

Many of the attitudes and behaviours that created conflict in refugees' home countries come with them and create problems in refugee camp situations.

The UNHCR Peace Education Programme (PEP) was designed to enable people to develop skills which would help them to build a more peaceful life while in the camp, and for later on when they could return home, settle permanently in their host country, or resettle in a third country. [PEP teaches skills, values and attitudes for living together constructively, which in turn helps to build a constructive future.](#)

In UNHCR PEP community workshops, participants express a strong desire for peace, [but they have little understanding of the behaviours and attitudes that promote peace or those that are not peaceful \(or promote conflict\).](#) There is a tendency to solve problems by violence or by postponing the problem. The responsibility to solve problems belongs to the elders or leaders.

[Within refugee communities, Peace Education seeks to complement the traditional problem-solving approaches which are breaking down.](#)

The UNHCR Peace Education Programme incorporates a school aspect and a community aspect, in order to create a supportive environment for children and teenagers both in and out of school. It is an integrated programme that invites and involves the participation of the whole community.

At the initial launch of the programme in Kenya, traditional leaders, religious leaders and elected group leaders were the first groups to be targeted by PEP. This was in the hope that if these people considered the programme worthwhile, (and their attitudes and behaviour changed), then they would encourage their communities to participate as well.

[As the programme developed, refugee youth were next targeted since they were expected to play an important future role in the community, and because of their repeated involvement in camp fights. In Kakuma, Kenya, in 2001, three times as many workshops were focused on youth. The democratic election of new leaders in 2001 in the camps gave new prominence to this social group and they attended PEP workshops, and occasionally special workshops were run for them.](#)

The Peace Education Programme has been implemented in refugee and returnee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. It has contributed to the learning and practice of peace building skills in the camps, and to the reduction of conflict. The stories on the next two pages demonstrate the positive impact PEP has had on refugees, and how it has helped refugee youth build their future by minimising or resolving conflict.

THE DAY THE FIGHTING STOPPED (from Kakuma, Kenya)

Two rival groups of Dinkas stood on the ridges of Kakuma Camp one day, summoned there to fight. Theirs was not to wonder why. Their role was to obey the elders, unquestioningly, to fight. A variety of weapons had been collected, unearthed from their hideaways. Some of the young men had eyes flashing, spoiling for the fight. Others were more hesitant.

But something strange was happening. What was it? What was happening? Slowly, imperceptibly, one by one, some were drawing away from the larger groups. Silently, one by one, they just turned aside, and slowly separated out from the others. More followed. One by one.

They looked over to the opposite ridge. To their amazement, the same thing seemed to be happening over there, quite independently of what was happening on their own ridge. They even recognised from a distance one or two of their peace education friends walking away.

It was true! The peacemakers were moving! One by one, the peacemakers were leaving! Something new was afoot. For sure! More and more followed, on both sides, peacemakers and friends, drawing away from the main fighting groups. One by one, they dropped their weapons, turned and left the scene.

Those who remained could see the futility in standing their ground. They left, too.

This day is known as the first time peacemakers ever stopped a large fight. And it is interesting to see how they did it, almost unconsciously, spontaneously, silently, one by one. There had been no plan, no planning, no talk at all.

Later, when they looked back on that day, some said: 'Well, there on that ridge, I began to wonder why I always obeyed the elders and fought. I wondered why I have to put myself in danger and get hurt. I wondered why I should risk my resettlement plans which are almost through'. Another said: 'And last time this happened, many of my friends were injured and several of them were left dead on the field. I began to ask myself, there on the ridge, why me? Why jeopardise everything I have been working for, and the peace that we have all been working for? I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't fight that time. Something inside me was saying: "No, don't do it". So I left the ridge! I just left!'

'Yes,' said another, 'I felt the same. And when I saw my peace education friends on the other ridge walking away just like we were doing, I knew we had to be right. I knew we shouldn't just blindly follow those orders to fight.' 'What does peace mean, after all?' said a fourth. 'Are we to fight just because someone tells us to fight? Who is telling me to fight? For what? For whom? I won't do it again. I shall listen to my own head!'

This story was contributed by at least seven people, peacemakers and Peace Education Programme managers who remember the occasion. The peace warriors in this story had only recently graduated from their PEP school and community course.

