



Susila
Dharma
International
building with humanity

e-news

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Photo: Hijas de la Paz project graduation, Amanecer, Colombia

Wishing Peace and Goodwill to all Humankind - From Inner Peace to Peace-making in the world

Those of us living in the global north are celebrating winter holidays - Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Diwali among them. These holidays fall at the darkest time of the year and celebrate the impending return of the light, closeness with family, harmony and a spirit of renewal. They bring us together around different historical moments that challenge us as communities, as we celebrate humanity's resilience.

These holidays are also a time to reflect on the past year. Many of us, in our own ways, have been deeply affected by the wars happening around us and conflicts on many levels. You have written to us about a deep longing to contribute to peace - a just and positive peace that is more than about putting a bandaid on long-standing wounds in our communities, but about being part of a process of acknowledging the acts that have led to unspeakable human suffering, rectifying and finally, reconciling. Your stories of moving from a place of inner peace to peace-making are truly inspiring.

As a special gift to you, we are pleased to offer this Holiday Edition of the SDIA eNews, on the theme "From Peace Within to Peace in the World". We invite you to join us on January 17th for a live online event (see link below) on the same topic, to share a moment of reflection, music, thoughts and prayers for a just and positive peace in the New Year.

Wishing you and yours happy holidays!
From the SDIA Board and Office

Photo: ©Warriors Against Violence



SD Canada supports the Warriors Against Violence Society, Vancouver, Canada to address violence and inter-generational trauma

By Dave Hitchcock, SD Canada Board member

Editor's note: From 2008 to 2015, the Government of Canada mandated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to document the history and legacy of the Canadian Indian Residential School system. It highlighted the experiences of more than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children who were forcibly removed from their families to attend residential schools between the mid-19th century and 1996.

In 2015, Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission released its report on the devastating impact of residential schools on indigenous students and their families. Although SD Canada had focussed on supporting projects in other countries, a growing number of Subud members started to suggest that deserving Canadian projects should not be excluded from applying for funding – especially those that address historical trauma experienced by First Nations' communities.

It was timely then, that SD Canada learned of the Warriors Against Violence Society in Vancouver's Eastside, through an indigenous Subud Vancouver member who was both a residential school survivor and a counsellor/facilitator with the society. The Warriors Against Violence Society is committed to helping aboriginal families stop violence and abuse in their families and the local community by reclaiming traditional values of honour, respect and equality.

The Society runs a family healing programme. It helps First Nations' families, particularly men, to build healthy relationships and find peace within. It offers three sessions a week, with talking circles that focus on understanding where anger comes from and how participants can share their stories of pain and trauma in a safe environment. Here they can get needed support and tools to help end unwanted, violent behaviours and start their healing journey. Childcare is available when needed and hot meals are served at each session. These are much appreciated as many of the participants live in poverty.



Photo: ©Dave Hitchcock

In the past year, a total of 257 participants took part in the programme, together with approximately 100 elders and community members. Funding by SD Canada has gone towards supporting the provision of childcare and the cost of hot meals at the weekly healing sessions. Over time, the Society has reported a decrease in violence and that more families can live in safety, free from domestic abuse.

This year, SD Canada approved funding for a second indigenous project in Canada – also in Vancouver – helping to support cultural workshops as part of an Indigenous Female Hockey Jamboree.

Supporting these projects addresses the suggestion from our Canadian Subud members for funding Canadian humanitarian projects, while also being a positive way that the Subud Community can make a meaningful contribution towards truth and reconciliation with First Nations' communities.

EDUSER in partnership with UNESCO - Healing the wounds of history and collective trauma in Colombia

By Rossana Silva and Adriana Vargas C.

Colombia is recovering from 60 years of internal armed conflict that has caused the forced displacement of more than 7.6 million people. In order to heal the wounds of its history, Colombia has become a kind of 'peace laboratory' with many thinkers and organisations exploring how to help the country to heal the wounds of past conflict. The NGO Eduser - founded by the GHFP and SDIA - entered into a partnership with UNESCO to implement one such "Collective Healing" programme, working with trauma-affected communities through a series of healing circles.

