

Building Peace Through Trans-local Community and Collaboration: The Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network

Joyce S. Dubensky & Tanenbaum Staff¹

This article explores the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network. The authors discuss how the Network organically formed and how it is structured, as well as its evolution and effectiveness. The authors also review the ways in which Etienne Wenger et al.'s "Communities of Practice" model is reflected by the Network's concepts of domain, community, and practice. The Network's 32 religiously motivated Peacemakers (28 now living) work across various conflict zones throughout the world. Together, they inspire one another, feel less isolated, develop new ideas, and collaborate through Tanenbaum-facilitated "Interventions." Hind Kabawat's story, alongside other Peacemaker stories, is woven throughout to illustrate how the Network serves as an effective model for structuring peace vis-a-vis peacebuilding writ large.

Keywords: peacemaker, religious peacebuilding, Syria, network, network theory, women in peace, interreligious, peacemakers in action

On May 5, 2016, the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding (Tanenbaum) had the privilege of presenting its *Peacemakers in Action* program at the Religions and the Practice of Peace Colloquium at Harvard Divinity School. There, I had the opportunity to present with Hind Kabawat, a peacebuilder from Syria ("the Dubensky/Kabawat joint address").² Together, we reflected on Tanenbaum's 20 years of engagement with local religious peacebuilders operating in deeply rooted global conflicts, and on Hind Kabawat's experiences as one of 32 Tanenbaum *Peacemakers in Action*.

Over those years, Tanenbaum's understanding of the *Peacemakers'* work evolved. The Dubensky/Kabawat joint address straddled what Tanenbaum has learned with the visceral human reality of Hind's peace practice as she faces armed conflict and the destruction of her homeland.

Here, we touch on this dichotomy, but focus our analysis on Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action Network*, the vehicle now structuring Tanenbaum's work in religious peacebuilding and through which we monitor our impact. Hind's personal story and stories of her fellow *Peacemakers* serve as examples of our thesis that Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action Network* is an effective structure for building peace.

The Peacemakers in Action

Tanenbaum did not begin its religious peacebuilding work with the idea of establishing a formal, operationalized network. Rather, our initial focus grew out of a discussion with the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who suggested that Tanenbaum recognize unknown religious

¹ Special thanks to Tanenbaum staff Clayton Maring, Bruce Crise, and Janie Dumbleton.

² Joyce S. Dubensky and Hind Kabawat, "RPP Colloquium: The Evolving Field of Religious Peacebuilding" (presentation, Religions and the Practice of Peace Colloquium at Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 5, 2016).

peacebuilders with an award. Holbrooke saw this as a way to provide unknown individuals (and sometimes duos) with public recognition that would afford them some protection from harm or persecution, through media attention or international acknowledgement.

In consultation with scholars of religion and conflict resolution, Tanenbaum subsequently established its *Peacemakers in Action* award to realize Holbrooke’s vision, and further resolved to create case studies of the individuals selected, who best embodied the following five criteria:

1. *Religious Motivation*: Their peacemaking work is fueled by their religious and/or spiritual beliefs.
2. *Armed Conflict*: They either work or have worked in an area of armed conflict.
3. *At Risk*: Their lives and/or liberty have been at risk.
4. *Locally Based*: At least some of their work is closely connected to the conflict situation at the local level. Most awardees are from the communities they serve, but some have left their original homes and spent many years embedded in a local community suffering from conflict.
5. *Relatively Unknown*: Despite their impact, they have not received significant international attention or support at the time of selection and are not widely known across the world.

In the process of identifying *Peacemakers*, studying their work, collecting data via in-depth interviews and—most critically—building strong relationships with them, Tanenbaum produced two volumes of case studies.³ Through this process, we also gained insights into what is, for each *Peacemaker in Action*, a vocation of religious peacebuilding.

Rather than being a field filled with religious individuals whose work is confined to objectively identifiable religious techniques and who work only in religion-fueled conflicts (either on the surface or at their core), the vocation of religious peacebuilding turns out to be far more nuanced and complex.

