

PORTRAITS OF PEACE LEADERS



Helder Lopez

Lawyer and Human Rights Defender



I am a lawyer, human rights defender, and work with leaders of civil society organizations, local government, and non-government organizations in Alianza, Honduras to create alliances towards a culture of peace.

For me, leadership for peace means the active participation of society members to create networks or alliances that consciously and strategically seek the decolonization of peace, respect for human rights, social inclusion, and harmonize with the practice of sustainable development objectives. Together we collectively construct parameters for strengthening communities in terms of sustainable development and peace. Through knowledge and empowerment, people become multipliers of peace in communities affected by conflicts, generating a culture of peace and social coexistence that is inclusive, sustainable, and equitable. Leadership for peace creates very positive aspects in practice by creating a collectively calm, stable, safe and well being environment where people communicate using dialogue and active listening, mutually respect diversity of opinions, and are inclusive of all contributions.

It motivates me to face diverse challenges and responsibilities, to make decisions collectively, to inspire and motivate other people and convince them of what they are capable of and the great things that can be done when working as a team. I am inspired by the possibility to create a more equitable, sustainable environment, to create a world free of violence and authoritarianism, to instill qualities that make up emotional intelligence and social intelligence for the transformation of conflicts. I am inspired by building each other up to ensure freedom, peace, social coexistence, and, above all, to build ourselves internally to be able to contribute to the world with soul, life, and heart.



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Wazieh Offuh

Wazieh Women and Children Safety Advocacy Foundation

Through the Wazieh Women and Children Safety Advocacy Foundation I work with displaced youths in Jos North, a local government area in plateau state, Nigeria, including orphans and survivors of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and trauma. We provide listening spaces for these youths to talk about their emotions, the challenges they face as young people, and the pressure within and around them. We inspire them to take the control as we give them a safe and brave space for their voices to be heard. We inspire them to tell their story as it is, knowing that we are here for them and will listen and hear them.

The listening spaces aim to build understanding and appreciation of the interconnectedness of humanity, fostering our shared accountability for each other and the environment in which we live. The space inspires them to be good listeners as it is one of the fundamentals of cultivating peace within themselves and with their peers. We also inspire them to show up for themselves and their friends. They are all advocates and should not keep quiet whenever they or their friends look troubled.

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To me, peace leadership is the adoption of nonviolent behavior to challenge the inhumane behaviors, systems, culture and structure that is gradually leading to divisions, defensive stands against the other, and the extinction of humanity. In practice in my work, this looks like cultivating the skills of active, deep listening by being present with the whole “Being” - not being disconnected - and being fully and wholly present in the moment - not in the past - through a storytelling space that leads to healing, safety, belonging, connection and transformation.

My personal story inspired and is still very much inspiring and motivating me to do the work I do and so much more. I keep discovering how deep my work is and I keep wanting to get deeper until everywhere is so bright by this light called “Peace.”



Ratu Bintang Assyifa

Leadership Lens

Along with a group of close friends, I co-founded and lead Leadership Lens, a volunteer group of peacebuilders and activists in Jakarta, Indonesia. At Leadership Lens, we promote peace leadership based on empathy, gender equality, and conflict resolution through activities with art and sport. We specifically target Student Council members in secondary schools so they can integrate these values into their activities.

To me, peace leadership means engaging with every aspect of society, including ourselves. Our program starts with empathy practices, including River of Life, an exercise in which students reflect on and draw a picture representing the significant experiences and milestones in their life; and a deep listening activity to listen to their peers with no follow-up questions or reactions. The students continue to group-based activities such as roleplay and gender-mixed futsal. Through roleplay, students choose their own story by deciding what actions to take, drawing parallels to real life situations in which conflict worsens when you don't listen. With gender-mixed futsal, we create a world where boys and girls work together and utilize teamwork. After our workshop, 100% of participants believe that empathy is an important pillar of leadership and 66% believe that boys and girls can lead effectively.



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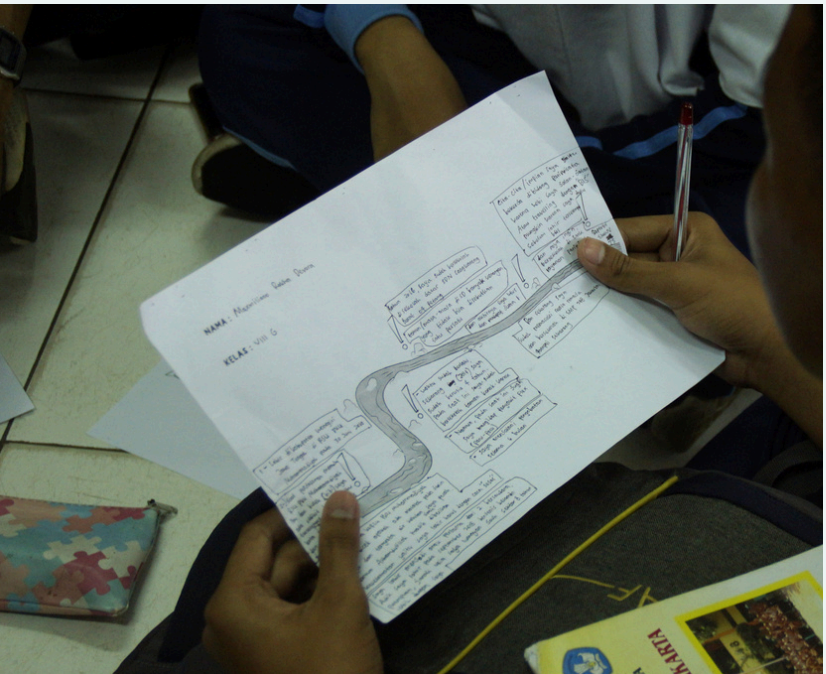
To do this work I’m inspired and motivated by my community! I am who I am because of the people in my life - my schools, friends, teachers, and so on. I have been very blessed to learn about peace in various avenues, and I want them to experience the same. Furthermore, the experience of having a friend being radicalized affirmed my commitment to continue this work for my community.





