

In March, 2013, a core team of Ivory Coast citizen-peacebuilders successfully brought together 250 deeply-divided women, men, and youth from alienated villages and tribes in Duekoue, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). The effective relationship-builders were from the NGO United For Peace Against Conflict International (ONG UFPACI) in Abidjan. Below are tips and how-to guidelines, insights, and notes of conference visionary and leader, Offuh James Offuh.

A.

IMPORTANT INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DUEKOUÉ CONFERENCE Plan and Plan, Work and Work

PLANNING STEPS

- 1) **Have inspiration** to determine the project THEME. Have passion, courage, and compassion to take steps towards enriching lives with your theme.
- 2) **Know and understand the people's needs** -- especially for empathy and post-war psychic therapeutic listening about physical, emotional, and psychological trauma, and about other social, political, cultural, and humanitarian issues.
- 3) **Initiate several visits** (four or more) to the victims to sensitize them about your project and theme. Show concern for their needs, pains, and hurts. Explain the usefulness of your theme and each module of enlightenment towards addressing their particular needs and healing -- psychological and emotional trauma, and impact of war on human health.
- 4) **Our ONG UFPACI project theme** is "Building Intercommunity Relations through Intercultural Dialogue." Objectives include making credible peace workers, peace defenders, artisans of communication and peace.
- 5) **The above steps will establish confidence**, trust, and clear the purpose of your project in your first visit for relationship building with the bereaved people in Doukoué's diverse community.

WORK STEPS

- 1) **Set up a team.** ONG UFPACI has one facilitator with four others to help coordinate mobilization of the people before the March conference date. The team must visit at least four times to the bereaved people and choose two or more people from the indigenes of the land to serve as intermediates between the team and the population. This will facilitate speedy trust-building relationships before and after the conference date.
- 2) **Provide personal, material, and financial resources** to enable mobility for logistics and distribution of invitation letters to different social strata in the community. Consider including municipal authorities, prefectural-government representative authorities, diverse religions, traditional leaders, youth leaders, political parties, and the disputant groups and rivals.
- 3) **Face-to-face meetings congruent with depositing invitation letters** are best made by the visionary of the theme, Offuh James Offuh, to personally connect with all different social strata

authorities or leaders to give enlightenment on the theme and project objectives. This helps to show more seriousness and readiness to do the plan as promised.

- 4) **Always be in contact** with the local core team and with the delegated group or team of indigenes of the land. This ensures that all logistics and mobilization are in place and ready before conference date. This is required for dependable success.
- 5) **On the conference date** be confident and steadfast. Never be influenced or frightened by the facial appearance of the bereaved people coming into the conference. They may appear hard, defensive, and rigid. Be focused on the objective. The way they come into the conference is not as important as how they will return home from the conference. Your target as the visionary of the theme is to transform their condition, heal, and reconnect the people to other humans. Be present, focused, and of good intention and spirit. This will give people confidence to absorb your healing teachings and participate in the ongoing activities and exercises of psychic therapy. Remain flexible. You will be changing methods progressively based on the reactions, responses, and needs of the participants. You may adjust your methods to help people move bit-by-bit from their earlier fear, alienation, discrimination, and segregation on a path toward listening, mutual understanding and dignity, empathy, reunion, responsibility, collaboration, and becoming credible peace workers and artisans of communication excellence.
- 6) At this level people are on the path toward transformation. Of course, it is a continuing process and life journey together.

The above is my methodology and strategy.

Signed:

Offuh James Offuh

President and Founder

NGO United For Peace Against Conflict International (ONG UFPACI)

May God almighty, who empowered me in this mission, empower anyone who wishes sincerely in her or his heart to continue passing on the light of peace to next human near or far.

B.