In Tanenbaum’s most recent volume of case studies, *Peacemakers in Action, Vol. II: Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding*,⁴ Tanenbaum observes that religious peace actors use a mix of so-called religious and secular peacebuilding techniques to achieve peace, while continually adapting their practices to contextual realities.

In this way, religious peacebuilders live out their vocation and operate across all peace related efforts. Their work can, and often does, overlap with and encompass work that is typically *deemed* secular, especially in Western frameworks: economic development, humanitarian work,

³ Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*, ed. David Little (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, *Peacemakers in Action, Vol. II: Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding*, ed. Joyce S. Dubensky (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁴ Tanenbaum, *Peacemakers in Action, Vol. II*.

conflict resolution, transitional justice, political action, etc. Significantly, however, for many of the *Peacemakers* these activities are better understood as religious acts, ways of realizing tenets within their faith.

Consider, for example, José “Chencho” Alas from El Salvador. Chencho’s passionate work for the environment (for him, Mother Earth) reflects his deep religious conviction that God created the earth and that we must honor, protect, and preserve this precious gift. His tireless work to cultivate environmental stewardship in others is thus not something he would define as either a “religious” or “secular” technique. Rather, he would view the secular/religious duality as a flawed framework that cannot define his work. Given this, we do not define religious peacemaking by specific official roles, types of peace work, or particular techniques. Instead, we view religious *Peacemakers* through the lens of their motivation and larger vision. They are individuals driven by religious or spiritual beliefs to pursue a vision of a lived peace—even in the face of grave risk and at great personal cost across the breadth of society.

Early on, Tanenbaum developed an expansive view of religious peace actors, naming two women as *Peacemakers* in 2002 (Sakena Yacoobi and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge). Around the same time, the field of religious peacebuilding similarly broadened its thinking. Where it once focused on religious leaders—thereby excluding most religiously motivated women and men not of the proverbial cloth—the understanding of whom should be recognized as religious peace actors has expanded.

Many have contributed to the development of religious peacebuilding, including pioneers Douglas Johnson, Cynthia Samuels, Scott Appleby, Marc Gopin, David Smock, and John Paul Ledearch, as well as Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah. In 2011, Toft, Philpott, and Shah published *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*,⁵ in which they helped institutionalize the language for describing those involved in religious peacebuilding, identifying them not as “religious leaders,” but as “religious actors.”

The former language had impact. By focusing solely on “leaders,” it marginalized the peacebuilding voices of most religiously motivated women and all non-clergy individuals. The expanded language is therefore useful, as it helped mainstream the recognition of peacebuilders like Tanenbaum’s diverse *Peacemakers in Action*: individuals motivated by religion who are woven throughout peacebuilding. They certainly include religious leaders, but also educators, grassroots activists, human rights lawyers, civil society actors, on-the-ground mediators *and*, sometimes, local actors who also assume diplomatic roles. The language of “religious actors” makes more space in the peacebuilding sphere for individuals who pursue peace because of their faith, regardless of their title or position within their faith community.

Hind Kabawat, 2007 *Peacemaker in Action* awardee, embodies this reality. A Christian woman from Damascus, Syria, Hind has never held any clerical title or position, though she is deeply motivated by her strongly held beliefs. Her work, which reveals the fluidity that many religious peace actors exhibit, has shifted over time in response to evolving realities on the ground. Early in her peace work, she built bridges in her home country across the Abrahamic traditions,

⁵ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

bringing a rabbi to a land suspicious of its neighbor Israel and of Jews.⁶ Since war erupted in Syria, her focus has shifted, as her country faced new gruesome and deadly realities. Today, she works on the ground conducting trainings for those seeking and planning for the cessation of violence, oversees three schools for Syrian refugee girls in Turkey, and serves on the High Negotiations Committee, which represents the Syrian opposition in Geneva in pursuing peace talks with the Syrian state. In this role, Hind incorporated women’s voices into the peace talks by founding the Women’s Consulting Group for the High Negotiations Committee.

The Network: An Idea Becomes Reality

During the early years, Tanenbaum’s Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution program focused on recognizing individuals and preparing their case studies, always with the idea that this provided the awardees with the cover that Ambassador Holbrooke had envisioned. However, as the cohort of *Peacemakers* grew, Tanenbaum’s vision expanded. We decided to bring these peace activists together to build individual capacity, unaware that a collective dynamic would emerge—one that created a new trajectory for the program.

