

Interview with

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

I am Raymond Nkwenti Fru, a Cameroonian born but residing in South Africa. I hold a Teaching Diploma from the Higher Teachers Training College of the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon, a B.Ed. Honours, M.Ed., and a PhD all from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. I am a senior lecturer of History and Social Science Education and the Head of the Department of Human Science Teaching in the Faculty of Education at Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, South Africa. My role amongst others is to capacitate pre-service teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills to become effective in the teaching of History and Social Sciences and to contribute to knowledge production in my discipline through relevant research. As part of my community engagement and scholarship, I participate in initiatives related to peace and non-violence education as well as Global Citizenship Education (GCED).

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

In my view, the most frequent type of conflict and violence in South Africa is gender-based violence (GBV) which includes sexual assault and domestic or intimate partner violence. A 2022 report by Amnesty International indicated a rise in the incidence of GBV in South Africa with murders of women increasing by 10.3% in 2022, and 989 women killed between July and September only. In the

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.



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same year, sexual offenses increased by 11% and rape by 10.8%. There have been widespread protests and campaigns to address and combat GBV. Then there is also the problem of high levels of crime, including robbery, assault, and murder. Xenophobic violence is also prevalent whereby foreigners are being scapegoated for South Africa's woes through sporadic and sometimes lethal harassment and violence especially targeting African and Asian foreign nationals living in the country, including refugees, asylum seekers, and both documented and undocumented migrants. Gang violence in certain urban areas, particularly in Cape Town is also noteworthy. These gangs are often involved in drug trafficking, extortion, and turf wars. Farm attacks are a form of violence against farmers and farm workers usually motivated by factors such as disputes over land and theft. It can therefore be deduced that South Africa experiences three broad categories of violence, namely direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. With the schools being a microcosm of society, these types of violence easily manifest themselves in education spaces with increasing levels of GBV and bullying quite common in schools.

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

Firstly, I believe that the main cause of conflict and violence in South Africa is the historical legacy of apartheid with deep-rooted inequalities, social divisions, and historical injustices that have contributed to ongoing tensions and conflicts. Secondly, there is economic

Inequality. A World Bank report on Inequality in Southern Africa released in 2022 determined that South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, ranking first amongst 164 countries in the World Bank's global poverty database. The report further notes that 10% of the population of South Africa owns more than 80% of the wealth with race being a key determining factor of this inequality. The effects of this unequal distribution of wealth include unemployment and poverty, which in turn create fertile ground for social unrest and conflict. Other drivers include substance abuse and corruption.

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

On individuals, we can talk of direct physical harm ranging from minor to life-threatening injuries, significant psychological trauma leading to anxiety, depression, and even mental health issues, and serious emotional impact manifested through fear, anger, guilt, shame, and destruction of relationships. At the community level, we can mention stigmatization faced by communities renowned for violence, and education disruptions in violent communities, Violence can hinder economic development by disrupting businesses, reducing property values, and deterring investments, High levels of violence create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity within a community, impacting residents' daily lives and activities. As I mentioned earlier, women and girls tend to be the most vulnerable to violence and are consequently the most affected by the scourge.

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

Yes. The school reflects the broader society so all forms of violence and conflicts prevalent in the communities also manifest themselves in schools. Day in and day out, different media platforms report on alarming acts of violence happening in schools. This includes bullying – which takes the form of physical, verbal, and social bullying and cyberbullying especially with the increased use of technology among students. There are also reports of physical violence such as fights, assaults, and other aggressive behaviors that occur between students, or even involving teachers within the school premises. Sexual harassment, GBV, corporal punishment, gang activity, racial and/or ethnic tensions, and xenophobia, are all different forms of violence experienced in the school environment.

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

One significant role that education can play in promoting peace and preventing violence and conflicts is through effectively capacitating teachers. I draw inspiration for this suggestion from UNESCO which states that to remove the root causes of the ills in a society on a long-term rather than cosmetic basis, the involvement of teachers as frontline agents is a prerequisite. By the very nature of their profession, teachers are agents of change. It is said that if you want to transform society, transform its schools, and if you want to transform the schools you must transform the teachers who make up the school. Also, education can expose individuals to diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives. By learning about diverse cultures, students can develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the richness of human diversity. This understanding helps reduce stereotypes and prejudices, fostering a culture of respect and cooperation. In line with the above, schools can integrate global citizenship education, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the world and the shared responsibility for global issues. This encourages a sense of belonging to a broader human community and promotes a commitment to peace and sustainability.

