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Interview 2024-2

Interview with

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African Union

IICBA: *Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?*

My name is Dr. Mary Mugwe Chui from Kenya. I am a Senior Lecturer at Mount Kenya University, a private chartered and ISO 9001:2015 certified university in Kenya committed to a broad-based, holistic, and inclusive system of education. We offer various programs at the certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, masters, and doctorate levels, in flexible modes of study such as online, blended, and face-to-face. I have held diverse leadership and administrative roles within the institution, including overseeing instructional and pedagogical delivery of educational training-oriented units. I currently serve as the Coordinator, Postgraduate in the School of Education, and Coordinator in the Academic Advisory and Mentorship Programme. I am also the Patron of the Peace Club in the university. I also serve for the United Nations Peace Education Programme as the coordinator at MKU and support UNESCO's O3 Plus Project on the Promotion of Health and Wellbeing among university students. Finally, I am involved in a few other ventures, including as a student trainer in Entrepreneurship, Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Management of Senior Chief Gichohi Secondary School, and active participant of the Christian Scientific Association of Kenya and the Kenya Association of Educational Administration and Management.

IICBA: *What are the most frequent types of conflicts or violence in your country, including risks of violent extremism?*

Background: This series of interviews was prepared for the International Day of Education on January 24 whose theme for 2024 is "learning for lasting peace". As noted on UNESCO's International Day of Education webpage, "the world is seeing a surge of violent conflicts paralleled by an alarming rise of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hate speech. [...] An active commitment to peace is more urgent today than ever: Education is central to this endeavor, as underlined by the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development. Learning for peace must be transformative, and help empower learners with the necessary knowledge, values, attitudes and skills and behaviors to become agents of peace in their communities." This series of interviews builds on projects implemented by UNESCO IICBA on education for peace and the prevention of violent extremism with support from the Government of Japan.

From the People of Japan

Education 2030

Since independence up to the early 1990s, the country has been relatively peaceful despite occasional inter-community conflicts and election-related violence in parts of the country. However, in 2007/08, the country witnessed widespread ethnically instigated post-election violence after disputed presidential election results, resulting in the loss of over 1,000 lives and 600,000 persons being internally displaced as well as the destruction of both public and private properties including offices, vehicles, health centers and schools. Economic losses were valued at more than KES 300 billion.

Government statistics indicate today that nearly 90% of adults have experienced physical violence since they turned 15 years old, including due to muggings, home invasions, car hijackings, and murders. In 2015, the rate of robberies was 6.09 per 100,000 people. In a 2010 crime victimization survey, 3.7% of respondents had experienced robbery, and 5.1% had been assaulted/threatened. A 2013 report by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) noted that Kenya was the seventh most violent country in the dataset with just over 3,500 recorded politically violent events, which had resulted in over 7,200 fatalities. Kenya also faces school-linked violence, the most prevalent being arson on school grounds by students. One example was the burning of Kakamega high school dormitory which hosts 600 students.

Kenya also faces frequent outbreaks of resource-linked conflicts, related to access to land, pasture, and water especially in pastoral areas. Cattle rustling has affected communities and schools in the Rift Valley causing school closures and dropouts by students. It has also experienced terrorist attacks, some of which have resulted in dozens of casualties such as the Al-Qaeda bombing of the United States Embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and the more recent Al-Shabaab attacks in Westgate Mall, Garissa University, and Dusit D2. In 2016, the National Counter-Terrorism Centre reported that approximately 900 people, including security personnel, had been killed in terrorist attacks in Kenya since the year 2000.

