



Peace building in Lebanon



Breaking down barriers: Muslim and Christian children came together for a peace-building camp in Lebanon.

Conflict is a normal and natural part of living in a world with other people. However, there are different ways for people to resolve their differences without using violence or force. Peace is always possible. For example, Australian citizens support the work of World Vision to help bring peace in countries like Lebanon and Sri Lanka.

The issue: From 1975 to 1990, there was a civil war in Lebanon and the capital city (Beirut) was divided into Muslim and Christian sectors. For many years, there has been conflict and fighting between Lebanon's Muslim and Christian population.

A global citizenship response: World Vision has been bringing children from both sides together for peace-building activities and has run a six day camp for more than 100 students.

Fatmé Ghosein is a 20 year-old Muslim university student who volunteered to be one of the camp leaders. She said, *“You have no idea how much our country needs these camps. We live in a country that is divided by religion and politics. I don't see any other way out of this other than working with the youth – they are our future. We have to offer a new perspective to the youth, to undo what previous generations have passed to them. We have to prove that our parents were wrong when they told us that a Christian was better than a Muslim or vice versa. This camp is living proof that we can all live in peace and acceptance of one another, regardless of our religion and background.”*

She remembers that, on the very first day of the summer camp, children avoided talking with kids who were of a different religion, or whom they thought looked “different and weird”. Then, step-by step, through organised activities, the children started to interact and have fun together.

Andrew Ghafari, World Vision Lebanon camp leader, says a couple of days after the beginning of the camp, many parents came back to check on their children because they felt worried since it was a “mixed” camp of both Muslims and Christians. *“It's time for the parents to stop worrying about the differences and instead, start trusting that those differences will give their children more confidence and strength. In many ways, it's the parents that need peace-building activities. But we believe and trust that our students will be the agents of change in their parents' lives.”*

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 2006 census, there were 86,599 Lebanese-born Australians and 70,908 Sri Lankan-born Australians.



Peace building in Sri Lanka

The issue: Since 1983, there has been conflict involving members of the two main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka – the Sinhalese (who make up 74% of the population) and the Tamils (18%). An estimated 70,000 people have died in the conflict.

A global citizenship response: Lojini, 17, and Shyamali, 17, share a unique friendship. They do not go to the same school, they do not come from the same village and they do not belong to the same ethnic group. Their cultures are different and in the backdrop of the ethnic conflict they should be rivals, but they are best of friends.

Shyamali: When I was small there were times I was not allowed to play with some children because they were Tamil. I didn't understand at that time, but today I have Lojini and many other Tamil friends. We met at a World Vision Children's Forum meeting one year ago. The meeting brought together children from different ethnic backgrounds within Sri Lanka. I remember that first meeting. Lojini smiled at me first, so it was easy for me to make friends with her. At first we all sat in our own comfortable groups of friends. Sinhala children sat together, Tamil children in their group and Muslim children in their group. But World Vision helped us break the ice. By the end of the day we were all mixing up, talking to each other and making friends. Since that day, things have changed in our meetings. We are comfortable to sit with anyone from any community.

Lojini: Sinhala people are different from us Tamils. The way they walk, the way they talk and the way they dress is different, but we still can be friends. I've learnt many things about their culture from Shyamali and many good things too.

Shyamali: It makes me cry when I see Tamil people killed. But sometimes it's difficult to make the adults understand. If every child can have a friend from the other community, it would solve a lot of problems. That is what World Vision did for us.



Lojini and Shyamali are best friends despite their cultural differences.

For You To Do!

1. What do these stories teach us about building peace between people in the world?
2. In a small group, choose a conflict situation (with school, family or friends) and role play different ways to resolve the conflict peacefully and successfully. Follow the guide below:
 - a. What is the problem? What has happened?
 - b. How do the characters feel about the conflict?
 - c. What would people like to happen? Talk about different ways to solve the conflict.