

Summary of the Family Encounters and of the Forum on 17th October on Peace

Guatemala, 28th October 2010

The Family Encounters are gatherings based on the recognition of the knowledge held by families living in extreme poverty. They offer a reflection and dialogue space with other people allowing them to get to know each other, to learn to speak in public and to listen, by putting together everyone's knowledge. These encounters are divided into two phases of equal importance: the preparation in groups of origin, mainly in their neighbourhood, (this eases the dialogue) and a main meeting (where people from other social backgrounds come along and a dialogue is established between the groups and the guests).

A Public Forum was held on 17th October based on the same principles as the Family Encounters.

The theme: "Peace, a construction for all people by all people."

Although we live in a violent world, we long for peace. Under these circumstances, why aren't we living in peace? How can we live in peace? These are essential questions to which we tried to find answers during the family encounter on 25th September, that served as a basis for the Forum held during the 17th October commemoration.

What lies behind the word "peace"? Why do we try to build peace and with whom? Inside the Movement we talk about a peace respectful of Human Rights; that can be forged by everyone, in which everyone can participate, because this is the only way to ensure peace for all people.

To do so, our dialogue starts from the commitment and the reflection of the disadvantaged families with whom we have been working for several years now. We believe that this knowledge, enriched by their life experience and by the debate with others who have a different life experience, can shed a new light on our society which seeks peace, but is not capable of building it for all of its members.

Important ideas born from the Family Encounters

- Money does not bring happiness for me; that is not peace, peace means that we are all together in good health (...) For me, peace means living in the respect that we have to learn from an early age so that children are respectful; the change should start with them (Mrs. J. from zone 4, Escuintla).
- I cannot say I live in peace. There are many things that tear you apart you from your peace. I am unemployed; I don't have anything to feed my kids. For that, I can't say I live in peace. (Mr. O. from zone 7, Escuintla).
- Sometimes there is no food at home, and what I generally do is go to the mountains look for leaves; before I do that I ask Him for help, I ask Him to remove the snakes or anything that can harm me, so that I can bring some money home (Mrs. B from zone 3, Escuintla).
- Living in peace (...) means that there is assistance in the hospital, and not that it is difficult to take the sick there, that there are no medicines and that you are badly treated, because this takes away your peace. Another thing is that the school is well provided; someone from the government came saying that they were going to give a book to the children that should last for five years, which is impossible (Mrs. R. from zone 18, Guatemala city).
- When I am with the kids I tell them "come in children, come in!" and when they come in I am peaceful and I ask God to protect us. Since our house is corrugate metal, a bullet could go right through. So when we are all there, I say "We are all blessed my God" and that is God's grace. Then I can feel peaceful because they are all inside (Mrs. C, zone 21, Guatemala city).
- If we are united, we can forge peace. As long as there is no unity, there is no peace (...) I have always talked about unity; that is our strength, otherwise we will never gain peace; if

my neighbour lacks something that I have, then we can share it. I saw people dying in their homes without others even realizing it (Mrs. V from zone 3, Escuintla).

- I can live in peace thanks to the satisfaction I gain personally. When I feel that I can reach my goals, this gives me peace. I believe this peace, regardless of the way we live it, we can spread it to the others, through our action and our attitude. I think we can't live peacefully by ourselves, but by interacting with the others. Otherwise, it's like spiritual peace. (O. allied of Guatemala city).
- I give peace when I am a goof friend. When there is no trouble, when the kids are asleep we feel happy and in peace. I was tired of so much washing and ironing, I arrived home and my children were fighting over the things they had to do, I was not peaceful and I did the housework myself (Mrs. M from zone 4, Escuintla).
- Sometimes I don't have strength for anything. If I don't have any money, I would rather stay in bed so that the kids don't get up and start crying because they are hungry. This is why we have a saying that goes: "We can see the faces, but we do not know the hearts". (Mrs. M from zone 18, Guatemala city).
- Committing crime, it's just like for work, but I think like that because I think that if they become thieves it's because there is no work or because what they earn is not enough (...) I used to work at Terminal and I was earning 25 quetzals (US\$3), I had to give milk to my child and I watched (...) I watched the 25 quetzals and I told myself this was not enough, what will I do? I will take a knife, grab someone and steal his money because mine is not enough. That's what I used to tell myself (Mrs. L, Southern zone, Guatemala city).
- For me peace is a minute of dialogue; it's difficult, but communication is important (Mrs. A. from zone 3, Escuintla).

Important ideas from the 17th of October Forum

What conditions should be reunited in order to have a peaceful society	What are my commitments in order to help building peace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for public services • Being united and supporting each other within the community • Everyone should have a job and a decent salary • Communication within the family • Preserving essential values like friendship, solidarity, respect and tolerance; passing these values on to children • Respecting the others and their opinions and settling conflict as to come to an agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate my children • Do not discriminate • Show respect to others • Communicate • Helping people living in the street • Studying dutifully • Giving a good example to kids • Do not judge the others • Offering confidence and understanding to the others • Fighting for a better world

During the Forum, we listened in the groups to the sad conviction that violence was not going to disappear. However, the examples given by some, the testimonies of solidarity and mutual support in the neighbourhoods made credible a concrete manner of living that allowed us to reach a new conviction: *peace is possible*.

Mrs. C. told us how the day when her house collapsed because of a landslide; several neighbours got the pickaxe, broke the rocks and got the land out. Ever since they helped her rebuild the shack. Mrs. C told us: "*I felt happy, I realized I was not as alone as I thought*". This happiness of knowing that we are not alone, that we can count on others in times when our lives go off the rails, is the basis on which we can lay the foundations for security that builds peace. Let's hope that we can learn from these families who are too well aware of the consequences of being forgotten, of the incomprehension and the ignorance of the rest of the society towards them.