To implement the programme, it invited 20 local facilitators to participate in a capacity-building programme, coming from 10 communities in Colombia's Chocó department, Tumaco, Popayán, three indigenous communities and one women's association working to restore territorial rights. These communities have suffered the legacy of poverty, transatlantic slavery and colonialism and, as a result, are victims of racial and gender discrimination, forced displacement, coercive recruitment of young people into armed groups and lack of employment opportunities.

This innovative collective healing project delves into spiritual damage and dehumanisation (the victim-perpetrator dichotomy). It is a programme of listening, of breaking the silence, of bringing things out from within, of growing in relationships and understanding that in order to achieve social transformation, it is necessary to make changes in structures and systems that govern people's lives. It also highlights that the spiritual practices of communities are a great asset in fostering openness and achieving moments of healing.

During the development of the Collective Healing Circles, safe and trustworthy spaces were created, where all voices were heard with deep respect, validation and trust. The sessions were part of a process that was co-constructed session by session. Adriana's testimony demonstrates what she, as a facilitator, learned about peacebuilding and healing the wounds of history...

Healing circles: a path to dignity and encountering the "other"

My journey with the Healing Circles began almost without me realising it. I had been going through a process that lasted several years in which I sought to understand my own questions about care, memory and the silent weight of the traumas we inherit without knowing it.

That personal journey ended up intersecting with the proposal from UNESCO and the NGO Fundación Eduser, and there I discovered a deeply human practice, a space where personal stories are not judged, but honoured; where silence and listening become tools for restoration; and where the community is both the wounded place and the source of healing.



Photo: ©Rossana Silva



Photo: ©Adriana Vargas

What led me to get involved was intuition and recognition of the pain and the needs of our community. Studying the methodology allowed me to understand how these processes could transform not only individuals, but also the way we relate to each other. Our communities are plagued by legacies of structural violence, discrimination, and accumulated silences. This work allowed me to accompany groups which, despite their shared pain, still had an enormous desire to recognise each other, dignify each other, and rebuild their trust.

In this work, I experienced challenges, of course, such as maintaining silence or acting with restraint when deep emotions arose, creating a sufficiently safe space in contexts where vulnerability is not always welcome, and accompanying without intervening, always trusting in the wisdom of the group. But those challenges also revealed unexpected strengths. I discovered that even people who arrive with scepticism can, over time, open themselves up to deeper listening; that compassionate presence can dismantle old defences; and that in every community there is an enormous reserve of resilience that just needs a space to express itself.

One of the most significant lessons was confirming that healing is collective in nature - that the whole benefits from each individual's release of pain...

That we are social beings, that we need other people to live, and that together we are born, we heal, we transform, and that none of this could happen in isolation. It happens when people can see each other without labels, without pre-assigned roles, without the burden of being victims or perpetrators, but as whole beings, equally worthy.

I also learned that transformation is not always grand or immediate; sometimes it manifests itself in small gestures, in a word that was previously difficult to say, in a new way of looking at the other, in a new way of understanding something, in a small act of self-care or compassion.

For those who work in peacebuilding or community processes, I would like to share a message that I consider fundamental: it is not just about techniques or methodologies, but about presence, about fostering a space with radical respect, about allowing people to find their own voice, about listening with curiosity and trusting that the community has within itself the resources to heal. When that happens, when the healing circle becomes a space of restored dignity, healing is a destination, the shared bond of the group is a way of walking the path together.

Adriana Vargas C., Healing Circle Facilitator, EDUSER Project 'Healing the Wounds of History'

Prevention of gender-based violence as part of the Community Learning Centre Project in the DRC

By Mamie Butundu, SD Congo Gender Advisor



Photo: ©Mamie Butundu

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to face major social challenges, including violence against women and girls. Such violence is reported both in conflict zones and in areas that have not experienced the ravages of war.