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

In December 2020 I participated in a UNESCO IICBA project on “Transformative Pedagogy for Peace, Resilience, and Preventing Violence through Education.” I found the workshop immensely helpful because it helped me to be able to articulate how issues of peace and violence manifest and intersect in my context but also globally and to be able to identify strategies for enhancing

education for peacebuilding in my context based on transformative pedagogy. At the end of the workshop, I and three colleagues from South Africa (Dr. Duduzile Mzindle of Durban University of Technology, and Dr. Zakhile Somlata and Dr. Reinhold Gallant of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) who were also part of the workshop constituted a team that developed training sessions using the transformative pedagogy approach and cascaded to different stakeholders at our institutions with funding from UNESCO IICBA. After the workshops, the facilitators presented a paper at the 3rd World Conference on Innovative Research in Education which was held in Stockholm, Sweden, on July 23-25, 2021. The title of the paper was “Experiences of Teaching Transformative Pedagogies for Peacebuilding across selected Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa.” The paper was eventually published in the International Journal of Higher Education Pedagogies and is accessible online.

Since then, I have been involved in several other actions in peace education. For example, from 1-4 November 2023, I organized a capacity-building workshop for 23 pre-service teachers from the Sol Plaatje University on Global Citizenship Education. The concepts covered at the training included promoting human rights and responsibilities, education for non-violence, intercultural understanding and respect, gender, equality, and women’s empowerment, Global justice and peacebuilding, and education for sustainable development. The picture below was taken at the end of the workshop with the participants. Finally, from 6-8 October 2022, on the invitation of the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, I took part in a workshop on



“Transforming education for learning to live together and strengthening citizenship values through the teaching of History” in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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

My institution, the Sol Plaatje University, today promotes peace and makes efforts to prevent conflicts and violence through different measures. This includes not only putting in place relevant policies to deter perpetrators from committing acts of violence, but also ensuring the protection of potential victims including through the establishment of relevant structures such as the Health and Wellness Centre as well as the Sol Plaatje University Legal office. Awareness is also raised through periodic campaigns such as the Gender-Based Violence Awareness Campaign. Separately, on 19-21 July 2023, the SPU Campus Security, in partnership with the Division of Student Affairs and the Employee Wellness Office, launched a Safety Week Drive on the Central and South campuses under the theme ‘Our Campus, Our Safety’. The initiative sought to create awareness about campus safety and security for both students and staff, as well as awareness of student and staff wellness and the importance that it plays in building a safer campus and community. Although the university has been consistent in stating its support for the right to peaceful protests, it has always strongly condemned any form of violence and damage to university property.

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

The government of South Africa has implemented various initiatives and policies to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence. These initiatives include Community Policing, the adoption of a National Crime Prevention Strategy, Anti-Gang Strategies, Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Initiatives, Youth Development and Restorative Justice Programs, Community Development Projects, and Firearm Control – International Cooperation.

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

There are many initiatives around but nothing particularly innovative.

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

The main challenge in my view is poverty. There is a loose saying that states “A hungry man is an angry man.” When people are hungry, it becomes exceedingly difficult for them. So, I believe addressing hunger and poverty in our society is the first step to resolving issues of crime and violence. For this to happen, other factors would also need to be tackled such as the elimination of corruption, addressing economic inequality, etc.

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

Once I was teaching a course in History and the themes were all linked to war and violence. It was the period from World War I up to the Cold War. At some point in the course, a curious student raised an observation linking the violence in history to what is happening in the contemporary world and wondered if the world could ever be a better place. That conversation with the student was serious food for thought for me as I was left reflecting on what my contribution to humanity is if my role is limited to reminding students about violent experiences of the past. It was at this point that my interest in peace and non-violent education as well as Global Citizenship Education was born. Training received from UNESCO IICBA as well as from the Asia Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) afforded me the capacity to improve my philosophy of history teaching such that I now make sure to integrate critical ideas and the concepts of peace education in my teaching. The conversation with the curious student was my Aha! moment.



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