THE BIRO AND THE TWO-CLAN CONFRONTATION (from Dadaab, Kenya)

No one even noticed what happened at school that day. No one could say how it really started. After all, biros were being lost every week, and young boys fought all the time. But the day Jamma lost his biro stayed in the minds of everyone in the camp that year. And they speak of it still. It was late in the afternoon that Jamma went to Guleid asking to have his biro back.

"But I never borrowed a biro from you! Why are you bothering me?" retorted Guleid.

Jamma persisted, "Yes, you did. You borrowed my biro two days ago and now I want it back." An idea came into Guleid's head: "Let me see if I can keep this boy silent by slapping him," he said to himself, "after all, he is smaller than I am." And he did. Jamma ran home to tell his parents that Guleid had hit him. And the two sets of parents came to confront each other, to defend their sons.

Now, it happened that the two boys were from different clans. Before anyone realised what was happening, things started getting out of hand. Guleid's community rallied round and started threatening Jamma's clan. The clans shouted, they started insulting each other and threatening to fight. They told the parents, "Step aside. This is clan business now." Guleid's clan was told to pay blood money for having hurt Jamma. But they were not ready to pay anything of the sort. They reminded Jamma's people that eight years before, one of the girls of their clan had been raped, that a clansman had been injured, and that the history of attacks by Jamma's people on



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Sources:

- UNHCR (2001) UNHCR Peace Education Programme. UNHCR, Nairobi
- UNHCR (2002) Peace Education Programme in Dadaab and Kakuma: Evaluation Summary. UNHCR, Geneva

themselves was long and was not forgotten. They clamoured for justice and revenge.

The Peace Teacher was alarmed when he saw how fast things were moving. He went to plead with one side and then with the other but no one would listen. They told him that by now the problem had gone far beyond a school matter and that he should just leave it to the clans. Besides, the teacher realised that he came from one of the minority clans and he lacked authority to talk to these larger clans.

The problem was growing by the hour and the teacher was now at a loss as to what to do. He went to find his fellow peace teachers and facilitators and told them what was happening to his pupils. They rallied round. Some of them were from the larger clans. They resolved that they would all go, as a group, to the clan leaders and talk to them.

The clans watched this group of serious and dignified young men enter and were bound by courtesy to listen. No one remembers now what was said. They think that the peacemakers reminded the clans that fighting in the home country was what they had all fled from; that it was no good perpetuating old wrongs and disputes; that there had to be another way out of this problem. There was a lot of arguing late into the night but in the end, the clans agreed to reconsider the boys' quarrel. Guleid and Jamma were called separately by the peacemakers and asked to recount the incident. By this time, Guleid was alarmed and contrite.

"I did borrow the biro," he admitted, "and I did not want to give it back. I thought I could keep Jamma quiet and with a slap or two because, you see, he is smaller than me."

"And are you brave enough to say this to your parents?" the peacemakers asked him.

"Yes," said the boy.

Guleid's parents were dismayed and shocked when they heard the truth. So were the two clans. It began to dawn on them that a small incident like two boys quarrelling was not something that should have led men to talk of fighting.

"We apologise for our son, Guleid," said the parents.

"And we shall not ask for blood money," said Jamma's parents.

Everyone went home....

.... A few weeks later, the Peace Teacher was walking home from school when he caught sight of Jamma's father.

"Let us walk together," said the teacher, "I am on my way to visit friends." Without knowing exactly how he got there, because they were deep in conversation as they walked along, Jamma's father found himself ushered into one of the homesteads in the neighbouring block, and suddenly came face to face with the father of Guleid.

"Come in, come in and welcome!" he was greeted with traditional courtesy. Now here was a dilemma for Jamma's father. He had not been prepared to find himself in the home of his erstwhile archenemy, not so close, not quite so uncomfortably close. Custom dictates, however, that when you are offered food by your host, you accept it. So he did. The mother and the daughters came to serve the men. Now by the end of the meal, conversation was flowing easily.

"My friend, we shall expect you at our house next week for supper, if you can make it," said Jamma's father.

"I will gladly come," said the other.

The Peace Teacher returned a tired but happy man to what he called his home for the last ten years, in one of the mean shelters in the sprawling Dadaab camps of the parched, arid plains of eastern Kenya. "I think peace has now come into the hearts of these two families," he said to himself. "I just wanted to see if our Peace Education Programme could change the hearts of these people who were so angry a few weeks ago. I know we managed to stop them fighting but I hope we changed their hearts. I think we did."

A Dadaab Peace Teacher told this story to a Peace Education Translator.