

PEACEMAKERS IN ACTION

Profiles of Religion in
Conflict Resolution

TANENBAUM CENTER for Interreligious Understanding

EDITED BY DAVID LITTLE

Foreword by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke

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Advance praise for *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*

"This is the single most important book published in the field of religion and conflict resolution to date because, through the brilliant presentation of our most eminent scholar, David Little, it finally demonstrates the evidence of what we have all been arguing, the living examples of heroic, positive religious peacemaking and their inherent potential to change the face of the global community, if we let them."

Dr. Marc Gopin

Author of *Holy War, Holy Peace*

"Are there children of a lesser God?

"Are there lives that are worth less?

"Are there truths that are more so?

"Heroes are those who answer 'no' with their lives to those questions. *Peacemakers in Action* tells their stories and peacemaking achievements. More importantly, what emerges is a new narrative of human interaction across divides – so alien to the shouts and arrogance of leaders who cannot lead without an enemy."

Gianni Picco

Former chief UN hostage negotiator

Author of *Man Without a Gun: One Diplomat's Secret Struggle to Free the Hostages, Fight Terrorism, and End a War*

"The Tanenbaum Center is ahead of our time with its program Peacemakers in Action. In today's world, religion is often a source of conflict. By profiling those courageous individuals who put themselves at risk to use religion to resolve rather than cause conflict, the Tanenbaum Center shines an important spotlight on a hidden tool in today's dangerous world. This impressive volume of brave leaders' stories around the world is also a testament to the key role of women in resolving conflict. World leaders should read this book and learn its lessons. They fail to do so at their peril."

Ambassador Nancy Soderberg

Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN

Author of *The Superpower Myth: The Use and Misuse of American Might*

“Theory is one thing; practice quite another. This book is about the doing, not the talking. As such, it provides new and important insights into the practical challenges of religious peacemaking. It also helps define the art of the possible in this burgeoning, yet largely unexplored, field.”

Dr. Douglas Johnston

Founder and President, International Center for Religion and Diplomacy
Coeditor of *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*

“I strongly commend *Peacemakers in Action* at this time when religion’s leaders and its positive role are being questioned.

“This book illustrates the successful work actually being done on the ground – at the micro level – by many religious leaders of differing faiths who work to diminish the darkness. They are all united in using their moral suasion to further the peace and justice that arises from their beliefs, and to build bridges of coexistence and community. It also illustrates the importance for all leaders at the macro level to support these religious leaders who wish to unify, instead of divide, and to assist in furthering their visions and dreams of a world where common values of a peaceful community are universally respected.”

Alan Slifka

Board Chairman of The Abraham Fund Initiatives

“*Peacemakers in Action* persuasively makes the case for the positive role people of religion can play in those parts of the world that have seen devastating destruction of innocent life. Each personal journey toward conflict resolution and peace reveals the unspoken quality of each anonymous servant of God, male or female, without whose sincere efforts on the path to peace, the suffering of the people in those regions would have continued unabatedly.

“Needless to say, without the efforts of the Tanenbaum Center, the present volume mapping the constructive role religion can serve as a resource for peacemaking would have remained inaccessible. The beautifully written narrative of real people engaged in peacemaking provides a plan of action for those who want to emulate peacemakers like Pastor Wuye, Imam Ashafa, Father Reid, Rabbi Froman, Sakena Yacoobi, and many others, who stand out as beacons of light in the darkness of injustice and violence. A rare and unique addition to the literature on what people of religion can deliver in action today.”

Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina

Author of *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*

PEACEMAKERS IN ACTION

Just a quick look at your local media on any given day is a powerful reminder that devastating armed conflicts worldwide are destroying lives and whole communities – often in the name of religion. Hidden in the news, if reported on at all, are the brave religious leaders in these zones of violence, working to bring peace and reconciliation to their people. These inspiring men and women offer critical insights and skills for addressing today's most urgent conflicts. But their stories are rarely told.

Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution shares the experiences of 16 such remarkable religious peacemakers who have put their lives on the line in conflicts around the world – from Israel-Palestine to Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Sudan, South Africa, El Salvador, Indonesia – and beyond. For each of these men and women, religious texts and traditions have served both as a source of inspiration and as a practical resource in resolving conflict. These grassroots peacemakers are powerful – but underutilized – actors for resolving some of the world's most horrifying conflicts. As such, this book contains timely information for diplomats, government officials, conflict resolution practitioners, as well as today's students of religion and international affairs – our future peacemakers. And in a world where religion-based conflict affects us all, this book provides critical lessons and much-needed hope for each of us.

David Little is the T. J. Dermot Dunphy Professor of the Practice in Religion, Ethnicity, and International Conflict at Harvard Divinity School and an associate Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. Previously, he was Senior Scholar in Religion, Ethics, and Human Rights at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. There, he co-authored a book on Islamic activism and U.S. foreign policy and two books and several articles in the Institute series on Religion, Nationalism, and Intolerance. From 1996 to 1998, Dr. Little was a member of the U.S. State Department Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. Previously, he taught at a number of other schools, including Yale Divinity School, the Universities of Virginia and Colorado, and Amherst and Haverford Colleges. Dr. Little's writings are in the fields of comparative ethics, human rights and religious freedom, religion and peacemaking, sociology of religion, and the study of nationalism.

The Tanenbaum Center is a leader in providing practical programs urgently needed to prevent verbal and physical conflict perpetrated in the name of religion. As a non-sectarian not-for-profit organization, the Tanenbaum Center addresses unresolved – and often unrecognized – tensions by helping to change behaviors in areas of armed conflict, schools, and workplaces. *Religion and Conflict Resolution*, one of the Tanenbaum Center's core programs, runs the *Peacemakers in Action* initiative. In a world where religion is increasingly misused to fuel conflict, this initiative identifies and supports the work of relatively unknown men and women who use religion as an effective resource to resolve conflicts. The Tanenbaum Center is a pioneer in the field in its study of the unique techniques of these individual religious peacemakers, the expert training it provides them in order to strengthen their impact, and its commitment to widely disseminating its findings to bring attention to these *Peacemakers* and other religious leaders as urgently needed resources for resolving today's conflicts.

Acknowledgments

In the course of developing a book such as this, you inevitably have occasion to work with many people without whom the book would not have been possible. And although you always want to take a moment to express your gratitude for their help, in this case, I must begin by thanking the men and women who are the subject of this book – the Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers in Action*. These men and women are true heroes. They inspire us. And we owe them a vast debt of gratitude for allowing us into their worlds and work – usually kept so private and out of the public eye – so that we can better understand what they do, how they do it, and how they keep going.

It is an honor to have the opportunity to tell the stories of these sixteen diverse individuals. Together, the Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* represent a global network of often isolated local leaders. Their devotion to resolving violent conflict (including those fueled in part by religious differences), and their use of religion as a tool for peace provide a roadmap for activist religious peacemaking. I thank each of the *Peacemakers* for all that you do and for allowing us to tell your stories.

Although it is the *Peacemakers* themselves who are the centerpiece of this book, in shaping this project another community of individuals has emerged; one dedicated to the power of the religiously motivated peacemaker and to the vital importance of telling his or her story. I would like to thank all those whose imagination, dedication, and tireless effort brought about the publication of this volume.

First, I have to express my appreciation to Dr. Georgette Bennett, the founder and President of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, for her vision and unflagging commitment to making religion a resource for resolving conflicts and transforming societies. Without her

ability to translate ideas into action, this book would never have come to be. I am deeply grateful to Georgette for having the opportunity to work on this important project.

All books require someone to guide them and their content. This book would not have been possible without the dynamic dedication of Joyce Dubensky, Executive Vice President of the Tanenbaum Center. Her keen appreciation of the timeliness and importance of this project to the global community, as well as her deep understanding of the work of the religiously motivated peacemaker, has provided us with unmatched guidance and leadership, vital to the success of such a formidable undertaking. Thank you, Joyce, for everything.

Throughout the process of writing this book, the members of the Tanenbaum Center for Religion and Conflict Resolution Advisory Council were a constant source of inspiration. Special thanks are due to Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, Honorary Chair of the Advisory Council and the inspiration for the Peacemakers in Action Award. The growing community of Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* is a living testament to him.

