

[hope against hope]

SERENITY SEEKERS

Carving out a path through the thorny field of conflict resolution

by Kelly Knufken

War has touched their lives. They've seen too much. It's made them seek ways to make peace.

Monya Kian, Yusuf Gawany and Zacharia Akol are three of the 10 students working toward master's degrees in Peace and Justice Studies at USD this year, and they want to make a difference in the world.

Kian lived in Iran until she was 6. She's thought a lot about her heritage and how it's complicated her career choices. It turns out that those in the peace field often have to carve their own path.

"Had I not had the background I've had, maybe I wouldn't even care (about peace)," she says. "Your background really does shape who you are. Sometimes I think, 'Why can't I be interested in architecture or want to be a doctor?' Being young and being in Iran when a war was going on, I was thinking about these things at a young age. It's been with me since day one."

She knows that she can't change the world overnight. Her current plan is to become a U.S.-based consultant focusing on mediating local dissent, and maybe serve as a contractor for the United Nations and travel to conflict zones to help arbitrate larger conflicts. She hopes she can someday help make progress on such issues in Iran as women's rights and the choking pollution she

experienced there when she visited her native country a few years ago.

Gawany is proud of his country's peaceful posture, but he's seen firsthand the effects of war on his home continent of Africa. He lives in Tanzania and works for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). He left his family — a wife, a son and a daughter — to study in the program affiliated with the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice for a year.

"I am a humanitarian at work," he says. He hopes to bring the conflict resolution skills he learns at USD to the camps where he's been helping protect refugees who've been fleeing from the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1994.

"You could imagine where you have 100,000 people living, you could have a lot of good and bad coming out of the situation," he says. "You have constant conflicts. You need to work on it. As UNHCR, we are there to protect the refugees. That protection is broad — you have mental protection, physical protection and legal protection."

Akol, meanwhile, was living a normal life in 1983 when Sudan crumbled with the outbreak of war. He left his family at age 9 to head to Ethiopia, and lived in Kenya before coming to the United States in 2001 as a refugee. Like the oth-



Pursuing a master's degree in Peace Studies has been a gratifying educational experience for Zacharia Akol (left), Monya Kian and Yusuf Gawany. All of them say that finding a balance between being optimistic and realistic is one of their biggest challenges.

ers, he looks to the Peace and Justice Studies program to sharpen his conflict resolution skills.

Since moving to the United States he's been active in speaking about the problems of Sudan, and plans to continue in that educational role as long as he is here. Akol formed the Sudan Awareness and Support Group as an undergraduate at Michigan State University. He plans to eventually

return to Sudan, where he hopes to work with organizations trying to make a difference. Despite the peace agreement signed in 2005, he is far from optimistic about the prospect of peace in his country.

"With the mobility that I have had for years, I learned to be very optimistic and hopeful about certain things, but I have not been hopeful about the situation in Sudan," he says. "I wish that some-

thing else could be done. The direction that things seem to be going is not very promising."

Kian, too, worries about conflict involving her native country.

"I used to be really, really optimistic," she says. "Now it depends on the day, truthfully. It's hard to see the news (about conflicts between the United States and Iran) and think they're going to work it out."

Still, a sense of hope creeps back in when she meets others committed to working on problems, whether in her role as a board member of the United Nations Association's San Diego chapter, or when she meets others who aren't content with the status quo.

"We can't go on like we are. People need to realize hardcore politics and fighting wars doesn't really lead to peace." 🌍

[etc.]

Japan's Empress Michiko met with USD President Mary E. Lyons at the Imperial Palace in Japan in November. The empress attended Sacred Heart University in Tokyo and was subsequently tutored by USD professor emerita Sister Helen McHugh, R.S.C.J., in English for several years. President Lyons spent an hour with the empress and delivered a letter and gift from Sister McHugh. The president was in Japan — along with Vice President and Provost Julie Sullivan and School of Business Administration professor Ellen Cook — to take part in the Inamori Foundation's presentation of the 22nd Annual Kyoto Prizes for Lifetime Achievement in Technology, Science and the Arts. USD will take part in the sixth annual Kyoto Laureate Symposium in mid-March, when events celebrating Kyoto Laureate and international artist and designer Issey Miyake will be hosted by the university. While in Japan, the group also enjoyed what Lyons calls "a wonderful alumni reunion in Tokyo" as well as taking in of a tour of Sony headquarters.

November was busy for President Lyons, who attended a conference on "Universities and the Church's Social Doctrine" in Rome late that month. She was invited to the event in August by Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace President Cardinal Renato Martino, who visited USD in late summer. "There were approximately 180 representatives from Catholic universities around the world at the conference," Lyons recalls. "Many were from Africa, Asia, Indonesia, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, and speakers addressed the benefits of interdisciplinary scholarship in promoting the values and application of the social teachings."

She says she was most struck by the wide-ranging conditions under which Catholic universities fulfilled their missions: "That awareness reminds the more affluent and secure universities of North America and Western Europe to be ever-conscious of the challenges confronting sister institutions around the world."

Low-income and disadvantaged youth will be served by a \$120,000 grant the university was awarded in November. The three-year grant, from Learn and Serve America, will help fund a USD-led project in which college students assist in community projects that prepare young people and their families for college and the working world. "At USD we believe strongly that college attendance will endow students with the skills and knowledge that will contribute to their own intellectual growth and, eventually, to California's economic vitality," says USD President Mary E. Lyons. "But first we must help get those students to college."

Some of the USD women's basketball team's biggest fans in the 2006-07 season are also their youngest. The Toreros adopted the kindergarten class at Bay Park Elementary School for a mentoring program. Each week the players visited campus for a physical education period in the morning with the students, followed by a classroom period when USD's players assisted with projects designed by the teacher. The 13 Toreros rotated in groups of three or four, participating on different days to work around their own class schedules. In other news, the women's volleyball team traveled to Gainesville, Fla. for the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA tournament, before losing to top ranked University of Nebraska. The Toreros ended their season with a 26-6 record.