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### **Moral Courage: Key Concept in Development of Local Capacity for Conflict Transformation**

In the area of contemporary response to protracted conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies there is a need to move beyond traditional statist diplomatic solutions. The development of strategies for conflict transformation which engage all levels of the affected population, support local capacities and address psychosocial issues show the highest potential for conflict transformation (Lederach 1997, Spence 2001).

The work of Peace Brigades International has a twenty year history of delivering peacebuilding in a strategic framework suitable to the needs of contemporary conflicts. Key aspects of Peace Brigades strategies are (1) Insertion at local level. (2) Peacebuilding work based on the Gandhian conception of conflict transformation openness, trust building and dialogue across all levels and aspects of a conflict. (3) Support for local actors who have the capacity to transform a conflict. (4) Use of powerful international networks to bring pressure to bear on actions at local level of the conflict. (5) Moral encouragement of actors experiencing repression and violence.

The area of moral encouragement is a key concept in the work of Peace Brigades and is the focus of research undergirding the ideas presented in this paper. Since its inception in 1983, Peace Brigades central strategy has been the provision of accompaniment to threatened actors attempting to organise social action towards resolution of a conflict.

Actors who continue to work for change in spite of threats and repression show moral courage. These individuals become central agents of conflict transformation. The research attempts to analyse social, community and individual characteristics that support courageous individual actions. Initial research has shown that moral courage is not one action but a set of tasks that are required for continuance of action under threat of brutality. The frameworks for discussion potentially provide a source of conflict analysis as well as pathways for developing support for moral courage development at local level. The key tasks are:

- Recovery from trauma.
- Dealing with loss and grief.
- Creation of a sustaining vision that is different to the surrounding reality.
- Finding a way to have a voice and not be complicit with what is happening.
- Finding of pathways that create a sense of safety.

Contemporary agency practice has tended to focus on the victim status of the affected population and led to the undermining of actual local capacities. Historical evidence supports the view that populations in the midst of violence have an actual capacity for tremendous courage and resilience.

Potential discussion will revolve around the following issues:

- Examination of field experiences of local capacity for courage and resilience.
- The role of moral encouragement as a key INGO pathway.
- Real and perceived capacities of affected populations.
- Development of strategic frameworks for conflict intervention that supports local capacities in this area.