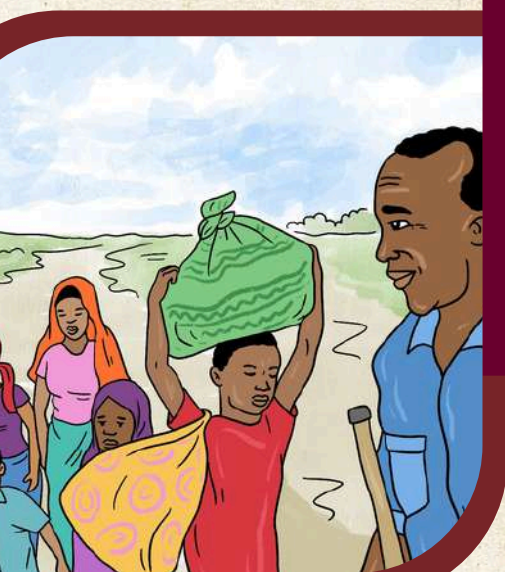




STORIES FOR PEACE & SOCIAL COHESION



Illustrations: Sally Whines



The Network
for Religious
& Traditional
Peacemakers



FUNDAÇÃO
MASC
Mecanismo de Apoio
à Sociedade Civil

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Introduction

Stories for Peace and Social Cohesion feature six illustrated stories, telling true-to-life experiences with conflict, displacement, inter-religious dialogue, and how everyone can act to build peace and community cohesion. The stories cover a variety of topics.

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The stories were originally produced for the "Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace and Social Cohesion in Mozambique (ID-PEACE)" project, which seeks to reduce inter- and intra-communal tensions and related religious freedom abuses by strengthening social cohesion and religious tolerance in Mozambique. The video versions of the stories are available in Portuguese, Emakhonde and Emakhua.

Access the online toolkit & watch videos:

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/stories-for-peace-and-social-cohesion-toolkit/>

Who is this booklet for?

This collection of stories is designed to be used:

- in inter-faith dialogue discussions about conflict resolution and peace-building;
- by community groups working towards social cohesion;
- by change-makers advocating for peace; and
- by anyone interested in better understanding conflict, conflict resolution, peace-building, and social cohesion.

Ideas for using this booklet

Discussion starters

Suggested discussion questions to get you started accompany each story. Feel free to create your own!

Role play

After reading the stories, have groups role play the story, posing the questions such as - what would happen if people took different decisions? How would you have improved people's approaches to conflict?

Find out more

Assign discussion group members to identify key issues from the stories and find out more - do research, ask family or the community their opinions - to share with the group.

Background information

Faith communities essential to peace-building

Faith communities have an essential role in promoting peace, tolerance and social cohesion. Interfaith peacemakers can:

- ✓ increase mutual understanding
- ✓ decrease attitudes undermining social cohesion
- ✓ promote conflict resolution

Negative consequences of violent conflict

Armed attacks and conflicts of a political nature are causing social problems: hatred, religious, ethnic and political intolerance and disrespect for human rights. This harms everyone and benefits no one. This can include:

- thousands of deaths and injuries and hundreds of displaced people
- homes and belongings lost and destroyed
- young children and women abducted, young men recruited into violence
- lack of unity and social cohesion hindering community and national development.

Respecting differences, finding common ground

As human beings, we all have differences. We may differ in our thinking, beliefs, perspectives, experiences, faiths, ethnicity, and political affiliations. Yet, many of our highest aspirations centre around common interests – for our families to grow and prosper, to live in security and peace, for ourselves and the people close to us to thrive. People and communities can find connections through common needs and interests. By respecting each other's differences and placing living in harmony as the highest priority (as our faiths guide us to) we benefit as individuals and communities.

Importance of resolving conflicts

Conflict will always occur. It is a natural part of life. When this happens, dialogue can resolve the situation. Without dialogue and conflict resolution, conflicts can easily escalate to create greater problems for everyone involved.

Tips for respectful dialogue

Respectful dialogue is the only way to prevent and resolve conflict. Tips for respectful dialogue include the following.

- Speak for yourself, not for a group or position
- Speak to communicate your own experience, not to persuade others
- Recognize the experiences and assumptions that shaped your views and opinion
- Speak from the bottom of your heart
- Practice active listening, give the speaker your full attention.
- Listen to learn, not to check existing assumptions or expectations.
- Listen with empathy, to see the problem from the other person's point of view, to put yourself in their shoes.
- Ask questions to clarify/ expand your understanding, not to challenge or engage in debate.

