

## 1. Principal Speakers

### Keynote Speech: Creating A Culture of Peace

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*(Material in this address is taken from a chapter by M.W. Ashford MD, PhD, in War or Health, edited by Hanna Tapanainen, to be published in January 2001. The chapter is entitled "Stubborn peace: Communities that refuse to fight".)*

Studies of war usually focus on the causes and contributing factors in the conflict more than the protective factors that may help a community resist violence. Historical analysis, for example, describes the economic, political, social and cultural context that seemed to make war inevitable. Recently, however, some organizations, such as International Alert, have been examining the peace capacity of societies at high risk of armed conflict, and attempting to enhance their inherent strengths to resist war. Some communities have taken grassroots actions to prevent armed conflict; these communities offer important lessons about what kinds of outside interventions might support and strengthen the indigenous initiatives. That is, in addition to studying what goes wrong, it is important to study what goes right when a community chooses not to take up arms. When people choose to stand in unarmed opposition to hate-mongering and tyranny, refusing either to fight or to submit, they demonstrate that alternatives can be found, even in desperate situations, and that the community itself is the source of power. I argue that these strong communities share common attributes that contribute to a culture of peace.

I will outline several examples of grassroots resistance – stubborn communities that refused to go to war. Fortunately, some of these communities have analyzed the reasons for their success and provided their comments in discussions or publications. Their insights are valuable, particularly for nongovernmental organizations working in the field of peace building where outsiders try to offer assistance and international solidarity to communities at risk.

Until the 1980s, the best-known example of the power of nonviolent resistance was Gandhi's long, determined fight against British rule in India. Although many died in the struggle for independence, the moral authority of Gandhi's methods undermined the rights previously accorded to colonial rulers and laid the groundwork for ending colonialism elsewhere. The lessons Gandhi taught were well known in the Philippines when people were subjected to the rule of Ferdinand Marcos. Their struggle for democracy and the final "velvet revolution" is documented in Ed Garcia's book *Pilgrim Voices: Citizens as Peacemakers*.<sup>1</sup>

Marcos was a brutal dictator known as the Hitler of the East, whose regime lasted from 1972 to 1986. In the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country, the Church initially espoused what it called "critical collaboration" with the government. As the Church became more and more critical and less and less collaborative, it eventually issued a pastoral letter advocating nonviolent resistance. Many disagreed vigorously with the letter, but by 1984, people were participating in