Executive Summary

Highlights

- Supported by funding from Sidney Topol to the Psychology of Peace and Violence program at UMass Amherst, 60 leading scholars, students, and practitioners of nonviolence met on November 3-4, 2017 at the University of Massachusetts, Boston to discuss how to transform nonviolence training and practice.
- This meeting is the fourth in a series of yearly meetings that began in 2014. Because of the work conducted over the last four years, this unique network of scholars, practitioners, and activists is now firmly and successfully established.
- Activist and non-governmental organizations new to the network and attending a meeting for the first time included Achvat Amim, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salam, Roots, and Waging Nonviolence.

The November 3-4 Meeting

On November 3-4, 2017 the faculty of the Psychology of Peace and Violence program at UMass Amherst convened a meeting of 60 scholars, practitioners, and students to develop new methods and programs for nonviolent approaches to conflict.

Faculty and graduate students from academic programs supported through Topol graduate student fellowships include:

- The Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence (COEX) program in the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University
- The Masters of Arts program in Peace and Conflict Management at Haifa University
- The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative at Harvard University
- Topol Fellows in the Fletcher Graduate School of International Affairs at Tufts University
- The Psychology of Peace and Violence program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- The program in Conflict Resolution, Human Security and Global Governance at the University of Massachusetts, Boston
- Students and their faculty mentor also attended from Boston Latin School.

NGO and activist groups that were represented at the meeting included:

- Achvat Amim
- The Albert Einstein Institution
- Combatants for Peace
- The Jewish Center for Nonviolence
- Institute for Nonviolence – Chicago
- Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence – Providence
- Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salam
- Rhize
- Roots
- Solidarity Uganda
- The U.S. Institute for Peace
Waging Nonviolence

Meeting Agenda

The core of the meeting were a series of six presentations, exercises, and discussion sessions led by the following invited speakers:

**Eric Stoner (Editor, Waging Nonviolence) Nonviolent Action Journalism**

Eric gave an overview of the history and approach of Waging Nonviolence. Waging Nonviolence is the leading journalism outlet for reporting on nonviolent social movements. Waging Nonviolence seeks to provide extremely high quality objective reporting on social justice movements that are not receiving coverage in the media. Very often, their reporting precedes and prompts coverage from larger media outlets. In the discussion following Eric’s presentation, the group discussed the ways in which activists and NGO organizations can most effectively engage with the media. We also discussed the possibilities for the academic programs in the Networks to develop opportunities for Topol Fellows to work in collaboration with Waging Nonviolence as part of their fellowships.

**Nadine Bloch (Beautiful Trouble & USIP Training programs) Nonviolent Assertive Intervention in Civil Resistance / People Power Actions**

Nadine Bloch, a long time activist and nonviolence trainer, led participants on a series of interactive exercises and discussions. These exercises were examples of some of the initial activities she conducts when training a group of activists who are about to begin a nonviolent protest campaign in which they expect police response or counter-protestors. She shared that the goal of training is to provide people with a solid base of preparation so that their actions in the protest are effective and nonviolent. In discussion following the exercises, the group reflected on the practice of nonviolence training and the diverse methods used by different organizations. Participants agreed that it is vital that members of the network support each other with cross group training. The group ended this session by discussing how we can we support each other via the network, shared trainings, and smaller group meetings.

**Joanne Sheehan (War Resisters League) Nonviolent Direct Action Training**

Joanne, a long-time peace activist and leader in the War Resisters League, led a training excise focused on evaluating nonviolent tactics and the effectiveness of nonviolent strategies. She began by tracing the history of nonviolence in the US, then moved to describing the goals of nonviolence as a tactic and how to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies when planning actions. Meeting participants were led through a training activity called a spectrogram, in which people evaluated different acts of resistance on a spectrum ranging from violent to nonviolent and effective to not effective. By asking participants to move to different areas of the room representing the different quadrants of the spectrogram, this exercise facilitated discussion amongst the group about different nonviolence tactics. The exercise brought to life differences in participants’ views about what does and does not qualify as “nonviolent” action. For example, people had differing views of property destruction (such as damage to pipeline construction). Discussion after the exercise delved into the question of how to handle actions in which some participants choose tactics (such as property destruction) that may not fit within a nonviolent approach. Joanne and other seasoned activists and trainers shared strategies for coordinating actions in groups where members have diverse perspectives on nonviolent philosophy and tactics.
PJ Fox of the Providence Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence and Teny Gross, Benny Lee, and Burrell Poe of the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago (INVC) and The Institute For The Study and Practice of Nonviolence (ISPN): 

