategy do you use to coordinate partnerships? What technology strategy do you use, or would you use?
- What can the Goldin Institute do to provide technical and project management expertise for your organization?

There were a number of specific ideas generated by the group on how they plan to maintain, manage or strengthen some of the new networks established at the conference:

- An exchange of donor names, contacts and possible sources of funding, especially for non-competing NGO's.
- An exchange of grant-writing, budget management, and final reporting tips and strategies.
- Student exchange programs, giving young people the opportunity to observe and study successful post-conflict reintegration programs. (Colombia, Israel/Palestine, Brazil and Bosnian examples specifically discussed).
- Exchanging "best practices" through an integrated online system hosted by the Goldin Institute.
- Formalizing the role of "communications manager" within each NGO to assure a more formalized network management function within the organization.

- Many people remarked that e-mail is often the most common form of communication, but it can be problematic since it is impersonal and can be easily misunderstood. Several people mentioned that in-person meetings and communication are still the best way to connect and work together.
- Participants felt they needed training or guidance on how to manage and prioritize information. They felt there is so much information coming in from so many different sources that it is hard to organize it and figure out what is important.



In addition to the ongoing forum provided by the Goldin Institute, participants noted several areas where the Institute can provide additional services on behalf of the network. Several participants requested assistance in obtaining better equipment as well as technical training on how to use different types of software and networks, with a particular need for in-person training on technology. In many areas without access to reliable electricity, there is a great interest in learning about the use of solar energy to power electronic equipment such as computers. Groups reported that it would be helpful for the Goldin Institute to help break down the language barriers that exist, so that like-minded groups from around the world can work together on joint projects. The Goldin Institute was encouraged to leverage the language assets of the network to assist in translating the documents and materials on their website into other languages. Lastly, groups noted that it would be helpful for there to be a more dynamic social networking system in place so that partners are more aware of others efforts in the field

Through this session, participants learned about benefits of social networks and how to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness through innovative utilization of web 2.0 technologies. As a follow-up to a goal set at the 2005 Institute in Amritsar, the presentation also focused on how the Goldin Institute has developed a more technically robust web-site that will help support the discussion and activity within the larger network. The Goldin Institute Online can now host online discussions, e-learning opportunities, facilitate project management initiatives, and host profile pages.

Commitments

In the afternoon, participants shared pledges with each other highlighting the work that they committed to do upon returning home. This was a powerful session of expressing personal convictions and commitments to take action. Commitment and the identification of new partnerships is a cornerstone of the work of the Goldin Institute. We have all come to understand that it is not enough to issue statements for others in the world to act, but necessary to commit and act ourselves.



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Day of the Brother and the Sister



During the evening, everyone met near the beach to celebrate the "Day of the Brother and the Sister" where people spoke about reconciliation. Dr. German Bula and Diane Goldin made

closing statements as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of the Interior, and the Dutch Ambassador to Columbia.

Friday, October 5th evaluation and forging new partnerships

On Friday, several international participants convened to evaluate the last few days and look for opportunities for future collaboration. A great deal of the discussion focused on convening a Goldin Institute regional event in Africa following up on some of the key issues and partnerships emerging from the Cartagena event. In an informal meeting Ms. Diane Goldin joined the group composed of Mr. Gabriel Akoi, Rev. Boimah Freeman, Mr. Iddi Hamad, Mr. Yusuf Haji Hassan, Ms. Roselyn Kesselly, Ms. Speciose Makugahima, Mr. Celestine Nkundabemera, Mr. Sonny Ayao, Dr. Susana Salvador-Anayatin, Mr. Tom and Ms. Sandy Hinshaw and Dr. Susan Weinger to develop an initial understanding of the goals and mission of the proposed African regional follow-up meeting.

Many of the questions raised by the group and the discussion that followed started with the basic question of "How can the Goldin Institute help support and sustain the network of grassroots organizers in Africa?" Those involved in the meeting broached a variety of questions as they sought to expand the Partner City network in Africa. Basic outcomes of this discussion included the use of Dr. Susana Anayatin from the Philippines as adviser and consultant in organizing a regional event in Africa and ongoing communication.

Additional emerging partnerships that were discussed during this informal session included:

1. Distributing "Culture of Peace Module" to Ms. Fanny Uribe Idarraga of Plan International and other Colombian participants, which they will translate and use as reference in their peacebuilding initiatives.
2. Cultural Exchange of students from the Masters of Peace and Development Studies of Mindanao State University and Notre Dame University with Western Michigan University with Dr. Susan Weinger.

The 2007 Goldin Institute global forum builds on the successes of annual events and on the growing expertise of our network, now active in over sixty cities around the world. The Goldin Institute began hosting the annual global events in 2002 in Chicago. This inaugural gathering brought together grassroots leaders from around the world to create a Partner Cities Network as a forum to share the methodologies, tools and mutual support needed to enhance the movements for peace, justice, and sustainability in their communities.

The 2007 Goldin Institute in Cartagena followed the tradition of previous Institute gatherings in:

- **Chicago, USA, 2002:** participants from over twenty cities learned from the experience of Chicago's grassroots leaders and worked together to build a platform for shared learning and support through a Network of Partner Cities.
- **Manresa, Spain, 2003:** teams of grassroots leaders and activists from over twenty cities explored the theme of building social cohesion in the midst of diversity, learning from each other and the nascent but growing movement to welcome and engage immigrant communities in Manresa, Catalonia and Spain.
- **Taipei, Taiwan, 2004:** teams from a variety of sectors of society from over twenty cities focused on understanding and addressing the global water crisis. Commitments to launch or enhance creative projects and initiatives engaging leaders from multiple sectors (Religion, Business, Education, Media, Science, the Arts, etc.) were shared and are now being created or enhanced in Taipei and in cities around the world.
- **Amritsar, India, 2005:** teams from a variety of sectors of society from twenty-four cities convened near the India - Pakistan Border to explore the theme of "Reconciliation: building effective partnerships for peace." This gathering was held in association with the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha.

thank you

The Goldin Institute would like to thank its partners at Centro Mundial and all the partner organizations in Colombia for the leadership and generosity that made this Institute possible. In particular, we extend our gratitude to the Cartagena Chamber of Commerce and the Palace of the Inquisition for graciously hosting our gathering. We also would like to thank Tom and Sandi Hinshaw for their generous support and to the team of volunteer facilitators, especially Shana Wills, Anne Petti and Sebastian Sosman. Thanks to the contributions of these partners and our participants across the globe for making the 2007 Goldin Institute a meaningful and productive global forum. We look forward to working with each of you in the months and years ahead to break the cycle of violence for vulnerable children and youth.