Tanenbaum first convened its *Peacemakers in Action* in Amman, Jordan in 2004, and then again, in New York in 2005 for weeklong sessions that we call “Working Retreats.” These interactions quickly demonstrated the value of coming together and sharing from the *Peacemakers’* local contexts, but it took Friar Ivo Markovic, the first person named as a *Peacemaker in Action*, to shift the role of this informal *Network* a few steps further. Fr. Ivo requested that the next *Peacemakers* Working Retreat take place in his post-conflict community of Bosnia-Herzegovina because he realized the power of bringing this international cohort of diverse religious *Peacemakers* to his country and believed that it would directly reinforce his local work.

Two years later, in 2007, Tanenbaum reconvened the group in Sarajevo, Bosnia. By then, the focus of the planned sessions had shifted from bringing in external experts, to having the *Peacemakers*—as the real peacebuilding experts—train one another. In Sarajevo, Tanenbaum and the *Peacemakers* also added the new dimension that Fr. Ivo had envisioned. Thus, the group not only worked together, but they also provided their Bosnian colleague with support by joining him in public events and meetings with key national and regional leaders. Together, they modeled the power of interreligious cooperation and reinforced Fr. Ivo’s work as a resource for his home community.

At the same time, conversations emerged about formalizing the relationships among these disparate individuals, whose lives and personal histories spanned religious, geographic, linguistic, and cultural divides. This was an organic process that evolved from the relationships and trust that they had developed over time. Interestingly, this foundational, relational work is akin to the process of peacebuilding itself, and rings true in the words of Reverend Canon Andrew White as he described his mediation in the Middle East:

⁶ Marc Gopin and Thanos Gatsias, “The Diplomat’s Daughter, Pursuing Peace in Syria: Hind Kabawat,” in Tanenbaum, *Peacemakers in Action*, Vol. II, 19–70.

Often the Western mentality would be sit down, start working immediately . . . Bam, bam, bam, bam, bang. It doesn't work like that. . . . You have to have a day of just getting to know each other again, of being friends, not doing business.⁷

It was therefore natural that, toward the end of the Sarajevo Working Retreat, one of the *Peacemakers* raised a key question about the future of the group and its potential for greater impact:

We call ourselves a *Network*, but we really aren't. Right now, we're a group of people who are brought together by Tanenbaum and who are happy to see one another when we are together. But then, we return to our lives and get caught up in them until the next time.

This led to the deeper question, "Do we want to be a *real Network*?"

The *Peacemakers* considered the ramifications of this question. To be a *real Network* meant that they would commit to ongoing collaboration to expand their individual and collective impact for peace. The *Peacemakers* discussed this and then took a vote. Unanimously, those present decided to explore options for establishing a *Network* in the years until the next Working Retreat. They committed to this process with the expectation of making a final decision when they were again together. Four years later, at their next convening, the *Peacemakers* considered the *Network* model that a few of their representatives had developed for the group. To our surprise, the *Peacemakers* quickly revised the proposed model and established a living structure better suited to the entire group. Then, with another vote, they formally and unanimously established the *Peacemakers in Action Network*. With this decision, Tanenbaum began the next part of its journey with its *Peacemakers*.

The Peacemakers in Action Network as a Community of Practice

At the time of this writing, 32 women and men (28 of whom are living) comprise the *Peacemakers in Action Network*. They are from a range of official professions and diverse roles, all individually motivated by their respective faiths and spiritual beliefs to build peace within armed conflict zones across the globe. All are actively engaged in peacebuilding and they work at, or near, the grassroots level in at least some of their work. Their *Peacemakers Network* grew organically, but it owes a particular debt to *Peacemaker* Reverend William "Bill" Lowrey, who guided the formation of the formal *Network*, aligning it with Etienne C. Wenger's communities of practice model.⁸ Tanenbaum operationalized the *Network* by providing a Network Coordinator, who brought it to life. And over time, the *Peacemakers* have successfully deepened—and stewarded—their knowledge of peace and conflict, as they shared experiences, skill sets, and ideas, both virtually and in person, to advance their collective (and individual) work for peace.

