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### Personal Peace Vision

Over the course of my adolescence and into young adulthood, I've had the good fortune to be surrounded by people and role models who represent what a true commitment to peace and justice understanding is. Past and current interns at the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice, and Public Understanding, Victor Ochen and other recent lecturers, and wonderful professors have demonstrated a commitment to sustainable, attainable peace. What used to be an idealistic assumption that "with enough can-do spirit" peace could be attained without systemic change has shifted and transformed into a broader, but still growing, understanding that true peace relies on many different congruent parts to actually occur. While sustainable peace may be unattainable in the next few years, and may never occur world-wide, people can still hope that actual, sustained peace is possible in places where people are working diligently towards understanding, reconciliation, human rights, and an end to violence. Without each of the four components I see in sustainable peace, it is likely that the conflict will arise again.

I see four different gears in sustainable peace that all work together. Without clicking each into place in a conflict, it is unlikely to reach one's overall goal of tolerance and understanding. In some areas certain components may be harder to work for than others. The first is an end to violence. A cease-fire, a laying down of arms, and conflict resolution is always the first step in working towards peace, but unfortunately this is the

place where most people stop. A simple ceasefire or surrender does not address the other needs of the community nor does it really ensure that the conflict will not rise again.

The second component is caring for each person's basic human needs. As Victor Ochen says, "no one will listen to you about reconciliation if they are still bleeding." As such, if the community is hungry, sick, enslaved, maltreated, or subject to any number of inequalities, they will be unlikely to listen to talks of peace. People who work for sustainable peace and conflict transformation use this opportunity after the cease-fire to treat the community's needs. Once those are taken care of and people feel they have few physical needs, they may be more open to reconciliation and understanding. The problem or difficulty with this step is that so many communities are in need of so much assistance. During my experience in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, I was around people who were in need of clean, free drinking water, nutritious meals, real medical care, housing, meaningful and fulfilling work (or any work), adequate transportation, an involved government, electricity and internet, and revised and equitable laws for all citizens. Everywhere there are missionaries and relief workers trying to fix just one of these social justice causes. If a conflict-ridden community has even a few of these, it could take years or decades to address. By that time, a conflict could have erupted again and you may feel that you are back to square one. But in reality, you are not. Like John Paul Lederach says in his model for conflict transformation: it is important to understand that achieving peace is a circular cycle. You move forward, hit a wall, fall back, but end up a little further along than you were before. To achieve peace, you have to be willing to commit the hours and resources to get what you want and the community deserves.

The third component of sustainable peace is paving the way for understanding and engagement. This may be done at the same time as working towards the community's basic needs, and perhaps you could adopt Eboo Patel's interfaith service work model. At the Interfaith Youth Core, people come together from different places to do service with one another where they might have been in conflict otherwise. In a place that has just gotten over a conflict, coming together to work on sustainable community projects may be a great opportunity for people who believe they are different from one another to find similarities. The engagements may come from town hall meetings, peacekeeping organizations, conflict transformers like Lederach, or simple conversations in a common place. It is important that these conversations eventually lead to reconciliation – another part that so many peacekeepers ignore. Unless there is true reconciliation on each side of the conflict, there is no way to ensure that one will not rise up again.

These conversations and reconciliations lead to relationships, the fourth component of sustainable peace. If a community can build relationships across warring lines, you can almost ensure that you have lasting peace. In this place that wants for nothing because you have already taken care of it, an openness and tolerance of differences (or even potential understanding), and relationships that could blossom into friendships, peace is almost guaranteed. There is little that could break up this haven. Even if you look at the United States Civil War where brothers fought against one another, if there had been equality already in the United States and no need for slavery, there would not have been anything to fight about.

As you can see, without any one of these important tenets of sustainable peace, it is nearly impossible to attain. But these different pieces are also very difficult: it really

will take the commitment of everyone in the world to ever hope of seeing world-wide sustainable peace, which is why many realists like myself see such a goal to be a little far-fetched. Even everlasting sustainable peace in a single community seems to be a lofty goal; how could a utopia like that exist in a world so filled with corruption, deceit, and greed? And it's true, there are many things that get in the way of social justice projects, peace plans, and right goals. But that is not a reason for peacebuilders to stop working for it.

I plan to continue working for peace for the rest of my life. At St. Norbert, I will work as a Norman Miller Center intern until I graduate. I hope to work with the current employees to continue to improve on the foundation we have and create a thriving resource on campus students and staff alike come to for assistance in student movements and worldwide problem-solving. At the Norman Miller Center, we highlight and promote ideas and organizations we believe will contribute to peace, and we call out practices that work in opposition to that. Each are equally as valuable: how can we continue to work for real change if we are content to go along with the status quo? When I can find a bad practice and help to change, that is where I feel the most meaningful and purposeful in my work, and I am excited that I get to do this for the rest of my life. We are also looking for feedback on how to improve, so please send suggestions to myself or Dr. Robert Pyne on how the Norman Miller Center can better serve the St. Norbert and Green Bay community.

In the future, I plan to teach for at least a few years and then move into a career of writing, advocacy work, and service. I have a passion for each and hope to create classroom environments and schools where the tenets of sustainable peace are practiced

and understood. If there is a conflict in my classroom, no one will be able to learn. If John comes to school hungry or Susan comes in sick, no one will be able to learn. If the class cannot talk to the other half because of differences in political party or religion, again, no one will be able to learn. And if no one has a relationship with anyone else, the necessary communication skills and interpersonal skills that schools (especially language arts) provides will be lost. It is absolutely imperative that I, as an educator, continue to promote my ideas of sustainable peace inside my classroom and school. After I am finished teaching, I hope that my essays, articles, and maybe even books can help create ideas and projects that encourage conflict transformation. I plan to write about social change issues, case studies, empathy, and many other topics, but all will center on the importance of peace and social justice.