IICBA: *What are the main causes or drivers leading to conflict and violence, including violent extremism?*

Let me mention four factors leading to conflicts. The first is political instability. As mentioned above, Kenya witnessed post-election violence after disputed presidential election results in 2007/2008. The second is ethnic and tribal tensions. Political and economic competition along ethnic lines has fueled tensions, leading to violence during elections or disputes over resources. Ethnic and tribal tensions have also been caused by cattle rustling especially among the pastoral communities, where communities resort to violent attacks in the competition for resources and cattle. The third is a lack of knowledge of peace resolution. Most high school students lack basic awareness of peaceful methods of conflict resolution. Thus, most students resort to violence to express their frustrations, including fear of national examinations, resistance to transfer of head teachers, change of educational policies, and peer influence and indiscipline among students. Such frustrations have translated to violence, vandalism, arson leading to the destruction of property, loss of lives, and educational halting due to the expulsion of students involved in instigating violence. The fourth is poverty and high levels of unemployment causing disparities in access to resources and

opportunities. Additionally, poverty's effects on idleness, low self-esteem, and the breakdown of family support networks may be correlated to violent extremism even if most poor persons are not violent.

IICBA: *What are some of the effects on individuals, communities, and society at large? Does violence affect women and girls differently?*

There are vast effects of violence on all actors in society. For instance, violence causes psychological trauma to individuals who have experienced it. Individuals and communities that experienced post-election violence may resent communities that harmed them and their families. Individuals also suffer injuries that may lead to long-term health issues. Violence also creates economic setbacks, especially when properties are vandalized, causing loss and expenses in repurchasing and repairing destroyed items. Violence also creates tensions. In Northern Kenya, communities that practice cattle rustling against each other with recurrent violent attacks have repressed relationships amongst each other, including resentment and isolation from other surrounding communities, weakening the social fabric in the area. Such violence, creates a cycle of further retaliation, making Northern Kenya and other parts of the nation an environment experiencing cycles of conflicts that challenge peacebuilding.

Violence also has a gendered impact, especially on women and girls. During a violent attack, women and girls experience death, sexual assault and rape, transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, psychological trauma, loss of livelihood, and displacement. Women and girls also experience the death of their loved ones, especially male figures in their family, whom they depend on, causing an economic setback and requiring the girls to drop out of school to cater financially to the rest of the family. Violence may also be in the form of domestic violence where women and girls suffer in their homes, a prevalent and ongoing issue in Kenya that causes inter alia psychological trauma to affected women and girls.

IICBA: *Does violence and conflicts affect schooling and learning in basic or higher education?*

Violence may affect basic and higher education in distinct ways. In basic education, there is rampant burning of schools that has occurred in Kenya and led to the death of students, and the destruction of school property, including buildings, books, school uniforms, and so on. In 2021, Kenya recorded arson in more than 120 secondary schools. The costs of repair are often levied on parents. Burning of schools is an expression of frustrated youth in schools who lack the skills and attitudes to resolve conflicts. In higher education, violence has affected learning in various ways. During the Garissa University terror attack in 2015, more than 140 students were killed and over 70 people were injured. Violence has also erupted in higher education during student unrest, especially at times of student elections. Student strikes have also led to the destruction of property, student injuries, and the halting of learning.

IICBA: *What do you think could be the role of education in promoting peace and preventing violence and conflicts?*

Education serves as a means of connecting youth with broader society, including by sharing morals, values, and beliefs. Through initiatives promoting peace, education is an avenue for informing and influencing the younger generation. In places of violence due to cultural beliefs, education can be used as a vessel to inform youth about peace, promote alternative livelihoods, and foster dialogue and reconciliation. Through Life Skills Education, religious studies, and social studies, peace education has been integrated into the basic education curriculum, employing participatory, interactive, experiential, and transformative teaching approaches to enhance learners'

ability to internalize knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes for peace. Encouraging self-expression through co-curricular activities such as art, music, or drama also presents opportunities for transmitting messages of peace, non-violence, and respect. Peace clubs in schools also provide a platform where skills for harmonious coexistence can be learned and practiced.

