



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS & MAKING CONNECTIONS

URI LEADERS, MUSSIE HAILU & MARITES AFRICA, SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE

This document is intended to help the URI community learn about connecting people working at the grassroots level with policy-makers. This information is taken from a staff training tele-conference in 2007.

From: Mussie Hailu
URI Regional Coordinator, Africa

SUMMARY

First of all thank you for asking me to share my experiences on how to create good contact points for CCs and connect them with policy makers. This is very important part of moving URI forward and making CCs more active. I will share some experiences on how to connect and form partnerships between URI CCs and policymakers. Since URI is a bridge building organization, a very important aspect of our work is to connect people at the grassroots with policymakers, and facilitate meetings where they can bring their various concerns together for discussion and solution. Our work is to continue to create an enabling environment so that people can come together and understand each other. URI can be a force to bring together like-minded organizations, individuals, and policymakers to discuss common issues and find common solutions. Overall, we are all stakeholders in the process of creating and maintaining cultures of peace. Bearing this in mind, the first thing we have to consider when we engage in activity as members of a CC is to identify all the stakeholders with whom we will need to engage to move the agenda forward. Sometimes it is helpful if stakeholders are invited to be part of the planning process right from the start, rather than invited to an event after it has already been organized. That way, they will have ownership of the process and feel they are part of it. They can also gain a better understanding of who we are and what our vision and objectives are.



To share the experience of URI in Ethiopia, what we did first was identify highly respected and well-known opinion leaders as well as different religious leaders in the community who we wanted to brief about URI. Once these leaders were identified, we looked for ways to make connections with them. For example, who from our Board knew someone in policy-making positions? Were there other ways we might make connection? In some cases we just called and asked for appointments. We believe it is important to meet individuals individually and take time to brief them and familiarize them with URI and our Charter. One-to-one conversations are very important whenever possible. Once they were briefed, it was easier to involve them in bigger events. Later we invited them to be

guests of honor at special events, etc. In Ethiopia, it was necessary for URI to register as a legal nonprofit organization with the Ministry of Justice. This may not be necessary in other countries, but for us to operate it was necessary. This may be something to consider in your own contexts. In the same way we approached opinion leaders, we also did the same with all relevant government bodies and other institutions, personally introducing them to the URI. We sent out official letters, arranged personal visits, and briefed them on what we intend to do, and how we can complement each other's work by identifying common interests.

In the same way we also contacted Embassies, sent introduction letters, and met with Ambassadors, especially with the countries where there are URI CCs, both within Africa and the rest of the world. We have also used the platform of the International Day of Peace of the UN on September 21. This is a very good opportunity to introduce what we are doing. Each year, we invite special guests of honor from different government organizations to address the assemblies. Capitalizing on other events like the International Day of Peace can raise the profile of URI. These are good platforms to promote partnerships between CCs and policymakers.



This past year we established the Goodwill Ambassador for the Golden Rule and asked world-renowned athlete Haile Gebreselassie to be the first Goodwill Ambassador. By this we not only honored him but brought the message of the Golden Rule and the work of URI to the world. Wherever he goes he promotes these messages since he is an international celebrity and has access to international media. In all activities, transparency is very important. It is often very helpful to engage the media in order to bring our message to the public

more broadly. We look for opportunities to invite the media and brief them about what we do. The more they report about what we do, the more other stakeholders and policymakers become interested and want to partner with us to move forward our common agenda. Sometimes it is effective to organize events in partnership with others.

For example, we organized events with Addis Ababa University School of Fine Art and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This raised our profile and created a good connection with the policymakers there. We also partnered with other institutions like the African Union and UNESCO. When we launched IPI, we did it at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The venue by itself attracted attention, raised people's awareness of who we are, and gave credibility to the CC. These are just a few examples but there are many others where partnerships can be created, a special venue identified, and events organized.

Another event that we have organized annually is the Peace Award. We did this in conjunction with the

International Day of Peace. When people come to these major events, they see who we are and what we do. Next, they remember us and are more willing to connect with us. This is one way to promote working partnerships. These are just a few ideas for practical ways to link some activities and establish good working relationships between CCs and policymakers. During our meeting I can share more ideas.