Wenger's communities of practice model and its three key elements (domain, community, and practice) serve as the framework for the *Peacemakers in Action Network*.

⁷ The Reverend Canon Andrew White, interviewed by Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, New York City, Tanenbaum archives.

⁸ For a brief introduction to communities of practice, please see: Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, "Introduction to Communities of Practice: A Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses," Wenger-Trayner, last modified 2015, <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>.

Domain – For Wenger and his colleagues, the domain is at the core of a community of practice. Wenger et al. define domain as “common ground and a sense of common identity. A well-defined domain legitimises the community by affirming its purpose and value to members and other stakeholders.”⁹ In the case of the *Peacemakers Network*, the domain—or shared purpose—is a collective commitment to religiously motivated peacebuilding, in which peace actors utilize tactics and approaches couched in conflict resolution, transformation, reconciliation, peace education, human rights, and social justice. The *Peacemakers Network*, by virtue of its global and heterogeneous composition, has both a core and a loosely defined domain. Central to all of the *Peacemakers’* efforts is a core commitment to working for peace and interacting with the *Network* on an ongoing basis to advance peace. How they advance peace, however, is less circumscribed, as Tanenbaum’s *Peacemakers* use multiple approaches and skill sets for addressing conflicts.

Community – When Wenger et al. define the dimension of community in the model of a community of practice, they note that strong communities manifest a vibrant learning environment that “fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust” and “encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions and listen carefully.”¹⁰ A sense of community is particularly important because learning requires a sense “of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head.”¹¹

When applied to the *Peacemakers Network*, this theory comes alive. Many of Tanenbaum’s *Peacemakers* have known one another, despite working in different regions of the world, for well over a decade. They maintain close relationships with one another, and the majority stay in close contact by providing regular updates on their current work, fielding questions for the *Network* to consider, and providing mutual support in the sometimes lonely—and dangerous—work of peacebuilding. In these exchanges, we note that our *Peacemakers* work alone or for different organizations, but are not in direct competition, which allows them to share areas of uncertainty free from fear of professional sanction.

The core community of the *Peacemakers Network* is the current group of 28 women and men recognized by Tanenbaum for their religiously inspired work for peace and social justice. Not a static group, the *Network* expands as appropriate to include individuals within each of the respective *Peacemaker’s* domestic and international networks. Biennially, Tanenbaum also expands the *Network* by selecting two more individuals (one of whom must be a woman, the other a woman or man) whose lives and work make them appropriate recipients of the *Peacemakers in Action* award. When the individuals chosen accept the award, they become new members of the *Peacemakers Network*.

Practice – The final dimension of the Wenger, et al. model is “the practice” or the group culture. The practice is the “set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that the community members share.” Together, these components create a body of knowledge that is developed, shared, and maintained by the community and allows its members to effectively navigate its communal purpose or domain.¹²

⁹ Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002), 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

In the case of the *Peacemakers Network*, the practice constitutes the design of the *Network*, which includes a leadership group and the ideas, experiences, support, statements of solidarity, methodologies, and peacebuilding skill sets that the *Network* members share on an ongoing basis. Frequent interaction allows the *Peacemakers* to do the following: broaden their understanding of peace, inclusion, justice, and conflict; sharpen skills; and widen their approaches for resolving conflicts in what are often dynamic and evolving contexts.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the *Network* encourages, and is regularly enhanced by, practical collaboration. Tanenbaum calls these collaborations “*Peacemaker Interventions*.”¹³ In each, small groups of two or more *Peacemakers* from unique conflict zones come together to enrich one another’s work for peace on the ground. The participating *Peacemakers* bring their unique knowledge in peacebuilding, distinct methodologies, and personal histories. Yet they collaborate and, in so doing, sometimes innovatively re-contextualize each other’s work in different conflict settings.

Operationalizing the Peacemakers Network

Network Coordination – To establish a domain, community, and practice as described by Wenger et al., the *Network* members need to engage regularly with one another, both virtually and in person. However, establishing these connections was not a simple endeavour. It required a dedicated *Network* coordination mechanism.