IICBA: *If you participated in a project of UNESCO IICBA, was this project helpful, and if so, how?*

Yes, I participated in various projects of UNESCO IICBA that I deem life-changing. This included the "Teacher Training and Development for Peace Building in the Horn of Africa and Surrounding Countries" funded by Japan. The project focused on teacher training and development for peacebuilding in six countries. In Kenya, the initiative was implemented by the Ministry of Education and coordinated by the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, in partnership with Kenyatta University and Mount Kenya University. In 2018, training sessions were conducted at Mount Kenya University in which I participated. The project helped with the training of teachers and students, the formation of peace clubs within the university and in high schools, and the Training of Trainers (TOT). The first TOT training was transformative. We applied the knowledge and skills learned to devise proposals for peace grants and projects and mentor students. Participants provided testimonials on the impact of the peace training and preached peace and the prevention of extremism and its resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 general elections. We also held peace-building initiatives in other educational institutions including Masai Mara University and several high schools where various peace clubs were formed.

IICBA: *What does your organization or institution do today to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? What more could be done?*

Mount Kenya University has worked in partnership with the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO. In 2018, training sessions were conducted. Faculty members and in-service teachers from secondary schools within Nairobi were also trained. A monitoring and evaluation exercise, conducted to establish the impact of the training revealed that participants had been able to put into practice the knowledge and skills they acquired. Some of the initiatives to which the trainings contributed include: (i) Erection of billboards containing peace messages in several schools and universities; (ii) Student-led peace clubs established at Mount Kenya University and various secondary schools; (iii) Peace initiatives in the schools for teaching practicum; (iv) Sharing of success stories at the 5th Integrated International Research Conference held at Mount Kenya University (paper entitled "An analysis of transformative pedagogy for peace building: A case study of Githunguri Secondary School in Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Central Kenya"). It is evident that the peace building training made a significant contribution among teachers and students and it is envisaged that the trainees will continue to contribute to peace building efforts in larger society.

IICBA: *What is your government doing today to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? What more could be done?*

The Government acknowledges the role of peace in enhancing socio-economic development. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) provides for the recognition and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to preserve the dignity of individuals and communities, promotion

of social justice, and the realization of the potential of all human beings. Article 10 of the Constitution spells out the national values and principles of governance in Kenya. The Kenya Vision 2030, the blueprint for social, economic, and political development, underscores the need to inculcate a culture of peace and respect for the sanctity of human life through social institutions, in particular through education and training. In addition, the Fourth Agenda in the National Dialogue and Reconciliation Agreement signed in 2008 by contesting parties following the Post-Election Violence was to provide long-term measures and peaceful resolution to the political impasse and violence. To operationalize this commitment, the Government put in place legal and policy measures implemented through various frameworks, including, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Department of the National Cohesion and National Values, and the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management. The structures support community and institutional-based peacebuilding initiatives. The Ministry of Education has also put in place legal, policy, and programmatic interventions for promoting peace and harmonious coexistence in the country. Section 4 of the Basic Education Act (2013) values and provides for the development of peace building skills, promotion of peace, integration and cohesion, and elimination of hate speech and tribalism through instruction that promotes the proper appreciation of ethnic diversity and culture in society.

Kenya's Sessional Paper No 2 of 2015 notes the contribution of education and training to the development of a peaceful and socially cohesive nation. The philosophy (2.2), mandate (2.6), and guiding principles (2.7a) refer to learner awareness of national values and aspirations as well as instilling, affirming, and enhancing values such as patriotism, national unity, mutual social responsibility, honesty, humility, mutual respect, high moral standards, and the ethical and moral foundation of the Kenyan society. Issues of national cohesion, national values, people participation, inclusivity, equity, and equality are also constantly mentioned in several sections of the framework.

However, more needs to be done to address the root causes and drivers of conflicts and invest in education and awareness-raising on peacebuilding and conflict resolution while developing the capacities and skills of youth, women, and other groups to become agents of positive change.

IICBA: *Have you seen innovative initiatives to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? How did they work?*

Let me mention four initiatives. The first is the Nyumba kumi (which means ten households) initiative implemented in response to the 2013 Westgate terror attack. It aims at anchoring community policing at the household level, promoting collaboration between the private and public sectors to reduce the prevalence of criminal activities. Both county and the national government cooperate with groups of ten (10) houses, where in the event of security issues, the 10 neighbours join forces to address and resolve them before they escalate. Human security threats are communicated from the village to the national level through the administrative leaders.

