

The Network for Peace through Dialogue
in cooperation with **Marymount Manhattan College**

Presents

Healing a Nation: The Place for Dialogue in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Liberia



Mediators Beyond Borders

Prabha Sankaranarayan presented information about the program. Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB) has developed along with Ex-Combatants Peacebuilding Initiative (NEPI) and Public Conversations Project (PCP). The NEPI is a group of soldiers who met in a hospital and are eager to do reconciliation work. Much of the work with the rehabilitation of child soldiers takes place at Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana where there are 35,000 refugees.

Since 1989, Liberia has endured two civil wars and over 14 years of constant fighting. In the process, not only soldiers but community members and even family members became antagonists on different sides of the conflict. Most people in the country are tired of it and want to learn from MBB, NEPI and PCP what they can do on their own to repair relationships. However, the peace is very fragile, especially since 80% of the people are unemployed and people are hungry. The country is made up mostly of young people – the median age is 18 – and if they don't have something to do they are likely to return to their criminal habits in order to survive. Other complications are the class system -- an elite class descended from former American slaves owns 95% of the land – and tribal antagonisms that preceded the civil war among 16 different tribes.

Before they return combatants to the communities, both the combatants and the communities must be prepared. MBB pays respectful attention to traditional reconciliation processes. These can include meetings in a “palaver hut”, sacrificial feasts, hair cutting, and jumping through a doorway to symbolize leaving the past. People are also anxious to learn the new ways of conflict resolution that are being brought to them by MBB and PCP.

Women took initiative to end the civil wars and have been intimately involved in the reconciliation process. A good documentary about this is “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.”

www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org