JOURNEY COVER STORY OF OFFUH JAMES OFFUH AND TEAM

Experiences and Workshop Activities with the Duekoue People

On the 18th of February, 2013, Offuh James Offuh, president and founder of the NGO United For Peace Against Conflict International (ONG UFPACI), with Mr. Louis Patrice Gnamien, the NGO's executive secretary, responded to the general assembly meeting's conclusion on the need for a last consultation visit to Doukoue to further sensitize the public via mouth-to-ear ear communication, print media publication, and radio broadcast announcements.

We traveled by road with the local transport cooperative UTB -- Union Transport of Buake. The 460 kilometre journey lasted about 9 hours on the road from the UFPACI head office in Abidjan

city. In Duekoue we were met at the UTB terminal by Mr. Jean Emile, the United Nation civil affaires section officer for Duekoue. Also, Mr. Saturnin Deagoule, a Duekoue youth leader, came to pick us up at the terminal and advise us of our hotel accommodation. At about 7:00 pm we checked in at Ivoire Hotel Duekoue.

At about 8pm, Mr. Jean Emile, a UN civile affaires officer in Duekoue visited the hotel to inform us about security measures and the socio-cultural and political situations. He advised us about



The Hotel Ivoire in Doukoue city.

the site where the mass grave was located, and that hosting our conference at that location would be so symbolic and would attract many people to participate. We adhered to his advice and decided host at the venue at EPP DUEKOUE CARREFOUR primary school. After this 1h.30 meeting we departed for rest after this whole day of tiring, long journey from Abidjan.



Visit to the EPP DUEKOUE CARREFORE primary school with the president of the Duekoue youth group.

The following morning, the 19th February 2013, Mr. Saturnine Deagoule arrived as requested to facilitate our day's contacts with different social strata. For good mobility, we hired a Pathfinder jeep vehicle to enable travel into remote villages where the post-war victims lived. We visited four villages the same day, each about 23 to 26 kilometers from Duekoue city. First was Carrefore-Diahebernard Douekoue where we visited the mass grave site. We met Mr Zehia Denise, the village chief.



First visit to village called CARREFORE-DIAHEBERNARD village of the Duekoue Guerre ethnic, where mass body burial followed the Duekoue 2011 post-electoral war. Behind us surrounded with flowers 150 people including men, children, and pregnant women, men were buried altogether.

Mr Zehia Denisa, the chief of village Carrefore-Diahebernard (Guerre ethnic) village. Mr. Zehia lost 12 members of his family during the war.

We then moved on to Guezon, about 26 kilometers outside of Duekoue city, and met the chief, Mr. Honde Joseph.



Mr. Honde Joseph, chief of the Guezon village, Guerre ethnics of Duekoue.

Next we drove on to meet Mr. Oula Kpae Bernard, the chief in Guehebly, Duekoue.



Mr. Oula Kpae Bernard, chief of the village Guehbly, Duekoue region. They are Guerre ethnics. of GUEHEBLY In Doukoue region. He is wearing a cap and neck towel.



Mr. Oula Kpae Bernard and Mr. Traore, resident Malien in Guehibly (with black cap) who saved the life of Oula during the war. The rebels shot at Oula three times at close range without success and furthermore decided to burn him alive with fuel. The rebels poured a gallon of fuel on him, but the flame refused to rage on him. As they were deciding a next option to use, Mr Traore, a Malien Malinke resident in Buehibly, arrived at the spot and carried the fuel-soaked body of Oula away to the hospital for treatment. Because of his kind gesture of love, we shall be nominating Mr. Traore as an Ambassador of Peace, to encourage other Malinke to cultivate an attitude of peacemaker.

Our next stop was to engage another chief, Mr. Batahi Francois, in Zanoue and Blahou, canton-Duekoue.



Monsieur Batahi Francois, chief of the canton of Duékoué -- Zanou and Blahou.

Our final meeting was with Mr. Adama Dembele, village chief of communauté Sénoufo of Duekoue.



Mr. Adama Dembele, the chief of communauté Sénoufo of Duékoué.