I also owe a great debt of gratitude to Ambassador Nancy E. Soderberg, member and former Chair of the Advisory Council, who designed the strategic plan for the Program on Religion and Conflict Resolution that affirmed the publication of these stories and the growth of our work with the *Peacemakers*. Nancy is a great friend to the Tanenbaum Center, and her support of this project was invaluable.

Indispensable as well have been HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, who convened the *Peacemakers* for their first retreat in Amman, Jordan, and from which many of the learnings in this book emerged, and Dr. Marc Gopin, current Chair of the Advisory Council, whose work with the *Peacemakers* at the recent Tanenbaum Center working retreat deepened our understanding of how they address some difficult issues involving religious differences. Additionally, I am proud to credit Joseph Coffey, Senior Consultant to the Tanenbaum Center at the time of the program's inception, for his foresight in developing the early structure of the *Peacemakers'* case studies and identifying the initial criteria for the Peacemakers in Action Award, which is given each year to a newly identified religiously motivated peacemaker.

Likewise, I am indebted to the insightful research and adept writing of those who created the initial versions of some of our early case studies: Dr. David A. Steele, Program Manager, Civil Society and Conflict

Management Group, Mercy Corps (Markovic); Phillip Berryman, author and Catholic scholar (Alas); Dr. Katharina P. Coleman, Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia (Wuye and Ashafa); and Atalia Omer, Ph.D. candidate in Religion and Society at Harvard University (Froman). I thank each of you for your help in moving this project from idea to reality. It was your work that set the standard for this book and the case studies that were to follow.

Additionally, I want to thank the Tanenbaum Center staff, whose tireless efforts over the past several years have made our *Peacemakers* stories come to life.

Special thanks go to Tara Sugiyama and Natalie M. Carnes, whose prescience, commitment, intellectual creativity, and hard work transformed a collection of personal anecdotes and historical facts into detailed case studies that today have become the chapters of this book. Tara and Natalie's ability to articulate the special contributions of grassroots individuals motivated by religion to the field of conflict resolution was essential to telling their stories.

This book would not have been completed without the dedication of Sheherazade Jafari, who took over the leadership of this project and brought to this book uncommon intellect, insights, and the ability to translate complex ideas into language. Thank you for your professionalism and unrelenting commitment to excellence as you saw this project through to its final stages.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to Jonah Geffen for his dedication to this project, his ability to tackle delicate subjects with great care, his willingness to assist wherever needed, and his humor when we all needed a laugh. Also, thank you to Zachary Larson for his focus, his sharp editorial eye, and his readiness to do all the large and small tasks that had to be done during the closing stages of this project.

I also want to thank the others who contributed to this effort, especially Yasmin Hamidi and Josh Segal for their assistance in negotiating some of the more politically sensitive sections of the book, as well as former Tanenbaum Center colleagues whose efforts at various stages of this project are still appreciated: Nahide Bayrasli, Jason Biros, David Passiak, and Larry Rosales.

Throughout the creation of this book, there has been one other member of our *Peacemakers'* book-community who stood with us, encouraging and chiding us on. I thank John Berger, Senior Editor at Cambridge University Press, for his extraordinary belief in our cause. John's

partnership, commitment to getting it right, and profound patience are without parallel. And his ability to chuckle as we proceeded has kept us all going.

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Foreword

Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke

At least one thing has become clear in the last few years: if you are interested in peace in the twenty-first century, you cannot ignore religion.

Today's conflicts look different from the conflicts of the Cold War, when I started my career in international diplomacy. In those days, the threat of nuclear war conducted by nation states hung over us. The United States was fighting a war in Southeast Asia in which religion was not a factor. Today, religious and ethnic identity plays a huge role in setting the world's agenda. Indeed, at the end of the last century, the brutality and violence conducted in the name of religion was profoundly shocking. If today's leaders are going to be effective, they must learn how to respond to personal and group religious identity.

But focusing on religion as an instigator of conflict is only half the story and, quite frankly, dangerously inaccurate. Throughout my career, from the Indo-China wars, to the Bosnian war, to my work today, I have had occasion to witness the positive and powerful force of religion in promoting peace in communities torn apart by intractable conflicts. Amidst the violence were unsung heroes: religious men and women who put their lives at risk to bring stability to their communities. Their work and insights were crucial to ending human suffering. But they never made the headlines.