Ion Vlad

Teacher Training Programs



I began my involvement with teacher-training programs in human rights and sustainability in 2018. In my current work at The Miner Anderson Family Foundation, my biggest projects are weeklong intensive trainings for teachers in which they listen to lectures, participate in workshops, and go on field trips to deepen their understanding of educating for sustainability and equity. Topics covered include introductions to human rights and peace education, neoliberalism, global citizenship, and the UN sustainable development goals. After completing the training, teachers are expected to implement their newly gained knowledge by designing related classroom projects.

While putting together and conducting such programs with schools and universities, it quickly became apparent that peacebuilding and developing peaceful classrooms and institutional cultures were equally important topics to cover. The concept of peace leadership is closely connected to many of the precepts in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and many teachers have noted that teaching about, through, and for human rights involves not only discussing problems that take place outside of the classroom - in communities and elsewhere - but also creating peace-centered learning environments within the confines of their schools. As a result, we have started to give equal weight and attention in our programs to pedagogical practices that are student-centered and conducive to dialogism, while emphasizing the importance of forging a constructive working relationship with school administrators.

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Furthermore, scholars have underscored that human rights and peace education require a twofold approach, one that is values-based and structural; therefore, emphasis on a fair distribution of resources and the need for systemic equity has been at the center of my efforts with teacher training. What motivates me to do this work, building on previous pedagogical experiences and initiatives, is the enthusiasm that I see on the faces of teachers - their joy in developing their understanding and in being understood. Many of these educators have to operate amidst multiple professional constraints. Providing them with a space where they can freely develop structural understandings and strengthen critical thinking, including about peace leadership, has been priceless.

Kaleem Hussain

Planting For Peace

The Planting for Peace (PFP) initiative is a volunteer-led initiative, that I curated and launched in 2023, to create echo chambers and environments for peaceful contemplation, mindfulness, and mutual exchange and dialogue that will have the reciprocal benefit of facilitating peace and protecting our environment. In collaboration with organisations focused on protecting the environment and the natural ecosystem, volunteers plant flowers and trees at schools, hospitals, and other venues, in designs aimed at promoting contemplative reflection and protecting our ecosystem. So far the initiative has been well-received.



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My inspiration for the PFP initiative came about after I visited the United Nations Meditation Room, "A Room of Quiet", in New York. The room was opened in 1952 as a silent space dedicated to peace and people who give their lives for peace. I wanted to create a similar eco-system and enabling environment in an outdoor setting that orientates towards conflict de-escalation, peace, and reconciliation. I felt there is no better way to do this than by connecting with nature, planting the seeds of hope, and laying the foundations for sustainable cooperation, contemplation, peace, and dialogue.

The PFP initiative kick-started on International Peace Day 2023, observed around the world every year on 21st September, which the UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing non-violence. The first PFP activity took place at Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust in the West Midlands, England: a Peace Garden was set up on the hospital grounds that provides doctors and patients with a space for mindfulness, contemplation and recentering, connecting with nature, and a chance to break out from the stresses and strains of the hospital ward. Seeing the positive impact the PFP initiative had in the UK, I decided to bring the initiative to South Asia. To date, three PFP activities have taken place across school and hospital settings in Pakistan. The aim is to expand the initiative further in the future.

If you would like to connect with Kaleem Hussain to arrange an activity under the PFP banner, please get in touch with us at info@peaceleadershipcollaborative.org.



Janith Perera

Empowering Youth Leadership for Peace

Through my role as Director of Capacity-Building at Citizens, an international youth-led movement originating from Sri Lanka, I coordinated and participated in the International Youth Workshop, "Leveraging the 'Youth, Peace, and Security' (YPS) Agenda to Champion Localized Efforts for Sustainable Development" in August 2024. The workshop, organized by Citizens in partnership with ten other organizations, brought together over 150 participants from diverse backgrounds and showcased the collective commitment of youth from around the world to advance peace and sustainable development at the local level.



The three-day event served as a platform for young leaders, activists, policymakers, and experts to delve into the critical role youth play in peacebuilding and community resilience. Participants engaged in dynamic sessions that explored how the YPS agenda can be applied to tackle local and global challenges such as conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation. Through interactive workshops and collaborative discussions, the participants were empowered to develop localized strategies for promoting peace and sustainable development in their respective communities.

By the conclusion of the workshop, participants had not only gained practical insights but also built strong networks to continue their efforts beyond the event. The initiative demonstrated the power of youth-led collaboration and reinforced the idea that young people, when given the right tools and platforms, can be transformative agents of change. The workshop, held in recognition of International Youth Day, stands as a testament to the growing global movement for peace and sustainability driven by the energy and vision of youth leaders.

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