Miriam's Story

My name is Miriam. My story is painful. It is the story of many mothers.



We lived in a small village. Every day we walked to the river for water. Yousufa teased Salim for being slow, but she always helped her little brother. They shared a close bond. This was before the violence. We didn't have much, like most people we hoped for more. But we grew and sold vegetables. We were ok.

When the attack happened, the gunshots were so loud! We panicked, started running. I tripped. My husband pulled me up, pushing me towards Salim huddling with the two youngest children, shouting "Go and hide!" - the last words my husband ever said to me. He ran to find our eldest son and Yousufa.



When the attack happened, the gunshots were so loud! We panicked, started running. I tripped.

My husband pulled me up, pushing me towards Salim huddling with the two youngest children, shouting "Go and hide!" - the last words my husband ever said to me. He ran to find our eldest son and Yousufa.

After a long time hiding, we fearfully walked home. Then, the worst moment of my life. They killed my husband and our eldest son. Our home was badly damaged. And Yousufa, just 13, they took her.

Little 11-year-old Salim was devastated - losing his father and brother, and not knowing where his Yousufa was. His worry and confusion left a dark hole in him. He waited for her every day. We all worried - where was she? Was she ok?

Salim was never the same. He became angry. Always arguing with me, his teachers, anyone and everyone.

After the terrible attack, conflict emerged among friends and neighbours previously living in peace. Everyone was tense. People of different religions stopped trusting each other. Then we started hearing of young men suddenly gone, swayed to join the violence, leaving behind heartbroken parents. As the weeks passed, more and more destruction - homes, shops, even schools!

Many fled, but I refused. What if Yousufa came back? People begged me to leave and advised me to think about my three young children. Everything worsened. The day I packed the few things we had, I will never forget the look in Salim's eyes.

Arriving at a new place, tired, scared, I had no idea how to start over. But, with children to care for, I didn't waste time. A community group helped us. I built a shelter and started a business. The children are back in school. The bad memories keep me awake at night. And every minute, every day, I pray for Yousufa - that she is ok and one day we will be together again.



Then last week I saw some young men talking to Salim. We all know these young men, full of false promises, words carefully chosen to manipulate longing for a better life. They lie and use religion as a weapon to justify violence.

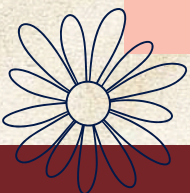
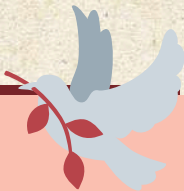
Later, at home, I shouted at Salim. What was he thinking? How could he speak to these people? He stayed silent. An angry heart doesn't see reason, and a young man sometimes will not listen to his mother.

I am a proud and very private woman. But pride is no reason to not ask for help. I spoke with our Imam and my neighbour, a community leader who has always been kind to Salim - I asked them to speak with Salim. I reported the young men talking to Salim to the chief.

I pray and hope for Salim to understand, to see reason. I have lost too much already.

Discussion Questions

- What types of conflict has Miriam experienced?
- What are the consequences of the conflict for Miriam, her family and the village?
- Miriam recalls the attack dividing people. Why is it important to remain strong and united in the face of conflict? How can communities maintain solidarity?
- Miriam is worried about who Salim is talking to – what could they be saying to convince him to join their group?
- Salim is angry. Peace is absent from his heart. How is this affecting him?
- What could happen if the conflict at home between Miriam and Salim is not resolved?
- Miriam feels she can't resolve the conflict with Salim alone – did she take the right step asking for help? How can Miriam and her Imam help Salim?
- What do different faiths say about anger? About people who encourage anger and division? How can we use religious teachings to discourage anger and promote peaceful coexistence?



Mohammed's Story

My name is Mohammed. Growing up, I felt very alone. Conflict was part of my everyday life.



My father and mother argued a lot, usually because there was never enough in the house. And I frequently quarrelled with my siblings, each of us taking sides. Worse, when my grandfather passed away, my father and uncles argued over his land and properties.

Around me, I saw people with more than me, and with better opportunities. Just because of who they knew and what group they belonged to. I became very angry. I started fighting in school. My teachers and parents lost patience. I felt more alone than ever.