When the *Peacemakers* voted to establish their *Network*, they discussed how to turn their idea into a practical reality. They concluded that a dedicated person needed to be identified who would be charged with coordinating their new undertaking and moving it forward on a consistent and ongoing basis. As part of the plan for the new *Network*, therefore, the *Peacemakers* charged Tanenbaum with actively coordinating their new community of practice.

As a next step, Tanenbaum created a *Network* Coordinator position to steward knowledge, streamline communications, compile and share relevant information, develop *Network* projects, and continually work with the *Peacemaker*-designated *Network* Leadership to assess the health of the *Network*. The *Network* Coordinator serves as a dedicated colleague who manages the *Network* and does everything from connecting *Peacemakers* to support and help one another in times of crisis, to managing logistical arrangements for virtual and face-to-face meetings, coordinating *Interventions*, and working closely with the members of the *Network* to help them problem-solve and take advantage of opportunities. This frees the *Peacemakers* from added tasks in the midst of their high-stress and high-demand roles, and makes it possible for them to fully participate in the *Network*, free of coordination and logistical responsibilities.

Connecting the Peacemakers Network

Virtual Communications – In addition to coordinating and planning calls with the *Peacemakers* who serve on the *Network* Leadership between in-person convenings, the *Network* Coordinator organizes

¹³ For more information on *Peacemaker Interventions*, please visit “*Peacemaker Interventions*,” Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://tanenbaum.org/Peacemakers-in-action-Network/Peacemaker-interventions/>.

monthly conference calls and all *Network* members are invited to participate. The *Peacemakers* may choose from two staggered call times to best coordinate with their own time zone and personal schedule. On these calls, the *Peacemakers* and the *Network* Coordinator discuss topics within the *Network* domain and strengthen community relationships.

Most often, the *Network* conference calls begin with quick updates from each of the *Peacemakers* about their current work and the challenges they face. The call then moves on to a discussion of particular challenges and ideas for how best to deal with them, based on the group’s experiences. These conversations range from technical discussions to emotional, supportive conversations, illustrating the deeply social nature of this type of learning and knowledge development. When *Peacemakers* identify opportunities for collaboration, the *Network* Coordinator works with them to concretize the ideas into a plan for an Intervention.

E-Newsletter – The *Network* Coordinator circulates a bimonthly newsletter to the *Peacemakers* and to Tanenbaum’s Program Advisory Council. The newsletter includes media clips and articles, and related information on the *Peacemakers* in the *Network*, so that members whose work, geographic location, language restrictions, or access to technology does not permit regular participation, can stay up-to-date with the community.

Organizing and Partnering with the Peacemakers Network

Working Retreats – The *Network*, as a standard practice, meets in person regularly. The goal is to convene every two to three years for a weeklong Working Retreat, and that has been the general practice for over 15 years. At these retreats, the *Peacemakers* build their community; discuss peacebuilding issues reflective of their domain; expand their skill sets by learning from one another; assess global issues like extremism and the inclusion of women in peace work; and identify ways to leverage the *Network’s* members and their experiences. These more in-depth Working Retreats deepen relationships and collaborations that lead to Interventions and enhance the effectiveness of the virtual meetings.

Interventions – On an increasingly frequent basis, the *Peacemakers* plan to conduct Interventions through which they collaborate in small groups for targeted peacebuilding efforts. Usually held in the home country or to help with the home country’s conflict, sometimes they collaborate outside their own regions in the pursuit of peace.

Two illustrative Interventions with different specifics exemplify these collaborations. In the first example, two *Peacemakers* came together to bring new skills and possibilities to a third conflict. In the second, *Peacemakers* from three conflicts joined in the home of one of them to share examples of, and strategies for, peacebuilding.