Our experience in the DRC is that sustainable peace is only possible when women's rights and contributions are respected and they are fully able to participate in the social, political and economic life of the country. More inclusive, gender-equal societies are also more peaceful and prosperous societies.

Among the different forms of gender-based violence that women and girls experience on a daily basis are forced marriage and early marriage. These common social practices jeopardise the future of thousands of young girls. This form of violence disrupts their education, leads to early pregnancies and plunges many young women into a lifetime of social and economic dependency.

Social norms and gender inequalities continue to hinder girls' access to formal education in many communities in the DRC

To address this situation, SD Congo, with the support of SDIA and SD Canada, created the first Community Learning Centres (CLCs) for women and girls, - to restore the right to education that they have been denied. This project was launched in 2022, with an initial three centres in Nkandu and Kingantoko, in the province of Kongo Central in a peri-urban area, and Ngiri-Ngiri in the heart of the capital (City of Kinshasa).

The CLCs, which provide vocational training, literacy and a cross-disciplinary rights-based training programme, is an innovative and inclusive response aimed at strengthening women's empowerment and promoting sustainable social change.

Project data show a particularly revealing trend: each cohort has seen an increase in enrolment, dominated by single mothers seeking to rebuild their socio-economic lives. This phenomenon illustrates not only the extent of gender-based violence, but also the social demand for educational initiatives tailored to the needs of marginalised young women.

Trainings offered at SD Community Learning Centres

The CLCs offer a range of training courses that simultaneously address the educational, economic and psychosocial needs of beneficiaries. These include literacy courses to enable women and girls to acquire basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, a fundamental prerequisite for any form of autonomy.

Vocational training is also provided in dressmaking and sewing, aesthetics, food processing and basic IT. These courses promote access to employment or self-employment and strengthen the capacity of women and girls to generate income and become independent and self-sufficient.

Beyond literacy and vocational training, cross-cutting modules on gender, gender equality, positive masculinity, sexual and reproductive health, the environment, leadership and entrepreneurship are offered in all courses, enabling learners to understand the major sustainable development issues of today and strengthening their self-confidence, decision-making skills and spirit of initiative.

Some Observed Results

After six training cohorts, (more than 2230 learners) the implementation of the project has had a significant impact on women's empowerment, the fight against violence against women and girls, and community transformation.

The increased community support for the project, as evidenced by the high number of enrolments in each cohort, demonstrates growing social acceptance of the model and content of the training provided by the CLC. Families in these communities are gradually recognising the importance of training for girls and young women. An instantaneous intergenerational mobilisation is underway: former learners are raising awareness among their husbands and those around them and encouraging them to participate in CLC training, thus becoming community ambassadors, motivated to share the knowledge they have acquired. Men are increasingly accessing the training, and are welcomed as current and future champions of gender equality. In this way, they are helping to transform gender relations within households and the community.

Various testimonies received attest to the fact that gender training promotes a better understanding of violence against women and girls. Following these waves of training, there is a growing recognition that certain practices and attitudes previously considered as 'normal' actually are acts of violence. This greater awareness now leads to more rapid reporting of cases of violence and abuse, a real willingness to take action for prevention, and a keen desire among learners to engage in the promotion of women's rights, particularly within the framework of community consultations set up by the CLCs to bring women's needs and concerns into the decision-making of local institutions.

While we need to be humble about our successes, which are small vis a vis the scale of the problems in the DRC, we also need to be positive that one woman, and one man at a time, we are very gradually working towards a society where both women and men can enjoy their rights in greater peace and prosperity.



My name is Mariana, I am currently 16 years old. I have a 2-year-old child. I left school because my parents wanted me to marry a man of their choice. But I got pregnant with another boy. For four years, I stayed at home, with no future and no support. When I heard about the centre, I was afraid to come. I thought I didn't know anything anymore. But here, I found women like me. I learned to read properly, I started sewing and, above all, I discovered that I have rights. Today, I dream of opening my own tailoring workshop. This centre has given me back my hope.