Some years ago, I sat with the president of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, Dr. Georgette Bennett, and discussed the importance of publicly identifying religious peacemakers for recognition, support, and training. My idea was that these men and women would gain some protection from the public recognition and would be harder to marginalize – or kill – once the public became aware of their work. I already appreciated the Tanenbaum Center's readiness to tackle religious intolerance in ways that others had not done before. Dr. Bennett and

her team have dedicated enormous vision and energy to this effort. In only eight years, the Tanenbaum Center has identified *Peacemakers in Action* working in conflicts throughout the world, convened them for expert training, and learned of their incredible stories, which they have captured for the public in this book.

It is, therefore, a personal privilege to write this Foreword, and to have the opportunity to acknowledge the Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers*. This is their book, full of the stories of men and women who are driven by the peaceful teachings of their faith to work tirelessly toward ending some of the world's deadliest conflicts. They work within communities, on the ground, and are generally unknown outside their personal circles. They work within their religious institutions and outside of them, with those who are victims and those who kill. And they do this with one shared impulse: to create an environment for lasting peace and stability. In today's political climate, religiously motivated men and women are a necessary component of Track Two diplomacy. They are the answer to other people who, in the name of their religion, preach race-hatred, assassination, the killing of innocent bystanders, and war. We must encourage them.

We have much to learn about the role of religion in peacemaking. Thankfully, the field of religious conflict resolution is growing, and currently it offers a handful of useful publications, which primarily concentrate on the work of religious communities and institutions. This groundbreaking book pushes the field, providing a much-needed focus on *individuals* and an in-depth glimpse into the impact that individual religious and lay leaders can have. But *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* does even more. By analyzing the ways religion motivates and creates a distinct set of conflict resolution techniques, this book shows how others might follow in their footsteps. Such a study is critical to understanding how we can further promote the efforts of these individuals – and utilize a key tool for diplomacy today.

In my almost forty-five years working in international affairs and diplomacy, I have seen firsthand the efforts of hundreds of religiously motivated men and women. Nearly always, they were working alongside the people – long before, and long after the diplomats arrived. Many had keen insights about what was transpiring around them, and they frequently displayed an insider's perspective on how to convince key actors to move toward reconciliation. Above all, they had credibility. Whether or not a particular conflict revolved around religion, I saw how these religious peacemakers often had a legitimacy that allowed them to reach out to

parties in a conflict, especially at times when the diplomats, politicians, and other Track One actors could not.

The individuals in this book are stellar examples of religiously motivated peacemakers from around the world. Each of the Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* is unique, as they hail from different religious traditions and carry out their work in vastly different settings. And yet their efforts are motivated by a shared moral conviction and a religious calling to work until peace and justice are a reality.

One of the first things I learned as a diplomat is that success in peacemaking takes a number of qualities: diligence and persistence, unique insight, credibility, passion, and a commitment to the idea that peace is possible. The Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* display all of these attributes, and in today's world, they are one of the strongest links to communities throughout the world. As the misuse of religion continues to kill, devastating the lives of generations and escalating tensions to new heights, I fear what will happen if we ignore the impact of these individuals – and what they teach us about resolving today's conflicts – any longer. These heroes must no longer remain an underutilized resource.

This book poses a unique opportunity for diplomats and students of religion, as well as politicians, academics, religious and lay leaders, conflict resolution practitioners, community activists, young people – in short, all of us. I urge you, as someone concerned about violent conflict and the countless lives lost, to read carefully these *Peacemakers'* accounts. We need to engage their insights and skills and support their crucial role in Track Two diplomacy. For students of religion, let these men and women serve as examples of how even one person's religious motivation can move us closer to peace. I urge you to learn and be our future peacemakers, and I hope the rest of us will find ways to support your vital work into a more peaceful future.

Preface

Religion is a powerful force in societies around the world and in the lives of people everywhere. However, its impact, whether international or local, is too often associated with violent conflict. Recognizing this, the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding promotes practical programs aimed at reducing verbal and physical violence perpetrated in the name of religion. We are a nonsectarian organization and our goal is simple: to encourage the practice of interreligious respect in daily experiences – in school, at work, and in areas of armed conflict.

