



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Pamoja CC

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Baha'i, Christian and Muslim

Location of CC: Kampala, Uganda

Key Areas of Focus: Youth, Environment and Women's issues

Summary:

Pamoja CC is located in Kampala, Uganda. Pamoja CC members are engaged in conflict training sessions to find alternatives solutions to violence and issues affecting youth. Pamoja CC collaborates with youth from various CCs in undertaking environmental discussions at secondary schools, training at women's prisons in Kampala, International Day of Peace events, and soccer sporting events. The CC is focused on promoting religious tolerance through education, communication, and sports activities in an interfaith context.

1) Can you please help me understand the current religious/cultural/political contexts in the area where your CC is working?

PAMOJA CC was started as a youth CC at the University with a purpose to promote religious tolerance through education, communication and sports. Currently, the youth at the universities are not very familiar with religious diversity and therefore tolerance of one another becomes hard for most who hail from different backgrounds. Often youth are prime targets for steering violence in the country, if not tamed it makes them become potential obstacles to peace.

2) Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed where your CC is working?

As said above, the youth are often used as prime targets for instigating violence through unlawful riots, terrorism, and/or violent extremism. Without them fully appreciating religious and cultural diversity, they become liabilities to peace. However, if they are transformed into peace ambassadors, the world stands a better chance to a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. The university students continue to return once their studies are done, therefore with them becoming peace ambassadors, they carry the message of peace to their different constituencies. Our reach therefore is with all youth inside and outside school.



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3) Can you please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is doing this year?

This year we are undertaking environmental discussions at secondary schools and we hope to conduct training on alternatives to violence at a women's prison in Kampala. This is to help us utilize the knowledge and skills gained from training on alternatives to violence. The trainings on alternatives to violence shall also be our major focus next year since we are prioritizing women's issues in our next programmes.

4) Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

We are currently building bridges among the Baha'is, Christians and Muslims as informed by our CC membership, but are open to all religions.

5) Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

Many times, it has been that different faith groups organise programmes within their religious groups. We utilize a strategy of grouping youth of different faiths working on one activity in order to bridge the gap between the different faiths. Our audiences appreciate the collectiveness of the work. We do this through dialogues with different groups from different religions participating, and also conduct visits to places of worship to help us understand and appreciate their values. Such ventures help us to connect with people who would otherwise have not known the existence of other faiths. The more interactions we have, the more we are able to demystify myths about other religions.

6) Given the current contexts, you described, what does your CC hope to achieve?

We mobilize the youth in and out of school with an aim of promoting religious tolerance through education, communication and sports. As the youth are joined together by the common values of love, respect, care and others, they begin to value people of other faiths as one and equal to them.

7) How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

We strive to improve cooperation with knowledge sharing and imparting skills during our interfaith dialogues, sports events, and visits to places of worship. During such activities, people interact, chat, eat, and laugh together. It's also an opportunity to wind down from the busy programs of work and other life commitments. As members, what was started as a small initiative for youth, the university has now enhanced to adults as well. As adults we look up to each other for support on personal, professional and social causes.



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8) How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflicts? (as this in areas with open conflicts)

Not at the moment.

9) What are some indicators / observations you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?

As said, we started as young university students without a vision. We were then introduced to the interfaith agenda by the Regional Coordinator and gradually have come to appreciate religious diversity. The interconnectedness in faith is such a powerful tool that helps us to unite on other social issues such as environmental conservation, youth, women's issues and others. We look beyond our religious differences to address problems that affect us all. For instance, if I learn of a training or job opportunity, I recommend a colleague from our CC other than looking outside the circle.

10) Do you have a specific short story you can share about your work that might inspire other CCs or teach us a lesson about interfaith?

No story shared.

11) How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission or URI?

We mobilize the youth on interfaith cooperation and use this as a strategy to address social problems affecting youth such as violent extremism during riots, demonstrations, election campaigns, and other activities. Our programs help to mentor the youth to look at themselves as pivotal players in peace building using their energetic character to influence peers. When we engage youth in interfaith dialogues, sports and other programs, we do it in a way to help them appreciate diversity and learn to live harmoniously. We hope this can help us to venture into other social needs, but focusing on the interfaith cooperation is our major focus at the moment.

12) Within your CC, you have members from different faiths/cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation between these members? What are the challenges?

We started as people in our different religious backgrounds with little knowledge of how such diversity could be exploited for a common goal. As members of the Baha'i, Christian, and Muslim communities we celebrate each other's religions as seen during the festive seasons such as fasting, *Eid*, Easter and Christmas, where members freely participate in the festivities without holding back on the religious differences. This used to be rare to see a non-Muslim feasting with Muslims during the celebration of *Eid*. As the practice is honoured by our members, the more their relations improve.



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The challenges have to do with members taking on with more life's demands in work, family, studies and other commitments that it becomes quite difficult to connect regularly. To address this challenge, we have resorted to e-mail communications, phone conversations, and the social media. This area is still critical and our future plans shall focus on ways of boosting our membership to become more active and connected. Our formal registration of the CC is currently ongoing and expected to be completed by next year, but as we stand now, we need to operate as a fully fledged entity.

13) How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

We have gained many skills and knowledge in religious tolerance, non-violent mechanisms in addressing conflict, and networking opportunities with other CCs. We hope to strengthen this bond with other CCs because that is one of the ways we can improve our work, and also share URI's values with more people. The continued mentorship of the Regional Coordinator, Bishop Ocholla, the current chairperson, Sheikh Musa Khalil (founder of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative) and others is exceptional. Their experiential stories and presence alone serves as an inspiration to us, the youth, as their age and stature creates a lasting impact among all the CC members.

14) How can URI better support your CC in reaching its goals?

It is encouraging to have a forum to hear and share our experiences, but sharing skills through training has a bigger impact as these skills can be shared with more people. It would also be helpful to encourage the CCs, (especially those in out of reach areas) to share their stories on a regular basis through such initiatives as regular phone calls that encourage CCs to take pictures and caption the photos without necessarily writing detailed reports. URI can ensure publishing and circulating this information to inspire and motivate CCs across the network.