José “Chencho” Alas, Tanenbaum’s El Salvadoran *Peacemaker*, brought fellow *Peacemaker* Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge of South Africa, to Honduras. There, they worked together to inspire and help build a new political effort that sought to offer an alternative to the government in upcoming elections and to bring about a participatory democratic process. In collaboration with Tanenbaum, they then brought a representative of the incipient political effort to South Africa to meet top representatives from the African National Congress (ANC). Not only did the representative learn about the ANC’s work in post-conflict South Africa, but he also received a

commitment for an ongoing mentorship for the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP) coalition if they won in the election.¹⁴

The Asia Pacific Intervention in the Philippines occurred as this piece was being prepared. Tanenbaum *Peacemaker* Maria Ida “Deng” Giguiento of the Philippines invited three fellow *Network* members—Reverend Jacklevyn “Jacky” Frits Manuputty of Indonesia, and peace partners Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa of Nigeria. Due to a conflict, Imam Ashafa could not participate, but Jacky and Pastor James joined Deng in the Philippines to advance interreligious action for peace. Together with Catholic Relief Services, Deng gathered over 30 religious and peace practitioners across religious, government, academic, and civil society sectors to explore faith-based approaches for preventing and addressing threats of violent extremism.

Peacemaker Pastor James shared his story, which included his own violent extremist past in Nigeria. He then went on to describe lessons learned from the Nigerian experience, and to offer ideas for moving forward in different contexts, specifically within the Philippines. His ideas and inspirations included understanding the roots of conflict; shifting language so that you can be understood; and recognizing the value of faith-based peacebuilding and using it for peace. He suggested that in the Philippines, faith leaders and peace practitioners facilitate psychosocial interventions. Similarly, Reverend Jacky shared his experiences working with youth, and with interfaith dialogue, in Indonesia.

Reporting on the workshop process, Deng noted: “The workshop process consisted of listening sessions and conversations among the participants and experts that were intended to expand the participants’ knowledge and understanding of their faith foundations vis-a-vis peacebuilding. . . . [As such, it was designed to give] them impetus to generate innovative ideas and plans, especially in preventing and countering violent extremism in each of their work areas.”¹⁵

Offering Support Both for Opportunities and for Times of Crisis

In addition to sharing opportunities with the *Peacemakers* including prizes and recognition that could enhance their work, the *Network* and its Coordinator also provide support in moments of crisis. One example is unfolding as this piece is being drafted. The life of one of the *Peacemakers* has been threatened, making it impossible for that *Peacemaker* to remain in the individual’s home country. Members of the *Network* naturally rallied with support, and one *Peacemaker* is actively working to find sanctuary in his home country for his colleague. Simultaneously, Tanenbaum has identified other possibilities through collaborations with major U.S. universities and funds that might provide resources or sanctuary, and has reached out to government contacts. Though we will not know the extent or success of our efforts for some time, it is clear that our *Peacemaker* is not alone.

¹⁴ For the full Intervention report, please see: “Summary Report: Honduras and South Africa Interventions,” Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, last modified July 2014, <https://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Honduras.pdf>.

¹⁵ “Faith Encounters and Peace Actions: Overcoming Violent Extremism in Communities through Faith-Based Peacebuilding – A Synthesis of Learnings from the Workshop on Advancing Interreligious Action for Peace: Contextualizing Religious Literacy to Overcome Violent Extremism in Communities,” report produced by Maria Ida “Deng” Giguiento.

The Network Adds Value

The *Network* provides value to the *Peacemakers* in a range of ways. For example, when people operate alone, the full range of potential responses to a situation is rarely visible. With the *Network*, this is no longer part of the *Peacemakers’* reality. They have peers who face similar challenges in local environments with different contextual factors and dynamics; by sharing, new approaches and possibilities for peace practice sometimes emerge that were previously difficult to envision.

Sometimes, these new options do not work out as envisioned. For example, during the initial stages of the civil conflict in Syria, a fellow *Peacemaker* suggested to Hind that the nonviolent protestors she was advising seek to humanize their efforts with the government forces, by bringing water, flowers, and kind words directly to them. While this offered the potential to create a new dynamic between protestors and the armed state actors that would not have been explored otherwise, these efforts did not avert devastating military conflict. Nor did they prevent devastating personal consequences for those who sought to give flowers to government soldiers.