This book is a product of one Tanenbaum Center program: *Religion and Conflict Resolution*. As part of this program, every year we conduct a global search for religiously motivated men and women working on the ground to end violent conflicts. Those individuals most clearly exemplifying Tanenbaum Center ideals are then selected as *Peacemakers in Action* by the experts who comprise our Religion and Conflict Resolution Advisory Council.

Today there are nineteen *Peacemakers*, and sixteen are the subject of this book. In all likelihood, you have never heard of most of them. That is by design. Our objective is to discover unheralded and religiously motivated grassroots leaders who, with limited resources and little publicity, regularly risk their lives and freedom in an effort to end violent conflicts.

But the Tanenbaum Center does much more than simply identify and write about these compelling individuals. We also bring them together for intensive working sessions designed to enhance their effectiveness. The *Peacemakers* were first convened in Amman, Jordan, in 2004 at the invitation of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. More recently, in 2005, they were assembled for a six-day working retreat in New York City. There, they shared their life stories and insights and worked with expert trainers to strengthen their skills and enhance their

ability to address the conflicts that they work to resolve. In New York, they personally met His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who publicly affirmed the importance of their work. And as they departed, they declared that they were leaving with renewed strength to continue their peacemaking efforts.

To meet the *Peacemakers* and hear their stories is to recognize their unique and crucial role in conflict resolution. This book makes that point, by tracing “who” they are and “how” they do their work. In this, the book is inspirational, and we are confident that it will move religiously motivated people of action worldwide to follow in the *Peacemakers’* footsteps. The Tanenbaum Center *Peacemakers* prove that religious peacemaking is a vocation. And if this book helps to stimulate the professionalization of Religious Peacemaking, it will have fulfilled another goal of the Tanenbaum Center, while aptly honoring the lives of the *Peacemakers in Action* to whom it is dedicated.

Additionally, the Tanenbaum Center believes that – if people pay attention – they will find men and women like our *Peacemakers* at work all over the world, endeavoring to resolve armed conflicts. Having studied the great impact that they have in transforming their communities, we are convinced that these anonymous individuals are a critical resource for diplomats and others working to transform the more than fifty religiously affected conflicts around the world today. If this book encourages diplomats and government officials to engage religiously motivated grassroots peacemakers in the task of mitigating violent conflicts, then, again, the Tanenbaum Center will have begun to meet another of its core goals.

The one thing these stories have in common is their power. In their details and the way they are told, they are very different. Involved are sixteen distinct individuals, all of whom have unique ways of narrating and communicating their experiences. Some are effusive, others more reserved. Some are expansive and natural storytellers, while others are impatient to get on with their chosen vocations. Some *Peacemakers* were ready respondents no matter where they were located, whereas others could seldom be reached because they work in remote villages, where contact is often impossible.

In all cases, effort was made to fill in gaps with extensive research and additional information obtained from friends and associates. And although the *Peacemakers’* stories differ in structure and, in part, reflect constraints faced in assembling the book, what each of them have told us only whets our appetite to know more about them.

It also will be noted that the *Peacemakers* are not referred to in a uniform way throughout the book. Sometimes they are mentioned by religious titles, sometimes not; sometimes by last names, sometimes by first names; and occasionally by a title of endearment. An effort was made, depending on the *Peacemaker*, to reflect in one case the way they refer to themselves, in another, the way their community speaks of them and, in still another, the way we at the Tanenbaum Center have come to know them after years of collaboration and friendship.

Finally, we have sought to present a balanced and accurate account of the dangerous and highly complex situations to which the *Peacemakers* have responded. It can be argued that “balanced accuracy” is unattainable because of the sensitivity of interpreting the conflicts represented in this book. Yet, in our view, we must do the best we can. The settings in which the *Peacemakers* work, however complicated and controversial, must be described in order to appreciate the nature of the contribution these men and women make. Accordingly, the level of detail, as well as the complexity of description, varies in the history section of each case (note that at the end of each chapter are a summary of facts and, when appropriate, definitions for each conflict location).

This work tells the stories of heroic individuals, who are finding ways to use their religious traditions as a resource for building peace. Our fervent hope is that those who read these stories will be inspired to pick up where they leave off.

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