After visiting with village traditional chiefs , we needed to talk with the municipality authorities the government departments of Duekoue. About 15:00 GMT we went to Duekoue government house to meet with the head in charge, Mr. Soury Diabate, Regional Governor of Duekoue). He very happy with the conference theme and objectives of our initiative, and promised to participate in the conference or send his representative, Mr. Toure Adama.



At the prefecture government house with Mr. Soury Diabate, Regional Governor of Duekoue.



Mr. Djahi Kane Marcel, the 4th Maire (mayor) of Duekoue.

At the municipal headquarters we met with the fourth Mayor (Maire) of Duekoue, Mr. Diah Kane Marcel, who also appreciate the conference theme and objectives. Progressively, we had now visited different strata of public life to consult, sensitize, and prepare the community for the conference date.

At about 18h GMT evening we finished this task and thanked God for his help and direction and favor, before returning home to Abidjan.

On the 27th of February we embarked on another journey for the Duekoue conference itself. This time we journeyed with a whole team of five. After our 8 am departure from the Abidjan UTB bus terminal, we travelled about 300 kilometers before the bus broke down at Buafle city. After 2h.30 at the UTB terminal, at about 16h GMT we were transferred to another UTB vehicle going to Dalua city, UTB's next terminal about 70 kilometers away. Arriving Dalua terminal at about 18h GMT, we waited for another 1h30 for the next UTB bus going to Duekoue. At 20h GMT we again departed, arriving at Duekoue about 22h at night. As before, Mr. Saturnin Deagoule was waiting to accompany us the IVOIRE HOTEL where another challenge awaited us - - no electricity. Throughout our stay there was no electric power. The total blackout continued over the three days. We used candle light throughout the nights.

During the 28th of February and 1st of March, 2013, we started refreshing our contacts with the invited communities by seeing once more the traditional rulers and leadership cabinets to make sure everyone remained fully informed about the conference and ready to participate. Our earlier visits were rewarded. The various communities were informed and ready to participate. That same day we delegated indigenous women from village Carrefore-Diahebernard Duekoue to take care of the food and drinks. We provided them with adequate financial means to prepare meals that would sufficiently please and sustain the participants throughout the conference activities. We also delegated Mr. Saturnine Deagoule to take care of transportation for conveying all participants from distant villages to arrive safely to the venue and return safely back to their respective villages after the conferences. We hired a gasoline-driven generator to supply electricity, and a sound system and operator to amplify participants' voices and provide music for the people during refreshments. We also rented 250 chairs and three canopy stands for participant comfort. We expected 200 invitees, but actually 250 participants were registered at the venue. We had printed only 200 copies of the Certificate of Participation. So the remaining 50 newly registered participants received their certificates by postal service after we returned home to Abidjan.

Saturday, the 2nd of March, 2013, the conference for 250 youth and adults was a day of healing beyond our expectations. Women and men age 18 to 35 years numbered 123, with 92 participants age 40 and over. There were 35 youth age 10 to 17 years. Photos of this and two earlier, preparatory conferences at <http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriaivorycoast.htm> . Some Duekoue Conference Observations and Insights are below.

Returning home on the 3rd March, 2013, at Duekoue we boarded the UTB transport cooperative for Abidjan. At Yamasoukro city, the political capital of Cote d'ivoire, the bus broke down. We waited for about 2 hours before the company brought to us another UTB bus to continue the journey. Thank God, at about 21h GMT we arrived safely and in good condition in Abidjan to meet our welcoming families.

C.

DUEKOUÉ CONFERENCE OBSERVATIONS & INSIGHTS

At the opening ceremony, participants arrived with frowning, hard faces showing signs of anger and desperation. At a moment before the entry point of introducing the context, motives and principles, I was personally afraid because the security law enforcement police we invited were not present. So our team was just part of the mix of more than 200 participant-victims of the post-electoral war.

After introducing the motives and principles of the conference, I sensed calmness in the crowd and participants starting to focus -- showing signs of being thirsty for information and

therapeutic solutions to their psychic and other needs. At that point confidence and steadfastness begins to erupt in me.