When the *Peacemakers* meet face-to-face or connect via technology and share information, lessons, and techniques from their work, the exchanges sometimes become fuel for their *Network* colleagues, who appropriate valuable ideas and mold them based on their knowledge of the contexts of their local conflicts. Through such conversations, we witness *Peacemakers* evidencing the concept of the “adjacent possible.” Borrowed from the scientific world by Steven Johnson to reveal processes of innovation, the adjacent possible describes the limited number of next steps available to someone seeking to advance knowledge from a technological, biological, or even creative starting point.¹⁶ People have ideas but sometimes, they do not recognize all their options for action (i.e., the adjacent possibilities). In these instances, exposure to new ideas can reveal new directions or trigger new pathways for *Network* members to pursue. As a *Network* member takes this new information and filters it through his or her knowledge and experiences in a particular conflict zone, entirely new peacebuilding practices can emerge. As such, the *Network* has built trans-local informational connections among individuals struggling with similar problems.

A powerful example of the value-added elements noted above occurred during a *Network* Intervention in Nigeria. There, a Pakistani peacebuilder shared his work with Madrassa leaders and teachers, aimed at bringing more inclusive and less polarizing education and understanding of the Qu’ran to students. His Nigerian hosts have since discussed the possibility of taking this work a step further by taking it to Christian educational institutions as well. As the Nigerian *Network* members told us, “We hope to use it [the educational reform technique] both for those who teach Christian religious knowledge as well as in Muslim madrasas to bring about unity, further understanding on issues of religiously motivated violence.”

The *Peacemakers* also support each other in more personal ways. In her address at the Religions and the Practice of Peace Colloquium, Hind Kabawat noted that the *Network* stands with her. She is not alone and does not feel isolated in her work for peace in Syria. As she explained, “in the middle of the darkness, we find light.” Her fellow *Peacemakers* not only share the emotional load by speaking and sharing with Hind, but at times, they have also joined her to share their skills and insights, drawn from years of dedicated peace practice, with the Syrian activists on the ground.

¹⁶ Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 9.

In addition, as noted, Tanenbaum now has a deeper understanding of what it means to adopt the vocation of religious peacebuilding because of its close collaboration with the *Network*. *Network* members assume diverse functions across sectors, including, but not limited to, religious, educational, administrative, activist, legal, and medical; and occasionally, diplomatic. However, when *Network* members come together, they bond around their common vocation of religiously motivated peacebuilding.

For Tanenbaum, our continued engagement with the *Peacemakers* revealed that this core bond—this identity as religiously and spiritually driven women and men pursuing a vision for a lived peace in the face of conflict—is at the heart of being a religious *Peacemaker*. It is not the functions or even the techniques that they employ. Rather, Tanenbaum has witnessed how *Peacemakers* evolve within their specific contexts and continue to serve the cause of peace in their communities, whether that manifests in conflict mitigation, the provision of education, participation in government, or some other channel.

As the field has made clear, peace is not a destination, but a fluid relational milieu. The *Peacemakers* model techniques for one another, and also model fluidity across roles in the cause of peacebuilding in a changing society or situation. Hind, as just one example, has worked extensively with Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge of South Africa, who has run the gamut of experiences, from ANC (African National Congress) activist and prisoner to diplomat to political gadfly. Hind, similarly, has moved from activist socialite to expelled critical voice now on the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee. The *Network* provides information to help her understand these shifting roles.

Reflections on the Peacemakers Network

Tanenbaum *Peacemakers in Action* have always been (and still are) active—and sometimes vulnerable—individuals. And yet, they share a palpable sense that the *Network* and the relationships that it nurtures are particularly valuable. Through it, they give and receive social, spiritual, and technical benefits that have motivated them to seek and actualize a structure for formal cohesion.