Walking home, I often saw my cousin Salif with his friends. They looked strong and happy, everyone had nice clothes and a good phone one hot day, Salif invited me to sit and have a cold drink with him. We talked and laughed. I felt great.



Salif and the others also complained about many things. The bad quality of services in our community.

How some people benefited more than others. They talked about religion, how faith calls on us to act. I agreed, even though I wasn't sure what they meant.

Salif asked me to join their group. He said I could be part fighting to change things. He promised a better life, money to buy what I wanted. That day I didn't agree.

But my problems continued and their promises sounded so good. So eventually I did join their group. At first, I was happy. I felt like I belonged to something important. I believed the lies they told me.

The first time they put a gun in my hand, I felt powerful. I trusted my cousin and thought of him as my newfound brother.

Planning our first attack, I was excited to be fighting for what they told me was an important cause. But then, the day after the attack, I saw many mothers crying with scared children clinging to them.

The group celebrated victory and I joined in – but inside guilt was heavy in my heart. Our leader stood up, talking about religions, tribes and political parties. I cheered with everyone else. But I was already filled with doubt.

I stayed, too scared to go home, to admit the bad things I did. I committed crimes, they said it was for our cause. I sometimes took sides when leaders quarrelled or people argued that some benefited more from our crimes. I found relief in harmful drugs that were so easily available.

The day I was arrested and then sent to prison – that day was my lowest. For many months I did not speak with anyone, I barely ate, they say I almost died. Meeting Abdirashid saved my life. He was part of a group that helped counsel prisoners.



Laying on my cot one day, Abdirashid sat beside me, starting to talk. At first I said nothing. But his voice was soothing. He talked about God, forgiveness, peace and love.

After a long time, I told him my story, ashamed. Abdirashid listened. He did not judge me. I started to feel hope. He read from the Koran, taking time to explain. The messages of tolerance and togetherness made more sense than the hateful ideas Salif and his friends would say – which always seemed self-serving.

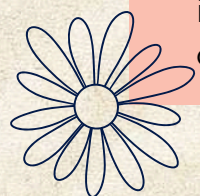
The day I walked into my parents' home, shaking with fear, to ask forgiveness I was scared and ashamed. Abdirashid stood by me. My parents cried with relief. For two years they did not know where I was.

I will not lie and say it's easy. Every day is still difficult. I live with the guilt of the things I've done. My body and my spirit are still healing. But I work with Abdirashid and tell my story, so young people like me learn from my mistakes, and know that a life filled with violence is not the way to find peace and happiness.



Discussion Questions

- What types of conflict did Mohammed experience?
- How did social/economic factors contribute to Mohammed's decision to join the armed group?
- How did political, religious, and ethnic division influence Mohammed's choices?
- How does this relate to Mohammed's story?
- Mohammed's cousin Salif and Abdirashid had very different beliefs based on their faith – how can we counter messages of hate and ensure messages of peace and tolerance?
- What are some of the passages or words found within different religions that confirm peace, love and tolerance above all?
- How does this story relate to the real-life circumstances in our communities?
- Abdirashid helped Mohammed – how can one person/one voice have such an impact? How can you use your own voice to encourage peace within your community?



Paulo's Story

A few months ago, we had a very worrisome situation in our community. But here, we're always on the lookout, so we resolved the situation before it became a big problem.



My name is Paulo. I'm part of a community early warning alert group. We have our eyes and ears wide open for signs that could mean conflict is knocking on our door, in one form or another.

There are different community alert groups, people of all types are involved - men and women, youth, religious and community leaders, neighbourhood secretaries, heads of localities, police and government – all working for the same thing, to preserve peace.



You see, our district has been known as a recruitment location for the violent people leaving a trail of destruction and tears across the North of our beautiful country.

Many local youth are frustrated, especially the young men. There are few jobs and they lose hope in their future. This makes them believe false promises and follow trouble, cleverly disguised as opportunity.

When strangers started moving through our community, all of us alert group members kept their eyes out for hints of trouble, including me. Buying bread one morning, a young man I didn't recognise stood beside me, asking for 2 loafs. I greeted him. Following our customs, I welcomed him to the community, and enquired of his health and his family.

Our conversation left me feeling uneasy. He didn't answer my questions directly and he seemed nervous. As soon as you ask yourself, "what's going on here?" or "Who is this person?" That's the time to act, no hesitation. Because of the alert group training, I knew what to do.