Mariana, learner, CLC NKANDU



I am the husband of a former student at the IT centre. After completing her training, she advised me to enroll in the IT course. I didn't hesitate, as I felt that the successful training had helped her to progress in many ways.

Today, I consider her not only as my wife, but as my friend, as my sister, because after long discussions with her about gender equality, I understood that we all have the same rights, and we men must give women the chance to express their talents.

Jean Luc, learner, CLC Ngiri-Ngiri

Puppets as Peace Ambassadors

By Erica Zoltan Sapir, Puppeteers without Borders
www.puppeteerswithoutborders.com

This year, we at Puppeteers Without Borders (PWB), are celebrating 20 years of activities which have taken us all over the world to share the power of puppetry for positive change, from the Lofoten Islands, north of Norway, to Indonesia and Australia, from Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Mexico City and El Salvador, from Nepal to Somalia, and more. Through puppets, we helped communities and caregivers tackle challenging issues such as HIV, family planning, health and hygiene, domestic violence, human rights, non-violent communication, bullying, the plight of refugees, and more.



Photo: ©Erica Sapir

More recently it seemed that exploring the meaning of Peace became the major concern as armed conflicts reached our doorsteps and the nightly news. And what better way to start than within our own educational systems: all over the world, in the schools we have visited, it has been pointed out that in the classroom and schoolyard, bullying is the biggest problem. And bullying among young children is a precursor to adult warfare.

Thanks to generous financial support from friends, we could offer schools in our area (South of France) a series of workshops aimed at addressing bullying with kids from ages 8 to 11. Children created their own puppets then used them to navigate conflict situations; we introduced principles of tolerance, nonviolent communication, and we let kids express their frustrations and fears through short scenes which they created with our help. Of course, we would have liked to give much more space to such workshops (each one was for one day and lasted no more than 5-6 hours), but schools have limited time for activities that are considered outside the normal curricula.

We called this school-based programme “Puppets as Peace Ambassadors”, an ambitious name, but it forced us to consider deeper: can a puppet really be an ambassador for peace? Seriously?

Yes, and looking back on my experience, puppets can be a medium for serious dialogue about the hardest issues: As an alter ego, the puppet can embody our fears of the other, our prejudices, our lack of compassion and of generosity and help us examine the kinds of stories these qualities produce, versus the kind of stories possible when we are at peace within ourselves and with others.

I started to develop the idea of proposing puppetry workshops to the many peace organizations active in Israel, who work hand in hand with the Arab population and with the Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

For this purpose, I traveled to Israel this past October, and with a group of volunteers, I went to stay for a week in a Palestinian village in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to help with the olive harvest. It was a very complex immersion in the incredibly difficult life of this population. I spoke to many people, Palestinians and Israelis, I heard all sorts of opinions and views and I was strengthened in my conviction that Peace with Justice is the ONLY way.

I am not saying that puppets offer a solution to the complex historical and political obstacles to peace, but there are specific situations when they can open the possibility of dialogue; when there is a willingness, but words don't come; when the moment is right but emotions are strong and confused... there is a moment when creating together puppets which become alive by the flick of your hand, and then when these creatures can be used to help us express pain or make fun (already what a liberation to be able to smile, or even to laugh), and can speak of things that otherwise cannot be talked about. Through the use of puppetry and story-telling, we can liberate ourselves of all the pent-up anger and frustration, then, maybe, we can hear the other, maybe we can look at the world from his/her hill, see what he/she sees, and vice versa, and maybe we both can see with hope.

Walking to have a voice (a story of migration)

By Rosa Bohórquez, Subud Uruguay / Subud Venezuela

Editor's note: Positive Peace (PP) is not just about the absence of warfare: it is about focusing on building just systems that address the root causes of conflict and social tensions that can explode into violence. Mass migration is often, if not always, the result of government policies, in some cases foreign policies such as sanctions and embargos, which are designed to generate unlivable conditions in the country of origin. Venezuela is such a case, where millions have been forced to flee as punishing sanctions have reduced the access of ordinary citizens to food, medicines and basic services.