The first request I presented as a principle was for participants to sit side-by-side with someone of different value to them. I said: "SIT WITH SOMEONE YOU DO NOT KNOW BEFORE OR SOMEONE THAT IS DIFFERENT IN VALUE TO YOU.". There were many in opposition to this article. More than half of the participants did not want to sit with people they did not know before. I said: "WE ARE HERE TO LEARN HOW TO DIALOGUE, TO PRACTICE CITIZEN-TO- CITIZEN COMMUNICATION, HEART TO HEART COMMUNICATION." I said: "If you decline from this article, you are telling us you are not willing in your heart to reconnect and reconcile with your enemy." This means our arrival in Duekoue is fruitless. I further said: "You cannot expect healing of your heart when anger, hate, prejudice and readiness to revenge intention are still in your heart." I said: "Please do us a favor to soften your heart, keeping it open with willingness to reconnect to the other human through listening-to-learn techniques -- without critiques, judgments or blame."

As soon as I finish this request, I observed adjustments in the crowd. Participants began to locate next to other participants of different values and began to seat side-by-side.

To start, the participant sang their national anthem, followed with a minute of silence in remembrance of those who died and those suffering unspeakable pains from the violence and war. Then we introduced icebreakers, as participants started getting acquainted with each other. Safety and trust began to be experienced in the physical space. The Perspective Squares exercise helped a lot for participants to discover diversity of perceptions in same reality. Hand Outlines among paired participants helped a lot to bring the participants to discover their shared humanity -- what they have in common, bringing them to appreciate the other human and to avoid prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, alienation, and unnecessary fear.

Coming to "AN EXPERIENCE OF DIALOGUE," the participants were given shared, equal time to express their experiences of the war impacts. Many emotionally revealed their pains, hurts, and hopes. These uncensored, public narratives helped the entire group of participants to deepen their compassionate understandings of the sufferings, hurts, and needs of the others. This exercise served in encouraging harmonious reconnection, with all participants listening to learn. I observed all the participants being PRESENT, ATTENTIVE, FOCUSED. After this exercise, I did not observe any more segregation or derogatory approaches. I sensed a homogenous attitude in the conference space. Everyone became "ONE IN HEART" seeking for the welfare for all during and after this meeting.

Progressively, the use of graphics charts helped a lot, using the account of the Two Icebergs to illustrate the need for face-to-face communication. Then we move over to the Mask and Culture exercise to help participants do self- introspection of their personal life and culture. The Candle Light exercise, indeed was a great time. The symbol is more of spiritual signification that has strong physical consequences. At this moment, I sensed great movement within the environment. Strange things begins to happen -- tears of hope, joy, liberty, and strong feelings

for creating a new community in harmony and fraternity. Participants pledged commitment to serve the community as credible artisans of peace by raising up their right hands. They believed in my words and admitting to divine help from God to stand among the human race as an artisan of peace.

During this great time of getting closer, the impressive thing that touched my life in this experience was that 60% of GUERRE ethnics were ANIMIST, and they had been in permanent religious conflict with Christians and Muslims. They had been very hard-hearted people and defended from making heart connections with others. But this conference touched them and everyone at their hearts, and their lives and culture seemed to be flowing in the direction of redressing practices of tolerance, respect, and union with others.

I will stop here for now and thank God for his grace in touching and healing lives. My humble regards and gratitude to God almighty for the mandate he gave me to "UNITE COMMUNITIES FOR PEACE, TO SAVE HUMANITY FROM DESTRUCTION" is working indeed through the supportive ministry and hands of Libby and Len Traubman, founders of Jewish–Palestinian Living Room Dialogue in California. My prayer is: "May God continue to strengthen their ministry for the salvation of humanity!!!"

Remain blessed.

Yours Faithfully

Offuh James Offuh

President and Founder

NGO United For Peace Against Conflict International (ONG-UFPACI)