I went directly to the neighbourhood secretary to report the information. Luckily, he was available, although I know the other contacts if he isn't. As I left, I knew he would immediately inform the traditional leader.

I walked home, finally arriving to satisfy my hungry stomach with the bread bought in the morning. I thought about the path my message would take – to the head of our locality, then if investigations warranted, on to the police, the commander and possibly arriving to government officials. This is how it works in our early warning system, in some places it's a little different.



I know this is the path my information will take, but people at each step won't be informed of who I am. Everyone respects that in turbulent times, discretion protects people and builds trust.

I was very right to speak up! Investigations found these strangers had been spinning their clever words among our youth. At least 4 young men were ready to depart with them, to join their violent campaign. One was my neighbour's son, a boy I've known his whole life! He's a good boy, so I was surprised, but I also know that anyone can be tricked.

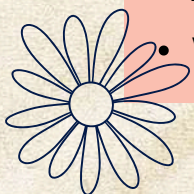
The response part of the community alert system went into action. The police did their part. An urgent community meeting was called. Interventions and counselling happened quickly.

Sadly, one young man snuck away in the night. But I'm happy to say, my neighbour's son and two other young men stayed here, where they belong. They saw reason and a different possible future, before committing any crimes. our early warning alert system works! But we must not let our guard down.



Discussion Questions

- Is there a community conflict early warning alert system or group where you live? If so, how does it work? If not, how could one be implemented?
- In Paulo's story, many different kinds of people are part of the early warning group - why is this important?
- Does early warning help prevent conflict escalating? How?
- In the story, the community alert system includes response interventions - why are these essential?
- Why would a particular area be known as a "recruitment location?" What strategies can be put in place to reduce recruitment risks?
- Paulo mentions that lack of jobs and hope contribute to recruitment, why is this?
- What kinds of "false promises" are used in recruitment tactics?



Amade's Story

I'm Amade, a very lucky man. Sometimes, people who don't know me look at me with pity – seeing a man with one leg. But to my community, I'm known as a man who gets things done.



I lost my leg a long time ago. It was years after the civil war ended, but any kind of conflict usually leaves danger behind. I was walking home, hungrily thinking of the delicious meal waiting - when boom! a landmine exploded under my left foot. Laying there, in pain, I thanked God for the life He gave me. I also prayed to survive.

I made a vow to God – please, send help, just one person. I promise, whenever one of your children needs help, I will take care of them. Well, I'm here. Someone found me. I never forgot my vow. I just had no idea how many people would need my help!



A few years ago, new faces started arriving in our community. As a local leader, I went to greet them. I heard terrible stories of vicious attacks, many families and neighbours killed. Crying mothers spoke of children missing in the confusion. Homes and belongings were destroyed or left behind. I realised, this was probably just the beginning and reported to government officials.

I was right. Every day, many more people arrived – men, women, some travelling alone and others with families, people from different walks of life and religions, but all with tragic stories.

The community welcomed all of our traumatised brothers and sisters displaced by the conflict with open arms. The government and organisations help, but resources are stretched in every direction. Many stay with relatives, others we helped build shelter. I invited some of the younger ones who arrived alone, the most traumatised, and a few I wanted to keep my eyes on into my own home.

My wife, Ana, complains sometimes. I don't blame her. It's not easy - people of different religions, ethnicity, political beliefs, languages, each with their own habits and customs, living together in the same compound.

My work is very busy, I'm rarely at home. People are rebuilding their lives. And everyone, both displaced and life-long residents, know the threat is close. I attend many meetings – with different organizations, religious leaders, the early warning committee. These meetings bring everyone together to prevent conflict and keep peace in our community.

We also invite everyone in the community to public dialogues. These community dialogues were difficult in the beginning - people were reluctant to speak and to listen to others. Now, many people participate and the dialogues are important places where people speak and listen to others.

My wife teases me, asking how a man with one leg can run from place to place all day. She calls our home a Noah's Ark of people. I remind her, I live by both God's teachings and the Constitution – so heavenly and earthly instruction.



Ana is shy, and not comfortable attending community meetings. But the truth is, Ana's heart is pure and good. She's taken notice of who prays when and does her best to accommodate everyone.

She talks non-stop to Salome. Something very bad must have happened to the young woman, she doesn't speak a word. Her eyes are filled with sadness. But Ana talks with her throughout the day. She visited the Imam's wife, to understand Salome's culture and how to make her most comfortable.