Why? Reasons include the following:

- *Supportive Community*: As discussed above, the *Network* members experience a greater feeling of community and outside support for their work that reaches outside the *Network* and into the communities where they work. This involves a sense of connection and emotional support but, also, shared action. As one example, “Statements of Solidarity”¹⁷ from our

¹⁷ One such “Statement of Solidarity” was issued to protect Colombian *Peacemaker* Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas as he faced severe political persecution at the hands of the Colombian military and paramilitary groups in the region in 2013. In response, Tanenbaum and the *Peacemakers in Action Network* developed a strategy to raise pressure and ensure that Colombian authorities protected Ricardo. The *Network* Statement demanded the protection of Ricardo's life, but more was done, including: appealing to key contacts at the U.S. State Department and to U.S. and Colombian politicians, disseminating an online petition (which accrued over 2,000 signatures), and meetings with NGOs and human rights organizations to raise support. For more, please see “Intervention to Protect Colombian *Peacemaker* (2013),” Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, last modified 2013, <https://tanenbaum.org/Peacemakers-in-action-Network/Peacemaker-interventions/2013-Network-intervenes-to-protect-colombian-Peacemaker/>.

Network of global *Peacemakers* have reached activists on the ground in Nigeria, Syria, and Honduras. Our *Peacemakers* in those regions report that, in their communities, these statements are more than mere words. The statements reveal that leaders for peace around the world are paying attention to local realities, and this heartens grassroots peacebuilders and justice advocates who often feel isolated and forgotten. It appears to Tanenbaum that the element of community, stressed in Wenger’s theory of communities of practice, may have this additional psycho-social benefit for participants, especially as individuals dealing with extreme stress in their work.

- *Advice and Counsel:* *Peacemakers* share ideas and synergize on *Network* calls. They also use the calls as a space to ask for advice from their colleagues. The advice allows the *Peacemakers* to more effectively (or at least with solidarity) address difficulties in their work.
- *Innovative Peacebuilding Approaches:* Their interactions, both in person and virtual, have become the seedbed for innovative peacebuilding practice. As detailed above, this has resulted in new synergies, adaptations of strategies, and new applications for peacebuilding drawing on the knowledge that each *Peacebuilder* has of her or his local context (i.e., the adjacent possible).

Impact Beyond the Formal Network

From the beginning, Tanenbaum envisioned that a successful *Peacemakers Network* would involve voluntary connections and collective action. Happily, this has begun. Without Tanenbaum’s involvement, participants are more frequently reaching out to each other individually, even having conversations about their work or pursuing conversations started during *Network* interactions such as the Working Retreat. An example is *Peacemaker* Friar Ivo Markovic, who works for reconciliation in Bosnia, recently traveling to Kosovo in the course of his work. During his visit, he made a special effort to contact a fellow *Peacemaker*, Father Sava Janjic, who had not as yet become an active member of the *Network*. Friar Ivo told him about the *Network* and returned to the group with an update on Father Janjic’s work and with new ideas for working with him. Many other examples bear this out, while some go unrecognized within the broader *Network*.

What is clear is that the Tanenbaum *Peacemakers Network* is a robust community of practice that retains its capacity for organic shifts and growth. While still guided by a shared sense of purpose and vision, community members also continue to influence its direction in unforeseen ways that strengthen the community and build a sense of shared ownership of the process.

As such, the Tanenbaum *Peacemaker Network* is not only thriving, but it is contributing—both as a model for others, and by providing real-time impact in a world fraught with conflict. The regions where the *Peacemakers* operate include areas with conflicts that often manifest religious division and tensions. In this landscape, the *Network* offers a peacebuilding model that may be used, and adapted, to advance the cause of peace, including the work of religious peace actors. This achievement marks a path forward. It is a path only made possible because of the vision and commitment of Tanenbaum’s *Peacemakers*.

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Joyce S. Dubensky is the CEO of Tanenbaum, a globally recognized thought leader in peacebuilding and combating religious violence and hatred. Tanenbaum works with religious peacemakers in armed conflicts worldwide and proactively tackles religious bullying of students, harassment in workplaces, and disparate health treatment for people based on their beliefs. In her peacebuilding work, Dubensky collaborates with Tanenbaum's Peacemakers in Action Network to enhance knowledge exchange and collaborative efforts for peace. She is the editor of Peacemakers in Action, Vol. II: Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Internationally, Dubensky has presented and conducted trainings and workshops at the United Nations, USIP, the Alliance for Civilizations, Harvard Divinity School, and more. Dubensky holds a J.D. from New York University School of Law, where she graduated with honors, and a Master's degree in American History from Adelphi University.

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