***From: Marites Africa
Global Council Trustee, SEA Pacific Region
Director, Peacemaker's Circle Foundation CC, Manila Philippines***

SUMMARY

1) **Establishing connections with policy-makers.** When I first started in 1998, I only had a vision that was inspired by the URI, but people did not know who I was; and I did not have any concrete accomplishments to speak of. I quickly learned that in order to attract policy-makers and other people of influence in society, one must have three things.

- A good/noble vision – a driving force, an inspiration; a means through which we can make a difference in the world.
- A credible personality – Who are you, the person sharing the vision? How do you come across? How are you perceived by others? Do you inspire their trust?
- A concrete project – What you have to offer; what you are working on; accomplishments on the ground, etc.

I also learned that in order to be able to contribute to the realization of the vision, I needed to WALK MY TALK—manifest my commitment to the work by engaging in the actual endeavor of building relationships among people of different faiths on the ground.

2) **Building from the ground up.** We in the Peacemakers' Circle CC have done the following:

- Established ourselves as builders of peace among the conflicting Muslims and Christians in the grassroots community of Tala, Caloocan City in Metro Manila. We focused on reaching out to and making friends with community leaders, heads of various local government units, religious leaders, etc.
- Through our dedicated efforts we grew in capacity to help other Muslim-Christian communities around Metro Manila and replicate the success that we had gained in Tala. We focused on engaging in



partnership with the Office on Muslim Affairs, Episcopal Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue, Office of the President on the Peace Process, etc.

- Promoted awareness of our work through the media. We focused on organizing various projects and activities that involved the presence and participation of policy-makers and other people of influence in society.

3) **Connecting with the three anchor points.** I have learned from experience that there are three kinds of anchor points. Here is my personal reflection on the levels of support by policy-makers/anchor points.

- Primary Anchor: “Key” People—directly significant to the work and to the well being of the community members: community leaders, heads of local government units, religious leaders, etc.; they are the people we turn to for micro-level assistance.
 - Some ways of approaching/involving them: by writing them letters signed by all members of the community, visits with them, partnership in projects.
- Secondary Anchor: those who are already interested and/or are already in the same field of work; those whose work will benefit from and be enriched by the partnership (e.g. Loreta Castro, Gen. Dorlorfino, Dean Jundam, Archbp. Ledesma, Imam Moxsir)
- Tertiary Anchor: those who believe in the work but are not directly involved in its daily undertakings (e.g. donors, sponsors, funding institutions, agencies, etc.)



It is important to know the people we are working with— to be aware of their gifts and talents and be appreciative of them—that we may know how we can help each other develop our strengths and our capacity for creativity and growth. We need each other to keep going even when the going gets tough! If we believe in the vision, in ourselves, and in what we can offer, then others will believe too!

KEY LEARNING

The URI Preamble, Purpose and Principles are an important tool to use when introducing URI. There is a risk others will see URI as an outlet for special interests. It is important to remain firm on the PPPs so that URI will be accepted by all people, and not seen as propaganda for politics or religions. The PPPs are an excellent resource to establish credibility and neutrality. It is important to identify opinion leaders and make pro-active outreach to potential stakeholders early on. Find people in the field who are respected in their communities and invest time in contacting them so that they know about URI. This will help CCs and URI become more recognized. It is important to work at all levels to raise the visibility of URI – local, country and internationally. Visibility and positive name recognition at the UN is vitally important for CCs on the ground in various countries. Without partnership and

involvement of policy-makers at all levels, CC work will not go far. It's really important to believe in what you do. We must check ourselves (do inner work) to be sure our personal qualities and nature create a safe and respectful atmosphere for people so that we "walk our talk."

FOR REFLECTION

How do you share the PPPs? What ways have proven effective?

How do you manage personal visits and outreach efforts? How can you fit this important work into your very busy life?

How can URI begin to focus on external relations – contacting embassies, educational institutes, like-minded organizations, etc?