Photo: ©Rosa (Francisca) Bohórquez

Let me tell you about a Venezuelan tradition. When we emigrate, and we have done so in numbers reaching nearly 8 million people (22% of the population), those of us who are fortunate enough to travel by plane take a photo of the floor of Maiquería airport: our shoes on Carlos Cruz-Diez's work 'Cromointerferencia de color aditivo' (Additive Colour Chromointerference).

I left in October 2018. People often ask me why. It's complex: desperation, but not a lack of faith. Markets without products, military in the streets, civil marches met with repression, a devalued currency, and ideological discussions that escalated into violence, even among friends and family.

Chile welcomed us. I arrived in Santiago with my husband and two children. We were welcomed by two Subud brothers. My dear sister-in-law, Yamila, who had arrived a year earlier and has been a beacon and a driving force; and Mauricio, from the Santiago group. With their affection, traditional food and guided tour, we adjusted our expectations and sense of uncertainty.

Our destination was the south of Chile: La Araucanía. I promised myself I would go to Santiago and Concepción to do Latihan, but it wasn't necessary. The Latihan came to us. The national helpers travelled to strengthen the groups. Thank you, Nabilah, Dahlahi, Anita, Marilyn and Sabina. Isn't it God who takes care of us when we say, 'I will be with you'?

From stillness to vibration

In 2014, although food was scarce, we never went without. Subud California organised the shipment of rice, grains, cornmeal, and for Christmas: cocoa! We also received medicines: Subud members in Colombia and SIHA took care of it and we managed to get around the borders. These gestures connected us with local and international Subud members.

It was a time when I did a lot of testing. And the response was always: 'You are walking.'

We have been away from 'home' now for seven years. Making a new life in different spaces, working in different trades, connecting with diverse cultures. Having parents far away is perhaps the greatest challenge. Three months ago, my father passed away. I received the news from afar, while working as a caregiver for the elderly.

Today I live in Montevideo, Uruguay. I no longer look at my shoes on colourful mosaics. I know I have been fortunate. I have asked God, 'How can I thank you for your blessings?' and I receive the answer, 'Use your voice!' It is true: we migrants walk a lot, but we lose the right to speak. This is how I am rebuilding myself, under God's guidance, because finding peace involves a complete transformation and the courage to speak about the loss that we have experienced.



Photo: ©Rosa with Subud members from Chile



Photo: ©Rosa with Subud members from Uruguay



Photo: ©Rosa with Subud members from Venezuela

From Peace Within, to Peace in the World

By Mary Salisbury, SDIA/SDUSA Board member

When I was a little girl about four years old, my father came home from work one day incredibly excited. It was May 1954. The U.S. Supreme Court had just made a ruling that said that segregation of public schools did not provide equal education for all children. My father was a lawyer, and he explained the ruling to me in great detail. It was the first time I learned that the color of a person's skin might mean that the person might not have the same kind of life as me. To my four-year-old mind, this made no sense.

Soon after this day, one of my uncles had a talk with me. He had been a soldier in World War II. He told me that of all my cousins, I was the one who should work for peace. I didn't know what this really meant, but my uncle made it seem as if it were important. Again, to my child's mind, I believed that the way to peace was for people all over the world to sit down together and figure it out.

A few years later, I had the opportunity to spend several mornings canoeing at dawn with a woman who at the time was 101 years old. Each morning she would talk to me about fascinating things. Among these were memories of her time as a little girl when the U.S. Civil War was fought. I learned of the fear she had of being shot at by soldiers and the confusion of being displaced. Though young, I understood that war was a terrible thing and destroyed much more than it solved anything.

In my teen years, I was deeply impacted by the political assassinations of the 1960's. I knew that the world was not always a just place and I wanted to work for justice for all. I did this through music and speaking against war. At this point in my life, I understood little about peace within myself; however, I had a dream, a desire to bring people all over the world at one time to work for peace everywhere.