Disputes happen. Our building project to add more needed rooms stopped for three days because of a single thoughtless comment about religion escalating into a noisy quarrel among the builders - people took sides and then refused to work together.

Eventually, I called a meeting. Everyone promised a respectful conversation. We talked all afternoon. In the end, everyone agreed - intolerance and division benefitted no one. Everyone wanted the new rooms. Intolerance hinders progress. I can't say everyone left as friends, but at least they listened and tried to understand each other. Everyone agreed peace is not just the best way, it's the only way for us to live alongside each other.

Discussion Questions

- How does the story show the value of religious pluralism?
- Accepting differences promotes social cohesion. How do Amade and Ana, help promote social cohesion?
- Amade says "Everyone comes with their own habits and customs." How can religious, ethnic, political and other differences lead to conflict? How can people live together peacefully?
- Does Amade's disability hinder him in any way from being a good leader? Are people with disabilities included in peacebuilding? If not, how can this be improved?
- Amade says he lives by both God's teachings and the Constitution. What do different religions teach about tolerance and peace? What does your country's constitution say about freedom of religion?
- Ana isn't comfortable speaking at community meetings. How do we ensure that everyone, in all their diversity, is meaningfully included in building social cohesion?
- Religious intolerance created conflict in the building project. How does intolerance hinder progress in everyday life?

Maura's Story

My name is Maura. Joining a Savings Group helped me improve my life.



I started a business selling delicious stews. Now I can buy things for the house. I'm even learning to read and write! Even though I'm always busy, I make time to attend our important community meetings where we talk, learn, and try to solve problems to make things better and keep peace in our community.

Our Savings Group is a mixed group of women – of different religions, ages, and birthplaces. Yet, we have a lot in common. We all know struggle, hunger, and worry for our children. We each joined the Savings Group to improve life and provide for our families.



In the beginning, anger and intolerance almost ended the Savings Group. Arriving at one of our first meetings, everyone was talking about the most recent violent attack just north of us.

Augustina started an argument with angry, hateful words full of blame directed towards Amina. Amina was so hurt.

Trying not to cry, she told us, as a Muslim she is deeply upset that some use her faith as an excuse for violence. She tried explaining how the Koran clearly guides Muslims to be tolerant and peaceful, prohibiting violence and injustice. That being Muslim is no protection, her family is also suffering.

Augustina wouldn't listen. Others joined in, taking sides. I knew I had to calm everyone down. If not me, who?

I'm happy to say, I learned some things attending those community meetings. Finding my courage and my voice, I said loudly. "Please everyone, listen to me for five minutes. Then, if you choose to continue quarrelling, we'll all be going back to our homes, our hope in this Savings Group lost.

All eyes turned to me. I talked from my heart. Looking at Augustina and Amina, I explained that both their Pastor and Imam are important voices at the community dialogues, educating people, including me, about religious teachings for tolerance and peace. Speaking honestly, I told them how I've never been active in any religion, but their words inspire me to be a better person.

I said, this group has a choice. We can argue and debate, but only respectful dialogue will solve our problems. We can succeed together, or stay angry and our plans will fail, each standing alone.

Everyone was silent, looking at Augustina. Augustina took a deep breath. Speaking softly, she told us she hadn't slept the past two nights, worrying, she hadn't heard about her sister who lives in the area of the recent attack.



We all understood her pain and tried to comfort her. Including Amina! I was so surprised, seeing Amina forgive Augustina so quickly. I vowed to myself to be more like he.

As I said in the beginning, the Savings Group helped improve my life. So, you can guess – the Savings Group women chose to succeed together. So now I can say, I'm a proud business owner and a kind of community leader too!

I spoke up, and so can anyone – we all can help prevent conflict and help different groups in our communities to understand each other better – sometimes it just takes one voice to make a difference!

Discussion Questions

- Religious pluralism is about people of different faiths peacefully coexisting and recognising and accepting each other's beliefs. What in the story shows the value of religious pluralism?
- Accepting differences promotes social cohesion. How does Amade and his wife, Ana, help to promote social cohesion?
- People of different religions, ethnicity, politics, and languages now live with Amade and Ana. What could some potential conflicts be and how can they be avoided?
- Amade is disabled. Does his disability hinder him in any way from being a good leader? Are people with disabilities included in peacebuilding? If not, how can we intentionally increase their participation and leadership?
- Amade says "I live by both God's teachings and the Constitution." What do different religions teach about tolerance and peace? What does your country's constitution say about freedom of religion?
- Salome is traumatized. How can trauma affect a person? Why is it important to understand trauma for peacebuilding and social cohesion?
- Ana isn't comfortable speaking at community meetings. How do we ensure that everyone is meaningfully included in building social cohesion, even if they do not want to participate in community meetings?
- Religious intolerance created conflict in the building project. How does intolerance hinder progress in everyday life?



