

We had in mind a small village composed of inhabitants from different communities in the country. Jews, Christians and Muslims would live there in peace, each one faithful to his own faith and traditions, while respecting those of others. Each would find in this diversity a source of personal enrichment. The aim of the village: to be the setting for a school for peace. For years there have been academies in the various countries where the art of war has been taught. Inspired by the prophetic words: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more," we wanted to found a school for peace, for peace too is an art. It doesn't appear spontaneously, it has to be learnt.

### **Lessons for the international community**

The Friends of the UN invited the fifty award-winning communities to a seminar in New York, where they offered many insights into their successes.<sup>6</sup> They spoke of their sense of altruism, of being called to show the highest possibilities of being human, of a sense of dignity, identity and self-respect. They valued their ingenuity in designing initiatives that were home grown, not handed to them by outsiders. The communities described their moral code of decency, equality, respect for life and the individual, and their rejection of raw power, threats and greed. The vast majority pointed to their spiritual strength, and their religious or cultural traditions as sources of resilience, perseverance and hope. Respect for nature was often a part of this framework. They spoke of their common vision and goal in social justice, and the importance of community ownership of programs. Often there was a charismatic leader, but speakers were convinced that even if the leader had died, the people would have continued on the same path. Organizational structures were based on participation, equality and shared power. In fact, the people described the ideal structure as more circular than linear. They offered advice that communities should establish a culture of dialogue, build relationships across barriers, focus on practical results, build the legal basis for equality, disseminate skills and knowledge, and hold onto courage, hope and humor. They stressed the importance of a legitimate economic base as essential to long-term success.

What strategies for outside support and intervention arise from the lessons of these communities? The first is that simply showing concern provides those working for reform with a sense of solidarity that helps dispel the helplessness that often paralyzes action. Second, the importance of education in moral values is clear in all the cases described. The moral values are often based in a deep religious faith or spiritual traditions that could well be supported by adherents in other countries. Third, the development of structures and strategies such as zones of peace and training in conflict resolution can often be facilitated by outsiders who bring new ideas and materials to help organizers. Fourth, communication is key to successful action. The international community could take a powerful initiative in providing fax machines, cell phones, photocopiers and e-mail access to organizers working toward social justice and democracy in communities at risk. Fifth, outside assistance can also be valuable in the establishment of a justice system and educating people about participatory democracy. Sixth, a charismatic leader drew many of the communities to action. Whether outside support can nurture such a leader is not clear, but media attention to the leaders may bring the issues to the public sphere. Media attention is a two-edged sword, sometimes protecting prominent leaders, sometimes precipitating violence against them.