Training of gang affiliated/incarcerated youth in nonviolence

PJ Fox of the Providence Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence and Teny Gross, Benny Lee, and Burrell Poe of the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago (INVC) and The Institute For The Study and Practice of Nonviolence (ISPN) described the philosophy and actions of their sister organizations. Rooted in the perspective of Martin Luther King, they seek to work with community members to create a beloved community that is centered on the transformative power of a personal commitment to nonviolence. PJ led the group through an exercise that they use in the very early stages of a nonviolence training session called the Fist of Power that asks people to consider how presentation of a fist leads people on both sides to change their orientation to the interaction. Benny described how his background as a leader in the Vice Lords and his time in prison informs his understanding of the social and structural conditions that lead to conflict. Teny, Benny, and Burrell discussed in more detail their approach to community nonviolence training and community-police relations in their work to reduce gang-related violence in Chicago. After their presentation, the larger group discussed how nonviolent approaches to conflict transformation in community contexts are similar to and different than traditional protests contexts, as well as to nonviolent opposition to occupation such as in Palestine.

Jamila Raqib (Albert Einstein Institute) Observations of how we learn/teach nonviolent activism – possible future directions

Jamila Raqib, Executive Director of the Albert Einstein Institution described the work that their organization conducts with individuals, organizations and movements around the world. AEI uses the ground-breaking work of Gene Sharp (founder of AEI) to train people in the principles and tactics of nonviolent resistance. One valuable project that she hopes will gain support is to develop better archives for materials on nonviolent action. She shared some examples of extraordinary materials that AEI has in its archives from its work with protest movements. The larger group discussed the importance of better sharing and archiving material on nonviolent action that is generated in groups’ work for social change.

Galila Golan and Sulaiman (Souli) Khatib (Combatants for Peace): Sumūd camp and the Theater of the Oppressed

Sulaiman (Souli) Khatib and Galia Golan of Combatants for Peace discussed their personal history and the history and strategy of the organization which is composed of former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters. Souli described his background as a Palestinian and how while being imprisoned in an Israeli jail he began to learn about nonviolence through the work of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King. Galia told her story from the Israeli side, as an IDF member when young but later becoming a central player in peace activism in Israel and then began to work with Combatants for Peace. They discussed the approach of Combatants for Peace, which is to engage in joint action by Israelis and Palestinians together. They also discussed activities that their groups is taking in coordination with other Israeli and Palestinian peace activist groups including the Sumud Camp.

Meeting Wrap up Session

In the wrap up session for the meeting, the group discussed the strategic priorities identified in last year’s meeting and mechanisms for making stronger progress on reaching these goals. In
particular, the group agreed that we need to establish small group meetings in between the larger meetings; and to task particular organizations with primary effort on particular priorities.

**Strategic Priorities for the Topol Network**

In their ongoing work, the members of the Topol Nonviolence Network are focused on four key priorities.

**Increase impact and sustainability of efforts to promote nonviolent approaches to conflict**

- Increase outreach to people of influence
- Develop the next generation of leaders and activists
- Identify funding mechanisms for increasing activists’ access to nonviolence training
- Develop collaboration between members of the network in research, training, and activism

**Increase sophistication and impact of training and curriculum development**

- Build a framework for assessing quality of training
- Develop forums and mechanisms for nonviolence trainers to share best practices and issues for development
- Identify and disseminate best practices in the translation of training materials
- Increase the number and dissemination of case studies of effective nonviolent activism and approaches to conflict
- Increase the extent to which research and training on nonviolence is contextualized (in terms of cultural context, domain of conflict/activism)

**Summarize prior research and identify key issues for further data collection**

- Identify and summarize existing activist-needs assessments
- Identify and summarize evaluations of nonviolence training programs and approaches
- Identify and summarize work evaluating distinct nonviolent tactics and strategy
- Conduct background research on how to best create tools for activist-scholar match-making

**Develop a larger conference or meeting that will broaden the impact of the network.**

- Planning meeting to be held in coordination with the International Studies Association convention in April 2018

**Summary and Next Steps**

Small group planning and workshop meetings are being developed for the International Studies Association meeting in April 2018, and for Boston area participants in the spring and summer of 2018. Planning led by Stellan Vinthagen has also begun for the next large-scale gathering of the network.