Alberto's Story

My name is Alberto. About three years ago, the local council and an organisation working in my community invited me to be part of their work, building peace and social cohesion in our community. At first I said no, I thought, "why me?" I make and sell clothes – how could I be part of building peace?



Maybe the council suggested me because everyone knows I'm good with people. My clothes are popular and all kinds of people visit my shop. I'm a Christian myself, but there's many Muslims around here, they're my best customers! I enjoy having conversations with my customers. I've heard sad stories from some of those fleeing the North. But I also joke and laugh a lot with everyone.



Then the organisation hosted a meeting, explaining to everyone that anyone can be part of promoting peace. They told us we would receive training on how to become a community peace ambassador, especially resolving conflicts. I decided to give it a try. I learned a lot! First of all - peace at home and in the community are important.

When we live peaceful lives, peace becomes a part of us. Unresolved conflict in our lives adds fuel for fires of violent conflict to burn hotter.

We all face disputes in life. For example, in my business customers will argue, say "this isn't what I asked for" or "You did this wrong" – looking for some flaw to bargain down the price. I put myself in their shoes. Life is expensive. Everyone tries to save money wherever they can. So, I talk nicely, and do my very best for a satisfied customer.

Being a community peace ambassador is more complicated. Mostly I help resolve land disputes - and land is much more precious than clothing.

I'll tell you about one dispute. A couple, Mussa and Amina, bought land to farm. The problem started when their neighbour, Lucinda, planted her cassava inside where the couple understood was their land boundary. Lucinda said the couple was mistaken. The former owner refused to intervene. Mussa and Amina were upset. With three young children, they couldn't afford to lose this growing area.

Lucinda's daughter asked me for help, very worried. Land disputes can get out of hand quickly. About 15 years ago, during a land dispute one resident poisoned another's well. Retributions followed on both sides, ending with 20 people dead and several in prison.

Another thing, Lucinda is Christian, the couple Muslims - religion started entering the argument, even though this had no relevance to the dispute!

I visited each neighbor, listening to their grievances. I invited both to our next community dialogue. Unknown to them, it was on this very topic of land.

In the dialogue, we discussed how land disputes and resulting conflict causes many problems, separating families, even causing wars. We discussed laws around land ownership, and what this means for people owning land.



We also discussed different religious guidance on this difficult issue. For example, both Christianity and Islam teach that all land belongs to God, to be used wisely by people. Both religions advise resolving disputes peacefully, seeking mediation or legal resolution.

I invited the neighbours to meet the following day. Neither wanted the expense or time lost of going to court. They wanted to be good neighbours.

We eventually found an acceptable agreement. I also advised them about the law and steps to get a land certificate to avoid future problems.

Amina and Lucinda are now good friends. When Lucinda was sick, Amina helped sell her cassava. Lucinda's children are grown, and she helps with Amina's small children, especially during busy seasons. It makes me happy to see people of different religions supporting one another. I'm glad I was invited to be a community peace ambassador. Each and every person can be a peace ambassador every day, the path to peace begins with all of us.

Discussion Questions

- How can any person promote peace, tolerance, and social cohesion?
- Alberto engages in interfaith dialogues in his everyday life and in the community. How are they both important?
- Alberto says conflict in our lives/ communities is “fuel for fires of violent conflict to burn hotter.” Is this true? In what way?
- How can disputes between neighbours escalate to wider conflict?
- What does it mean, to ‘put yourself in someone else’s shoes?’
- Discuss the different kinds of dialogue that happened in the story. What did you think was the most impactful? What would you have done differently?
- Religion started to be part of land boundary dispute. Why does this happen? What could be potential consequences be? How can this be prevented?
- What do religious teachings say about disputes, conflict, and conflict resolution? How can you integrate these in your own peace building practices?
- What does social cohesion mean? How can social cohesion benefit everyone in the community?

The Network for Religious & Traditional Peacemakers



The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers builds bridges between grassroots peacemakers and global players in order to strengthen the work done for sustainable peace.

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