The second is peace transformative education in basic and tertiary education. As mentioned earlier, UNESCO IICBA's initiative for peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa and surrounding countries was transformative. More generally, transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding is an innovative approach to enhance the knowledge, competencies, and skills of both educators and learners. The approach involves interactive activities followed by discussions, reflection, and introspection to engage both the intellectual and emotional aspects. Transformative pedagogy assessment extends beyond conventional exams, encompassing community projects and social entrepreneurship initiatives. By applying, knowledge, skills, and competencies to real and local contexts, this approach aims to reduce tensions and promote peace in those local contexts.

The third is the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, a statutory body established under the National Cohesion and Integration Act (No. 12 of 2008,

Laws of Kenya) for the promotion of inter alia national identity and values, mitigation of ethnically and politically motivated violence, elimination of discrimination on ethnic, racial, and religious basis, and the promotion of national reconciliation and healing. The specialized Commission is to address violence and injustices in Kenya.
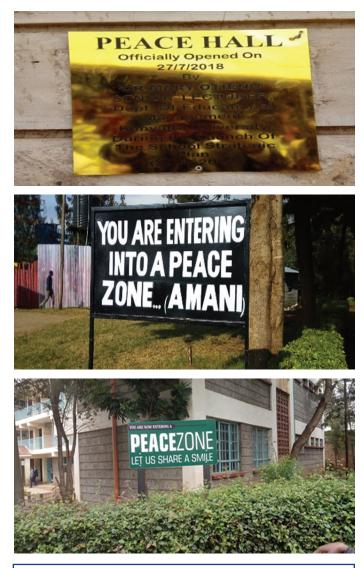
The fourth is the creation of peace activities that have led to innovative approaches in learning institutions, as mentioned above, including, erection of billboards at strategic points containing peace messages in several schools and universities, the formation of peace clubs and the launch of peace halls.

IICBA: *What are the main challenges today to implement initiatives to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence?*

One challenge is geographic coverage. Among educational institutions in Kenya, few have peace education programs or practices. Peace-building initiatives require funding and resources to adequately and effectively run through the years. Kenya also has many unemployed youths who may be susceptible to violence and violent expressions. Cultural perceptions are another challenge. Kenya has various ethnic groups with different cultural affiliations. Some cultural beliefs embedded in some of these ethnic groups involve violence, including in Northern parts of Kenya. Implementing initiatives in these areas may pose a challenge, especially in the change of perception of the cultural activities that cause violence. Finally, educational institutions suffer from a myriad of social conflicts, including among students, between students and university management, and between staff and management. Social conflicts are heightened by an unstable political climate. The frequent closures of universities due to students' unrest, lecturers' strikes, and pervasive violence reflect societal challenges. Lack of peace accommodation by society affects learning institutions with cycles of violence challenging the cultivation of peace.

IICBA: *Finally, could you share with us an anecdote about yourself or your work?*

During a conflict resolution workshop for high school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, I asked a group to form pairs and share personal stories of conflicts they had experienced or witnessed. After rotating partners several times, each student engaged with a least five different peers. Subsequently, we gathered in a circle for a reflective discussion on the insights gained from the activity. One student shared, *"I learned that we all have conflicts, and they are not always about ethnicity or religion. Sometimes they are about family, friends, schools, or sports. I also learned that we could solve our conflicts peacefully, by listening to each other, understanding each other, and respecting each other. I realized that we are not so different after all, and that we can*

live together in harmony." In appreciation of this insightful comment, I expressed gratitude and then asked the entire group if they concurred. They all nodded in agreement. Concluding the workshop, I emphasized, *"You have just experienced the power of peace education. By sharing your stories, you have built trust, empathy, and friendship. You have also developed skills and attitudes that can help you prevent and resolve conflicts in your lives and communities. You have become peace builders, and I hope you will continue to spread the message of peace wherever you go."* My utmost satisfaction comes from witnessing the positive influence I have on youth through my teachings, particularly those centered around promoting peace. It is my profound aspiration to be actively involved in engaging youth in peace building for a greater impact on them and society at large.