Photo: ©Mary with children
in a remote Hmong village in China



Photo: ©Mary on a lake in Wisconsin at age 7

As an adult, I taught in classrooms where my students were from many different cultures. My first teaching job was on an Indian reservation in Montana. This group of Native Americans had been denied their language, culture, and religion for three generations. The teachers at the school where I taught worked with the elders who had secretly kept their language, customs, and religion alive. By teaching the young about their history and culture, these high-school students found a sense of identity, of personal acceptance, and a place in the world which finally made sense to them. In many cases the pain of personal destruction and abuse were alleviated, and they began to experience an inward sense of peace.

As a professor of teacher credentialing, I taught future teachers how to create a learning community among their students so that all were heard, all had a chance to learn and succeed. Called Social Justice Teaching, my students were taught how to create classrooms which were emotionally and spiritually safe for all students. In my small way, I was working to help my students find peace within themselves so they could contribute to creating a society where people could cooperate.

In my role as a professor, I had the opportunity to visit other countries, where I was the Other. What a wonderful experience I had meeting people who had led lives so very different from my own! No matter how very different our outer lives were, we were more alike than different. In schools all over the world, teachers work with the same kind of passion and concern for their students' well-being and growth. Adults all over the world have the same kind of pride and concern for their children and families; we understood one another even when we weren't speaking the same language.

We are not born knowing how to hate. Hate is learned. It comes from fear of the Other which leads to dislike, which sometimes leads from minor conflicts to raging wars. It is our challenge as adults to resolve the hurts and pains inflicted on us in childhood. It is also our duty as adults to work together to create a better world for our children and future generations. My nearly 30 years in Subud has given me the tools to find inner peace through the Latihan. However, it can be a challenge to find the path forward in personal conflict. The same is true for collective conflicts. Be it a small group or an entire country, we are often challenged to find a path forward. Today there is a yearning for peace among people all over the world, but we are challenged to find the way.

Currently, I serve on the Board of Directors for Susila Dharma International Association. SDIA recently gave me a wonderful gift to organize the Peace Within, Peace in Our World Event. My childhood dream of having people from all over the world come together to focus on peace has come true. Please join SDIA, the Guerrand Hermes Foundation for Peace and SYAI on January 17, 2026 for this event which will include speakers, people who have worked for peace, and musicians from all over the world. Please join us in creating a time and space where all are welcome and where we can focus on being members of one family, the Human Family.

Susila Dharma International
Building with Harmony

GUERRAND-HERMES FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

SYAI

YOU ARE INVITED TO A SPECIAL EVENT:

SAVE THE DATE!

**PEACE WITHIN,
PEACE IN THE WORLD**

You are invited to a special event
Presented by Susila Dharma International Association
In partnership with GHFP and SYAI
With Speakers and Musicians from all over the world!

SATURDAY, JAN 17, 2026

Times: 15:00 hrs (UTC-time)
15:00 HRS LONDON
16:00 HRS PARIS/BERLIN/MADRID/KINSHASA
10:00 AM MONTREAL/NY/BOGOTÁ/QUITO/LIMA
7:00 AM LOS ANGELES/VANCOUVER
22:00 HRS JAKARTA

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83007574564?pwd=wbGVdWJsmQCrFSI9FeCxExE609yN89cY.1>
PASSCODE: 006076

zoom

©Illustration by Aminah Herrman

Join us on Jan 17th:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83007574564?pwd=wbGVdWJsmQCrFSI9FeCxExE609yN89cY.1>
Passcode: 006076

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Illustration: ©Aminah Herrman



Thank you for your generous support!
Wishing you and yours
a very happy and blessed holiday season!

The Susila Dharma International Association (SDIA) is an association of 57 members operating in 26 countries around the world. SDIA connects these local teams with resources for training, expertise, project management and financing.

Our member projects run activities in the following Program Areas: Health and Wellbeing, Child Development, Education and Youth, Environment and Sustainable Livelihoods.

Our national chapters – Susila Dharma Nationals – support our projects and, in some cases, also run their own project activities.